

Courses that Deliver: Reflecting on Constructivist Critical Pedagogical Approaches to Teaching Online and On-site Foundations Courses

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This article explores the transition of a foundations of education course from an on-site to an online delivery format. Constructivist and critical pedagogical theoretical work grounds the course content and approach overall, and specific links are made in terms of creating a similar critical environment while using both delivery methods with master's level students. The author describes particular adjustments to course assignments, as well as how students mobilize critical reflection about the course issues and the course itself in retrospect. This comparative look at course delivery methods has implications for creating engaging, flexible learning environments in all foundations-related course environments to nurture the development of reflective practitioners.

Introduction

As online learning continues to surface in higher education institutions in the U.S., it is important to critically reflect on how learning formats, pedagogical approaches and student achievement interact. Teaching dispositions associated with online learning (updating teaching practices, pursuing student engagement) parallel those encouraged among on-site educators (Ash, 2009; Coombs-Richardson, 2007; Kirtman, 2009; Shin & Lee, 2009). Further, using constructivist approaches in online classrooms potentially encourages not only ways for students to learn “norms” of online engagement but also to engage deeply with peers about course topics (McCrorry, Putnam, & Jansen, 2008; Swan Dagen & Ice, 2008).

In this article I will begin by exploring the literature related to critical pedagogy and constructivist teaching approaches, as well as to how these philosophical approaches manifest themselves in teaching online/virtual courses. Next, I will describe the campus-based version of the Critical Issues and Future Trends in Education course, followed by the ways in which I used critical pedagogical and constructivist approaches to transform this campus-based course into an online course. Finally, I will speculate about implications this theoretical framework has for online courses and foundations courses in particular, as well as offer ideas for continuing to develop online courses using these philosophical approaches.

Review of Relevant Literature

In this section, I will begin with a consideration of the literature regarding critical pedagogy and other theoretical grounding for constructivist teaching approaches (Dewey, 1938/1997; Freire, 1970, 2005; Kincheloe, 2005; McLaren, 2007). Then, I will segue into literature reflecting the use of these approaches in online classrooms, both in terms of dispositions and

student engagement (Ash, 2009; Coombs-Richardson, 2007; Kirtman, 2009; Shin & Lee, 2009) and of profound student engagement opportunities in online environments in particular (McCrorry et al., 2008; Swan Dagen & Ice, 2008).

McLaren (2007) explicitly and deeply explores the dialectical qualities of critical pedagogy—a central component to nurturing this approach in the classroom. When education is cultivated in this manner, one views “the school not simply as an arena of indoctrination or socialization or a site of instruction, but also as a cultural terrain that promotes student empowerment and self-transformation” (McLaren, 2007, p. 195). Schooling then becomes an opportunity for teachers and students to *share* power, to *create* meaning together, rather than a static, stagnant place where fragments of finite information are transferred from teacher to student, only to be returned in the packaged form of a test or other assessment.

Democratic classroom interactions comprise another important aspect of critical pedagogy (Kincheloe, 2005). Much in line with McLaren's viewpoints, Kincheloe (2005) links these ideas directly with preservice teachers and the necessity of their raised political awareness in relation to pedagogical practices. He suggests that “the recognition of these political complications of schooling is a first step for critical pedagogy-influenced educators in developing a social activist teacher persona” (Kincheloe, 2005, p. 2). Further, as these “political complications” and other societal aspects are constantly changing, it is necessary that educators who nurture a critical pedagogical stance foster flexibility in their teaching practices—a central theme in using these approaches in online teaching environments—which involves consistently updating their approaches and curricula in response to their students and social environment.

Dewey (1938/1997) links democracy and education through his notions of continuity of experience, principle of interaction, and formation of purposes. As

“[e]very experience is a moving force” (Dewey, 1938/1997, p. 38), the continuity of experience suggests engagement between teachers and students that breeds further engagement, thereby snowballing into experiences that take on lives of their own. Central to this process is the principle of interaction, with each consecutive interface resulting in a dialectical “feedback loop” of generated understanding for both teachers and students. Finally, the components of observation, comparing with previous interactions and evaluation associated with the formation of purposes reflects a complex process wherein students and teachers democratically engage in the educational realm.

Dewey’s concept of “interaction” parallels Freire’s (1970) “dialectical” connections, while Dewey’s notion of analyzing present problems aligns with Freire’s problem-posing education. Critical pedagogical classroom approaches constantly question and potentially (and ideally) disrupt unequal power relationships between dominant and oppressed groups in society. Freire (1970, 2005) grounds his educational interactions in social change, working from the perspectives of oppressed groups on *their* terms, as opposed to presuming those of dominant groups, in order to work toward equitable learning and living conditions.

Two central components of nurturing the concept of “interaction” and “dialectical” relationships in order to consistently work from oppressed perspectives toward social change are students’ and professors’ dispositions and levels of student engagement, both of which greatly impact the success or failure of online courses. Ash (2009) draws from multiple sources (all preK-12 or higher education teachers, or online teacher educators) to establish various qualities associated with effective online instructors. Among these characteristics are an ability to continuously update one’s online teaching practices, the use of multiple technological tools to engage students, a willingness to pursue students who are not engaging with the learning process, and an ability to experience online learning from a student’s perspective (Ash, 2009). Interestingly, all of these attributes are sought after in “brick and mortar” teachers as well.

Coombs-Richardson (2007) explores personal versus impersonal aspects of online environments through data collected from 65 graduate education students (52 female, 13 male). “In order of importance, the participants placed greater importance on observations, discussions, and instructor’s personal touch; and low importance on essays/reports, reading assignments, and exams” (Coombs-Richardson, 2007, p. 73). The author concludes that personalizing the online interaction processes—whether between teacher and students or students and their peers—facilitated positive learning experiences for students.

Kirtman (2009) evaluates the learning outcomes associated with online versus in-class courses. Three online courses (71 students) and three traditional courses (69 students) were compared (127 female and 13 male, overall), and while the online course involved asynchronous instruction through small and large group discussion/activities, e-mailed writing assignments, and PowerPoint slide shows (with audio overlay), the traditional classroom involved small and large group work, discussions, writing assignments, and PowerPoint presentations (Kirtman, 2009). By comparing exam grades, paper grades, and post-course surveys across all six courses, Kirtman found that student outcomes were the same across online and traditional courses, as well as that online interaction is a central concern of students and faculty for promoting students’ academic success.

