

OBJECTIVES

Foundations of American Education
FDN 3800

The study of undergraduate foundations of American Education, FDN 3800, is organized around three central themes: 1. Curriculum, 2. Knowledge, Emotion, and Identity, and 3. Power and Justice.(1)

“FDN 3800 asks students to examine what ‘diversity’ and ‘educational equity’ should mean, how they should be meaningfully related within a teaching and learning setting, and how therefore they should be embodied within schools.”

“Through readings and conversation students are provided ample opportunity to examine both why and how gender, ethnic, intellectual, religious, racial, and class (to name only more prominent) diversities ought to figure into educational institutions committed to nurturing social justice and developing the moral, intellectual and emotional dispositions of democratic citizenship.”

(1) See the document entitled “Rationale” for a more detailed explanation regarding the ways in which Foundations of American Education, FDN 3800, addresses the learning needs of pre-service teachers, and aligns with NCATE and DPI standards.

(2) Please see the FDN 3800 “Disposition” document.

(3) Please see the documents entitled “Curriculum,” “Knowledge, Emotion, and Identity,” and “Power and Justice” for a more detailed explanation regarding the ways in which Foundations of American Education, FDN 3800, addresses the learning needs of pre-service teachers, and aligns with NCATE and DPI standards.



How NC DPI standards are enacted in FDN 3800⁽¹⁾

The following North Carolina Department of Public Instruction standards are continuously addressed through the objectives in the “Curriculum,” “Knowledge, Emotion, and Identity,” and “Power and Justice” framework of Foundations of American Education, FDN 3800. (1)(2)(3)

CORE STANDARDS FOR ALL TEACHERS

C.1 Teachers know the content they teach

In FDN 3800 prospective teachers thoughtfully examine and explore ethical and epistemological issues concerning what

aspects of human culture, past and present, are worth learning and teaching. Students are encouraged to critically examine why standard academic disciplinary knowledge (e.g. science, mathematics, history, literature, music, painting), emotions (e.g. compassion, wonder, awe, love), and imagination are good, why they are worthwhile nurturing, developing and continuing to pursue in a human life, in their own life and in the lives of the students they intend to teach.

This critical examination is pursued through philosophical, historical, and sociological readings, through engagement with novels and short stories,

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and through experiences of music and art. Conversations focused on these materials is crucial both to the exploration of these issues and to the on-going acquisition by students of the contemplative disposition and analytical knowledge required to adequately address these issues. Reflective writings on readings and reflective and analytical essays also contribute to this end.

C.2 Teachers know how to teach students

FDN 3800 is committed to the proposition that prospective teachers cannot know how to teach students unless they have clear insight into the true nature of good and worthwhile learning. Learning (as is true of teaching) is emotional and intellectual labor and this class is designed to permit students to experience learning in that fullness.

Reflective conversations on and writings about matters of deep human concern and importance allow students to experience a learning unfettered from instrumental or utilitarian ends. This class is seriously and deeply committed to the notion that “love of learning” should indeed be the heart and mind of the relationship between learner and subject matter, and the relationship between learner and teacher.

Students (and teachers) in FDN 3800 learn that this love is a complex, mysterious, painful and delightful emotion and that schools (including universities) and teachers have the power to either nurture and develop this love of learning or distort, or even destroy it.

C.3 Teachers are successful in teaching a diverse population of students

Through readings in philosophy, sociology, history and narrative fiction, and through videos and music, students in FDN 3800 examine the significant consequences that class, race, ethnicity, gender (including sexual orientation) and religion have on learning and teaching experiences in schools.

“Each issue and situation more fully reveals its structural and inter-personal dimensions under the scrutiny of the various candidates’ personal and disciplinary perspectives. This interaction among students provides them with the kind of cross-disciplinary experience which is inherent to Foundations of American Education, and we believe it to be critical to future successful classroom teaching.”

