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Social Foundations, "Disciplinary," and Democracy

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This article was originally conceived for a paper session at the 2000 American Educational Studies Association conference in Vancouver, a session designed as a "multilogue" on teaching the foundations. In the article we discuss the nature of the "disciplines" and disciplined thinking within the field. We are vulnerable, as are many in the social sciences and humanities, to understanding "disciplines" as biased, political codifications that privilege the elite. Yet, as we argue here, we should avoid the modernistic discipline/antidiscipline binary by recognizing the "disciplines" as multivocal discourses. Teaching the "disciplines" that inform social foundations from this point of view presents our students with a historically grounded, critical view of education and schooling.

A disciplined view is, necessarily, a partial and biased view. This insight was at the center of the first School and Society course taught at Teachers College seventy years ago. If the object of a student's learning is the "discipline" itself, then there may be good reason to take a course that is restricted to a single "discipline." On the other hand, when the object of a student's learning is not the "discipline" but the phenomenon that the "discipline" studies, then the student would be advised to take an interdisciplinary course. Harold Rugg, William Heard Kilpatrick, and R. Freeman Butts and the others at Teachers College realized this. When they began the first School and Society course, they recognized that no single "discipline" could provide a complete enough picture of education to help prepare teach-

ers for their task in combating the twin evils of economic depression and the rise of dictatorships around the world. The result was an interdisciplinary course (and the birth of the interdisciplinary field that we now call social foundations of education) designed to harness the idea of interdisciplinarity to the advancement of democratic education.

Traditionally, disciplined scholars work in a bounded world organized around codes of classification (see Bernstein 2000, 5–11, for a discussion on classification and its relation to power). Typically, when we think of a “discipline,” we think of the rules that are used to determine the object, method, and values of a study. Disciplined scholars work within these rules and codes. Supposedly, it is this system of codes that provides both the strength and the weakness of disciplinary work. Its strength comes from the precision and order that follows from the careful implementation of agreed-upon rules. Its weakness results from the failure to consider what has been excluded by the codes. Combining more than one “discipline” into a multidisciplinary or interdisciplinary experience makes that experience less bounded (and, therefore, less biased) than a single disciplinary course. This is the motivation behind the move away from strict and bounded discipline-based instruction to the interdisciplinary School and Society course. There is, however, a problem with this approach. We can put together as many disciplinary perspectives as we want, but as long as each is bounded by the codes of its original “discipline,” the experience will be partial and biased. This latter point creates a problem for many of us today.

When we understand “disciplines” as code-based methods of inquiry,¹ then we (the authors) realize that those who are in a position to determine which codes are to be seen as legitimate and which ones as not legitimate wield much power. That power is realized in the interstices between the “disciplines.” As Bernstein states, “It is silence which carries the message of power; it is the full stop between one category of discourse and another; it is the dislocation in the potential flow of discourse which is crucial to the specialisation of any category” (Bernstein 2000, 6). This “silence which carries the message of power,” because it is “unheard” remains below the sonar range of most students. To the ordinary student, the subject matter and methods of the “disciplines” appear to be natural, unbiased, and apolitical. To many of us, however, they are arbitrary, biased, and very political indeed. And to those of us who are suspicious of any power that has become institutionalized during historical moments characterized by the inequities of capitalism, racism, patriarchy, heteronormativity, and other normalized savagery, the traditional “disciplines” appear to be no more than another hegemonic tool to reproduce the status quo. When we understand the “disciplines” as we have outlined, we (the authors) have little choice but to attempt to dismantle them with the hope that with such dismantling, the institutionalization of inequity might be (however, slightly) challenged. When we (the authors) think about “disciplines” in this way, we cannot but think that rather than interdisciplinarity being consistent with democratic

teaching, it may (at least in some ways) be antithetical to democratic ways. Rather than *interdisciplinarity*, perhaps we need *antidisciplinarity*. Rather than trying to teach and do our scholarship in a manner that honors, in some way, the integration or combination of “disciplines” without challenging their fundamental existence (i.e., *interdisciplinarity*), we need to teach in a way that dismantles the “disciplines” altogether (i.e., *antidisciplinarity*). And we are not alone. Many contemporary scholars, particularly in the fields of feminist studies, cultural studies, or who work from a postmodern position, share this view. Ellen Rooney (1996), for example, wrote that “if cultural studies collaborates in the resistance to theory, it will quickly be assimilated to the disciplinary structure of the university, which is to say, it will trade its political effects for a proper place among the ‘disciplines’” (210). Raymond Williams, in his essay, “The Future of Cultural Studies” (1996), noted the enhanced resources gained in the new status of cultural studies “disciplines” in the contemporary university, such as communications, film studies, and the like, but worried about the consequences of this evolution. “There remains,” he noted, “the problem of forgetting the real project” (174).

