## University of Pittsburgh School of Education



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| **Education and Culture**  **ADMPS 2343**  **Fall Semester, 2020-21 (2\*21\*1)**  **Mondays, 1:00 Zoom: 950 8461 7522**  **FLEX@Pitt 5108 Posvar Hall if possible**  **\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_** |

**COURSE DESIGNER**

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You will need to leave a complete message and contact information, including your best phone as appropriate. I prefer to return message by phone. Since we have neither phones nor offices that are accessible in Posvar, I am unclear as to where this will forward; it may become forwarded to my work email.

**Work email:** [mporter@pitt.edu](mailto:mporter@pitt.edu)

**Please communicate about class matters through the email function within Canvas of our course.** I check Pitt email at a regular time several days Monday through Friday (except on writing days or fieldwork days which this term are Wednesdays and Fridays), but not on weekends or evenings.

**Office hours:** TBD as schedules come in, likely Tuesdays 4-5:30. I will be on Zoom for up to a half an hour before class starts if you need to check in. Once we have settled on a Canvas or shared departmental platform, I will have virtual office hours. It may have a “waiting room” capacity so that I can cycle people in as soon as someone is finished. You may also be able to reserve an upcoming office hour slot after class before we dismiss. Zoom allows us to talk face to face for even challenging issues or questions that may arise in class. I much prefer visual modes of office hours as long as we cannot meet in person.

**ORGANIZING SYNERGISTIC IDEAS**

This is an arts-based experiential learning course that welcomes those very new to the field of educational foundations and cultural studies, as well as those who are advanced professionals in the field who seek new challenges. The focused readings and open-ended conversations show how important it is to understand educators’ theories of culture in order to grasp what informs their actual professional lives. It is a place to wonder and to reconsider, to affirm and to question.

Our seminar is a nexus of intersections, where people meet and ideas converge. Throughout the course, and hence this syllabus, you will find three major ideas that inform the design of the class. **Pedagogy** is where teaching and learning meet in classrooms; it reflects the foundational ideas that educators have about what matters.

**Praxis** is the effective interplay of theory and practice on a larger organizational scale. **Policy** is where education and culture intersect through actual innovations and social justice actions. These are parallel to our new departmental structure of EDFOP, or Education Foundations, Organizations, and Policy.

Our cultures inform our educational endeavors and the culture of educational institutions further propels our local and national cultures. Whether at a micro level in a classroom (pedagogies) or enacted on a larger stage (policies) or in the design of new programs or laws (praxis) culture matters. This includes what educators understand as the aims of education, which cultural elements should be passed down, what constitutes a national cultural heritage, the meaning of democracy, the role of transformative education, and which aspects of students’ home cultures belong at public school. The answers that different cultural groups have settled upon in different eras and in widespread regions around the world have varied considerably, however they also share some remarkable shared foundations. We will look at what makes the USA different and also what we have in common. Some cultural narratives have become so normalized that we hardly perceive them as constructions that profoundly shape, and limit, our moral, social, and political actions.

In addition to others’ writings, we will integrate structured personal reflections with classroom discussions. We will push beyond the surface and ask what we believe, why, and what the consequences of these cultural orientations are for education. To further broaden this important topic, we will look at education in formal settings (schools) as well as informal and non-formal settings, although we will primarily talk about public institutionalized settings that operate in a capitalist democracy. These are exciting and contested questions that are essential for us as educators to grapple with as we contemplate our own choices. Welcome aboard.

**EDUCATIVE DESIGN**

This seminar is not about top-down transmission of canonic or hegemonic information. Nor will I attempt to make you appear to conform to one ideology or worldview. I work from a **Social Constructivist Pedagogy**. (For capitalized terms look at the separate thematic pages within Canvas.) Students **all** bring something valuable and different to this shared seminar; your unique contributions are all needed and you will develop your voice as part of our discussions. We honor the different **contexts** in which hard choices are made and wisdom acquired. My goal is that you repeatedly expand your comfort in being in the **Growth Zone** in becoming an anti-racist, social justice educator.

The focus on these afternoon sessions is to enjoy **being present** with one another and creating a space where we can think more deeply and deliberately about the ways that education and culture matter greatly in our world. Students are active participants whose three-fold, full **presence** directly creates the educational experience. Instead of learning in isolation, they have multiple ways of working together and connecting, at a human and collegial level, with the material, with arts-based modes of synthesis, and with one another.

The goal is not to bring closure or an oversimplified, standardized answer that is right once and for all. Instead, the class is about cultivating **dispositions** towards learning that will lead to both the desire and the capacity to engage again. These align directly with developing what the Lincoln Center Institute refers to as the **Capacities for Imaginative Learning**. We are challenged to inform ourselves, to exercise our analytical faculties, and to create, literally new future cultural spaces in schools.