Shin and Lee (2009) share perceptions of graduate education students in relation to their online learning experiences. The authors suggest that flexibility is a central motivation for students in choosing online course options. They also find divergent opinions in “social” students regretting the lack of face-to-face classroom interaction and more introverted students valuing their opportunity to speak online rather than remaining silent in a traditional classroom. Shin and Lee conclude with a widespread student interest in pursuing hybrid course formats to allow a balance between online and traditional learning environments.

Online courses offer student engagement opportunities that differ from those in on campus courses due to the necessity of technological influences, and these possibilities are a boon for online interactions. McCrory et al., (2008) share research relating to how faculty and students engage, as well as the impact of content matter and types of student assignments in the online environment. Their teaching and research efforts reflect their conscious effort to link constructivist pedagogical approaches with online learning. A majority of the graduate students enrolled in the two courses were practicing teachers (38 out of 46), while some were involved in both online and face-to-face coursework. The authors find that students are more comfortable engaging with mathematical problem-solving tasks, for example, rather than the pedagogical issues associated with a particular “multimedia problem presentation” (McCrory, et al., 2008), as the latter might cause friction among the small group members while they challenge deeply held pedagogical beliefs. They also found that “students engage with and learn what the task, as they interpret it, requires of them” (McCrory, et al., 2008, p. 175), leading to a more focused online discussion of components necessary to complete said task, rather than deeper, more nuanced contextual conversations about

teaching and learning. The authors conclude by calling for explicit and structured approaches to online learning interactions in order for students to establish a comfort level with course “norms” of interaction that allow them to engage deeply in discussions.

Swan Dagen and Ice (2008) investigate how to engage a community of learners in an online reading methods course. The authors track Swan Dagen’s transition from a lack of community in her online courses to one that nurtures a community of learners through the assistance of Ice. Swan Dagen concludes with a much richer and more positive view of online learning as having great potential for nurturing constructivist communities of learners, yet she continues to struggle with both the workload issues (should it be decreased to allow for more collaboration?) and whether or not to continue “forcing” participation via graded rubrics (“bean counting”).

As this review reveals, research related to online learning environments indicates that flexibility, constructivist approaches to teaching and learning, and communities of engagement are all key aspects for producing positive online experiences for both teachers and students. While building my online course, I took into consideration these elements to consciously create a critical pedagogical and constructivist environment with which to pursue dialectical interactions with my students. We will now turn to the details associated with the on campus course goals and design, followed by a reflection on how I transformed this course for online delivery.

Structure and Focus of Critical Issues and Future Trends in Education Course

In the Critical issues and Future Trends in Education course, I encourage students to employ various “theoretical lenses,” i.e., race, social class, gender, self-fulfilling prophecy, to “read” many critical issues in education, i.e. standardized test reform, charter schooling, voucher plans, religion vs. public schooling. They then analyze and synthesize relationships and speculate about how these lenses and issues might impact their future teaching experiences. While there is a weekly writing component involving theoretical analysis of educational issues in an online posting forum, “real time” classroom meetings are primarily focused on facilitating a Freirean (1970, 2005) approach to peer interaction, in that students are encouraged to debate about issues and “make meaning” in relation to frequently difficult theoretical concepts and contentious educational issues. Dewey’s (1938/1997) “formation of purposes” comprise exactly the course goals in terms of linking theory and practice in a dialectical relationship, which is consistently

nurtured through the course assignments and interactions.

This course is meant to provide teacher candidates with a grasp of current educational issues, as well as theoretical approaches to assist in addressing these issues in their future classrooms. An exact description of the course is as follows:

This course is designed to give students an in-depth understanding of contemporary issues and future trends in education. Among the specific issues discussed are educational inequalities, school choice, standardized testing, religion in public schools, school violence, classroom management, and the move toward values, character, or moral education. The course also explores the larger socio-cultural and political-economic contexts of education and schooling. (D’Youville College, 2010a)

As this overview suggests, the themes explored in the course run the gamut of educational issues, exposing students to everything from standardized testing to character education. And, as noted above, theory is an important focus of this course, requiring students to tackle such foundational theorists as Kincheloe, McLaren, Foucault, and Freire.

In order to assist students in what is typically a very difficult transition into theoretical thought and practice, classroom activities are designed to link theory explored in the weekly readings, personal educational experiences, and teaching approaches. Since this course meets only once per week for a little under three hours, these interactions become paramount in terms of addressing misunderstandings and promoting a familiarity with theoretical language and theory-practice connections. Table 1 includes a few examples of activities that are aligned with the related weekly readings. As is evident in the descriptions in Table 1, each activity is meant to magnify the main theoretical points of the readings while at the same time linking them to classroom practices and related issues.

Before teaching the online version of this course, the main student assessments were weekly analytical reflection papers, the group presentation and subsequent reflection paper, and the final self-directed research paper. Weekly writing assignments (type-written papers consisting of 1-2 pages) helped students to individually develop skills writing and eventually *thinking* about educational issues using a “theoretical lens,” as well as linking these analyses to future classroom practices. I provided weekly feedback on these papers, both in terms of the mechanics of writing and student progress in theoretical analysis. In terms of the group

