

## **ED 435: Social Contexts of Education**

Thursdays, 4:30-7:00

Fall Semester, 2008

Lynch School of Education, Boston College

Campion Hall 200

Professor Dennis Shirley

Campion 221

Office Hours: Mondays, 1:00-4:30

617-552-1642

[shirleyd@bc.edu](mailto:shirleyd@bc.edu)

Ms. Cathie Ricci

[riccim@hotmail.com](mailto:riccim@hotmail.com)

Ms. Kathryn Sallis

[sallisk@bc.edu](mailto:sallisk@bc.edu)

### **Course Themes**

This course has been planned as a collaborative venture between two teacher leaders and a teacher educator in the Lynch School of Education at Boston College. The course is designed to provide students with a working knowledge of some of the most salient and contested themes in the social contexts of education in the United States today. Class readings explore the history of American education, encourage students to develop their own perspectives on diverse learners and kinds of schools, and thematize issues in the politics and micropolitics of educational change. Classes have been designed to promote inquiry and debate, and students are in no way to infer that the selection of a reading implies that students should endorse the authors' stance(s). Students are encouraged to develop their own interpretations of the social contexts of education and to articulate those in relationship to those with different and opposing views.

### **Assignments and Assessment of Student Work**

1. One six-page paper, due October 16th in which you present an interpretation of *a selected topic in American educational history or contemporary school reform* (25% of final grade).
2. One eight-page paper, due November 6th. This paper will be based on your *philosophy of instruction and learning in schools or school improvement* as key components of the social contexts of education (30% of final grade).
3. One eight-page paper, due December 11th. In this paper you will describe your *analysis of elementary and secondary school contexts, community engagement, technological change or teacher leadership*. (35% of the final grade).
4. Class participation (10%). Please note: this class is not a "spectator sport." High levels of student engagement make for a stimulating and enjoyable class; disinvestment and lethargy make for a chore for all parties. Students who text message in course or who respond to email or engage in or other distractions will receive 0% for class participation.

Each student will have permission to rewrite either the first or the second paper once. If you would like to have the final paper or final examination returned to you by mail, please attach a self-addressed stamped envelope with it.

Please notify an instructor if you have any learning disabilities or other circumstances for which we can arrange special conditions to ensure your optimal participation in this class.

### **Office Hours**

The instructors will be happy to meet with students individually and in small groups outside of class sessions. Professor Shirley's hours are on Monday from 1:00 to 4:30. For optimal access to the instructors, please email them in advance.

## Class Schedule

### I. Introduction

September 4     *Conceptualizing the Social Contexts of Education*

### II. Key Factors in the Shaping of Contemporary American Education

September 11    *Origins and Dilemmas of Public Education in the United States*

Required Reading: Thomas Jefferson, *Notes from the State of Virginia*, selections; Dennis Shirley, "A Brief History of Public Engagement for Public Education"

Recommended Reading: Eva Brann, *Paradoxes of Education in a Republic*; Michael Katz, *The Irony of Early School Reform*; Elaine and Thomas Pangle, *The Learning of Liberty*

September 18    *Origins of the Standards and Accountability Reform Movements*

Required Readings: Diane Ravitch, "In Search of Standards," *Left Back*, 408-452; "A Nation at Risk," *The American Curriculum*, 401-413

Recommended Reading: Richard Murnane and Frank Levy, *The New Basic Skills*

September 25    *The Promise of Data-Driven Decision Making*

Required Readings: For an Elementary focus: Amanda Datnow, Vicki Park, and Priscilla Wohlstetter, "Achieving with Data: How High-Performing School Systems Use Data to Improve Instruction for Elementary Students;" OR for a Secondary focus: Amanda Datnow, Vicki Park, and Brianna Kennedy, "How Urban High Schools Use Data to Improve Instruction"

Recommended Reading: Pamela Moss, *Evidence and Decision Making*

October 2        *Interregnum: The Boston Public Schools in Transition*

Required Reading: The Aspen Institute Education and Society Program and Annenberg Institute for School Reform, "Strong Foundation, Evolving Challenges: A Case Study to Support Leadership Transition in the Boston Public Schools" in Paul Reville, ed., *A Decade of Urban School Reform: Persistence and Progress in the Boston Public Schools*

Recommended Reading: Amy Hightower, Michael Knapp, Julie Marsh, and Milbrey McLaughlin, eds., *School Districts and Instructional Renewal*

Guest Speaker: Superintendent Carol Johnson, Boston Public Schools

Please note: This class will meet in the Murray Conference Room of the Yawkey Center.