Among the problems that disciplinary thinking creates are sacred canonical works, obscure and abstract theoretical terminology, insider practices, limiting logic, fragmentation, and the false claim to being apolitical while, in fact, engaging in noncritical, nonreflexive, immoral, normalizing action (see Hytten 1998 for a nice summation of many of these points). If we think of “disciplines” in this way, it seems inevitable to conclude that “disciplinarity” is inherently undemocratic; that is, “disciplined” thinking and inquiry cannot remain open to, inclusive of, and accessible to all kinds of thinkers and citizens.

But is this understanding of disciplinarity our most useful way to understand the term? We think not. In fact, to think of the “disciplines” in the way developed above is to fall prey to the logic of modernism. Only a modernist could think that disciplinary thought is a unique and coherent way of thinking and acting. “Disciplines” should not be thought of as disciplined ways of thinking and practicing but as discourses (or discursive practices if you wish to take a Foucaultian slant). A “discipline” may be many things but it is certainly a discourse. As a discourse, a “discipline” has a set of recognizable themes, privileged myths, sacred practices, canonical texts, and other elements of discourses. In this, “disciplines” are no different than any other kind of discourse. All discourses are organized around coded speech and practices.

What makes “disciplines” create the list of problems pointed out above is not that they are “disciplines,” but that they are discourses that have been used to advance the hegemonic interests of the elites. The problems created by disciplinary thought do not result from its “disciplinarity” but from its privileged positions. That is, what makes disciplinary thinking problematic is that “disciplines” hide their political interests through the “silence that carries the message of power.”

Those of us who work in the field of cultural studies or utilize a postmodern or feminist discourse do not escape the utilization of discourses. These discourses have their own set of recognizable themes, privileged myths, sacred practices, and canonical texts. The discourses of postmodernism, feminism, and cultural studies are not without their own borders. Many might object to the idea that cultural studies (or critical theory or postmodern feminism) can be so clearly drawn as to be codified. Each of those discourses, in fact, takes great pride in declaring its inability to be codified and, in fact, the undesirability of codification itself. In fact, one might say that one of the codes of these discourses is the need to honor the idea that they are not codified. One of their myths is that they are, in fact, not codified. But what makes our discourses differ from those of the “disciplines” is not that “disciplines” are codified while our discourses are not, but that we proclaim our objections to the idea of codification while the “disciplines” embrace it. In our insistence that cultural studies (for example) cannot, and should not, be made a coherent “discipline,” we are (in fact) attempting to insist on a rule that will help create a consistent stance. Given the myth that “disciplines” are coherent and disciplined, it makes sense to us to publicly proclaim that our “disciplines” lack coherency. But we should confuse neither their rhetoric nor ours with the reality. The “disciplines” are not as ordered as they proclaim, and ours are not as absent of order as we proclaim.

The attempt of postmodernist, feminist, and cultural studies scholars to codify the rejection of codification is as unsuccessful as the attempts of scholars dedicated to a traditional sense of their discipline to codify the acceptance of codification. This can be seen in the proliferation of the institutionalization of cultural studies and women’s studies in formal programs of study and the introductory textbooks that appear in our courses. As these fields of study develop, their discourses become more codified, not less so simply through a desire among some for openness and inclusivity. Rather than accepting the rhetorical claim that “disciplines” have monovocal discourses and rejecting the disciplines based on this principle, we should recognize that all disciplinary discourses are multivocal and that the attempt to impose coherency on any discourse is merely a play in the language game that makes up the politics of any discourse.

