

**EDPL 647**  
**Context for Teaching and Learning**

**Carol Anne Spreen, Ph.D.**  
**2105C Benjamin Building**  
**(301) 405-3572**  
**spreen@wam.umd.edu**

**Abstract of course:**

*Links between schooling and its social and cultural context provide the theoretical grounding for the course. Analysis and application of current theories and practices for teaching and student learning that promote equity, diversity and school success. Discussion of new approaches and definitions of cognition and learning and explorations of innovative instructional methods that support teaching and learning. Examination of school reform, its orientations and beliefs about teaching and learning, as well as the nature and impact of various reforms across education communities.*

**Course Description:** This course seeks to define and understand the complexity of teaching and learning in a diverse society. It aims to give educational leaders understandings and orientations that will help them examine educational contexts, conduct research in schools, and apply theory to practice. To that end, the seminar explores three key issues 1) the link between schools and the society (social and cultural contexts of education), 2) studies in pedagogy and practice, and 3) examining the broader (national and international) context of school reform.

Week one we will explore the link between schooling and its social and cultural context. The readings on the history of educational reform provide the theoretical grounding for the course. Theories of the intersections between education and race, class, ethnicity and gender will be utilized as major frameworks through which to explore current educational practices and student outcomes. In particular, connections between schooling and social, cultural and economic shifts will be explored. In the second week, the course explores the nature of teaching and learning in diverse contexts and examines some of the genres within curriculum reform (equity pedagogy, multicultural competence, meeting special needs, serving diverse learners). This section provides a window into the lives of educators and learners (teachers, administrators, students) the development and evolution of learning theory as it's applied to school reform. During the third week, we will examine the ways in which standards and accountability have been defined and schools have been organized to demonstrate these outcomes. Lastly, the course explores national and local school reform initiatives, their theoretical orientations and beliefs about teaching and learning, as well as the nature and impact of these reforms on a variety of learners in different communities.

**Texts and Articles:**

Though not required readings, much of the discussions and content for the class is derived from the following textbooks (which I highly recommend):

Oakes, J (et als) *On Becoming \*Good\* American Schools*  
Oakes, J and Litton, M (2000) *Teaching to Change the World* (  
Darling-Hammond, L (1997) *The Right to Learn*. (San Francisco:Jossey Bass)

**Course packets of required readings will be available for purchase (either at Shady Grove or UMCP).**

**Assigned readings:**

Readings are organized thematically in your course packet by week. Below you will find a brief description of each week's topics and issues.

**Week One: Social and cultural context of teaching and learning.**

This week we will discuss the culture of schools, school climate and school organization. The articles give an historical overview of educational purposes and practices, and discuss the evolution of the "educational reform movement" in the US. *The Right to Learn*, *Bureaucracy Left and Right*, and *Why is it so hard to get good schools* discuss the ideals and values of education as they are played out in the socio-political landscape of American schools.

## **Week Two: The Context of Curriculum and Teaching**

This week we will discuss the politics and possibilities of teaching and learning in a diverse society. The first group of readings – from *Rethinking Schools*, Giroux’s *Teachers as Intellectuals* and *What goes on in the classroom* - center on curriculum reform and critical pedagogy. The second set – *Structuring Learner-Centered Schools* and *Staffing Schools for Teaching and Learning* – emphasize the organizational aspects of teaching and learning. The third set – *Missing voice of culturally relevant teachers, Skills and Other Dilemmas, Empowering Pedagogies...* focus on issues of equity and diversity in the curriculum. In class we will relate the readings to new definitions of teaching and learning (strategic teaching, constructivist and experiential learning, cognition and types of intelligences, thinking processes, cross-cultural learning styles) and well as organizational instructional strategies (team teaching, clusters, cooperative learning, multi-age grouping).

## **Week Three: Standards, Assessment and Achievement**

This week we will focus on standards and assessment at the national state and local level. We will discuss equity and achievement, grouping practices and examine reasons for “the achievement gap”. We will also examine alternative assessment strategies, such as performance-based assessment, portfolios, and scoring rubrics.

## **Week Four: School Restructuring to Promote Teaching and Learning**

We will examine a variety of approaches and concepts of educational reform and school improvement. Readings emphasize Lessons from restructuring, using networks for school improvement, and leadership and empowerment. We will detail the components of a school improvement plan.