Table 1
Examples of Activities Aligned with the Related Weekly Readings

Week of Course	Course Readings	Activity Descriptions
6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A few chapters from Apple's (2006) <i>Educating the "Right" Way</i> 	A forum wherein groups of students take various positions derived from Apple's work (i.e. neoliberals, neoconservatives, authoritarian populists, new professional and managerial middle class, liberal progressives, parents of urban/suburban school students) and debate their varying positions on the use of voucher plans
8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Anyon's (1981) <i>Social Class and School Knowledge</i> Mahoney's (1997) <i>The Social Construction of Whiteness</i> Two chapters from Omi and Winant's (1986) <i>Racial Formation in the United States</i> A chapter from Thorne's (1993) <i>Gender Play</i> Davies' (1989) <i>The Discursive Production of the Male/Female Dualism in School Settings</i> 	Students are assigned five different perspectives (Mr. Jones, Mr. Jones, Sr., the female lead, the Egyptian friend, the guards); they then watch the last 5-7 minutes of the movie titled, <i>Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade</i> (1989), work in each of their assigned groups to write what occurred from their character's perspective, and once collected, the professor eliminates the perspectives of those characters who either died, disappeared or occupied positions in oppressed groups
10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Foucault's (1977) <i>Panopticism</i> Abu El-Haj's (2005) <i>Global Politics, Dissent and Palestinian-American Identities</i> Delpit's (1995) <i>The Silenced Dialogue</i> The second chapter from Freire's (1970) <i>Pedagogy of the Oppressed</i> 	Students watch a video called <i>The Wave</i> (wherein a high school teacher fabricates a student movement in order to teach his students about dictatorships and their power over indoctrinating processes), after which the professor and students engage in a conversation linking panopticism theory to the video

presentations, while each group presented, their peers engaged in a constructive feedback process, filling out forms that I then scanned and electronically posted on the Blackboard course website. The group presenters then each accessed this feedback and integrated it into the reflection paper which was due the following week and which included the standard weekly theoretical analysis along with a consideration of their presentation experiences, as well as of their peers' and professor's feedback, and all culminating in how they might use this experience/information to improve their future teaching practices. The final paper involved theoretically analyzing a self-directed research topic that, again, links their resulting analysis to their future classroom practices. As with the classroom activities, these various assignments were meant to constantly link theory and practice, pushing students to use analytical approaches to educational issues.

The individual work associated with reading and writing and the group work reflected in the classroom activities culminated in the professor-facilitated student conversations about the readings each week. This most

explicitly exemplifies the facilitation of a Freirean classroom in that I might have some ideas as to possible conversation directions, but the students weigh in, pulling the dialogue in different directions as knowledge creation takes place. The process of continuously "refurbishing" my syllabus also involves my students, in that I open a dialogue with my students to inquire about any specific changes they would recommend in relation to the course. While student evaluations certainly create an opportunity for this kind of reflection, creating space for direct interaction in relation to this "re-visioning" process frequently results in more detailed information, as well as provides students with an example of how they might approach their future students, classrooms, and curricular revisions.

Flipping between Formats: Making Meaning in "Real Time" and Virtual Classrooms

In this section, I will describe and analyze my experiences shifting this foundations course from an on-

site to an online delivery method using constructivist, critical pedagogical approaches, as well as the ways students respond to learning in these two formats. In this course, students in both course formats must now engage in an online forum to grapple with theoretical perspectives and their relationships to classroom practices. However, the on-site course offers weekly opportunities for students to engage in face-to-face conversations (not necessarily tied to the weekly online posting sessions) and activities that encourage building connections between theory and practice (see Appendix A for excerpts from the on-site and online syllabi pertaining to assignment descriptions for comparative purposes).

Alterations of course assignments have necessarily taken place to accommodate not only the online delivery method but also to lead to even more collaborative constructivist teaching and learning opportunities. For instance, in light of the asynchronous online course format, I called into question the challenges of facilitating group presentations, which were a major assignment associated with this course. Instead, I have developed an assignment involving each student using a theory to analyze a particular critical education issue with the help of teacher-oriented and student-oriented resources (such as peer-reviewed articles, children's books, movies, music, websites, lesson plans) to build links to how said student would help his or her future students better understand this theoretically analyzed topic (see Appendix B for an example of a Resource Assignment). At this point, I post each student's assignment in a separate online forum and encourage class peers to provide constructive feedback in relation to each assignment, thereby facilitating critical evaluation and collaboration (at the end of the semester, each student then has a breadth of resources on many topics, as well as constructive criticism for adapting it to different classroom environments). I now also use this assignment in place of group presentations in my on-site course, as students have articulated the value of the interaction and resulting resources associated with the process.

Considering this Resource Assignment is a culminating assignment and requires a great deal of interaction among students, I have eliminated the Final Paper in favor of a short (4-6 pages) Analytical Reflection Paper due during the fifth week of the course, which students then revise to submit during the tenth week of the course. By requiring students to engage in a deep theoretical analysis of a topic using course readings and then having them revise it, I model a critical constructive feedback process, as they must take my ideas into consideration for their revision. Dewey's (1938/1997) principle of interaction is evident most obviously in online/on-site interchanges but also

through professor-student feedback loops facilitated through individual e-mails and assignments, e.g., the Analytical Reflection Papers and Resource Assignment. Just as Dewey (1938/1997) highlights the importance of drawing from local communities and their resources, so too does my Resource Assignment emphasize linking these resources with classrooms to produce progressive, experience-oriented approaches to teaching and learning. The Resource Assignment adds a further level of interaction through the peer-peer assessment process. Engaging in this constructive feedback process then prepares them not only for this aspect of the Resource Assignment but also to mobilize this kind of constructive criticism through their work as future teachers and colleagues.

In terms of online forum interactions, students consistently have linked our online coursework with the theories and readings we explore throughout the semester. During the third week of one recent semester (and second weekly posting session), one student directly links the ideas of transmission-oriented versus production-oriented (or constructivist) learning with our online version of the Critical Issues course in the following excerpt from our online forum:

I certainly believe that transmitting and producing information are intertwined as well. I also agree that this is exactly what this course is intended to do. As you said, we are presented with reading materials and then asked to respond to a question using what we took from the readings. Freire (2005) wrote that the reader gives the text meaning. I believe this is the reason each of us may have a completely different answer to the questions posed each week. This sort of internet group discussion then allows for more ideas to blossom, as we are getting other students' perspectives or takes on the readings. I believe that this is a key component in being able to fully understand a text. If you simply read the text without discussing it with others, it seems to me that you will only be getting one perspective of what the text could mean. In collaborating with others, whole new ideas and meanings can be brought to the forefront. ("Week 3 Discussion Forum," 2010)

As is evident from this online course thread excerpt, this student views the constructivist approach to discussing and analyzing the course readings and topics as resulting in the construction of deeper meanings and multiple perspectives that would not surface had this method not been used. As Dewey (1938/1997) emphasizes, "[u]nless a given experience leads out into a field previously unfamiliar no problems arise, while problems are the stimulus to thinking" (p. 79). By consistently posing problems to students or through

their sharing of problems observed/experienced in classrooms with their peers and me, these become the experiences that feed interactions and lead to developing strategies that might be used to address similar issues in their future classrooms.