Although it is true that the traditional “disciplines” have a history of policing their ranks, using power to exclude many who challenge the sacred tenets of the field, it would be a mistake to conclude that such policing shuts down the opposition. If we have learned anything about discourse in the last dozen years, it should be that discourse is multivocal. All discourses are multivocal. Even the discourses associated with the “disciplines” are marked by multivocality.² Is the “discipline” of sociology, for example, really as bounded as the initial argument of this article presumes? We think of W. E. B. DuBois. DuBois was one of America’s first sociologists. In a remarkable career that lasted from the 1890s to the 1960s, DuBois never gave up on his belief that the “science” of the social

should be a moderated, objective, rational process. To this end he produced some of the very first sociological field studies (DuBois 1898, 1973), and he worked to promote the careful “scientific” study of Africans and their descendant peoples throughout the world. W. E. B. DuBois was one of the field’s creators and one of its most prolific and long-lived practitioners. Do we really want to assert that his socialist activism for people of color throughout the world is not a part of the “discipline” of sociology? And yet, if we continue to think of sociology as a “discipline” bounded by codes that *inherently* reproduce the status quo and exclude the possibility of transformative scholarship, then what are we to make of DuBois’s lifetime of work within sociology? Are we to assume that it only *appears* to challenge the status quo? On the other hand, if we accept that DuBois’s work actually does work to transform, then we must admit that the codes of the “discipline” of sociology are broad and bendable enough to permit alternatives.

And, of course, DuBois is not the only important African American sociologist. Think of Charles S. Johnson, whose Chicago School sociology adroitly combined statistics with personal narrative to bring the sociological case study to bear on social policy (Johnson [1934] 1966, [1941] 1967, [1938] 1969). Or think of the work of E. Franklin Frazier, whose study of family life and race brought new understanding to the problems of urbanization and stratification (Frazier 1939, 1957a, 1957b). And what of all of the students of these “big three” (i.e., DuBois, Johnson, and Frazier) whose work has yet to be recovered and made known? What of the 121 Black American sociologists identified by Conyers in 1968 (Conyers 1968)? And what of the 21 Black females who received doctorates in sociology from 1945 to the early 1970s (see Jackson 1974)? And we have only mentioned the American Black sociologists. What of the contributions of women to sociology? Or of Latinos and Latinas? Or of Asians? For that matter, what of the work of Marx? Certainly Marxism is one of the central theories of sociology and yet it cannot be understood to *merely* reproduce the status quo. Our point is that although *disciplining* the field is certainly an exercise in power, we should not confuse the “disciplines” with the hegemony that has attempted to define the field of sociology in narrow self-serving forms.

Or, consider the case of the multivocal “discipline” of philosophy. Although the Anglo-American analytic school dominated the “discipline” of philosophy in America for at least fifty years, do we really want to suggest that critics such as Alain Locke are not a voice within philosophy? The man who best articulated the aesthetic and philosophical basis of the Harlem Renaissance understood the “Negro” not as a problem but as a nation in building. His imaginative pragmatism built upon William James’s experiential pragmatism but expanded to include the values orientation of Continental philosophies is an important forerunner of what we today refer to as critical pragmatism (see Locke and Har-

ris 1989; Locke and Stewart 1983, [1925] 1968). What of the philosophies of Africans such as Frantz Fanon (1966), Kwame Nkrumah (1964), and Julius Nyerere (1968), whose work decenters the philosophical discourse? Or what of the work of Angela Y. Davis, whose black feminist philosophy has helped us reconceptualize violence (Davis 1971, 1989, 1998)? What of the many other women who have contributed to philosophy? The works of Charlotte Perkins Gilman ([1903] 1970, 1911), Hannah Arendt (1963, 1971, 1978), and Simone de Beauvoir (1948, 1961, 1972) comprise part of the “canon” of philosophy. Through critiques, reconstructions, and groundbreaking theoretical contributions, contemporary scholars such as Nancy Fraser (1997), Iris Marion Young (1990), and Seyla Benhabib (1992) have opened up philosophical discourses to wider realms of perspective and politics. These are prominent contemporary philosophers, but these women also are extremely critical of much of what their own “discipline” has to contribute toward the intellectual and political work of and for women and people of color. They make up part of the rich multivocality that is the discourse of Western philosophy.