Students in “Foundations of American Education” also are invited and encouraged to thoughtfully analyze the oftentimes vacuous rhetoric of political and educational conversation about diversity in schools and society, e.g. the notion that we should “celebrate diversity.” What does that mean?

Does the mere existence of a “diverse” belief or practice give it moral and educational weight? (e.g. does fervent belief in “creationism” or “intelligent design” – by no means new ideas in the pantheon of human ideas – by itself warrant respect and inclusion in a curriculum of what should be taught in schools?)

C.4 Teachers are leaders

C.5 Teachers are reflective about their practice

These two standards are described together because their complementarities lie at the core of FDN 3800. The class is focused primarily toward engag-

ing students in reflection about what learning and teaching should be, if reflection about it means to be a morally discerning human being committed to the work of educating children, adolescents and young adults.

A core assumption of this class is that teachers cannot be good leaders unless they acquire the dispositions and practices of such contemplative engagement.(2)

All of the readings, the class conversations, and the writing assignments in FDN 3800 reflect the commitment of the teachers of this class to pursuing with students the difficult, painful and delightful intellectual and emotional labor of this interpretive and normative work.

The fact that various sections of FDN 3800 are held together by a common set of questions, rather than a predicatively controlled set of answers, is indicative of our commitment to reflective inquiry.

C. 6 Teachers respect and care about students

Through FDN 3800 students come to see that respect and care are complex and oftentimes difficult to achieve human relationships. The very questions of what it means to respect another person, what it means to care for another human being, to care for non-human species, to be the recipient of care (the state of vulnerability, helplessness entailed by being cared for) are explored and critically examined.

The course assumes that the concepts of “respect” and “care” are complex, and that shibboleths like “respect for diversity” are worth careful scrutiny.

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At the same time the course examines the ways in which fear, hatred, and disgust have fueled the historical and contemporary degradation, humiliation of, and cruelty towards certain persons and groups of individuals (e.g. Jews, Blacks, Women, Gays and Lesbians, the homeless).

The readings in the course are intended to show concrete illustrations of dignity and degradation, of care and cruelty. Such concrete exemplars then serve as the basis for the philosophical and sociological analysis of the relational concepts of respect and care.

DIVERSITY STANDARDS

D.1 Teachers understand the central concepts, tools of inquiry, and structures of the disciplines. They teach and can create environments and learning experiences that make these aspects of subject matter accessible, meaningful, and culturally relevant for diverse learners.

FDN 3800 is fundamentally committed to engaging students in examining the question of what makes any “discipline,” any body of knowledge worth teaching and learning. In a society and schooling system wedded to utilitarian values and instrumental reasoning – in addition to various forms of crass materialism - students in this foundations class are provided the language and the intellectual and emotional space in which to see and understand the meaningfulness, the value, the “relevance” of disciplinary knowledge in other than a narrow and distorting framework.

Asked to consider the wonder, the beauty, the mystery of the disciplinary knowledge they are still learning (e.g. biology, history, music, mathematics, literature) and intending to teach, stu-

dents in FDN 3800 begin to see learning and teaching as the exhilarating and painful human questing that is truly is.

D.2 Teachers understand how students’ cognitive, physical, sociocultural, linguistic, emotional, and moral development influences learning and addresses these factors when making instructional decisions.

As is the case with all of the standards that this foundations class addresses, this standard is explored in FDN 3800 by an interpretive and normative question of the premises of the standard itself.

What does (and should) it mean to claim that individuals develop morally, intellectually and emotionally? The concept of “development” along any of these dimensions embodies certain teleological assumptions (often hidden under scientific jargon) that this course is committed to bringing to light and examining.

What constitutes good moral, emotional and intellectual development? (or substitute “growth” if you are in a Deweyan state of mind)

D.3 Teachers work collaboratively to develop linkages with parents/caretakers, school, colleagues, community members and agencies that enhance the educational experiences and well being of diverse learners.

In FDN 3800 students examine the nature and content of learning that occurs in families, in institutional contexts outside of schools, e.g. churches, community organizations.