Some students experience considerable transformations in terms of their interactions with people in their daily lives and what power they have to effect social change. During the fall 2009 semester, one student, who was a former homemaker and current waitress pursuing her Master's Degree in Education, frequently grounded her reflections in the online forums in links between the course readings and how they were consistently impacting her daily life and interactions. This student reflects on how the course readings for one particular week (week nine, which examined issues associated with sexuality and homophobia) impacted her experiences while speaking with a fellow waitress and high school student as related below, which are worth considering at length:

I had been working with a girl who was rather quiet, who mostly worked without saying anything beyond what was needed. I repeatedly tried to make small talk, but generally had little success. One day, I made some headway with her while inquiring about her plans for college. At first she had said she wasn't sure she was going to go but said she had started to look into it. I jumped on the opportunity to find out why she felt this way, encouraging her to seek any kind of postsecondary education. During the conversation, however, I discovered that many of her reasons for her lack of confidence and withdrawal had to do with the fact that she was gay. When she told me, I said "Oh, I didn't know that, so the girlfriend you made mention to is your significant other? - Where did you meet her?" That opened a flood gate of stories and emotions.

She recounted how she had spent her freshmen year of high school in therapy with the help of anti-depressants. She said she didn't have any friends at school and that she ate lunch everyday by herself. She went on to say that although she gets called names everyday [sic] by other students and she still sits by herself in the lunch room, she is doing a lot better than a couple of years ago. At this point I had a difficult time not crying from the pain that I felt emanating from her, even recalling the conversation brings up feelings of sadness for her and anger at the school district for not addressing the issue. The school has chosen to look the other way creating a system of oppression and injustice for this student and others like her. When she left that night, she came over to me and said "Thank you." I said, "You don't need to thank me for

treating you like the human being that you are." She told me that she thought it was awfully nice of me to treat her nicely, especially since she thought I was "all religious." I laughed and told her that if she wanted to think of me that way - then she should think of herself as a way God will teach others lessons of compassion and acceptance through.

I left that night feeling helpless, as though I had no way to stop the "violence" against this girl. After reading the articles from this week, however, I realize that none of us are helpless. I am going to speak with the Superintendent, who generally makes himself available to parents in the district, about the need to address the homophobia that is exerted at all levels of the school district. ("Week 9 Discussion Forum," 2009)

This student is clearly exceptional in terms of her persistence in pursuing this high school student's academic success, but it is clear that the course readings and online interactions have challenged her in terms of believing that she can do more than be a shoulder to cry on. Interestingly, another student in the course—on behalf of the majority of the other students, who were part of one of the on-site cohorts—asked me if I was actually this student, using her name as a pseudonym and providing a venue to show "theory in action." The fact that this querying student and her peers attempted to "call me out" shows how very compelling and seemingly unbelievable this other student's reflections had been and that these reflections became an example for her peers to use as a model of how to take action using the course theories in their daily lives.

Another student sent an e-mail regarding the high points of a six-week version of this course held during a summer semester, after the course was completed and final grades were posted:

I found your criticisms fair and encouraging; and allowed me to look more deeply into the topic at hand. Also, I loved the peer feedback, and discussion. This was one of the best parts of the course, and much better, in terms of feeling like a class community, than other online classes I have taken. I found myself compelled to keep checking moodle [sic], to see where the dialogue was going! (Personal communication, August 8, 2010)

This student highlights the importance of "feeling like a class community" through the online discussions and peer assessment processes, noting that she felt "compelled to keep checking" in on the online dialogue in which she was consistently engaged. "The control is social, but individuals are parts of a community, not outside of it" (Dewey, 1938/1997, p. 54). Both

professor and students interact in online and on campus discussions and activities, with the professor mediating as a facilitator of each community experience.

Course evaluation tools provide a window into how successful this “professor as facilitator” approach is for students, as they enable students to offer critiques of the course processes and professors without fear of course grade-related repercussions (completed evaluations are made available to professors only after final course grades have been submitted). The Student Satisfaction Survey (D’Youville College, 2010b), an online version of the course evaluation tool, provides a broad perspective from students as they look back on the entire course experience. On one online course evaluation, a student reflected on linkages between content and methods used in the course:

[The professor] offered an incredible class which examined issues at depth emphasizing the synthesis of the information presented. [The professor] was an excellent facilitator who encouraged critical analysis of information. This particular class actually helped me to more fully grasp the information presented in the philosophical foundations class I took this semester; it has shaped my perspective and philosophy to a considerable extent. (*Student Satisfaction Survey*, 2010)

As Dewey (1938/1997) suggests, “[w]hen education is based upon experience and educative experience is seen to be a social process, the situation changes radically. The teacher loses the position of external boss or dictator but takes on that of leader of group activities” (p. 59). Not only does this student highlight my position as a facilitator throughout course interactions, but this student also notes the broader impact on understanding other courses and shaping teaching philosophies.

Concluding Reflections, Implications and Ideas for Future Engagement

These reflections about teaching a foundations of education online and on-site course imply the importance of both engagement on the part of professors and students *and* flexibility in terms of ongoing curricular development in light of ongoing technological changes. Through the use of online forums, in particular, I have not only maintained a continuous link with my students as they struggle with course material but also helped them apply theories learned during these interactions to their teaching and learning experiences. Further, by approaching course delivery as a tool and courses as “works in progress,” I have modeled a flexible teaching approach that allows students to make suggestions for improving the course, both during and after these interactions, and to

comfortably use the spaces provided to “practice” analysis, not only of their current and possible future educational experiences, but also pertinent everyday interactions, as well.