All of these diverse voices are part of the “discipline” of philosophy and yet none of them merely adheres to the strict codes of philosophy in such a way as to make their work inherently reproductive. It seems to us that when we refuse to buy into the false modernist assertion that a “discipline” is a unified and limited set of codifications and recognize it as a discourse with all of the arguments, conflicts, and multivoicedness of any other discourse, then we must rethink our opposition to *disciplinarity per se*. Furthermore, when we realize that those of us who speak against the “disciplines,” ourselves speak within discourses, then we need to realize that the problem of codification is not in “disciplinarity” itself but in how those who work within those discourses present themselves. We must vigorously oppose those who would bound and homogenize our disciplinary conversations and insist that a full presentation of the multiple voices that make up and that can expand those conversations be included in our work and teaching. Our conclusion is that rather than substituting antidisciplinarity (i.e., teaching to dismantle the “disciplines”) for interdisciplinarity (i.e., teaching to honor, in some way, the integration or combination of “disciplines” without challenging their fundamental existence), we must teach and work in such a way that refuses to permit those who hold institutionalized power to successfully assert the false claim that “disciplines” are unified, codified, naturalized bodies of work. Rather than abandoning the teaching of the “disciplines,” we must teach them in such a way as to recover the multivoicedness of the long-term conversations we call “disciplines.” We must teach them in such a way that our students come to recognize the arbitrary and inherently political nature of disciplinary (and, therefore, interdisciplinary) work and in this way realize the democratic potentiality of interdisciplinary work that was at the heart of the birth of our field. How this may be done is, of course, a matter of pedagogy.

Disciplined Thinking and Multivocal Discourses in Teaching Foundations

In the first weeks of our lone required Social Foundations course (EDL 204), students read texts authored by Paulo Friere, E. D. Hirsch, James Baldwin, and Peggy McIntosh (Rousmaniere and Knight Abowitz 2000).³ Students (most of whom are sophomores at this midsize, selective, mostly White institution) also read selections from *A Nation at Risk* and discuss the recent history of the standards debates in American education. This interdisciplinary course provides a broad, critical reading of the object of study, primarily using the disciplines of history, sociology, and philosophy. EDL 204 attempts to engage students in the long-standing debates of American schooling using primary-source readings, seminar discussions, intensive writing assignments, and group action research.⁴

We attempt to use the foundations disciplines in an interdisciplinary and multivocal manner. The course reader integrates primary source documents to help students read the history of American education as it continues to unfold. James G. Carter, Thomas Jefferson, Daniel Webster, the first Massachusetts school law and the Mississippi law forbidding the education of slaves are all read as we use the discourse of history (its canon, codes, and silences) to understand American education. Students can understand through class readings that history is made and recorded by a variety of people using a variety of ideological perspectives. The philosophical texts in the course run a gamut from selections written by revered educational philosophers such as John Dewey and Paulo Friere to different kinds of texts that relate to the larger questions of aim, meaning, and purposes of American schooling. For example, students in the course read an essay by Richard Rodriguez and are pulled into the ongoing debate regarding the aims of public schooling in a multicultural society. Students are also assigned to read “The Year the Schools Began Teaching the Telephone Directory,” by Harmin and Simon (1965). This brilliant satirical essay helps students grapple with such philosophical questions as, “What is the purpose of schooling in a democratic society?” and “What is democratic pedagogy?” Philosophy as a discipline is used not as an end in itself, to be learned for its own sake, but as one way to pose certain kinds of questions, through certain philosophical methods, in a unique disciplinary discourse about education.

A multivocal curriculum is not in and of itself sufficient to help students understand “disciplines,” institutions, and discourses as politicized, socially constructed conversations. Although students can explore, in their own way, the fascinations of interplay and conflict between Friere and Hirsch, or Baldwin and *A Nation at Risk*, we also ask them to develop a particular approach to such comparisons. Yes, we are imposing a particular (dare we say) “disciplined” approach to social foundations of education through the use of textual analysis. Textual analysis—the process of interpreting the multiple meanings of a text—requires students to examine

