

EDUCATION 169
Schooling in the United States

Fall 2015
W/F 2:00-3:15pm
Stein 307

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Office hours: Wed. 10-11am, Fri. 12-1:30pm

Course Description

All of us believe we understand the process of schooling. After all, we have each spent an average of more than a dozen years sitting at desks in classrooms.

We believe we understand why teachers and students behave the way they do, why some schools are successful and others are not, and which policies are worth pursuing. It all seems relatively straightforward

Yet while each of us has observed hundreds of students and dozens of teachers, experienced different kinds of educational approaches, and felt the consequences of educational policy, we have done so largely from a single viewpoint—our own.

In reality, we know a lot less than we think we do.

This class is designed to help you see beyond the obvious, as well as beyond your own experience, when it comes to American schools. In pursuit of that aim, we will step back to consider big questions—questions about the purpose of school, about who should be educated, about what should be taught, and about the factors that constrain decision-making. In order to get a range of perspectives on those questions, we will employ a number of disciplinary lenses—history, sociology, psychology, anthropology, economics, etc.—to the task of critically understanding schools and schooling.

The end result of this class—if you choose to commit yourself to asking and answering questions—will be that when you think about schools, you see complexity instead of simplicity.

You will possess understanding and not merely experience.

Course Expectations

1. Readings: Do the assigned readings prior to class and be prepared to ask and answer questions in class. As a rule of thumb, shorter readings should be read more slowly and more carefully than longer ones. Please know that it is *very obvious* when you have not prepared for class.
2. Field experience: You will spend time in the field for this course. You will keep a log of your experiences, and will be asked to draw on them in assignments.
3. Participation in class: Participation in discussions, group work, and email is important in this class as a way of deepening your understanding of the main ideas of the course and practicing key skills. Useful contributions take a number of forms—building on the comments of others, bringing new points to light, raising questions, carefully listening—but are common in that they foster an environment of discovery. In short, your participation is not merely as an *individual*, but as a *member of a whole*; bear that in mind. Physical and mental attendance is a requirement.
4. Writing: We will focus a great deal on writing in this class, and you will be asked to complete several different kinds of assignments over the semester. You are responsible for fully understanding the Guidelines for Analytical Writing at the end of the syllabus.

* While you will not be explicitly evaluated on these course expectations, failure to meet them will adversely affect your ability to fully contribute as a member of the class and, consequently, will impact your grade. Meeting 75% of expectations, in other words, roughly translates to a C.

Grading and Assignments

Your course grade will be broken down into the following categories:

1. CBL Notes: 15%
2. Two Analytical Essays: 45%
3. Teacher Reflection: 15%
4. Final Exam: 25%

All assignments, unless otherwise noted, should be single-spaced and uploaded via Moodle.

*Late work will be graded down one-third of a grade (i.e. A→A-) for each day it is past due.

1. **CBL Notes** (you will complete this for only TWO of your CBL observations)

Due date: **Rolling**

During the CBL component of this class, you will have the opportunity to visit schools and to spend some time thinking about them—not as students, but as careful observers. But your task here is not merely to *see* (so don't just list a bunch of observations—that isn't the point!).

Instead, your task is to try to *understand* what you're seeing. Insofar as that is the case, then, you need to consider why things are happening and what those things reveal about schools.

These assignments are due whenever you want to turn them in. Why? Because you must draw a connection between the readings and your observations...and because there is no predicting which particular reading will help you understand what you saw during your CBL experience.

In light of that, my recommendation is: take extensive notes during *and after* your CBL experience. Then, consider which readings you might draw a connection to. If you can't see a connection to what you have *already* read, then pay attention as you *continue reading*—looking for something that might connect to your CBL experience.

Once you *do* find a connection, you will want to follow this format:

- Paragraph one: What you saw at your CBL and why it was interesting
- Paragraph two: What this might reveal about teaching, learning, or schools
- Paragraph three: How the reading (or readings) match with the reality you observed (Do they complement each other? Conflict with each other? Complicate each other?)

For each entry (two total), you will be evaluated on a 1-5 scale on the following:

- Your entry is 400-500 words in length
- Your entry substantively engages relevant course readings
- Your entry uses evidence to support claims (observations do count as evidence)
- Your entry has a strong analytical component and offers an explanation of a persistent dilemma, a new take on an old issue, or a key insight
- Your entry is respectful of the adults and young people you are observing

2. Analytical essays (roughly 1500 words each)

Due dates: **October 7** and **November 18**

These essays are your chance to write about anything you want (well...almost anything).

Start by casting a wide net. What topics cut across your readings, field experiences, and class discussions? In other words, what are the concepts around which you can synthesize different materials to create your own perspective or understanding? Of those, which are most interesting, confusing, or infuriating? In other words, which of those will be the most fun to write about?

