

# Schooling in the United States

Holy Cross  
WF 8:30-9:45

Spring 2008  
Stein 124

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Stein 437  
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## Introduction:

This course introduces the study of schooling within an interdisciplinary framework. Drawing upon sociology, we investigate the resources, structures, and social contexts which influence student opportunities and outcomes in the United States and other countries. From psychology, we contrast theories of learning, both in the abstract and in practice. From philosophy, we examine competing educational goals and their underlying assumptions regarding human nature, justice, and democracy. In addition, a substantial participant observation component will be integrated with course readings and written assignments.

## Readings:

DC Phillips and Jonas Soltis, *Perspectives on Learning, third edition.*

Vivian Gussin Paley, *You Can't Say You Can't Play.*

Additional readings will be made available to the class.

## How to succeed in class:

- Class begins at 8:30 AM, and I expect you to be present at every session from start to finish. If you consider attendance optional, drop the course now. If you run into a one-time scheduling conflict with this class, be sure to consult with me (by email, phone, or in person) BEFORE the conflict to inquire about alternative arrangements. If you wake up one morning and realize that you're too ill to attend class, then email me to inquire about what you're missing and how to compensate.
- Participate regularly in class discussions and bring the relevant readings and notes with you. While there is no formal "participation" grade, actively engaging in discussions (both inside and outside of the classroom) will help you learn the material. At the same time, remember that being a reflective listener is crucial to meaningful discussions, especially when the views of others differ from your own.
- The written assignments and observations make up the heart of the course, since they require you to bridge readings and class discussion with your school based experience. In writing the papers, be sure that your writing moves beyond *description* and into the realm of *reasoned analysis*. If you aren't sure how to fulfill this objective, be sure to ask for guidance.

## Course Requirements:

Learning in this class depends upon understanding and consideration of the implications of the material presented in the readings as well as the participant observation. The structure and requirements of the course, therefore, are designed to facilitate individuals' comprehension of the groups' discussions of the readings and an opportunity to reflect upon your experience as a community based learner.

The course requirements are as follows:

Four 3 page papers:	4 x 15%
#1 Theories of Learning	
#2 Explaining Educational Inequality	
#3 Comparing Classroom-based Reform Strategies	
#4 Philosophy of Education	
Five Classroom Observations (These will be graded on a Credit/No Credit/ Half Credit Basis)	20%
Community Based Learning	15%
Class Participation	5%

Be advised that adequate work earns a C, good work earns a B, and outstanding work earns an A in this class. Students are expected to engage in academic honesty in all forms of work for this course. If this is unclear to you, ask for clarification.

The penalty for overdue assignments will be a 1/3 grade reduction for every 24-hour period beyond the deadline, with exceptions granted only for documented medical and family emergencies.

Please notify me during the first week if you require any special accommodations for this course.

**W Jan 16** Introduction and Syllabus

### Participant-Observation Guidelines:

Students will work as “participant-observers” in a *school based* CBL experience for a minimum of thirty hours. The objectives are for Holy Cross students to:

- Integrate theoretical readings with first-hand experience and
- Develop meaningful relationships with students and teachers, to deepen our reflections on the contexts of urban schools and the purposes of education.

All students will be placed either in Burncoat Middle School or Burncoat High School. Every effort will be made to place each student in their school of choice, however there are limitations of space and school availability. During the initial visit with the teacher, students **will complete**

**a basic contract** to establish their schedule and role in the classroom. "Participant-observation" is more than just quietly watching; it includes more active roles in the classroom, such as one-on-one tutoring, working with small groups, preparing materials for a classroom project, and (in some cases) planning and teaching a brief lesson.

At the end of the semester, school coordinators will evaluate Holy Cross students' placement experiences based on their level of engagement, reliability, and effort demonstrated in the classroom.

**F      Jan 18            No Class**

## **Unit 1: Ecology of the Classroom**

*Question:*

*How do the physical, social, and curricular organization of schools and classrooms influence teacher-student interactions? How does what we see, and the manner in which it is presented, influence our view of schools?*

**W      Jan 23            Teachers' Work: Hollywood versus Reality**

Read:

Sophie Bell, "Dangerous Morals: Hollywood Puts a Happy Face on Urban Education," *Radical Teacher* 54 (1998): 23-27.

"Teachers, Teaching, and Professionalization" in Alan Sadovnik et. al., eds., in *Exploring Education, second edition*, (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 2001) pp. 239-244.

Video Excerpts:

*Dangerous Minds*

*High School II*

**F      Jan 25            Site Visit to Burncoat Middle/High School**

**W      Jan 30            Looking inside schools**

Read:

Sharan Merriam, "Being a Careful Observer," *Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998), 94-111.

Kathleen deMarrais and Margaret LeCompte, "The Social Organization of Schooling" and "What is Taught in Schools" in *The Way Schools Work: A Sociological Analysis of Education, third edition*. (NY: Longman, 1999), 43-52, 222-228, 236-247.

Video Excerpts:

*Eighth-Grade Mathematics Lessons: US, Japan, and Germany* (US Department of Education, TIMSS Study, 1998).