The course is designed to **provoke reconsideration** – through guided, thoughtful conversation - of students’ cultural and educational assumptions. Just a few organizing essential questions include:

* What should we teach the next generation?
* How can we most effectively go about it?
* Should they love or fear what we have to tell them?
* Which roles should discomfort or emotion play in deep learning?
* What about conflict or deliberation?
* What must a nation do in order to earn the admiration of devoted citizens?
* Can we think outside our cultures of origin?
* How do we each express our cultural affinities and pleasures?
* What are diverse cultural strengths and ways of knowing that we could experience? How do we share, play, tease, and tell stories to pass on important cultural lessons? What does it mean to teach for freedom or even democracy?
* What would it mean for education to be liberating or empowering?
* What if education contributed to social justice?
* And importantly, where do I stand in all of this?

In order to accomplish this kind of **complex wondering**, we will engage in deliberation as a whole class. This means bringing your entire self to class, being physically present, listening more than speaking, and reading deeply in order to prepare.

Some of the major course goals are:

* To make visible those cultural forces that shape our attitudes and beliefs, especially those which we consider to be “normal”
* To consider the consequences of normalized or inherited cultural heritage on our actions and priorities
* To think about the competing needs of the diverse groups who come together in public education in a particular nation state
* To complicate an oversimplified account of what constitutes public educational success or failure
* To be able to decipher and appreciate culturally rich objects that have personal meaning to our classmates
* To listen with an open mind and a hospitable heart to those whose cultural and educational experiences have been quite different to our own, and to be grateful for the opportunities
* To recognize the theories and positionalities from which we respond to a particular cultural event, symbol, stereotype, text, proverb, book, image, etc.
* To look at ways that we are intersectional beings who have multifaceted identities and pivotal personal/professional experiences
* To create representations of where we are in our own education journey, and to express our own areas of confusion or wondering
* To appreciate varied aesthetic forms of representing knowledge and theories
* To identify and build on our own cultural strengths as teachers and learners and to appreciate the cultural strengths of others
* To notice cultural and educational metaphors that shape our national discourse and “cultural wars” over public schooling
* To ask for help, forgiveness, clarification, and other gifts that classmates become willing to offer
* To dare to hope for a more socially just education that honors many cultures, not just a single hegemonic one
* To commit to the value of public education in sustaining a democracy
* To become more comfortable with liminal, non-binary situations, and to see them as spaces for transformative and liberatory action rather than as stasis
* To identify our own journeys and professional goals as part of a larger, collective struggle
* To think about our own culture and education as just one of many in a concurrent global praxis
* To situate our study within the larger academic field of social foundations of education
* To encourage a mindset of synthesis versus either-or thought

We will share a seminar where we can enjoy **liminal** spaces, that is, those in-between places where power, language, prior stereotypes, and personal connections are open to innovation, play, and reorganization. We will go where there are more than **binary** responses (such as yes-no, agree-don’t agree, right-wrong, us-them, then-now, we-I, theory-practice, teacher-learner, education-culture). We will consistently ask for more than two sides to a question of pedagogy or policy.

Our modes of learning will therefore also be multifaceted. We will try to deepen our collective reading skills by working purposefully with text and images. You will have the chance to practice both verbal and visual modes of responding, as well as other modes of demonstrating understanding. We will think about the consequences that how people **think** about the world have on what they **do** in the world. Students will gain clarity on their own journey and where they would like to go long term.

We need to listen more than speak, but also to contribute so that as a seminar we are open to actually considering other points of view and other cultural frames. We might find that our current views are strengthened. We might also realize that there are other ways to see things. The result can be invigorated professionals who can work with others to **counter patterns of dehumanization and social exclusion** that too often are the state of educational affairs.

We are learning by doing, so that we can do more, more effectively and with passion and reason in the future. This is what Dewey (1938) meant by an experience being “**educative.**” By offering the possibility of meaningful engagement and individual meaning making with authentic tasks with relevant case studies, it is my goal to provide you with just such an educative place of possibilities.

**COURSE PROGRESSION**

This is the first semester that all Pitt faculty are transitioning to the Canvas platform. Modules arranged visually like an outline, and you can see each week as a set. Every session has a page that outlines the prospective **Course Flow** of what we will cover and what to look ahead to anticipate; I will usually update this after the actual class to reflect what we did.

Note that all of Canvas is an **evolving platform** with new features being upgraded or added. New materials will also be added as this particular group expresses its keen interests. This is an example of **iterative design**, the purposeful sequencing of increasingly complex and abstract elements that enable students to revisit basic concepts in increasingly sophisticated ways. By coming back to ask more complex, open-ended questions, students will have the chance to situate themselves and their worldviews in a series of new scenarios. Further materials will also be added in Weeks 9 – 13 when students will work in teams to present on feature topics by sharing their unique expertise and passions. Student will help build those Canvas pages!

