

Schools in American Cities
Education 266
Fall 2008
T/TH 1 – 2:30 PM

Instructor Jody Cohen
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The course

An elective offered through the Education Program that also meets a requirement for Cities and Sociology majors, this course is designed for students to investigate the issues, challenges and possibilities of urban schooling. The purpose of the course is to create a community of learners who will conduct inquiry into both theory and practice to build an understanding of critical issues in urban education. Through readings, writings, field experiences and discussions, participants will address a range of factors that create the conditions for teaching/learning and reform in city schools.

In the first section of the course, we address socioeconomic, legal, and cultural issues in terms of their impact on urban education. The second part of the course examines students' and teachers' identities and perspectives and issues of curriculum and pedagogy in urban settings, especially in contested terrains such as language and literacy and mathematics. In the final stretch of the course, we investigate current topics in reform in urban schools and districts.

Since we are located right outside Philadelphia, a key site for urban school reform, the course utilizes Philadelphia as an illustrative "case"; we consider recent initiatives and pay particular attention to the city's current reform effort. Field placements in school settings and conversations with urban educators and students offer us opportunities to explore the relationship of macro-conditions to particular people, places, and programs. Students engage in a Praxis field placement, which provides us with practice-based experiences to extend and deepen our knowledge. The Praxis dimension of the course ensures that we grapple with real issues, using these to inform and revise theory, and that we use our resources to address felt needs in the field.

Class requirements

The course is demanding in terms of reading, writing, and participation. Because it is writing intensive, the course is limited to 25 students. Priority goes to students in the Education and Cities Programs and to Sociology majors. Students also complete a Praxis field experience in an urban education setting.

We are fortunate to be working with Zanny Alter at the Praxis Office:
salter@brynmawr.edu , Community Service/Praxis Office, 2nd floor, by appointment.

The course is designed to meet social justice criteria at both Bryn Mawr and Haverford. As set forth in the Haverford College Course Catalogue, course readings, assignments, and activities directly address "the structures, workings, and consequences of prejudice, inequality, and injustice" in relation to the system of schooling in the U.S. The course supports students in "critically examin(ing) in an ongoing way the hierarchies and relationships of power that shape our lives and how we shape them," as stated in the Bryn Mawr Social Justice Pilot Overview.

Attendance and preparation: This course will involve students as critical readers and writers of texts, active participants in class discussions, and participants in urban schools and other

education-related settings. Your presence and active engagement are essential. If you must miss a class, please call or email me ahead of time if possible.

Lateness: If there is a reason that you cannot complete an assignment by the due date, speak to me about an extension BEFORE that date.

Students who think they may need accommodations in this course because of the impact of a learning difference are encouraged to meet with the course instructor privately early in the semester. Students who attend Bryn Mawr should also contact Stephanie Bell, Coordinator of Access Services, at sbell@brynmawr.edu or 610-526-7351 in Canwyll House, as soon as possible, to verify their eligibility for reasonable accommodations. Haverford Students should contact Rick Webb, Coordinator, Office of Disabilities Services, at rwebb@haverford.edu or 610-896-1290.

Assignments:

IMPORTANT NOTE:

All course writings referring to your field placement **must use pseudonyms for schools, programs, and all participants**. All sources must be cited completely and properly, using APA, MLA, or Chicago style guidelines. (For specific instruction in citation style, please consult Within this web site, be sure to distinguish between print and electronic sources.)

1. Field-based writings: These will provide a series of opportunities for you to examine what's going on in your field site in the context of our readings and discussions. You will share these with your field group and also turn some of these writings in for comments.

(a) Field log: You will keep a field log that includes entries for each time you enter your field site. Remember to use pseudonyms for places and people in order to preserve confidentiality. We will discuss a variety of ways to use your field log to document what you are learning. Field logs will provide a source for all field-based work.

(b) Vignette from the field: Select an incident from your field log that illustrates a key theme emerging in your field experience. Write this up as a focused narrative; then frame the narrative with interpretive commentary.

(c) Letter to your site teacher(s) about what you're learning from your experience in their classroom and your ongoing questions and ideas about your work at the site. Please format your letter appropriately and write it to your site teacher as your audience, since we will send these letters to your placement.