## **Unit 2: Theories of Learning**

*Question: How do classical and contemporary theorists explain how people learn?*

**F Feb 1** Classical Theory and Behaviorism

Read: Phillips and Soltis, *Perspectives on Learning*, intro and chapters 1-4

**Due: Observation #1**

**W Feb 6** Constructivist Theories: Piaget, Dewey, and Vygotsky

Read: Phillips and Soltis, *Perspectives on Learning*, chapters 5-6

**F Feb 8** Constructivist Theories: Bruner

Read: Phillips and Soltis, *Perspectives on Learning*, chapter 7

**W Feb 13** Making Sense of Theories of Learning, Case Studies

Read: Phillips and Soltis, *Perspectives on Learning*, chapter 9

**Service Learning in Action – Real Life Stories from Rhode Island Classrooms**

In class: Howard Gardner, “Multiple Intelligence Theory,”

<http://edweb.cnidr.org/edref.mi.th.html>

<http://pzweb.harvard.edu/Pis/HG.htm>

**F Feb 15** Theory and Practice, the case of Special Education

Reading will be provided in class

**Due: Observation #2**

### **Unit 3: Explaining Educational Inequality**

*Question: How do different theories attempt to explain racial, social class, and gender gaps in educational achievement?*

**W Feb 20** Making Sense of Race, Social Class, and the Test Score Gap

**F Feb 22** School Finance and Tracking

Read: Jonathan Kozol, “Children of the City Invincible: Camden, New Jersey,” *Savage Inequalities: Children in America’s Schools*. (NY: Crown, 1991), chapter 4.

Jeannie Oakes, “The Distribution of Knowledge,” *Keeping Track: How Schools Structure Inequality* (New Haven: Yale Press, 1985), excerpts from chapter 4.

**Due: Paper #1**

**W Feb 27** Cultural Capital

Read: Annette Lareau, “Social Class Differences in Family-School Relationships: The Importance of Cultural Capital.” *Sociology of Education* 60 (1987), pp. 73-85.

**Due: Observation #3A**

**F Feb 29 Cultural Discontinuities**

Read: Lynn A. Vogt et.al., "Explaining School Failure, Producing School Success: Two Cases." *Anthropology and Education Quarterly* 18 (December 1987): 276-286. John Ogbu, "Immigrant and Involuntary Minorities in Comparative Perspective," in M. Gibson and J. Ogbu, eds., *Minority Status and Schooling*. (NY: Garland, 1991).

**W Mar 5 No Class**

**F Mar 7 NoClass**

**W Mar 12 Stereotype Threat**

Read: Claude Steele, "A Threat in the Air: How Stereotypes Shape Intellectual Identity and Performance," reprinted in Eugene Lowe, ed., *Promise and Dilemma: Perspectives on Racial Diversity and Higher Education* (Princeton, 1999), excerpt from pp. 107-108.  
Claude Steele, "Thin Ice: Stereotype Threat and Black College Students" *Atlantic Monthly* (August 1999), pp. 44-54.

**Due: Observation #3B**

**F Mar 14 Gender Bias**

Read: Myra and David Sadker, "Hidden Lessons," *Failing at Fairness: How America's Schools Cheat Girls* (NY: Scribner's, 1994), chapter 1.  
AAUW, *Gender Gaps Executive Summary: Where Schools Still Fail our Children* (Washington DC: AAUW, 1998). <http://www.aauw.org/2000/gg.html>

#### **Unit 4: Comparing Classroom-based Reform Strategies**

*Question: How do different strategies attempt to reform and improve schooling? What assumptions do these strategies make about the causes of inequality?*

**W Mar 19 Cooperative Learning**

Read: Robert Slavin, *Cooperative Learning: Theory, Research, Practice, 2nd edition*. (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1995), chapters 1 and 2.

**Due: Paper #2**

**F Mar 21 No Class**

**W Mar 26 De-tracking and Multiculturalism**

Read: Sonia Nieto, "Multicultural Education in Practice" in *Affirming Diversity: The Sociopolitical Context of Multicultural Education, 3rd edition* (NY: Longman, 2000).  
Video: Michelle Fine et. al., *Off-Track: Classroom Privilege for All* (Teachers College Press, 1998). [VID 1931]  
Website: The Algebra Project (<http://www.algebra.org>)  
Read "History and Programs" and "Origins" and "Curriculum" (especially "Drums")

**Due: Observation #4**

**F Mar 28** Family-School Connections and Teachers' Work  
Read: James Comer et. al., *Child by Child: The Comer Process for Change in Education* (NY: Teachers College Press, 1999), prologue, part I, chapter 5.

**W Apr 2** Service Learning  
Read: **Kahne and Westheimer**, *In the Service of What: the Politics of Service Learning*

### **Unit 5: Philosophy of Education**

*Questions: What is the purpose of education? What is worth learning? How should debates over these issues be resolved in a democratic society?*

**F Apr 4** Individual Freedom and Civic Virtue  
Read: Amy Gutmann, "Democratic Education in Difficult Times." *Teachers College Record* 92 (Fall 1990): 7-20.

### **Due: Paper #3**

**W Apr 9** Religion and Education Test Cases  
Read: US Supreme Court, *Wisconsin v. Yoder* (1972), Opinions by Justice Burger and Justice Douglas, edited version.

In class: Moot Court debate.

**F Apr 11** Democratic Education in the Classroom, I  
Read: Vivian Paley, *You Can't Say You Can't Play* (Harvard Univ Press, 1992).  
"Why Address Gay Issues With Children" *It's Elementary* Viewing Guide, 1997.  
Video excerpt: *It's Elementary: Talking about Gay Issues in School* (San Francisco, CA: Women's Educational Media, 1996).

**W Apr 16** Democratic Education in the Classroom, II  
Read: **Boston, et al**, *Restoring the Balance Between academics and Civic Engagement in the Schools*  
(<http://www.aypf.org/publications/Restoring%20the%20Balance%20Report.pdf>)

**F Apr 18** Competing Views on Liberatory Education  
Read: Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (NY: Seabury Press, 1970)

**W Apr 23** Competing Views on Liberatory Education  
Read: Lisa Delpit, "Skills and Other Dilemmas of a Progressive Black Educator," reprinted in *Other People's Children* (NY: New Press, 1995).

**F Apr 25** Closing Observations and Reflections