Each week will also have separate pages for what you should **Prepare for Class.** Most weeks will also specify what you should be ready to **Bring to Class** to extend and apply your readings. These give us several opportunities each session to meet in smaller breakout rooms in Zoom or in person, as we are able.

**RESOURCES**

While there are a nearly boundless set of relevant resources (including articles, books, papers, reports, and internet links) on education and culture, we will be judiciously working with a **small set of books** as our shared core texts. Students who wish to explore any of the big questions raised in the course (whether for their own edification, a comprehensive exam, a thesis or dissertation, a certificate, or for other growth) are more than welcome to chat and ask for advanced or particular materials. Students using this class for UCIS or other certificates can also incorporate materials to help focus their essays and class experiences.

After all, with complete renovation of he fifth floor of our building and then COVID quarantine, everything that I kept is now in my garage! Blessedly, I have inherited the library of my predecessor who taught this course for a long time, and I have an excellent collection from her and my own scholarly life and libraries. I would be more than happy to help you pursue additional study. I will also be discarding a number of books in an ongoing manner, so if you give me a heads up about your particular interests, I may find something just for you!

This short list of books has been chosen because of their inspiring **content** and **composition**. Some are easily accessible to those very new to the field of education. Most are accessible for those building their English language skills and technical vocabulary. All provide a conceptual and emotional challenge! Focal texts are solid examples of professional writers’ decades of revision, reflection, and sophisticated analysis. Some are new ventures and others are successful latter editions. All speak to us in different ways, and together they make a set. These have been selected carefully to **model** a range of rhetorical styles and media, from personal essay to graphic novel to extended analysis to historical review to retrospective. These allow students to see an expansive set of models of academic writing from educators who have had quite different scholarly and professional lives. Most importantly, last session’s students (Fall, 2018) expressed their clear preferences, and those are the ones that I have retained! They will **inspire** your stories and your own leadership.

Ayers, W. & Alexander-Tanner, R. (2010). To teach: The journey, in comics. New York: Teachers College Press.

ISBN 978-0-8077-5062-9

Chávez, A.F., & Longerbeam, S. D. (2016). Teaching across cultural strengths: A guide to balancing integrated and individuated cultural frameworks in college teaching. Stylus Publishing, LLC. ISBN 9781620363256 ProQuest Ebook Central:

<https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/pitt-ebooks/detail.action?docID=4410192&pq-origsite=primo#>

Gay, G. (2018). Culturally responsive teaching: Theory, research, and practice. (3rd Ed.) Multicultural Education Series. New York: Teachers College Press.

ISBN 978-0-8077-5876-2

Roland Martin, J. (2002). Cultural miseducation: In search of a democratic solution. New York: Teachers College Press.

ISBN 978-0-8077-4239-2

And, for advanced culture studies students and PhD students:

Wren, T. (2012). Conceptions of culture: What multicultural educators need to know. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

ISBN: 978-1-4422-1638-9 (paperback)

ISBN: 978-1-4422-1639-6 (e-edition)

**ANALYTICAL ASSESSMENTS** (30% of grade)

Students need to demonstrate by both the substance and the depth of their participation in class that they have **read the materials** thoroughly. Full participation can take many forms, although students will each be expected to work at their **growing edge** and participate mindfully and generously in class discussions. For many, this will mean developing greater capacities to participate verbally in the ongoing flow of classroom discourse and deliberation. For others, this may mean learning to pause and to step back and to become more of a listener and ally. Students will be provided with prompts, as well as readings at different levels of difficulty, to help them prepare ideas to bring to class exchanges. Each person will personally respond to different parts of the complex readings. Varied modes of responding and sharing each week give each person a means of contributing to class.

I expect that students will come to every class session, in person or synchronous Zoom if at all possible, and will **engage** to the best of their ability each time. I realize that many factors may impinge upon their full participation, and I am willing to be flexible to **accommodate** students, especially if we can plan in advance. If you miss a class, it is up to you to reach out to classmates to see what you missed. It is likely that we will only record the first overview session. This will enable us to speak freely.

Students should plan on being present at the start of class, arrive with all necessary materials, and be ready to candidly share what they have brought. When it is the date for you to present, use our shared Zoom time or set up your own meeting to make sure that you are coordinated; I will **open the class session on Zoom** from 12:30 even if I am not yet there. Plan ahead for the time that you may need to complete this task.