### **Outline of Course Activities:**

Role play. Participants will use role plays to critique relevant literature and devise strategies for resolving conflicts, engaging school staff, including parents, building consensus, and leading/directing their vision of school change.

Individual presentations of site visit and case study findings. Over the course of the semester the class will prepare for and participate in analyzing and critiquing a variety of school reform initiatives. Students will have the opportunity to present their case study findings in small groups and in an open plenary. While the presentation should focus on analysis of the selected initiative, the presenter will also be asked to draw on related readings, personal experience and comment on the broad policy conclusions regarding this initiative.

ONGOING

Strategic Planning Working Groups – A significant portion of instructional time is devoted to school-improvement planning based on new learning principles, theories of equity-based practices/inclusion, examination of local school restructuring initiatives.

Individual presentations of school/district improvement plan (final assignment). This is conceived as a “dry-run” or dress rehearsal of a plan/proposal that participants will be preparing and presenting to their boards of education, the district office, the site-based planning team, or to the county to propose an alternative/magnet/charter school.

### **Outline of Assignments:**

Reflection Assignment: This is 7-10 page mapping exercise of the organization of schools, the relationships between different members in the school community, and the way that time is organized for learners and educators. Students will be asked to describe and visually depict their ideas and beliefs about what should be done in schools to improve teaching and learning. They will be asked to use cognitive maps, pie charts, tables, or graphs to illustrate and represent the following: 1) ORGANIZATION: show how schools/districts should be organized to facilitate new learning environments (e.g. What does the school day look like? How is time allocated? What kinds of organizational learning/networking/collaboration should take place? With whom? How do new ideas become operationalized?); 2) LEARNING: How should restructured schools/districts be organized to affect the learners (e.g. show what new/different learning activities look like and how time is differently allocated in a restructured school) in what ways is technology used to enrich curriculum and instruction; and lastly, 3) NEW ROLES: How are changing roles and responsibilities for teachers, parents, staff and administrators represented (what does the day of a teacher/administrator/staff in a restructured school look like?).

Due Week 1.

NCATE Standards: 1.1 b., 1.2 b, 2.1 a, 2.2 a & c; 6.1 b & g; 6.2 b; 6.3 b

Case Analysis: Each student will be required to write a brief summary of a current national restructuring initiative. (I have abstracts of several initiatives in my office. We will also discuss a variety of options in class, as well as use the www as a resource for ideas.) Students may work in small groups (2-3 people) on researching the programs, but must write and submit individual papers. In five to seven pages, the brief should describe the purpose of the reform initiative, the context in which it was developed/implemented, its impact and limitations. The brief should also include wider issues related to instructional change, new roles faculty/staff/parents/community, and the political and cultural dimensions of school restructuring.

Due Week 2: June 17.

NCATE standards: 1.4 a & b; 2..3 a, b, c, d;

Final Project/Proposal: As a capstone to the course, students will be asked to develop a school/district improvement plan or a proposal for a restructured (charter, magnet, alternative) school. In addition to drawing on examples from related readings throughout the course, the proposal should be based on the needs of a particular school-district community the participant serves, it should be generated within the requirements of the state/school district (as described in the proposal outline) or local school board, and lastly it should reflect the students philosophy and vision of education location and experience in schools, as well as attend to the orientations and needs of members of his/her school community (including community and business leaders, religious, political and service organizations). Students are expected to write an engaging, provocative proposal that clearly articulates a vision for school restructuring, strategies for implementing it, and considerations for governance, finance, recruitment and for cultivating consent from different members of the school community.

Due June 30.

NCATE standards: 2.4 a, b ,c; 3.1 a & d; 3.2 a & b; 3.3 c; 4.1 a, b, c, d ,e, f, g, h; 4.3 a, b, c; 5.2 b; 6.1 b & g; 6.2 b; 6.3 b

**Timeline for Completion of Assignments:** The above assignments are cumulative in nature and build on the readings, class discussions and site visits that are conducted during the semester. Students are expected to do weekly readings to contextualize the learning activities. Each class will also begin by meeting in groups to discuss various themes or topical questions from the reading/and or present findings about the field studies that they are conducting. There are two major written assignments for the course (see course weight and grading overview below) all require class presentations and demonstrations. These assignments are spread out over the semester.