This work has implications for how foundations of education courses are taught, as well as the philosophical underpinnings of any course interactions in general. For instance, if Freire’s (1970) banking concept of education approach results in reduced engagement in classrooms on campus, what will the same approach elicit from students in an online course environment? Critical pedagogues like Freire, Kincheloe (2005), McLaren (2007), and Dewey (1938/1997) articulate the importance of foundational teaching philosophies, essentially highlighting those crucial aspects of student-teacher interactions and dispositions that Ash (2009), Coombs-Richardson (2007), Kirtman (2009), and Shin and Lee (2009) find are indeed central to the success or failure of online learning environments. Further, McCrory et al. (2008) and Swan Dagen and Ice (2008) explore the importance of nurturing student engagement, both with their peers and professors, in online environments, which supports Freire’s (1970) concept of “dialectical” relationships and Dewey’s (1938/1997) notion of “interaction.” Simply put, those educators who mobilize critical teaching philosophies have been nurturing students in classrooms on campus for years in the same productive ways that are supported by these researchers of successful online courses.

As we continue developing online and hybrid approaches to course delivery, it is of central importance to also examine what we have done and are doing in on-site courses and facilitate a dialogue of sorts between online and “offline” teaching and learning realities. In terms of future research, professors might not only continue mining and building from students’ feedback but also involve students in the development of foundations of education courses. This form of feedback might impact individual classroom meetings or assignments, or perhaps lead to the co-construction of all course processes. In this way, these “dialectical” interchanges, according to Freire, or “interactions” with each other and our environments, as Dewey would say, fuel constant changes of all course delivery methods, which in themselves constitute constructivist, critical pedagogical approaches to teaching and learning.

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Appendix A

Assignment Descriptions from the On-site Syllabus for “Critical Issues and Future Trends in Education”

Specific Requirements:**Attendance and Participation (20%)**

The rigorous seminar format of this course requires that you attend each classroom session in a timely fashion. Missing classes, coming late, and leaving early will effectively work to lower your course grade, and the grade deduction will be dependent upon the circumstances of your absences. **If you miss more than 5 classes, then you will fail this course.** A total of 5% of this part of your grade will depend on your professional comportment. As professional educators, you will be expected to treat your coworkers and students with respect for their diverse backgrounds and ideas. As such, throughout this course, you should emanate said behavior with your fellow classmates and your instructor during all interactions (i.e. classroom conversations, group presentations, meetings with the instructor). Finally, while this course is predominantly comprised of seminar-related activity (i.e. large- and small-group debate), side conversations are prohibited during the class session.

An additional 5% of your participation grade will depend on your weekly use of the Blackboard forum. The instructor will pose an initial question to which every student is expected to respond. Students are encouraged to respond to each other, engaging in conversations about the overarching question and related themes, and the instructor will draw pertinent points or resultant questions from these interactions each week to add to in-class conversations.

Group Presentation (30%)

Each student will work collaboratively with another 2 or 3 students to give a 1.5-hour presentation on one of the critical issues we cover in the course. Using the assigned readings as a starting point, you are required to conduct additional scholarly research on the topic, prepare discussion questions, and organize activities to lead the whole class to learn. Activities such as role-play, debate, guest speakers, video show, etc. are recommended. Each student presenter will then write a reflection paper (3-4 pages in length, typed, double-spaced) due via e-mail to the instructor (**before** the classroom meeting) on the week following their presentation, in which they will use a theoretical lens to analyze presented readings’ issues (as in the weekly analytical reflection papers), reflect on issues raised during the presentation, as well as reflect on issues related to the experience presenting as a whole. Your performance for the presentation will be evaluated by both your fellow students in class and your instructor. The outline found at the end of this syllabus provides an overview of the elements to include in your presentation, and copies of this outline will be distributed to students before each presentation to facilitate the feedback process. This feedback will be collected after each presentation, and the instructor will scan it onto Blackboard for the presentation group to use in their reflection papers due the following week.

Weekly Analytical Reflection Papers (20%)

In addition to the component associated with the group presentation and classroom participation, communication through strong, well-grounded writing is another crucial aspect of this course. For each classroom meeting, you will write a reflection paper (1-2 pages, typed, double-spaced) in which you analyze critical characteristics of the readings. **You will e-mail your paper to the instructor each week before the related classroom meeting.** These papers are **not** a place for merely summarizing the texts, but they are meant to be an opportunity for you to synthesize the ideas introduced. Further, you may reflect on your personal educational experiences, but you **must** ground these reflections and observations in the theories discussed in the readings. For instance, while reading about the issue of cultural capital, you may describe how your particular social position has prepared you with cultural capital to succeed in particular social situations and not others. These papers are weekly “practice” for your final papers, so you will be using theories to analyze various critical issues in education, as well as to speculate about ways particular issues may play out in and/or influence your future classrooms when you are teaching. The instructor will provide feedback and grading (4 points/paper) each week to assist in developing your writing and analytical skills.

Your writing should be academic in nature, and you should ensure that all sources are cited properly and referenced in a bibliography in the end of the paper. APA is the required writing style for all papers.

Final Paper (30%)

The topics introduced during this course are not only broad, but they are also by no means exhaustive in terms of critical issues in education. Since they only skim the surface of possibilities, you will select a topic of interest—either delving deeper into one of the weekly topics or selecting one not covered by the course—and write a 6-10-page research paper (typed, double-spaced) exploring this issue in relation to broader educational forces, as well as those occurring at the classroom-level. This paper will diverge from the form of a literature review, for you will gather **at least 4 scholarly references beyond the course readings** and analyze main themes raised therein using **at least 1 critical theoretical lens** discussed during this course, analyzing your topic and speculating about it in relation to education. For instance, you may be interested in how student-teacher relationships affect math achievement in high school classrooms. You could use the lens of gender (achievement in boys versus girls) or that of the self-fulfilling prophecy (teacher perceptions influencing student achievement) to better understand and analyze the literature you find for your research paper. As with the reflection papers, you may draw from your personal educational experiences, however these should remain largely at the level of impetus (i.e. when describing your motivations for selecting the topic during your introduction) and/or conclusions (i.e. how you plan to integrate these ideas into your future classrooms). The 6-10 pages will **not** include the title page or reference section. The rules in relation to writing style outlined in the “Weekly Analytical Reflection Papers” section above also apply to the final paper. **All final papers are due no later than 12pm (noon) on Wednesday, April 29th via e-mail to the instructor.**