(d) Your evolving question or focus: What question or issue seems most central to the school/classroom/student(s)? What information and impressions do you already have pertaining to this question? What kinds of knowledge would further your inquiry?

(e) Final field paper: First, you will collect data in the context of your field experience for this class. This will involve keeping a weekly log and also gathering relevant site documents (to be discussed in detail in class). Then, as your final paper for this class you will write an extended (approx. 10-12 page) paper in which you integrate what you have observed and learned in your experience with teachers and students in an urban education setting with relevant readings and discussions of critical contextual and educational issues.

Your **field portfolio** should include 3 selections from (a) as well as (b), (c), (d) and (e) above. Due at end of exam period.

2. Posts to journal group via Blackboard site: In class we will form journal groups of 3-5 people; you will post four times to your group in response to prompts about the readings and/or your Praxis experience (see focus for these posts under relevant dates). You will read and print out your group's posts prior to class, and in class you'll have time to discuss issues raised in your posts. In some instances I'll ask you to bring a hard copy for me to respond to. You may also be

asked to post occasionally on topics arising from our class discussions.

3. Issue Analysis (5 - 7 pages): Use our readings and discussions to locate and analyze a “core issue” in urban education. For example, what is the so-called ‘achievement gap’ and how should educators address this? What are the dimensions and implications of the issue? How do legalities and funding impact this issue? Do you detect significant differences in the ways this issue get discussed and defined across our readings? In the news? What questions and perspectives seem to you most useful in terms of addressing this issue in urban education? Draw on our readings, field experiences if relevant, and any other sources that inform your analysis.

4. Using the medium of film to re-view urban education (3-5 pages): Select one or more film(s) from those on reserve in Canaday [including *I am a Promise*, *Hard Times at Douglass High*, *Freedom Writers*, *School Colors*, *The Wire*, *Season IV* (choose scenes from one or more episodes)] and use the film(s) to examine students’ perspectives, teachers and teaching, or issues in school reform. How do our readings and/or your placement experiences inform your viewing of the film, and conversely, how does your viewing of the film inform your reading of texts and/or of your placement experience? You may choose to focus on one or several scenes, in which case you should specify your narrowed focus. Additionally, please include specific references to all sources—filmic, textual, and experiential.

5. Strategies for Change (5 - 8 pages): During the course, we’ve considered the challenges of urban education at multiple levels, from the contextual issues of poverty, racism and public policy to the classroom-based issues of students’ and teachers’ experiences. Bearing in mind these challenges as well as the directions for change suggested by our readings, discussions and experiences, write a paper in which you propose a map for change; discuss your rationale for the strategies you recommend. You may focus at any level (e.g. the classroom, school, district, city, state or more broadly still), but wherever you focus, keep in mind the importance of linking levels in any ultimate plan for change.

Assigned Texts (available at Bryn Mawr Bookstore and on reserve at Canaday when possible):

Anyon, Jean, *Radical Possibilities*

Michie, Greg, *Holler If You Hear Me*

Noguera, Pedro, *City Schools and the American Dream*

A bulkpack of assigned readings will be available for purchase in Bettws-y-Coed, front office.

* Bring readings to class on the day they are due. You will be asked to draw on them actively during most class periods.

****** Class Meetings and Assignments**

All assignments are due on the day they are listed.

Week 1: Overview

Tuesday, September 2

Orienting to the course

Thursday, September 4

Reading due:

Noguera, *City Schools and the American Dream*, chaps. 1 & 2

Week 2: Socioeconomic, cultural, and legal lenses

Tuesday, September 9

Reading due:

Noguera, *City Schools*, chap. 3 and 4

Post #1 to Blackboard site by Wed. at 5 pm: Locate a quote or specific issue from the reading that you want to think more about, and write a 1-2 page response. Come ready to discuss your group's posts on Thurs.