the analytical, interpretive, and normative perspectives of educational texts they encounter in the course. Although textual analysis could be considered an innovation from the pedagogy of cultural studies, as it requires students to view texts in a nonfoundational, critical manner, we also can tie this and other EDL 204 assignments directly to Standard I of the CLSE Standards (1996). “The purpose of foundations study is to bring these disciplinary resources to bear in developing interpretive, normative, and critical perspectives on education, both inside and outside of schools” (7). From the overlap in pedagogical aims of critical theory, cultural studies, and social foundations comes a tool for reading texts in EDL 204 that we have made central to the course. We use the textual analysis process to help engage students in an investigatory, critical stance to educational texts and discourses—including the “sacred” canonical texts of our own foundations “disciplines.” Students are asked to analyze texts organized around analytic, interpretive, and normative questions. The *analytic* looks at what’s going on in the text, both in terms of claim, evidence, and rhetorical strategies such as narrative, imagery, and ideographs. The *interpretive* requires students to frame the text in historical and cultural contexts that shape both what’s being said and how the text is interpreted. The *normative* perspective helps students examine the values promoted by the text, the values that they as readers use to make meaning of the text, and whose interests are advanced in the process of textual meaning making. The text analysis process helps our students develop critical habits of thinking about education and schooling in our culture. It helps them look for ways that rhetoric is used in educational texts, and how rhetoric helps shape meaning. The process asks students to identify different kinds of evidence offered by text authors. The process, moreover, requires students to investigate issues of influence and power.

A governmental report on educational standards, a political speech on education by a presidential candidate, a classical essay by John Dewey on the aims of education—all texts are examined using text analysis processes. By this process we hope to dislodge cultural myths about education. Such myths include: Educational aims in our democracy are stable and a product of consensus; educational philosophies and epistemologies are politically neutral; politicians and legislators want what is best for all children; and schools are the great equalizers in our democracy. Myths can be perpetuated by disciplines read as univocal systems, but by making full use of the multivocal nature of discipline discourses, these myths become easier to question for our students. By treating education in a humanities style, using educational texts as various points within a broad, historically grounded cultural conversation about schooling and education, we aim to use disciplined thinking without destroying the multivocal nature of the field of education or the “disciplines” that make up the foundations of education.

Another assignment in EDL 204, the pedagogical project, requires that students join in the *public* discourse around specific educational issues. Again drawing from critical theory, cultural studies, and the democratic agenda embedded in so-

cial foundations, we help students to both analyze a cultural conversation *about* education and to *enter into it* as well, keeping in mind that education is a public responsibility that requires civic participation and activism. Through assignments like our pedagogical project, students study an educational discourse currently at play in our culture, such as censorship in libraries, diversity issues on campus, and eating disorders among young women. After studying the public discourse on their selected topics, teams of students then design a way to insert themselves into that conversation. Student groups might develop posters or flyers and place them around campus, or hold informational meetings, or organize a letter-writing campaign, or (at least once) organize a student protest at the university president's office. We hope to promote through this pedagogy the idea that as students and as educational workers, they develop their own value positions on the basis of critical study (see Standard I, 7), and to attempt to influence the positions of other citizens.

As of yet we have not engaged in any "reader studies" of this approach to foundations (an approach that borrows heavily from the humanities-based cultural studies field). How do students make meaning of our curriculum? What do we trade off in using this approach over a more traditional approach that organizes the subject matter by the disciplines? By focusing on a few of the central debates in education rather than on the "disciplines" per se, we may lose a kind of precision and specialization that disciplinary discourses provide. Our hope is that interweaving authors of widely varying times, contexts, and ideologies provides a "real" sense of the politics and chaos of educational discourses. Unfortunately it also may get a traditional college sophomore lost in a disarray of people, ideas, and agendas. We shudder to think, for example, that our students walk around thinking that E. D. Hirsch is as weighty a figure in education as is John Dewey. Moreover, we wonder if students gain an adequate appreciation for the histories and consequences of the various philosophies of education (itself a whole field of study that we microsize into a few weeks of class discussion). Like anything else, our choices involve trade-offs and prioritization.