Class Schedule

<i>Week</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Assignment/Activity</i>
Week #1	1/14	Introduction—Review of Syllabus and Viewing of <i>The Ron Clark Story</i>
Week #2	1/21	Educational Inequalities—Kozol (pp 1-31); Freire (1 st and 9 th letters, pp 31-47, 135-54); McLaren (pp 194-223) (T= 95 pages) <i>Recommended reading:</i> Kozol (1991)
Week #3	1/28	Educational Inequalities cont’d—Chomsky (pp 15-36); Freire (2 nd letter, pp 49-59); Kincheloe (Chapter 1, pp 1-43) (T=74 pages) <i>Recommended reading:</i> Kozol (1991) Viewing of <i>Children in America’s schools</i>
Week #4	2/4	Standardized Testing and Ability Grouping— <i>NCLB</i> website document (4 pgs); Meier and Wood (all chapters) (T=123 pages) Viewing of <i>Paper Clips</i>
Week #5	2/11	Standardized Testing and Ability Grouping— Gardner (pp 5-48); Natriello (pp 1-13); Yonezawa and Stuart Wells (pp 47-62) (T=71 pages) <i>Recommended reading:</i> Rist (pp 411-451) Group Presentation 1
Week #6	2/18	1-page Final Paper Outline and References Due School Choice, “America” and Moral Education—Apple (Chapters 1 and 2, pp 1-52)

		(T= 52 pages) <i>Recommended reading:</i> Apple (2006), Chapters 3 and 5
Week #7	2/25	School Choice, “America” and Moral Education—Apple (Chapter 7, pp 185-201); Noddings (pp 215-230) (T= 31 pages) <i>Recommended reading:</i> Hochschild (1995), Pak (2002) Group Presentation 2
Week #8	3/4	Social Issues in Education— Anyon (pp 3-42); Mahoney (3 pages); Omi and Winant (pp 1-23); Thorne (1-10); Davies (pp 229-241) (T=87 pages)
Week #9	3/11	Social Issues in Education—Horvat and Antonio (pp 317-42); Weis (pp 111-132); Rofes (8 pages); Johnston (6 pages) (T= 61 pages) <i>Recommended reading:</i> Friend (1993) Group Presentation 3
Week #10	3/18	School Violence, Surveillance and Issues of Power—Foucault (pp 195-209); Abu El Haj (pp 199-215); Delpit (pp 21-47); Kozol (pp 62-87); Freire (Chapter 2, pp 71-86) (T= 79 pages) <i>Recommended reading:</i> Freire (1970), Chapter 1 (pp 43-69) Viewing of <i>The Wave</i>
Week #11	3/25	<i>No class meeting—Spring Break</i>
Week #12	4/1	School Violence, Surveillance and Issues of Power—Apple (pp 1760-1772); Giroux (pp xiii-xxii); Abu El Haj (pp 199-215) (T= 36 pages) <i>Recommended reading:</i> Freire (1970), Chapter 3 (pp 87-124), Chapter 4 (pp 125-83) Group Presentation 4 Viewing of <i>The Merchants of Cool</i>
Week #13	4/8	Media, Culture and Technology—Miller (pp 1-16); Bodroghkozy (pp 566-89); Dolby (pp 63-77); Mashburn and Weaver (pp 559-66); Sensoy (pp 593-602) (T= 70 pages) <i>Recommended reading:</i> Noble (1996), Alvermann and Heron (2001), Dimitriadis (2001) Group Presentation 5 Viewing of <i>The Future We Will Create</i>
Week #14	4/15	<i>No class meeting—AERA Conference</i> Weekly Reflection due for following readings before 4/22 class meeting:

		Media, Culture and Technology— Storey (pp 1-20); MacKenzie and Wajcman (pp 3-27); Bromley (6 pages); Steinberg (pp 207-218); Kincheloe (pp 249-266) (T= 78 pages) <i>Recommended reading:</i> Valentine and Holloway (2002), Jenkins (2000)
Week #15	4/22	Reframing Critical Issues in Education—Come to class having viewed <i>Blackboard Jungle, Dangerous Minds, and Lean On Me</i>
Week #16	4/29	<u>FINAL PAPERS DUE BY 12PM (NOON) VIA E-MAIL!!</u>

Assignment descriptions from online syllabus for “Critical Issues and Future Trends in Education”:

Specific Requirements:

Online Forum Participation (40 pts)

The rigorous seminar format of this course requires that you “attend” each weekly online forum threaded conversation in a timely fashion. The instructor will post each of the weekly queries on the Moodle forum on the Saturday before the Tuesday deadline—students will then have until the following Saturday (by midnight) to interact with the instructor and their peers in relation to this weekly query. While it is expected that students will continuously respond to/initiate chat threads throughout the week, **all initial responses to the instructor’s weekly posting must be submitted by 8pm on the Tuesday of that week’s reading.** The twelve initial posting due dates are 8/31, 9/7, 9/14, 9/21, 9/28, 10/5, 10/12, 10/19, 10/26, 11/2, 11/9, 11/16, with the November 30th through December 7th posting session focusing exclusively on the Resource Assignment (described in the related section below). For instance, as indicated in the “Course Schedule” below, once a student completes the first set of readings for “Week #1,” s/he will post a response to the posted query relating to those readings by 8pm on Tuesday, August 31st. This student will then continue posting through Saturday, September 4th (at which point the instructor will post the next query). While the initial posting is worth 1-2 points, each additional posting is worth .5 of a point, for a weekly maximum of 4 points. **Please note: As there are 12 weeks of posting sessions (at a maximum of 4 points each) but 40 points total for this aspect of the course assignments, students may choose either to skip two weekly posting sessions or post initial/response postings for two weeks for points that will be added to their final course grade.**

Part of your grade will depend on your professional comportment. As professional educators, you will be expected to treat your coworkers and students with respect for their diverse backgrounds and ideas. As such, throughout this course, you should emanate said behavior with your fellow classmates and your instructor during all interactions (i.e. online conversations, peer/instructor e-mail interactions, real time/virtual meetings with the instructor).

