**Organizational Perspectives on Educational Improvement**

**LSAP 3095-1010 (CRN# 29060)**

**Instructors**

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Office Hours: By appointment

**Schedule**

**Tuesdays, 1:00 – 4:00**

**LRDC 731**

**Course Description**

One way to see the act of education is that it is essentially about what occurs between teachers and learners. In other words, the key unit of analysis is the classroom or activity structure. The classroom is important, but teaching and learning are also shaped by their context. Individuals are situated in organizations, which are situated in broader social, cultural, and political environments. Consequently, reform and improvement efforts must not only take seriously individual factors, they must understand the ways in which individual action is enabled and constrained by organizational and environmental contexts.

This seminar will focus on schools as organizations drawing on theoretical and empirical work grounded in organizational theory. We will interrogate the institutional, organizational, and day-to-day contexts of work in schools. We also explore how reform efforts targeting organizational features can intervene and perhaps, improve teaching and learning.  In order to grapple with the concepts from the literature, students will analyze cases of organizational improvement efforts, conduct a small study examining an improvement effort in a local educational organization, and develop an independent paper that applies an organizational perspective to a topic of interest.

**Goals / Objectives**

1. Students will demonstrate understanding of central organizational elements (e.g. core technology, human capital, social capital) through application to analysis of fictional and real-world organizational cases.
2. Students will demonstrate an understanding of how organizations are shaped by their cultural, political and institutional context through analysis of fictional and real-world organizational cases.
3. Students will evaluate different models for educational improvement (e.g. charter schools, organizational learning, collaboration and networks) through an organizational perspective

**Course Requirements**

Students are responsible for completing the weekly reading assignments and preparing to actively participate in class discussions. The first segments of the course will culminate in a case-based written analysis. Students are encouraged to form study groups to discuss readings and the preparation of the case, but should write analyses individually. In addition, students will work in teams to analyze the organizational contexts relevant to an applied design project. Finally, students will develop a course paper that applies

Assignment 1: **Individual case analysis.** Students will write a 4 to 5 single-spaced page analysis of an assigned case, drawing on the concepts from the first segment of the course. **Due Oct. 9**

Assignment 2: **Organizational analysis and presentations**. Students will complete original research in an organization undergoing a design-based improvement effort. Students will collect primary and secondary data, analyze data, and present findings in oral and written formats. **Presentations (Nov. 20) & Memos Due Nov. 27**

Assignment 3: **Individual paper.** Students will synthesize and apply course readings to analyze an issue relevant to their research interests. How do the organizational theory concepts help you think about your research topics of interest?

The assignment will unfold in three parts:

* Paper concept – 3 or 4 sentence overview of your idea for applying an organizational perspective to a topic of interest **Due Oct. 23**
* Paper outline – Detailed outline for the paper **Due Nov. 13**
* Final paper and presentation – 10-20 page paper and 10 minutes presentation **Due Dec. 11**

Grades will be determined by class attendance, active participation in class discussion (15%), by the quality and timely completion of the individual case analyses (15%), group organizational analysis and presentation (20%), and individual paper and presentation (50%)

Students should notify the instructor in advance of absences whenever possible. In order to avoid a deduction in participation points when absent, students should prepare a 2- to 3-page memo that summarizes and reacts to the assigned course readings. The memo and other assignments (if applicable) should be emailed to the instructor before the next course session. Absences greater than two will result in a reduction in participation points regardless of memo completion. A rubric will be provided in advance that outlines the grading for the individual case, organizational analysis, and final paper.

The statements contained in this syllabus, other than the grading policies, may be subject to change with reasonable advance notice as deemed acceptable by the instructors.

**Required Texts**

Please purchase/obtain a copy of the following books:

* Scott, W. R., & Davis, G. F. (2007). *Organizations and organizing: Rational, natural, and open system perspectives*: Pearson Prentice Hall.
* Bryk, A., Easton, J. Q., Sebring, P. D., Allensworth, A. & Luppescu, S. (2011). *Organizing for school improvement: Lessons from Chicago*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

All other assigned readings will be made available on-line through CourseWeb.

**Departmental Grievance Procedures**

Students are encouraged to first discuss the grievance with the instructor. If the grievance cannot be resolved, the aggrieved may file an appeal informally to the LSAP chair. The LSAP chair will immediately confer with the student and the faculty member involved. The aggrieved may request the assistance and presence of one of the graduate student representatives at this and at all following steps in the procedure. If a satisfactory resolution is not achieved, the individual may file a written statement of grievance with the LSAP chair. Upon receiving the grievance, the chair will establish a Grievance Committee composed of one faculty member selected by the aggrieved student, one faculty member selected by the chair, and a third faculty member appointed by the other two members. This committee will consider the grievance and make a written recommendation.

