EDUC 5773 RT/WT; Community Perspectives on School and Society

Syllabus

Course Overview

The complexity of community thus relates to the difficult interaction between the tendencies originally distinguished in the historical development: on the one hand the sense of direct common concern; on the other hand the materialization of various forms of common organization, which may not adequately express this. Community can be the warmly persuasive word to describe an existing set of relationships, or the warmly persuasive word to describe an alternative set of relationships. What is most important, perhaps, is that unlike all other terms of social organization (state, nation, society, etc.) it seems never to be used unfavourably, and never to be given any positive opposing or distinguishing term. (76)

Williams, Raymond. "Community." In *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*. Revised Edition. NY: Oxford University Press, 1983.

Welcome to the course. In this course we will investigate the complex and somewhat problematic idea of community. At first, it is common for most of us to think about community as a place of safety and security. Like the idea of family, community can be seen as a kind of "heaven in a heartless world" as Christopher Lasch put it. Furthermore, in a world where intimate connections see to be much harder to find, and where anonymity is normalized, we all crave a lost belonging or sense that we are a part of

something enduring. Finally, as much as we can believe that intimate relationships have eroded as modernity has advanced, it is also clear that most people today are intensely focused on intimate relationships represented by the idea of family and community which are now imbued with emotional and affinity connections rather than those of duty, tradition and obligation. The popular imagery that surrounds this positive vision of community is typically that of a "tight-knit" rural village where everyone knows one another or perhaps an affluent urban or suburban environment endowed with services and high-quality public spaces (like parks and shopping areas) that bring people together in convivial ways.

There are of course elements of truth to this vision. There are also elements of trouble here as well. Communities can be places where people hide their crimes and excesses and where they retreat into their comfortable yet exclusive identity constructions keeping all those who don't "belong" on the outside. The recent rise of various nationalisms and backlash politics around immigration, women's rights and the politics of gender and sexuality are just a few of the flashpoints that illustrate the double-edged nature of community. Other examples include the xenophobia of groups, typically located in some geographic or imagined community who worry incessantly about the "accommodation" of newcomers who somehow threaten established identities.

There is no doubt as well that the idea of community has been used as an instrument of power to shape perceptions and solidarities and to mobilize groups of people against one another. This is most easy to see (at least for us in the West) in highly controlled societies and police states. The quintessential examples are Nazi Germany, the Soviet Union, Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge, and in communist China. The rise of the extreme right in Holland, France and in other parts of Europe as well as in the United States and in Australia illustrates however that these kinds of radical response to difference and to diversity are also present in contemporary democracies. All of these movements, past and present, rely on some kind of appeal to community, belonging and to solidarity.

When it comes to schooling, the idea of community is commonplace. The primary location of schooled learning is often referred to as a classroom community a space in which young citizens learn what they need in terms of both academics and socialization. At least from the time of Dewey, the classroom has been understood to be a microcosm of democracy, a space where the young are given increasing amounts of responsibility for self-management and collective governance. Additionally, the classroom itself is often constructed in terms of a community of learners and many teachers use communal imagery to frame the crucial socialization function of schooling as well as problems of management and student discipline. Teachers are now commonly positioned as members of what are called "professional learning communities", actively engaged in the production and

sharing of reflexive, collectively produced professional knowledge. Schools themselves are also imagined as communities, organized in authority structures that themselves reflect the organization and governance of larger scale communities. These school communities of course both reflect and fit into the larger communities in which they are located.

Because the language and imagery of community is so ubiquitous, there is a lot of work to do when it comes to pulling apart the various strands in the discourse of community. Is it a useful idea today, or rather is it discursive rubbish bin into which we throw our prejudices, fears and fantasies? Is the concept of community a valuable metaphor for schooling, or is it yet another way to sugar-coat instrumental problems of governance and the regulation of children? The purpose of this course it to help you clarify and complexify the way you use and understand the idea of community in your professional work. It is also important, I think, that you come to understand better how the language of community is used to motivate and possibly manipulate educators in the various networks of power in which you operate both professionally and personally. Finally, the idea of community takes on a particular shape in what are called "neoliberal times" an overarching concept that addresses the way that educators, students and others connected with schooling are drawn into an individualizing matrix of performativity best represented by standardized curricula and assessment.