In our current formation of EDL 204, we value the critical analysis of power, rhetoric, and cultural contexts operating in educational texts over the value of the traditional "disciplines" as bounded ways of talking and thinking about education, but we also value the "disciplines" *as discourses* and ask the students to engage them as such. This is most evident in our graduate-level foundations courses, taught by social foundations of education faculty (unfortunately, most of our EDL 204 sections are taught by graduate students with little background in foundations). In the teaching of a core course called Culture and Education to PhD students in our Administration and Curriculum degree programs, students look at the idea of culture from three different discourses: anthropology, sociology, and cultural studies. The much-debated meanings and approaches to culture within these three discourses reflect a multivocal understanding of both the disciplines studied and the concept of culture itself. In a master's-level social foundations class based on a theme of "community

and schooling,” texts are deliberately chosen from the fields of philosophy, history, and anthropology to illuminate the ways in which different fields use their own language, methods, codes, and silences to understand a common phenomenon. We value critical analysis with a multivocal emphasis in this particular cultural moment, both for our students and for ourselves in our own work. In a capitalistic democracy saturated with educational rhetoric and speeches, images and reforms, we believe students must be taught how to critically read culture and educational discourses, as much as they must be taught the educational histories, philosophies, and sociological discourses that run through the texts they are reading. A relevant parallel to this pedagogical goal has to do with our own scholarly associations. We value critical analysis with a multivocal emphasis for the field of social foundations of education. At recent meetings of the American Educational Studies Association (AESA), the push toward a more inclusive and diverse foundations field is palpable and promising. Such an opening up of the field helps make a healthy environment for the multiple identities and scholarship agendas of a diverse AESA. However, both multivocality *and* the kind of critical analysis provided by disciplinary and disciplined thinking is where the promise lies. We must not lose the “disciplines,” either from our teaching or from our scholarly associations, but use them as tools with which we understand, critique, and engage our public problems.

As teachers of social foundations, we find ourselves in the difficult situation of trying to introduce students to a field as broad as the social foundations in a single semester without any hope that more in-depth study will follow. Like many others we have opted to address the difficult task of offering foundations courses by using a topics-based approach that intertwines the many subdisciplines of our field. This approach allows us to use the insights of our different subdisciplines to focus on particular topics in much the same way that that original School and Society course at Teachers College permitted William Heard Kilpatrick, Harold Rugg, and the other Teachers College foundations scholars to do. But it would be a mistake to confuse our approach with an abandonment of the “disciplines.” We have carefully selected the readings in a manner that tries to reflect the discourses of the subdisciplines as well as of the broader field of social foundations as a whole. And we have developed a method of analysis, interpretation, and critique that derives directly from the standards of the Council of Learned Societies which is itself an attempt to codify a field that is engaged in a debate over the desirability of codification itself. Like many other pragmatists, we believe that the disciplinary/antidisciplinary debate is best solved by dissolving the problem. When we recognize that the dualism is itself the result of modernist thinking, we realize that the best approach is not to teach the “disciplines” as coherent bodies of knowledge and method or to abandon the “disciplines” as if the themes, concepts, and theories of these “disciplines” have no history. Instead, we hope to teach the students something of the many conflicts, contradictions, and politics of these long-term conversations themselves and then invite the students to find their places and participate

in the conversations as they occur today. We also hope, as teachers and scholars in the changing field of foundations, that we can participate in the critical inquiry and debate that shapes our scholarly associations and future fields of study.

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Notes

1. One of the best, most fully developed discussions of disciplinarity in the field of education is Pietig (1984). In this piece Pietig presented several different attempts to “discipline” the field of education and concludes that none of the attempts is rationally justified. In the end Pietig suggested that we “demystify the disciplines” (372), a view that comes closer to our argument here than that of the disciplinary abolitionism that we are about to discuss.
2. Anderson (1999) also made this point. She stated that even the infamous positivist period of the early-to-middle twentieth century was marked by discord: “Critical attitudes towards attempts to establish disciplinary norms around positivistic assumptions were always part of the mix” (7).
3. We have developed a reader for the course that contains written lectures, educational documents, as well as many essays by prominent educators of the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries.
4. EDL 204: Sociocultural Foundations of Education, was developed by Richard Quantz and Kate Rousmaniere of Miami University’s Department of Educational Leadership. Dr. Rousmaniere, in particular, wrote much of the original curriculum in 1993 that remains in the course today.

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