**Policy on Academic Integrity**

Students in this course will be expected to comply with the University of Pittsburgh’s Policy on Academic Integrity. Plagerizers will receive a failing grade for the course.

**Disability Policy**

If you have a disability for which you are or may be requesting an accommodation, you are encouraged to contact both your instructor and Disability Resources and Services (DRS), 216 William Pitt Union, 412-648-7890 (412- 282-7355 for TTY) as early as possible in the term. DRS will verify your disability and determine reasonable accommodations for this course.

**Organizational Perspectives on School Improvement – DRAFT Schedule**

| **Week** | **Session** |
| --- | --- |
| **1**  **Aug. 28** | **Course overview**   * Introductions * Review syllabus and major assignments * Introductory lecture: Spillane, Gomez & Messler |
| **Segment 1: Organizational Resources for Implementation and Improvement** | |
| **2**  **Sept.**  **4** | **Human Resources**  Spillane, J. P., Gomez, L. M., & Mesler, L. (2009). Notes on reframing the role of organizations in policy implementation. *Handbook of Education Policy Research*. Routledge.  Scott & Davis, Chapter 7: Labor and Structure  Select one of 5:   * Johnson, S. M. (2015). Will VAMS reinforce the walls of the egg-crate school? *Educational Researcher*, *44*(2), 117-126. * Ingersoll, R. (2011). Power, accountability, and the teacher quality problem. In S. Kelly (Ed.) *Assessing teacher quality.* New York: Teachers College Press. * Podgusrky, M. and Springer, M. (2006). Teacher performance pay: A review. *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management, 26,* (4): 909–949 . * Marsh, J. A., Bush-Mecenas, S., Strunk, K. O., Lincove, J. A., & Huguet, A. (2017). Evaluating teachers in the Big Easy: How organizational context shapes policy responses in New Orleans. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, *39*(4), 539-570. * Borman, G. and Dowling, N. (2008). Teacher attrition and retention: A meta-analytic and narrative review of research. *Review of Educational Research*, 78 (3): 367-409. |
| **3**  **Sept. 11** | **Social Resources**  Scott Chapter 11: Networks In and Around Organizations, pages 278-285.  Review the section on Social Resources in Spillane, Gomez & Messler  Daly, A. J., Moolenaar, N. M., Bolivar, J. M., & Burke, P. (2010). Relationships in reform: The role of teachers' social networks. *Journal of Educational Administration*, *48*(3), 359-391.  Bryk, A. S., & Schneider, B. (2003). Trust in schools: A core resource for school reform. *Educational Leadership*, *60*(6), 40-45.  Spillane, J. P., Halverson, R., & Diamond, J. B. (2001). Investigating school leadership practice: A distributed perspective. *Educational Researcher*, *30*(3), 23-28.  Coburn, C. E., Russell, J. L., Kaufman, J. H., & Stein, M. K. (2012). Supporting sustainability: Teachers’ advice networks and ambitious instructional reform. *American Journal of Education*, *119*(1), 137-182. **OPTIONAL** |
| **4**  **Sept. 18** | **Tools / Core Technology**  Guiding Question: How would you describe the core technology in schools? What implications does the nature of the core technology having for educational improvement?  Scott Chapter 6: Technology and Structure  Rowan, B. (1994). Comparing teachers' work with work in other occupations: Notes on the professional status of teaching. *Educational Researcher*, *23*(6), 4-17.  Collins, A. & Halverson, R. (2010). The second educational revolution:  Rethinking education in the age of technology. *Journal of Computer Assisted*  *Learning, 26*(1) 18-27.  **OR**  Kraft, M. A., Papay, J. P., Johnson, S. M., Charner-Laird, M., Ng, M., & Reinhorn, S. (2015). Educating amid uncertainty the organizational supports teachers need to serve students in high-poverty, urban schools. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, *51*(5), 753-790. |
| **5**  **Sept. 25** | **Routines**  Review Spillane, Gomez & Messler section on routines.  Sherer, J. Z. & Spillane, J. P. (2011). Constancy and change in school work practice: Exploring the role of organizational routines. *Teachers College Record*. *113*(3), 611-657.  Hatch, T., Hill, K., & Roegman, R. (2016). Investigating the Role of Instructional Rounds in the Development of Social Networks and District-Wide Improvement. *American Educational Research Journal*, *53*(4), 1022-1053.  **OR**  Stelitano, L. & Russell, J. L. (Under review). Organizing for Inclusion: Exploring the Routines that Shape Student Supports. *American Educational Research Journal.* |