For me, the challenge is to move from relatively simplistic notions of all-inclusive "community" in the singular to a more inclusive and complex, pluralized idea of communities. If we really think about it even the most allegedly "close-knit" stereotypical rural community is a collection of different groups of people with different agendas, political/social positions, access to resources and interests. To speak of any collective of people as a "community" tends to assume a sameness that inevitably blurs and even obscures the important differences between individuals and sub-groups. Indeed the idea of community is often used as a way to mask the power of certain individuals by imagining that everyone within a community is equal and even that they speak with one voice. By pluralizing the idea of community we can begin to look at the differences that exist within educational sites and geographic locations.

Instructor

Dr. Tony N Kelly is a university lecturer and rural educator whose career has been made in rural Nova Scotia whilst traveling to and studying in large urban universities. He has taught at all levels of the public school and has been involved in school administration and leadership. His academic interests are: literacy and the ways in which adolescents and transitional youth make use of literacy; literary anthropology as research method; leadership and professional development; ethics and philosophy

of education; identity in place; transitional learners; rusticity and rural education in globalized settings; educational policy in relation to literacy and rural education; Afro-centric education and social change; indigenous education; narrative inquiry; teacher education; and student well-being.

Dr. Kelly is particularly interested in the way rural places are represented within the dominant culture and the effect this representation has on teacher identity, especially the way in which teachers view their calling or vocation in relation to matters of rural identity. He has published scholarly pieces on these topics in the journal Changing English and in edited collections. Dr. Kelly is currently involved in capturing the long transitional moment as seven rural youth negotiate their future beyond high school: Dreaming Your Way Out of Town: Seven Rural Youth in Transition to Post-secondary Education and Beyond. He also writes and publishes in the popular media on issues to do with rural life and sustainability.

Contact Information:

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Course Materials

Required text:

Parker Palmer (2017). *The courage to teach: Exploring the inner landscape of a teacher's life. 20*[th] Anniversary edition. San Francisco: Josey Bass. ISBN - 9781119439677

Other readings: All readings for the course are available through the Acadia Library. You will find them posted on the course ACORN page as well.

Evaluation

Discussion forum posts and responses	30%
Book Review	30%
Final Assignment	40%

Writing and academic integrity

This is a university course and as such I expect the highest quality of written work and the highest standards of academic integrity. This means that the work should be your own. When you reference the work of others you are expected to use proper citation and referencing form. I prefer APA but any standard academic form will do. Plagiarism will be treated as an academic offense that will result in you will be asked to leave the course with a failing grade. I also assume that you will write clearly and carefully and that your work will be virtually error-free.

Discussion forum posts and responses (30%)

Each week you will be required to complete the readings for a topic (typically 3 articles or chapters) and post a response to those readings to be shared with other members of the course. Each week you are also required to respond to at least three posts written by other members of the class. **In the event that three posts by peers are not available I will provide a prompt or question to elicit your further response to this particular topic.**

Book Review (30%) Due at the end of Module B.

This assignment requires you to find a book that deals with the intersection of community, education and society. The book should have a theoretical component and be an academic title rather than a professional "how-to" book. **I will approve the book before you go ahead with the review**. The review should be approximately 1500 words.

Final Assignment (40%) Due two weeks after the end of Module C.

Your final assignment can take the form of a formal essay, but I would encourage you to experiment with other ways of representing such as a web-site, a film, alternative forms of writing and art. If you do a visual project this should be accompanied by a detailed written description. Should you choose the essay route the paper should be about 3000 words. I would like for you to contact me before beginning your final assignment so that we can discuss its appropriateness in the context of this course.

The assignments are delivered to the instructor via assignment drop-boxes. Please remember to put your name, student number, course number, and assignment number on the assignment and keep a copy in the event the original is lost.

Note files must be readable by Word 2007.

Student Handbook

You are responsible for becoming familiar with the contents of the Student Handbook. It contains important information about scheduling examinations (if applicable), applying for extensions, withdrawing from your course, ordering books, and computer and library services available to you. If you have questions about the policies outlined in the handbook, contact:

Open Acadia
21 University Avenue (Rhodes Hall)
Wolfville, NS B4P 2R6
Phone: 1-800-565-6568
Fax: 902-585-1068
Email: openacadia@acadiau.ca

Academic Integrity

Academic integrity demands responsible use of the work of other scholars. It is compromised by academic dishonesty such as cheating and plagiarism. A student who is uncertain whether or not a course of action might constitute cheating or plagiarism should seek in advance the advice of the instructor involved.