October 9        *Unintended Consequences of Data-Driven Decision Making*

Required Reading: Andy Hargreaves and Dennis Shirley, "The Persistence of Presentism"

Recommended Reading: Dan Lortie, *Schoolteacher*

October 16       *Beyond Liberalism and Conservatism: Rethinking Strategies for Raising Achievement and Closing Gaps*

Required Reading: Charles Payne, *So Much Reform, So Little Change*, 17-66, 191-206

Recommended Reading: Linda Darling-Hammond, *The Right to Learn*

October 23 *Finding Inspiration, Developing a Sense of Mission*

Required Reading: Marvin Hoffman, *"You Won't Remember Me"*

Recommended Reading: Jonathan Kozol, *Death at an Early Age*

### III. Selected Themes in the Social Contexts of Education

October 30 *Problematizing How Children Learn: An Elementary School Case Study*

Required Reading: Bonnie Shapiro, *What Children Bring to Light*

Recommended Reading: J. Myron Atkin and Paul Black, *Inside Science Education Reform*

November 6 *Problematizing How Adolescents Learn: Three Readings from Secondary Schools*

Required Reading: Catherine Cobb Morocco, Nancy Brigham, and Cynthia Mata Aguilar, "Co-Teaching in Dolphin Middle School," *Visionary Middle Schools*, 15-45; Denise Clark Pope, *Doing School*, 7-49; Anthony Bryk, Peter Hollander, Valerie Lee, *Catholic Schools and the Common Good*, 81-100

Recommended Reading: Patrick McQuillan, *Educational Opportunity in an Urban American High School*

November 13 *Issues of Language, Race, and Culture*

Required Readings: Charles Payne, *So Much Reform, So Little Change*, 93-120; Dennis Shirley, "Morningside Middle School," *Community Organizing for Urban School Reform*; "Sam Houston Elementary School," *Valley Interfaith and School Reform*

Recommended Reading: Susan Eaton, *The Other Boston Busing Story*

November 20 *New Technologies: Guest Speaker: Professor Richard Jackson*

Required Readings: Chris Bigum and Jane Kenway, "New Information Technologies and the Ambiguous Future of Schooling—Some Possible Scenarios," *Handbook of Educational Change*; Chuck Hickock, Anne Meyer, Dan Rose, and Richard Jackson, "Providing New Access to the General Curriculum: Universal Design for Learning;" Joan McGuire, Sally Scott, and Stan Shaw, "Universal Design and its Application in Educational Environments," *Remedial and Special Education*

Recommended Reading: Larry Cuban, *Oversold and Underused: Computers in the Classroom*

December 4 *The Imperative of Teacher Leadership: Guest Speaker: Liz MacDonald*

Required Reading: Elizabeth MacDonald and Dennis Shirley, *The Mindful Teacher*

Recommended Reading: Ann Lieberman and Lynne Miller, *Teacher Leadership*

December 11 **Final Paper Due**

#### **Regarding Class Readings**

Please note: The following books have been ordered for this course and are available in the BC bookstore:

Marvin Hoffman, *"You Won't Remember Me"*

Charles Payne, *So Much Reform, So Little Change*

Bonnie Shapiro, *What Children Bring to Light*

All other course readings are available through Blackboard at [cms.bc.edu](https://cms.bc.edu) – under the course listings on Blackboard, find ED435, and then click on the course title. Once you are in the course site, click on the readings which are organized by week. The Lynch School library liaison, Brendan Rapple ([rappleb@bc.edu](mailto:rappleb@bc.edu)) is available to assist you with any special questions about research services.

### Writing the Papers: Some Guidelines and Suggestions

Every instructor has his or her own preferences in terms of student writing. The following are some suggestions to guide your thinking regarding papers for this class.

1. *Provide a clear thesis statement that will require you to develop a critical and independent interpretation of the material.* Avoid truisms in your thesis statement. For example, the statement that every beginning teacher should be familiar with effective strategies for teaching English language learners cannot really be argued. What is more interesting to the reader would be the author's attempt to make sense of the existing research and to ascertain whether the research findings are consistent with one another and make sense to the author based on his or her observations or teaching in schools.

