Doctor of Education (EdD) Program
EDUC 3003: Leadership in Groups and Organizations
Executive Syllabus- Spring 2026

In-Person Meetings:
1501 Posvar, 8:00 AM-12:00 PM EST
January 10, February 7, March 7, April 11

Mission/Vision of the School of Education

We ignite learning. We strive for well-being for all. We teach.
We commit to student, family, and community success.
We commit to educational equity. We advocate. We work for justice.
We cultivate relationships. We forge engaged partnerships. We collaborate.
We learn with and from communities. We innovate and agitate.
We pursue and produce knowledge. We research.
We disrupt and transform inequitable educational structures.
We approach learning as intertwined with health, wellness, and human development.
We address how national, global, social, and technological change impacts learning.
We shape practice and policy. We teach with and for dignity. We think. We dream.
We lead with integrity.
We are the School of Education at the University of Pittsburgh.

Rematriation Statement

We join one another on the land and near the rivers originally in the care and protection of the Adena and Hopewell Nations, and the Monongahela Peoples, and shared over time by many Indigenous Nations—including the Delaware, Iroquois, and Shawnee Tribes—as a place of gathering and exchange. We join you also on the land and near the rivers cared for and cultivated as a site of Freedom, from the Underground Railroad to global uprisings for racial justice. As a process of Rematriation, we acknowledge our connection to place and honor the land as a relative.

Source:
Dr. Sabina Vaught (https://www.education.pitt.edu/faculty/directory/sabina-vaught/)
Department of Teaching, Learning, and Leading
School of Education
University of Pittsburgh

Doctor of Education (EdD)

The University of Pittsburgh is a center for excellence in professional programs, and the School of Education school-wide Doctor of Education (EdD) program is grounded in this ***commitment to excellence***. The program prepares working professionals to become **leader scholar practitioners** to develop *specialized knowledge in their area of concentration* and *apply their intellectual and practical skills to address and mitigate enduring problems affecting children, families, and communities*.

Program Learning Goals

As a result of attending the EdD program at Pitt, students and graduates become leader scholar practitioners who:

1. Identify problems of practice, including questions of equity, ethics, and justice

2. Use data to inform decisions in daily operations and improvement projects
3. Communicate and collaborate to work with diverse communities and build partnerships
4. Lead change that improves practice
5. Are committed to use improvement science to address problems of practice

Doctoral Requirements
This course is a required course in the Foundation sequence of the EdD program.

About The Course (EDUC 3003)

Course Facilitators
François Guilleux, PhD: **fjg6@pitt.edu**
Rachel Robertson, PhD:**rachelr@pitt.edu**

Office Hours
By appointment. We are happy to schedule a mutually convenient time to meet. Our preference is to meet via Zoom or phone. If you need to have a conversation about something in the course, we can arrange a meeting on an as-needed basis. Just email us and let us know the dates+times you're available. We will be glad to schedule a conference between 9am and 5pm Monday through Friday, at a mutually convenient time. You can email us directly through Canvas or from your *Pitt* email.

Rationale and Description
This course is designed to prepare educators for leadership in educational professions. It continues to evolve most recently with contributions from Dr Emiola Oriolla, Dr. Tom Ralston, Dr. Bea Dias, and Dr. Sabina Vaught woven in.

The course provides students with tools with which to address problems of practice. The overarching framework for the course is **Adaptive Leadership,** developed by Ron Heifetz at the Kennedy School at Harvard University over the last 40 years and represented by Heifetz, Grashow, and Linksy in their fieldbook *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership: Tools and Tactics for Changing Your Organization and the World* (2009). To offer different and minoritized perspectives on our exploration of adaptive leadership, we dive into the work of adrienne maree brown on **Emergent Strategy** (2017) and draw from other authors representing different social, organizational, and professional contexts.

Ellen Schall in her presidential address to the Association of Public Policy and Management said, "We must invent more ways to teach reflective practice and prepare people to learn systematically from their own experience so that they might better navigate the messy realities of day-to-day public management" (1995, p. 202). More recently, Heidi Brooks of the Yale School of Management has been inquiring in her teaching and writing, "how do we cultivate the capacity to learn from our experience to create a future worth fighting for?"

Traditional teaching methods in leadership courses fall short of preparing students for the complex realities of leadership in organizations (Beer, Finnström & Schrader, 2018; Darling-Hammond, 2007; Heifetz, et al., 1989). Data on change management points out that change initiatives do not fail due to a leader's lack of knowledge *about* leadership (Bregman, 2014). Organizational leaders across industries and the world describe the need for leaders with the capacity to inhabit more complex situations (IBM, 2010). Anderson and Adams (2015) argue that an organization's structure and performance is limited by its leaders' level of consciousness and Ginwright (2022), Brown (2017) and Caruci (2016) all point out that organizations will not succeed in change unless the leaders are themselves willing to change.