After settling on a topic, you want to think about what you have to say about it. What might you say that is new, interesting, provocative, troubling, or problematic? How can you go beyond what others have already said? How can you reach beyond what we have already discussed?

Then you'll want to gather evidence. What readings can you use (you must use several readings from the course, and none from outside it)? What from your field experiences can you draw on?

Key in this assignment will be avoiding summary. Instead, you should concentrate on making a point that enhances or complicates our understanding of a particular issue. You should have a central argument that you then substantiate with evidence. Be sure that your central argument is at the core of your essay and that you cut out everything extraneous to that core argument.

You will be evaluated on the criteria laid out in the “Guidelines” section at the end of the syllabus. Read those guidelines. Keep reading them all semester long.

These papers are due no later than the dates above, but you need not delay in writing. If you turn in your essay one week in advance, you will earn the right to re-write. Regardless of when you decide to hand in your essays, I am happy to look at outlines of papers during office hours.

3. Teacher Reflection (800-1000 words)

Due date: **October 28**

For this assignment, you will be reflecting back on a teacher you had at some point in your K-12 career—a teacher you remember, who made a distinct impression on you (whether good or bad).

The first task is to consider what your experience was like in this teacher’s classroom. Was it positive or negative? Was it fun? Challenging? Comfortable? Interesting? In short, you need to figure out what was going on in that classroom.

The next task is to figure out why that classroom felt the way it did. What made that teacher successful or unsuccessful with you as a learner? Would that work with *all* students? Should *all* teachers be this way? Were there negatives associated with the positives?

Finally, you should work to figure out what this reveals about teaching. What does this tell us about the challenge of teaching? What does this tell us about training teachers? What does this reveal about who goes into teaching?

You will be evaluated on the following:

- The degree to which your essay has a central theme (it should not simply be a string of disconnected statements and musings about the class);
- The degree to which you clearly explain what your teacher’s classroom was like
- The degree to which you analyze that classroom, drawing on course themes to figure out why your teacher acted a certain way, why the class felt a certain way, etc.;
- The degree to which you use this particular case as a window into the teaching profession
- The degree to which you use evidence to support claims (you should draw on course readings and, if possible, CBL experiences);
- General writing best practices; see “Guidelines” section.

4. Final exam

Due date: **TBD**

The final for this course will be a take-home exam. More detailed instructions will be given to you toward the end of the semester, and questions will be handed out on the last day of class.

Course Texts

All of your readings for this course are available on Moodle. You should either print them out or use a software program that allows you to annotate your readings. Further, you should bring your annotated readings—hard copy or digital—to the class meeting for which they are due. Do not come to class empty handed.

Classes and Readings

* Readings should be completed for the day under which they are listed

Week 1 (9/2 + 9/4): Schools...as seemingly simple places

W: Introduction to course

F: Mike Rose, *Why School?* (2011), chapter 2

Week 2 (9/9 + 9/11): ...as places with history

W: David Labaree, *Someone Has to Fail* (2010), chapter 2

F: David K. Cohen, "Teaching Practice: Plus que ça Change," *Contributing to Educational Change* (1988)

Week 3 (9/16 + 9/18): ...as places with many aims

W: John Goodlad, "We Want it All," *A Place Called School* (Ch. 2, pp. 33-60)

F: David Labaree, "Public Goods, Private Goods," *American Educational Research Journal* (1997)

Week 4 (9/23 + 9/25): ...as reflections of society

W: Claude Steele, "Thin Ice: Stereotype Threat and Black College Students," *The Atlantic* (1999); Beverly Daniel Tatum, *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?* (1997), chapter 4

F: Geoff Whitty, "Education, Social Class and Social Exclusion" (2010)

Week 5 (9/30 + 10/2): ...as purveyors of commodities

W: Albert Hirshman, *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty* (1970), chapters 2-4

F: Denise Clark Pope, *Doing School* (2003), chapter 7

Week 6 (10/7 + 10/9): ...as places to learn

W: National Academy of Science, "How Children Learn"

*10/7: First Analytical Essay due

F: Dan Willingham, *Why Don't Students Like School?* (2009), chapter 1

Week 7: **FALL BREAK**

Week 8 (10/21 + 10/23): ...as places to teach

W: David Labaree, "On the Nature of Teaching and Teacher Education: Difficult Practices That Look Easy," *Journal of Teacher Education* (2000)

F: Lee Shulman, "Knowledge and Teaching: Foundations of the New Reform," *Harvard Educational Review* (1987)

Week 9 (10/28 + 10/30): ...as places to work

W: Dan Lortie, *Schoolteacher* (1975), chapter 1

* 10/28: Teacher Reflection due

F: Barnett Berry, et al., *Understanding Teacher Working Conditions* (2008)

Week 10 (11/4 + 11/6): ...as the subjects of popular media

W: Movie Day

F: Marshall W. Gregory, "Real Teaching and Real Learning vs. Narrative Myths about Education," *Arts and Humanities in Higher Education* (2007)

Week 11 (11/11 + 11/13): ...as agents of change

W: Aundra Saa Meroe, "Democracy, Meritocracy, and the Uses of Education," *Gordon Commission Report* (2012)

F: Gloria Ladson-Billings, "From the Achievement Gap to the Education Debt," *Educational Researcher* (2006)

Week 12 (11/18 + 11/20): ...as organizations

W: T. Corcoran and M. Goertz, "The Governance of Public Education," *In the Public Schools* (2005).