Analytical Reflection Papers (30 pts)

Communication through strong, well-grounded writing is another crucial aspect of this course. You will write one reflection paper (4-6 pages, typed, double-spaced) and then revise it; the first is due on 9/21 and the revision is due on 10/26 (both Tuesday 8pm deadlines). **You will e-mail your paper to the instructor by each 8pm Tuesday night deadline.** You will be analyzing critical characteristics of the readings using a selected theory, and your analysis should involve **at least 4** course readings.

These papers are **not** a place for merely summarizing the texts, but they are meant to be an opportunity for you to synthesize the ideas introduced. Further, you may reflect on your personal educational experiences, but you **must** ground these reflections and observations in the theories discussed in the readings. For instance, while reading about the issue of cultural capital, you may describe how your particular social position has prepared you with cultural capital to succeed in particular social situations and not others. Writing and revising your paper is meant to provide a “practice” opportunity for completing the theoretical analysis of your resource for your Resource Assignment, so you will be using theories to analyze various critical issues in education, as well as to speculate about ways

particular issues may play out in and/or influence your future classrooms when you are teaching. The instructor will provide feedback and grading (a maximum of 10 points for the initial submission and 20 points for your revision) to assist in developing your writing and analytical skills. Late papers will not be accepted unless documentation of serious illness or crisis is provided. **As the analytical reflection papers are benchmark performances of the course, failure to submit completed papers on time (or at an alternative time negotiated with and approved by the instructor) will result in failure of this course.**

Your writing should be academic in nature, and you should ensure that all sources are cited properly and referenced in a bibliography in the end of the paper. The 6th edition of American Psychological Association (APA) is the required writing style for all papers and details are found online at <http://www.apastyle.org/pubmanual.html>.

Resource Location, Sharing and Assessment Assignment (30 pts)

In addition to the components associated with the forum participation and analytical papers, each student will select a topic, gather **at least 6** resources related to this topic and then use one theory to analyze how these resources might expose connections relating to this topic when used with future students. As I have provided many recommended readings and viewings, you may choose to use **no more than 2** of these recommended course readings as two of your teacher-oriented resources for this assignment. Resources may include websites and other Internet sources, books, movies, music—any kind of multimedia that might help future students better grasp, analyze, and evaluate (think of Bloom’s taxonomy here) the selected topic. You may also gather resources that inform your teaching approaches only, your classroom interactions only, or a mixture of both. **At least 3 of your selected resources must be for direct use with your future students.** Each student will then write an analytical reflection paper (2-4 pages in length, typed, double-spaced) wherein the selected theory will be used to analyze how each of the **at least 6** resources highlights important aspects of the topic (and look to your analytical paper structure to assist you here).

For instance, a student might choose standardized testing practices in a 3rd-grade classroom as the topic with social class as the theory. After locating two websites (perhaps outlining lesson plans or activities to be used with the 3rd-grade students), a book (at the 3rd-grade reading level that might be used with the 3rd-grade students), a DVD (to be viewed with the 3rd-grade students), a song (two be considered by the 3rd-grade students), the recommended *A Class Divided* documentary and Rist reading from Week #2, the student then writes the 2 to 4 pages in which s/he analyzes how these resources expose connections between social class and testing practices, as well as how these ideas will surface through using the resources with the 3rd-grade students. As is evident by this example, selecting a grade level, age level or particular student group/school environment will help focus the process of locating resources, as well as completing the accompanying paper.

Each student will then send the resources/descriptions and paper to the instructor (by 8pm Tuesday 11/30), who will then post each submission on the Moodle forum for peer consideration and assessment. Every student will then perform a brief “Resource Assessment” of each student’s resource list and accompanying analysis. The instructor has posted a copy of the “Resource Assessment” under “Course Information” on Moodle. Please refer to the “Course Rubrics” under “Course Documents” for specific details about quality and quantity of postings for successful completion of this assignment.

Class Schedule

<i>Week</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Assignment/Activity</i>
Week #1	8/22	Review of Syllabus—Please direct any questions to instructor via chat or e-mail/telephone (contact information located on page 1 above)
Week #2	8/29	Educational Inequalities—Kozol (pp 1-31); Freire (1 st and 9 th letters, pp 31-47, 135-54); McLaren (pp 194-223) (T= 95 pages) <i>Recommended reading/viewing:</i> Kozol (1991), “Week 2, Theoretical Terms” PowerPoint, “EDU 653, Contextual Activity Description”

Week #3	9/5	<p>Educational Inequalities cont'd—Chomsky (pp 15-36); Freire (2nd letter, pp 49-59); Kincheloe (Chapter 1, pp 1-43) (T=74 pages)</p> <p><i>Recommended reading/viewing:</i> Kozol (1991), “Week 3, Theoretical Overview II” PowerPoint, <i>Children in America’s schools</i>, “EDU 653, Kozol Group Conversations” PowerPoint</p>
Week #4	9/12	<p>Standardized Testing and Ability Grouping—NCLB website document (4 pgs); Meier and Wood (all chapters) (T=123 pages)</p> <p><i>Recommended reading/viewing:</i> <i>Paper Clips</i>, “Week 4, NCLB Definitions” PowerPoint</p>
Week #5	9/19	<p>Analytical Reflection #1 Due by 8pm Tuesday 9/21 Standardized Testing and Ability Grouping— Gardner (pp 5-48); Natriello (pp 1-13); Yonezawa and Stuart Wells (pp 47-62) (T=71 pages)</p> <p><i>Recommended reading/viewing:</i> Rist (pp 411-451), “Week 5, Alternatives to NCLB” PowerPoint</p>
Week #6	9/26	<p>School Choice, “America” and Moral Education—Apple (Chapters 1 and 2, pp 1-52) (T= 52 pages)</p> <p><i>Recommended reading/viewing:</i> Apple (2006), Chapters 3 and 5, “Week 6, School Choice I” PowerPoint, “EDU 653, Forum Activity” PowerPoint</p>
Week #7	10/3	<p>School Choice, “America” and Moral Education—Apple (Chapter 7, pp 185-201); Noddings (pp 215-230) (T= 31 pages)</p> <p><i>Recommended reading/viewing:</i> Hochschild (1995), Pak (2002), “Week 7, School Choice II” PowerPoint, “EDU 653, ‘I am from’ Poetry Activity” PowerPoint</p>
Week #8	10/10	<p>Social Issues in Education— Anyon (pp 3-42); Mahoney (3 pages); Omi and Winant (pp 1-23); Thorne (1-10); Davies (pp 229-241) (T=87 pages)</p> <p><i>Recommended reading/viewing:</i> “Week 8, Social Issues I” PowerPoint</p>
Week #9	10/17	<p>Social Issues in Education—Horvat and Antonio (pp 317-42); Weis (pp 111-132); Rofes (8 pages); Johnston (6 pages) (T= 61 pages)</p> <p><i>Recommended reading/viewing:</i> Friend (1993), “Week 9, Social Issues II” PowerPoint, <i>It’s Elementary</i>, “EDU 653, Role Playing Activity Linked with ‘It’s Elementary’” PowerPoint</p>
Week #10	10/24	<p>Analytical Reflection #2 Due by 8pm Tuesday 10/26 School Violence, Surveillance and Issues of Power—Foucault (pp 195-209); Abu El Haj (pp 199-215); Delpit (pp 21-47); Kozol (pp 62-87); Freire (Chapter 2, pp 71-86) (T= 79 pages)</p> <p><i>Recommended reading/viewing:</i> Freire (1970), Chapter 1 (pp 43-69), “Week 10, School Violence, Surveillance and Power” PowerPoint, <i>The Wave</i>, “EDU 653, ‘The Wave’ Group Discussion Question” PowerPoint</p>
Week #11	10/31	<p>School Violence, Surveillance and Issues of Power—Apple (pp 1760-1772); Giroux (pp xiii-xxii); Abu El Haj (pp 199-215) (T= 36 pages)</p> <p><i>Recommended reading/viewing:</i></p>