Students examine the complex relations that exist between these non-school settings and contexts, and the teaching and learning that should be experienced in schools.

Recognizing the unarguably significant role that these familial and societal settings have on shaping children and adolescents (even adults as they come to discover) students in class begin to see points of both complementarities and points of conflicts. Through the readings engaged in, FDN 3800 students come to see that students and

teachers are mysterious emotional and intellectual human beings with joys and sorrows, loves and heartaches. In teaching and learning we are all in this together and we had better learn to see each other for the complex, wonderful and perplexing individuals that we are.

“ We cannot know whether educational equity is advanced or retarded (perhaps even reversed) until we have a clear understanding of what “educational equity” should mean. And the answer to that question depends upon becoming clear about what a good education is.”

D. 4 Teachers acknowledge and understand that diversity exists in society and utilize this diversity to strengthen the classroom environment to meet the needs of individual learners.

As described in C.3 FDN 3800 is concerned not simply with having students see and understand the complex diversity that exists in the world, but to also explore carefully the normative question of what, if anything, that diversity should mean for teaching and learning. Normative questions and

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issues concerning diversity are framed within a context of social justice in a democratic society.

Through readings and conversation students are provided ample opportunity to examine both why and how gender, ethnic, intellectual, religious, racial, and class (to name only more prominent) diversities ought to figure into educational institutions committed to nurturing social justice and developing the moral, intellectual and emotional dispositions of democratic citizenship.

“A core assumption of this class is that teachers cannot be good leaders unless they acquire the dispositions and practices of such contemplative engagement.” (2)

D.5 Teachers of diverse students demonstrate leadership by contributing to the growth and development of their colleagues, their school and the advancement of educational equity.

We cannot know whether educational equity is advanced or retarded (perhaps even reversed) until we have a clear understanding of what “educational equity” should mean. And the answer to that question depends upon becoming clear about what a good education is.

After all, no one is truly interested in pursuing equity in *bad* teaching and learning. FDN 3800 examines those critical questions and issues with students. If the gap between blacks and whites (or females and males) on standardized tests of reading comprehension is closed over a period of time, but we find over that same time period that

all students hate reading books, have we achieved any kind of meaningful equity in education? Questions such as this one animate FDN 3800 classes.

D.6 Teachers of diverse students are reflective practitioners who are committed to educational equity.

FDN 3800 asks students to examine what “diversity” and “educational equity” should mean, how they should be meaningfully related within a teaching and learning setting, and how therefore they should be embodied within schools. Students explore when achieving equity would mean treating “diverse” individuals the same and when it would require treating or responding to them differently.

Students are asked to explore just what human differences ought to make an educational difference, and when such alleged differences have been the basis for discrimination and oppression. As students are encouraged to identify their own biases and prejudices they are pulled into considering issues concerning moral judgment and discernment, i.e. what distinguishes an unwarranted bias from a sound moral judgment?

TECHNOLOGY STANDARDS

T.6 Teachers understand the social, ethical, legal, and human issues surrounding the use of technology in PK-12 schools and apply those principles in practice.

In FDN 3800 students explore the broad concept of technology as a never ending series of tools created by human beings to meet human needs and respond to human desires.

To fully understand the use of technology in schools in the modern era, students must not only explore questions concerning the nature of human needs and desires, but also how economic and social forces circumscribe the needs of some, while amplifying the needs of others. Students are encouraged to situate their analysis of the use of technology in PK-12 schools within this larger context of social justice and situated choices.

For example, in the context of a discussion of what a “good school” might look like, students would consider the role played historically by technological change in shaping their conceptions of that vision of the “good school,” and how that precedent is manifested in the schools today.

“Whether the future teacher seeks to unlock the secrets of successful reading for his or her struggling student, or seeks to diffuse a behavioral issue in the classroom, the candidate must have access to, and draw upon, the sum total of his or her previous knowledge and experience if she hopes to truly enhance the educational experiences and outcomes for all learners.”