* 11/18: Second Analytical Essays due

F: Jonathan Supovitz, *The Case for District-Based Reform*, chapter 1 (2006).

Week 13: THANKSGIVING BREAK

Week 14 (12/2 + 12/4): ...as organizations, cont'd

W: NCLB Executive Summary; "How to Fix NCLB," *Time Magazine* (2007); Lamar Alexander, "A Better Way to Fix NCLB;" Andy Porter, "A Recipe for Fixing NCLB"

F: Charles M. Payne, *So Much Reform, So Little Change* (2008), chapter 6

Week 15 (12/9 + 12/11): ...as complex places

W: This American Life, "Harper High School" part I (optional: part II)

F: Eliot Eisner, "What Does It Mean to Say a School Is Doing Well?" *Phi Delta Kappan* (2001)

Final Exam: Open-note, take-home

Guidelines

Guidelines for Critical Reading

As a critical reader of a particular text (a book, article, speech, proposal), you should use the following questions as a framework to guide you as you read:

1. What's the point? This is the analysis issue: what is the author's angle?
2. Who says so? This is the validity issue: on what are the claims based?
3. What's new? This is the value-added issue: what does the author contribute that we don't already know?
4. Who cares? This is the significance issue (the most important issue of all): is the text worth reading? Does it contribute something important?

If this is the way critical readers are going to approach a text, then as an analytical writer you need to guide readers toward the desired answers to each of these questions...

Guidelines for Analytical Writing

In writing papers for this (or any) course, keep in mind the following things that good writers do:

1. Pick an important issue. Why should anyone care about this topic? Pick an issue that matters and that you really care about. In short, make sure that your analysis meets the "so what?" test.
2. Provide analysis. A good paper is more than a catalogue of facts, concepts, experiences, or references; it is more than a description of the content of a set of readings. A good paper is a logical and coherent analysis of a key issue. This means that your paper should aim to *explain* rather than describe.
3. Keep focused. Don't lose track of the point you are trying to make. Make sure the reader knows where you are heading and why. Cut out anything extraneous to your main point.
4. Aim for clarity. Don't assume that the reader knows what you're talking about. Instead, make your points clearly enough that even a lazy reader will get the point. Keeping focused and avoiding distracting clutter will help, as will writing clear sentences and deploying effective "signposts."
5. Provide depth, insight, and connections. The best papers are ones that go beyond making obvious points, superficial comparisons, and simplistic assertions. They dig below the surface of the issue at hand, demonstrating a deeper level of understanding and an ability to make interesting connections.
6. Support your analysis with evidence. You need to do more than simply state your ideas, however informed and useful these may be. You also need to provide evidence that reassures the reader that you know what you are talking about.

7. Draw on course materials. Your papers should give evidence that you are taking this course. You do not need to agree with any of the readings or presentations, but your paper should show you have considered the course materials thoughtfully.

8. Recognize complexity and acknowledge multiple viewpoints. You should not reduce issues to either/or, black/white, good/bad. Papers should give evidence that you understand and appreciate more than one perspective on an issue.

9. Do not overuse quotation. In a short paper, long quotations (more than a sentence or two in length) are generally not appropriate. Even in longer papers, quotations should be used sparingly. In general, your papers are more effective if written primarily in your own words, using ideas from the literature but framing them in your own way to serve your own analytical purposes.

10. Cite your sources. You need to identify for the reader where particular ideas or examples come from. This can be done through in-text citation: give the author's last name, publication year, and (in the case of quotations) page number in parentheses at the end of the sentence or paragraph where the idea is presented—e.g., (Schneider, 2011, p. 22); provide the full citations in a list of references at the end of the paper. You can also identify sources with footnotes or endnotes: give the full citation for the first reference to a text and a short citation for subsequent citations to the same text.

11. Take care in the quality of your prose. A paper that is written in a clear and effective style makes a more convincing argument than one written in a murky manner, even when both writers start with the same basic understanding of the issues. However, writing that is confusing usually signals confusion in a person's thinking. After all, one key purpose of writing is to put down your ideas in a way that permits you and others to reflect on them critically, to see if they stand up to analysis. Take the time to reflect on your own ideas on paper and revise them as needed.