		Freire (1970), Chapter 3 (pp 87-124), Chapter 4 (pp 125-83), “Week 11, School Violence, Surveillance and Power, Take Two” PowerPoint
Week #12	11/7	Media, Culture and Technology— Storey (pp 1-20); MacKenzie and Wajcman (pp 3-27); Bromley (6 pages); Steinberg (pp 207-218); Kincheloe (pp 249-266) (T= 78 pages) <i>Recommended reading:</i> Valentine and Holloway (2002), Jenkins (2000), “Week 12, Media, Culture and Technology” PowerPoint, <i>The Merchants of Cool</i>
Week #13	11/14	Media, Culture and Technology—Miller (pp 1-16); Bodroghkozy (pp 566-89); Dolby (pp 63-77); Mashburn and Weaver (pp 559-66); Sensoy (pp 593-602) (T= 70 pages) <i>Recommended reading/viewing:</i> Noble (1996), Alvermann and Heron (2001), Dimitriadis (2001), <i>The Future We Will Create</i>
Week #14	11/21	<i>Thanksgiving Break—No Assignments Due</i>
Week #15	11/28	Resource Assignments due by 8pm 11/30—begin assessing peers’ assignments via individual Moodle forums
#16	12/5	Resource assessment continues through 8pm 12/7

Appendix B Resource Assignment Example

In our third grade classrooms we will be faced with children of varying abilities from different cultures and family backgrounds. We are prepared to navigate our way through these issues, but what will we do when faced with negative attitudes and beliefs which are shaped at home? Incessant name calling and teasing can no longer be viewed as “kids being kids.” Where do these ideas and words come from? Most often they will be heard and learned in the home environment. We cannot change the home environment but we can have an effect on students’ self-perceptions. The self-fulfilling prophecy is a powerful force, one that can often be negative. At home, if boys are called wimps or sissies by their fathers or other male role models they may often portray a violent or aggressive image because they don’t want to be called such names. Girls may be called tomboys because they are more interested in technology than cooking. We must tear down the gender specific stereotypes children are having created for them by others. We must empower students to be confident in their abilities and feelings.

In dePaola’s (1979) book *Oliver Button is a Sissy* we meet young Oliver who doesn’t like to do the same things the other boys do. His father insists, “Oliver, don’t be such a sissy! Go out and play baseball or football or basketball. Any kind of ball!” (p. 8). Oliver is faced with public displays of humiliation which are common in schools. Books like this are useful when trying to teach students that they need to believe in themselves in a positive way, regardless of what is said to them. In the end, Oliver persists with his dancing and is accepted as a star because he created and retained a positive self-image. The movie *Billy Elliott* (Brenman and Finn, Producers, Daldry, Director, 2000) gives students a text to world connection regarding a positive self-fulfilling prophecy. Billy’s father is less than supportive of his decision to join the ballet, wanting him instead to partake in the masculine sport of boxing. However, Billy follows his dream to dance in the ballet; he follows and achieves his dream in spite of the masculine male roles which surround him.

The male characters in both *Oliver Button* and *Billy Elliott* have been portrayed as having feminine characteristics. Hutchinson’s (1995) article contains quotes overheard in a physical education class and a poem by Griffin (1993) which show how students’ actions are related to the self-fulfilling prophecy. How you act in situations has an effect as to how people treat you. If you don’t believe that you can catch the fly ball, people will sense your lack of self-confidence and likely not pick you for their team or even publicly call you names. Use of this poem would allow students to feel the true weight and impact that phrases have on a negative self-fulfilling prophecy. The video linked to Thompson’s (2009) PBS webpage *The Search for Masculinity* suggests that football holds the traditional view of masculinity. The football coaches in the video encourage their players to “play tough” and “smash people.” Students may not realize what is happening while engaged in the situation; this video will allow them to see it from the outside.

So how do we change these perceptions and have students work toward a positive self-image which will help them work toward a positive self-fulfilling prophecy? The *Women in World History Curriculum* (2009, <http://www.womeninworldhistory.com>) website provides many lesson plans which detail the accomplishments and contributions of women throughout world history. These lessons will allow the boys to see that women are just as capable as men in contributing to the development of the world. These lessons will also empower girls to see that there have been women before them who have positively contributed to and impacted the history of the world.

We cannot be with our students twenty four hours a day. They will certainly come to school with attitudes and beliefs regarding gender stereotypes which have been formed at home. Using the resources provided we can empower children to believe that we all have something to contribute and that we must have a positive self-image regardless of what others say and do. Together, if we believe in positive change, we can create it within our students.