- Cheating is copying or the use of unauthorized aids or the intentional falsification or invention of information in any academic exercise
- Plagiarism is the act of presenting the ideas or words of another as one's own. Students are required to acknowledge and document the sources of ideas that they use in their written work.
- Self plagiarism is also a form of plagiarism. It is the presentation of the same work in more than one course without the permission of the instructors involved.
- A student who knowingly helps another to commit an act of academic dishonesty is equally guilty.
- Penalties are levied in relation to the degree of the relevant infraction. They range from requiring the student to re-do the piece of work, through failure on that piece of work, to failure in the course, and to dismissal from the university.

Course Schedule

The structure of the course

This course is comprised of a series of 3 modules each of which contains a number of discrete units of study.

Module A: Theorizing community

Topics:

1. *What is community?*
2. *Communitarianism and its critics*
3. *Communities of practice and practice theory*

Module B: Situating community in the act of teaching

Topics:

4. *Identity and fear in teaching*

5. *The teaching community*

6. *Toward an undivided, critical profession*

Module C: Communities and the politics of schooling

Topics:

7. *Ethnic and social class communities and modern schooling*

8. *Schooled to leave: rural community and schooling*

9. *Place, space and identity*

This course begins with a critical look at the idea of community and the way that it has been used both as a way of describing that which has apparently been lost and for building up that which might be again. Specifically we take up an analysis of the philosophy of communitarianism and the idea of social capital which have been promoted as a kind of "cure" for the ills of a society that has been riven by capitalist individualism. Finally we look at the idea of communities of practice which is a way of thinking about community from the perspective of the practices that particular groups of people perform, and particularly, how communities of practice induct new members through what is called limited peripheral participation.

We then move on to an analysis of Parker Palmer's famous text about creating community in and through teaching, the *Courage to Teach*. Here we take up what might be considered the "soft" side of community, or the idea of community as a resource for professionalism in the face of multiple pressures to turn education into a fundamentally technical enterprise. Palmer's vision of community seeks to break down the professional isolation and the divided professional personalities that have become all too typical he argues in the personality structures of educators. He encourages us to work together to build alliances, connections and meaningful cooperative projects to combat the isolating potential of our work.

From there we enter the final module with an analysis of communities that have challenged the inclusive vision of the public schools by arguing that community can also be used as a way to escape the homogenizing experience of bureaucratic public institutions. There are many ways that community has been invoked in this fashion, from the exclusive community discourse of private schools, to the opting out of formal state education and even structured education more generally represented by home-schoolers, to the focused pedagogies and specialized curricula of various forms of specialty or "centric" schools. The idea of school choice plays powerfully into these discourses which challenge the hegemony of inclusive public education, often pointing to the way that this dream itself has been used as a way to justify and continue the marginalization of identifiable social and cultural groups.

Next, the course looks carefully at a series of articles that respond to Michael Corbett's book about education and community in the context of a coastal region in Nova Scotia. We will read a series of articles that take up the theme of schooling as an ironic and unconscious presence. Community is present and strong in *Learning to Leave*, but its strength is not necessarily one that supports success in formal education for many community members.

The course concludes with a look at place, space and identity. The general argument here is that it is now important to challenge the placelessness of standardized neoliberal educational ideas and reintroduce into educational conversations not only ideas about community, but also reinforce the importance of attending to the particularity of place, culture, social difference in our work as educators.

Logistics

The course is designed in such a way that you will spend approximately three weeks on each module (one week per topic). Through the course you will be regularly posting responses to the weekly readings and responding to the posts of other students. The discussion forum which will be carried out on the ACORN page will represent our regular "classroom" interaction with the required readings.

If possible, at the end of each module we will meet in the synchronous online classroom for focused seminar discussion of course material. Each participant should be prepared to offer two insights gleaned from the work to date. The class news bulletin will contain postings regarding these virtual meetings.

The two independent assignments, a book review and your final project are due at the end of Modules 2 and 3 respectively (see above).

You have 6 months to complete this course. You may set your own schedule, but if you intend to complete the course in less than 3 months, you should let me know so that we can arrange a schedule.

Please do not leave all of your course work until a few weeks before your completion date. Although I will make every effort to accommodate your schedule within reason, I need time to grade assignments and mark exams.