2. *Refer to the research which informs your paper with some precision.* If you are writing about a topic such as Bonnie Shapiro's interpretation of constructivism and science education, take the time to make sure that you understand her point of view thoroughly and present it accurately. We advise that you take a paragraph or two to lay out the argument as you understand it. A few well-selected quotes can help to assure the reader that you have really understood the author's position. Footnote the quotes in standard academic format. **Warning:** while the world wide web has many benefits, we strongly encourage you to avoid sites that do not appear to have gone through a process of scholarly peer review that is common with research journals and university presses. If you wish to quote a scholar go to the original primary source whenever possible.

3. *Present your line of reasoning clearly and logically.* For example, if there are several reasons why you believe that the arguments in favor of charter schools outweigh those of charter opponents, give clear-cut arguments to support your line of reasoning. Refer to the most recent research evidence on the efficacy of charter schools and be careful that the cited research is not only sponsored by non-profit organizations or think tanks that conduct public advocacy on behalf of the charter school movement.

4. *Assume a well-intentioned but skeptical reader.* What objections might a reader raise to your presentation? In general, every interpretation has some weaknesses. Make sure that you acknowledge those explicitly and address them to the best of your ability before the paper is brought to a close. You are not expected to have airproof arguments, but you are expected to acknowledge potential problems with your perspective. *Please note: this dimension of student papers is often neglected.*

5. *Summarize.* Reiterate the main points of your paper and summarize the evidence in a final paragraph that reviews the most salient arguments you have advanced. Do not end papers without a conclusion. Do not introduce new arguments for your point of view in the conclusion; these should be in the body of the paper.

6. *Include footnotes and a bibliography,* with all materials properly organized and cited. Bibliographies, for example, should be formatted in the style of hanging indents, which can easily be done through the paragraph settings on your computer. Follow the guidelines of the American Psychological Association, the Chicago Manual of Style, or the Modern Language Association.

7. *Proofread carefully.* Spell check is a useful resource, but will not pick up grammatical errors or misuses of language (such as placing an apostrophe in "its" when using the possessive). Read your paper aloud, or have a friend read it to you, to make sure that the final arguments are coherent and persuasive. Finally, make sure that any materials that you are quoting from are not only cited, but are presented in quotation marks. **Otherwise, you are plagiarizing, and the paper will receive an automatic F with no possibility of rewriting it.**

### Scoring Rubric for Class Papers

**A.** The question is clearly stated and fully developed. The paper reflects insight on the topic, creative thought, and significant exploration of ideas. The study links observations on teaching and learning with a research base. The paper uses original research and the research of others to inform ideas and conclusions. The author explains the implications of the research on the social contexts of education. There is evidence of thoughtful integration of class readings, class discussion, and research. The language of the paper clarifies the writer's point of view. Relationships between ideas, observations, and data are explored. Analogies and metaphors are appropriate. The body of the paper is clearly developed and employs appropriate transitions. The paper is well written, coherent, and reflects correct grammar and punctuation. Citations are given and formatted according to established scholarly conventions.

**B.** The research question is clearly stated but not fully developed. The personal reflection is serious and honest but lacks intellectual depth and creative thought. While the research topic is connected to observations in teaching and learning the connection could be further developed. The implications of the research for teaching and learning are not fully explained. Class readings, class discussion, and research references are not clearly integrated. The body of the paper is adequately developed. Relationships between ideas, observations, and data are adequately treated. There are a few errors in grammar and punctuation. Citations are given, but are erratic in format.

**C.** The paper reflects some insight on and some exploration of the research question. The focus is not clear and there is insufficient integration of the class readings, class discussion, and research. Implications for teaching and learning are vague. The data are insufficient and the writer's point of view lacks clarity. The writer is imprecise in the use of language. The body of the paper needs more thoughtful development. There are several errors in grammar and punctuation which impede the reader's understanding of the author's point of view. Citations are lacking.

**D.** There is little or no insight on the research question. The paper lacks focus. There is little or no integration of the journal entries, class readings, and class discussion. Little or no data are used to support ideas and conclusions. Major concerns regarding the paper include: no introduction, no development of topic, no discussion of implications for practice, and no summary or conclusions. There are significant grammatical and punctuation errors throughout so that the reader can only follow the author's contentions with difficulty. No scholarly citations are given.

**F.** No paper is handed in; the author plagiarizes from others' work; or the paper handed in is unintelligible.

*Please note:* every student is responsible for knowing Boston College's standards for academic integrity. If you have any questions about cheating or plagiarism, go to: <http://www.bc.edu/offices/stserv/academic/resources/policy/#integrity>.