As such this leadership course is not a course *about* leadership but rather a course *for* leadership; ***for your leadership*** in particular. Many of the scholars mentioned above have called for leadership education that is reflective, experiential, and integrated in work contexts. Our goal in this course is to create a space for leadership education grounded in the integration of **adult development** (Garvey Berger, 2024, 2019; Kegan, 1994) and **adaptive leadership** theory (Heifetz, Grashow, & Linsky, 2009). Drawing on participants' personal and professional experience as leaders and learners, we invite participants to take a deep dive into the development of their leadership effectiveness through the application of course concepts to their work environment, to a problem of practice, and to our class.

On one level the course focuses on the experiential study of leadership of groups and organizations through the lens of adaptive leadership theory. Grounded in participants' experiences in educational institutions and the "temporary institution" of this course, participants learn how to diagnose system- and institutional-level complex problems of practice and how to mobilize resources towards student-centric solutions, sustainable excellence, equity, and social justice within education institutions at all levels.

On another level this course attends to the learning of leadership as the developmental task of growing habits of mind that shape our perspectives on ourselves, our roles, our relationships to others, and to the institutions in which we work.

Two overarching theses guide this course. The first is that the context of leadership has changed such that organizations, especially educational ones, need leaders who can keep growing themselves into more complex ways of leading. The second is that leaders make a difference and that leadership attributes improve through thoughtful examination of theory and practice in a highly-interactive learning environment. Thus, unlike more traditional graduate leadership courses which seek to teach students *about* leadership, this course is designed as an opportunity to learn *for* leadership—for your leadership in particular. It creates the opportunity to practice the exercise of leadership.

The experience of this course works best if you set aside expectations based on traditional graduate courses. Rather, **think of this course as a laboratory,** an improv theater stage, or an indoor Outward-Bound course--settings where your skills, talents, aspirations, fears and stories are called upon to experiment and engage more deeply in learning about yourself in organizations. This will be done by assignments to carry out in the schools and organizations in which you currently work and in the consideration of this class as a temporary organization.

This course also seeks to move you along the doctoral journey by offering new opportunities to identify and frame your problem of practice. A **problem of practice**, according to the Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate (2010), is a persistent, contextualized, and specific issue embedded in the work of a professional practitioner. When the practitioner addresses the problem, there is potential to improve understanding, experience, and outcomes associated with the matter (Buss & Zambo, 2014). We connect problems of practice to what Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky (2009) refer to as **adaptive challenges,** or "the gap between the values people stand for (that constitute thriving) …and the reality that they face (their current lack of capacity to realize those values in their environment)" and what Snowden (2007) and Achi and Garvey Berger (2015) describe as **complex problems**.
In addition to the parallels between problems of practice, adaptive challenges and complex problems, the systems-focused cycle of Improvement Science (Plan, Do, Study, Act) aligns to the adaptive leadership principles of Observe, Interpret, Intervene and the Experiment-To-Learn mode

of acting in Complex Adaptive Systems that are central to the course. *(Heifetz, Grashow & Linsky, 2009)*

Course Aims

- To engage intellectually and experientially in the practice of leadership and adaptive change as they relate to groups and organizations (Leader, Scholar)
- To demonstrate personal courage, creativity and risk-taking when solving problems and experimenting with new behaviors (Leader, Practitioner)
- To develop the theoretical and practical skills needed to facilitate action learning groups in professional learning environments (Leader, Scholar, Practitioner)

Format and Procedures

The course is divided into an introduction and 4 thematic blocks aligning with the four dimensions of adaptive work. These are:

- Introduction (module 1)
- Section 1: Diagnose the System (modules 2-5)
- Section 2: Mobilize the System (modules 6-9)
- Section 3: Self as System (modules 10-12)
- Section 4: Deploy Self (modules 13-14)

Each block will span two to four weeks. Weekly readings and assignments will be posted under each module. **Course weeks begin on Monday and end on Sunday.** Unless otherwise noted, assignments may be submitted at any time during the week but will be due by 11:59 pm on Sunday night for that week. Due dates and times help to keep us on track in the course. If you need more time to complete a specific assignment or are experiencing difficulties with the pace of the course, please let us know as soon as you can.

The class will meet four times for four hours on Saturdays (8 AM-12 PM EST) as per the published schedule. Each class provides an opportunity for large- and small-group work. In addition, you will be assigned to a Balcony Coaching Group, a coaching group with 4 or 5 of your peers. **Balcony Coaching Groups will meet up to 5 times for 45-60 minute meetings during the semester. At least three of those meetings will occur during our Saturday morning class meetings. The remaining meetings will happen virtually outside of the Saturday classes at a time decided by your group.**

Our Assumptions

1. It is our assumption that leadership is integral to the education doctorate. It is also our assumption that leaders who seek to transform educational systems need themselves to be open to transformation. Therefore, we expect each student to exhibit the courage to take risks when addressing problems of practice in their professional and personal lives.
2. We also assume that the work of transforming our current organizations into more equitable, just, and inclusive organizations is adaptive work that we must engage in both individually and organizationally. Therefore, the growth one needs to lead more adaptively supports the growth of leadership habits one needs to lead more inclusively.