| **6**  **Oct. 2** | **Review of Segment 1**  Bryk, A., Easton, J. Q., Sebring, P. D., Allensworth, A. & Luppescu, S. (2011). *Organizing for school improvement: Lessons from Chicago*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.  [Map onto the Spillane, Gomez & Messler Framework] |
| **7**  **Oct. 9** | **Case Analysis and Collaborative Design Projects**  Plus continued discussion of Organizing Schools for Improvement |
| **Segment 2: Organizational Learning** | |
| **8**  **Oct. 23** | **Organizational learning / Learning Orgs**  Argyris, C. (1977). Double loop learning in organizations. *Harvard business review*, *55*(5), 115-125.  Stringfield, S. (1998). Organizational learning and current reform efforts: From exploitation to exploration. *Organisational learning in schools*, 261-274.  Bensimon, E. M. (2005). Closing the achievement gap in higher education: An organizational learning perspective. *New Directions for Higher Education*, *2005*(131), 99-111.  Park, S., Hironaka, S., Carver, P., & Nordstrum, L. (2013). Continuous improvement in education. Palo Alto, CA: *Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching*. |
| **9**  **Oct. 30** | **Institutional theory**  Scott & Davis, Ch. 4 (pages 87-98) & 9 (pages 233-244)  Burch, P. (2007). Educational policy and practice from the perspective of institutional theory: Crafting a wider lens. *Educational Researcher*, *36*(2), 84-95.  Hopkins, M., & Spillane, J. P. (2015). Conceptualizing relations between instructional guidance infrastructure (IGI) and teachers’ beliefs about mathematics instruction: Regulative, normative, and cultural-cognitive considerations. *Journal of Educational Change*, *16*(4), 421-450. |
| **Segment 3: Organizations and environments** | |
| **10**  **Nov. 6** | **Organizational fields**  DiMaggio, P. J., & Powell, W. W. (1983). The iron cage revisited: Institutional isomorphism and collective rationality in organizational fields. *American Sociological Review*, 147-160. OPTIONAL  Renzulli, L. A., Barr, A. B., & Paino, M. (2014). Innovative education? A test of specialist mimicry or generalist assimilation in trends in charter school specialization over time. *Sociology of Education*, *88*(1), 83-102.  Rowan, B. (2002). The ecology of school improvement: Notes on the school improvement industry in the United States. *Journal of Educational Change*, *3*(3-4), 283-314. |
| **11**  **Nov. 13** | **Group work time / Individual meetings** |
| **12**  **Nov. 20** | **Institutional change**  Coburn, C. E. (2004). Beyond decoupling: Rethinking the relationship between the institutional environment and the classroom. *Sociology of Education, 77*(3), 211-244.  Peurach, D. J., Cohen, D. K., Yurkofsky, M., & Spillane, J. P. (Under Review). From mass public schooling to functional education systems: Changing patterns in the organization and management of instruction.  Lounsbury, M., & Pollack, S. (2001). Institutionalizing civic engagement: Shifting logics and the cultural repackaging of service-learning in US higher education. *Organization*, 8(2), 319–339.  Russell, J. L. (2011). From Child’s Garden to Academic Press: The role of shifting institutional logics in redefining kindergarten education. *American Educational Research Journal, 48* (2), 236-267.  Group Presentations |
| **Segment 4: Networked improvement communities…organizing for improvement at scale** | |
| **13**  **Nov. 27** | **Improvement Science**  Lewis, C. (2015). What is improvement science? Do we need it in education?. *Educational Researcher*, *44*(1), 54-61.  OPTIONAL: Shakman, K., Bailey, J., & Breslow, N. (2017). A Primer for Continuous Improvement in Schools and Districts. *Teacher & Leadership Programs*. |
| **14**  **Dec. 4** | **Networked improvement communities**  Bryk, A. S., Gomez, L. M., Grunow, A., & LeMahieu, P. G. (2015). *Learning to improve: How America’s schools can get better at getting better*. Harvard Education Press. Chapter 6.   |  | | --- | | OPTIONAL: Russell, J. L., Bryk, A. S., Dolle, J., Gomez, L. M., LeMahieu, P., & Grunow, A. (2017). A framework for the initiation of networked improvement communities. *Teachers College Record*, *119*(7). | |  | |
| **15**  **Dec. 11** | **Wrap Up and Final Presentations** |