### **Expectations of Students:**

This course is organized as an applied seminar. It will introduce current learning theory and research on student learning (focusing on authentic instruction and assessment, interdisciplinary and multiage grouping, as well as adult learning strategies) within the diverse context of American public schools. It also has a strong field-based component that will examine and build on, as well as critique, some of the current national restructuring initiatives currently underway in local schools. The readings and discussions provide a complimentary perspective on educational practice in diverse contexts – in addition to emphasizing theories about thinking, learning and assessment, we'll explore teaching in learning in the context of culture and community, professionalism and collaboration, and organizational or whole school change.

### **Goals:**

- \*Identify the social and cultural forces that influence understandings and beliefs about teaching and learning.
- \*Assess various trends in restructuring and understand their impact on teaching and learning.
- \*Learn to develop, initiate and evaluate the impact of various reform efforts on schools locally, regionally and nationally.

### **Grading Procedures:**

This course is built on the development of analytic and communication skills aimed at helping school leaders get a better understanding of how their own experiences in schools relate to broader trends in educational change and school reform. Accordingly, a large portion of your grade will depend on the preparation and discussion of the assigned material. There will also be three written assignments.

Course grades will be based on the following:

Class preparation	20%
Reflection Assignment	20%
Case Analysis	20%
Oral Presentation	20%
Final Project/Proposal	20%

**Office Hours:**

Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday 3:00-4:00, and by appointment

**UMCP Notice:**

All students are expected to abide by the code of academic integrity throughout this course. Academic dishonesty, including cheating, fabrication and plagiarism will not be tolerated and will be reported to the Student Honor Council. The full text of this code is available on the web at [www.inform.umd.edu/CampusInfo/Departments/jpo/codeacinteg.html](http://www.inform.umd.edu/CampusInfo/Departments/jpo/codeacinteg.html)

Students will not be penalized because of observances of their religious beliefs. Whenever possible, students will be given reasonable time to make up any academic assignment that is missed due to participation in a religious observance. It is the student's responsibility to inform the instructor as soon as possible of any intended absences for religious observances.

**Bibliography:**

- Ball, A. (2000) Empowering pedagogies that enhance the learning of multicultural students. *Teachers College Record*, 102(6).
- Lipman, P (1996) The missing voice of culturally relevant teachers in school restructuring. *The Urban Review*, 28.
- Sebring, P & Bryk, A. (2000) School leadership and the bottom line in Chicago. *Phi Delta Kappan*.
- Ann Lieberman (Ed.) Building a Professional Culture in Schools. New York: Teachers College Press, 1988)
- Nation's Report Card: National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)
- The Nation's Report Card is the only nationally representative and continuing assessment of what Americas students know and can do in various subject areas. <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/>
- Ogbu, J (1992) Understanding cultural diversity and learning. *Educational Researcher*. 21(8)
- Solorazono, D.G. (1995) The Chicano educational experience: empirical and theoretical perspectives. In Rothstein, S. (ed) *Class, Culture and Race in American Schools: A handbook*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.
- Anson, A., Cook, T.D., Habib, F. Grady, M., Haynes, N & Comer, P (1991) The Comer School Development Program: A theoretical analysis. *Urban Education*, 26 (1)
- Valdes, G. (1996) *Con respecto: Bridging the distance between cultural diverse families and schools. An ethnographic portrait*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Nieto, S. (1992) *Affirming diversity: the sociopolitical context of multicultural education*. New York: Longman.
- Allen & Boykin W. (1991) The influence of contextual factors on Afro-American and Euro-American childrens performance: Effects of movement opportunity and music. *International Journal of Psychology*, 26(3), 373-387.
- Allen & Boykin W. (1992) African American children and the educational process: alleviating cultural discontinuity through prescriptive pedagogy. *School Psychology Review*, 21 (4), 586-596.
- Giroux, H. ((1997) *Rewriting the discourse of racial identity: Towards a pedagogy and politics of whiteness*. *Harvard Educational Review*, 67 (2), 285-319.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (1995a) *Toward a theory of culturally relevant pedagogy*. *American Education Research Journal*.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (1995b) *But that's just good teaching! The case for culturally relevant pedagogy*. *Theory into Practice*, 34(3); 159-165.
- Moll, L, Amanti, C. Neff, D. & Gonzalez, N (1992) *Funds of knowledge for teaching: Using a qualitative approach to connect homes and classrooms*. *Theory into Practice*, 31(2), 132-140.