Course Requirements

Core Texts

brown, a. m., (2017) *Emergent Strategy : Shaping Change, Changing Worlds*. Chico, CA: AK Press. This book is available online through the Pitt library system

Heifetz, R., Grashow, A., & Linsky, M., (2009). *The practice of adaptive leadership: tools and tactics for changing your organization and the world*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business Press. This book is available online through the Pitt library system

If you have trouble accessing the book, please let us know as soon as possible.

Additional **required readings, videos and podcasts** will be available electronically through Canvas. From Marian Hampton, Hillman librarian and liaison to SOE, "Unlimited access to e-books means that any number of Pitt users can access the e-book at the same time. It may be helpful to remind your students that to comply with copyright limitations, most e-books have a limit to the number of pages or chapters that can be downloaded or printed within a 24 hour period -- usually 60 pages within 24 hours."

Optional material will also be posted on Canvas for most weeks of the semester. While this optional content is not required, we encourage you to skim the ones that you find yourself curious about.

Grades
Participation for this course entails attending the four Saturday class sessions and engaging in Canvas discussions. **Your participation will be graded as complete/incomplete**. In addition to your course participation, there are three types of graded, written assignments that will provide opportunities for you to provide evidence of your learning. **Each written assignment will be graded as an A or a 'Revise'**. If you receive an A, then your work is complete. If you receive a 'Revise', then you have an opportunity to submit a revision that addresses the comments from your instructor. The revision must be submitted within 1 week of receiving feedback from your instructor.

Assignments

Leadership Challenge Case Study
The purpose of the Leadership Challenge Case Study is for you to apply course concepts to a real-life situation in your own leadership experience.

The Leadership Challenge Case Study is a semester-long project that includes 3 tasks:

1. Narrative about your Leadership Challenge (due January 25)
2. Presentation of the Leadership Challenge to your Balcony Coaching Group (scheduled with your group)
3. End of semester reflection (due April 19)

Journal Entries
The purpose of the journal entries is to connect with course facilitators around your reflections on your leadership learning and challenges in the course, and the application of the course concepts in your work environment.

The online dialogue with course facilitators offers an opportunity for feedback and additional perspectives as you exercise adaptive leadership practices. You can base your journal entry on any aspect of the current course module that resonated with you. To be substantive, a journal entry should provide an authentic and meaningful reflection on core material (readings/media) or class session, or a thoughtful analysis of experimentation with course concepts in your work environment. **Submit one journal entry for each of the first three course sections (each course section consists of 3-4 modules).**

Balcony Questions
The purpose of the Balcony Questions assignment is to deepen your diagnostic habits of ***asking different questions, listening to learn*** *and* ***getting on the balcony to scan a system****.*

The system you will consider is EDUC 3003, our class as a group or as an organization. The week of a class meeting, pose one question you have been wondering about ***regarding the system of our class as a group or as an organization***. The question should be informed by the readings, your reflection on yourself as a system, your improvement goals, your leadership experience and how those dimensions of who you are interact into the informal role(s) you take up in the class. **The posting should simply be of one question that you are carrying about our system as we head into our next meeting**. As Heifetz points out, sometimes process of asking the question can be an act of leadership, so we will together see how our growing capacity to ask different questions nudges our system. Consider your colleagues' questions. Notice your reactions to reading their perspectives. Engage your colleagues' questions for the benefit of the class learning.

Midway Feedback
The purpose of this assignment is for you to solicit information from your peers on how you are showing up in your Balcony Coaching Group, and to use that feedback to reflect on ways you could increase your effectiveness as a team member over the rest of the course.

Optional: Re-watch the videos on Asking Different Questions, Taking Multiple Perspectives and Listening to Learn in preparation for giving and receiving feedback.

- Before our third class (March 7th), select **at least two** members of your consultation group from whom you would like to receive feedback.
- Once you have met with 2 of your colleagues, complete the reflection and submit as Journal Entry 2.

Stakeholder Analysis Paper
The purpose of the stakeholder analysis paper is to apply the concepts and learning from this course so far to your Problem of Practice by focusing on the stakeholders and others in your professional context who will have an influence on how you will be able to address your problem of practice.

The analysis that you do for this paper can be helpful in a future course when you work on your Applied Inquiry Plan. According to Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky (2009, p.133), "People who think politically discern the formal and informal exercise of power and influence among individuals in their organization. They take time to understand the interests, loyalties, fears of everyone who has a stake or might be affected by the change. And they understand that relationships count."

To complete the stakeholder analysis paper, review Chapter 10 in *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership* (pages 133-148). Create a table like the one on pages 147-148. Write a 1-page reflection about what you discovered by completing the table. How has your analysis helped you to think politically about your proposed problem of practice? As appropriate, cite sources from the course readings that support your analysis.

Tentative Course Schedule
The course is organized into four sections which follow the four dimensions of adaptive work:

1. Diagnose the System [tentatively Jan 12 - Feb 15]
2. Mobilize the System [tentatively Feb 16 - Mar 15]
3. See Yourself as a System [tentatively Mar 16 - April 5]

4. Deploy Yourself [tentatively April 6 - Apr 19]

Each week we will explore chapters from the core texts and application readings, and readings, videos and other media that apply the theme of that week to a particular context or to the work of leadership for equity and justice. All course material will be posted in our Canvas modules.