Thursday, September 11

Reading due:

Noguera, *City Schools*, chaps. 5

No Child Left Behind materials on Blackboard site (References)

Week 3: Socioeconomic, cultural, and legal lenses

Tues. Sept. 16

Praxis Orientation

Post #2 to Blackboard site by Wed. at 5 pm: Locate a quote or specific issue from Anyon that you want to think more about, and write a 1-2 page response. Come ready to discuss your group's posts on Thurs. And please bring a hard copy of one of your posts to turn in to me.

Thurs. Sept. 18

Anyon, *Radical Possibilities*, Part I

Week 4: Socioeconomic, cultural, and legal lenses

Tues. Sept. 23

Reading due:

Fruchter, chap. 1 and Long (BP); look over Court Cases on Blackboard site (References)

Reading due:

Thursday, Sept. 25

Fruchter, chap. 2 and Ladson-Billings (2006) (BP)

Week 5: Students' and teachers' identities and perspectives

Post #3 to Blackboard site by Mon. at 5 pm: Select an excerpt from your field notes that highlights a question, concern, or idea you have about your site, and add some context and commentary. Remember to use pseudonyms for the school and everyone involved! Come ready to discuss your group's posts on Tues.

Tuesday, Sept. 30

Reading due:

Casella, chap. 3, Ladson-Billings, and Noguera, *The Trouble with Black Boys*, chap. 7 (BP)

Thursday, October 2

Reading due:

Dance, chap. 4 and Corbett & Wilson (BP)

Week 6: Students' and teachers' identities and perspectives

Tuesday, October 7

Reading due:

Bondy et. al, Haberman, and Ginwright, chap. 2 (BP)

Thursday, October 9

Writing due: Issue Analysis (see assignments above)

FALL BREAK

Week 7: Students' and teachers' identities and perspectives

Tuesday, October 21

Reading due:

Michie, *Holler If You Hear Me*

Writing due: Letter to your site teacher (see Field Paper Assignments)

Thursday, October 23

Reading due:

Michie, *Holler If You Hear Me* and Michie article (BP)

Week 8: Inside Classrooms: Teaching and Learning

Post #4 to Blackboard site by Mon. at 5: Vignette from the field (see Field Paper Assignments). Remember to use pseudonyms! Come ready to discuss your group's posts in class on Tues. And please bring a hard copy of your post for me.

Tuesday, October 28

Reading due:

Cornbleth, chap. 2, and Duncan-Andrade, chap. 9 (BP)

Thursday, October 30

Reading due:

Fecho, chaps. 5 & 6 (BP)

Week 9: Inside Classrooms: Teaching and Learning

Tuesday, November 4

Reading due:

Strolin-Smith, chap. 8, la Rae, chap. 14, Lee, chap. 3, and Francois, excerpt (BP)

Thursday, November 6

Reading due:

Werkema & Case and Davis et. al, chap. 5 (BP)

Writing due Friday by 12 pm in the box outside my office: Film Paper (see assignments above)

Week 10: Changing Schools and Districts

Tuesday, November 11

Reading due:

Nieto and Monkman, Ronald, & Theramen (BP)

Thursday, November 13

Reading due:

Selections from *Is Small Beautiful?* and Aness & Allen (BP)

Week 11: Changing Schools and Districts

Tuesday, November 18

Reading due:

RFA, "Closing the Teacher Quality Gap in Philadelphia" (handout); Darling-Hammond, Au, and Crocco & Costigan (BP)

Thursday, November 20

Reading due:

Tough, Thernstrom & Thernstrom, and Bazelon (BP)

Week 12: Urban school reform

Tuesday, November 25

Reading due:

Noguera, conclusion, and Ginwright, chap. 8 (BP)

Writing due: Field research question or focus (see Field Paper Assignments)

Thursday, November 27: THANKSGIVING

Week 13: Urban school reform

Tuesday, December 2

Reading due:

Anyon, Part 2, chap. 6 and Part 3, chaps. 9 & 10

Thursday, December 4

Reading due:

Investing in Learning on Blackboard Site

Writing due Friday by 12 pm in the box outside my office: Strategies for Change (see assignments above)

Week 14: Praxis

Tuesday, December 9
Praxis panels

Thursday, December 11
Praxis panels and Closing

The field portfolio, to include final paper and select field assignments, will be due on the last day of exams (see Assignments above).