The **written language** for this course is Standard Written Academic English (SWAE), This means developing your skills in using rhetoric that is academically sophisticated, gender-inclusive, well-cited, clear, and persuasive. SWAE has a great deal of fluidity to incorporate diverse forms of speech as well as personalized voice. You should expect to refine your own writing styles and composition skills in SWAE. I can highly recommend going to the Writing Center (regardless if you are in your first term in the USA or an advanced native speaker) in order to hone your skills. This is a resource that you are already paying for, so make use of these kind coaches before you are alone in the professional world. You can express your own voice within SWAE if you wish to incorporate materials or writing in other languages, dialects, visualizations, or forms of expression. We just need to touch base to make sure that you do so such that I can make meaning from those parts (I cannot read Braille and my Swahili is just developing, but I publish in German). An important part of my job is to ensure that you can code-switch between SWAE and oral or vernacular forms of expression so that you can participate with savvy in academic realms.

**PARTICIPATORY ASSESSMENTS** (30% of grade)

Most weeks you will be asked to **bring in something** that will drive the class exchanges. You should spend ample time thoughtfully choosing what to compose or collect. You will also need to interpret it live in class. Sharing cultural items and practices that have a personal significance propels creative class sessions. For example, this might vary from sharing an item from: a culture that you identify with, one that represent the USA, a tangible material cultural object, one that illustrates or exemplifies intercultural communication, one that embodies intersectional culture or cultural flux, and one that motivates or centers you. You should not simply bring jewelry, a quote or text, or a photograph. Dig deeper, find something more complex and worth sharing. Think beyond what comes to mind first.

You will also have the chance to **work with a partner to lead class** during Weeks 9 – 13.

These provide opportunities for you to work people who are both culturally divergent and culturally similar with you, in order to lead activities that can help peers develop greater mastery of the content. Preparing a synthesis to share orally helps you to develop important skills that are hallmarks of graduate education in the USA. They provide moments for you to engage in pedagogies (that is, teaching and learning) that you find affirming and natural, as well as to try your hand at new modes of leading in a formal learning environment. You can have us go somewhere nearby each person’s broadcasting spot (via Zoom), do something creative, engage in a range of learning activities, etc. in order to help make “real” the important messages in the readings. You should prepare a hand-out, worksheet, guide, or summary. Students are encouraged to think about the cultural strengths that we each bring, and that we each could try, as they design and then lead focused and purposeful activities. I will be available to you to help you decide how to **curate** and to move to leading higher order thinking**.** Hopefully, you will raise many more good questions than we answer in this seminar, and it is my hope that some of these speak to you heart, capture your imagination, and inspire a passionate career as an educator. We will be able to observe this directly when you lead.

**SYNTHESIS ASSESSMENTS** (40% of grade)

First, the stories that we tell ourselves and tell others about culture and education are part of the overarching narrative of our lives as professionals. Story-crafting is an intentional practice that involves both cultural norms of representation, rich language, metaphors, cultural conventions, and individual responses to formal objectives. While the primary form of these stories will be text, they may also contain other forms of portrayal such as visual images or graphic story telling, visualizations and models, poetry, or dialogues. Working on a cumulative set of stories allows students to develop their own voice and their ability to articulate big ideas about culture and education with personal panache and flair. These **four increasingly refined stories** creatively connect your reflections with our shared course books and materials. These essays come at turning points across the term, and will demonstrate ongoing growth, personal risk-taking, and articulate expression. They will be turned in via the Assignments function of Canvas and will be primarily textual.

During this COVID-reshaped semester there is no one semester-scale externalized project due. Instead, one of the most important capacities for you as a deeply cultural being is to build up your **regular cultural practices that foster well-being**. Therefore, we will have scheduled check-ins (usually the same week a story is due and you have fewer readings) about things that you each individually commit to doing that either 1) enhance your appreciation of your own Cultural Strengths, 2) affirm and stretch your learning styles, 3) help you to connect to cultural practices from your kin and/or chosen communities, 4) link you to scholarly and social communities here at Pitt such as the UCIS Area Studies, Global Studies, or IISE in the School of Education, 5) express care for those who are suffering, 6) take action for political causes dear to you that touch cultural issues of the day, 7) connect you to fellow humans and classmates, 8) prompt you to enjoy physical activities, 9) get you outside in nature or 10) have meaning for you as a cultural, educational practice. You should be able to share how you are being invigorated, reassured, or restored through something that has resonated with you.

**CONCURRENT AVISING**

Meet with your advisor as a parallel part of this course. Talk to them about their own educational and cultural journey. Ask about the wisdom that they have gained and questions that still motivate them. Seek out complementary educative spaces and relationships. Ask them about books and resources that inspire and provoke them.

We will explicitly talk about the SCAE program (and, if different, your home program). We will look at your formative milestones and final projects. Ours is an individualized curriculum, so we can also talk about courses. We will talk about how our foundations-based, social justice curriculum builds on many of the core exhortations we address in this class. You will appreciate what a special program this is! You will also, most certainly, come to cherish the group of people who have come from all over the USA and world to meet here on Mondays!