TE 971
Teacher Learning in School Settings
Fall 2003

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Meeting time: This seminar meets on Thursdays from 4:10-7:00pm in Erickson Hall
(except for the first night of class which will be in Wells Hall C316), Room 212.
Office hours scheduled by appointment.

Introduction to the Course and Its Goals

There are three major purposes of this course; first, to introduce you to some
significant literature on teacher learning within schools; second, to contribute to
the development of your scholarly skills, particularly writing and participating in
academic discussions; and third, to contribute to the development of your
research skills, particularly in the area of conducting case study research.

The course has four interwoven strands that are related to these goals. The first
strand concerns two theoretical perspectives that might be relevant to
understanding teacher learning: (a) Dewey’s argument in Experience and
Education and (b) activity theory. The second strand concerns the substance of
the course – teacher learning in school settings. Within that strand, we will focus
on general readings in that domain, as well as attending to induction and
professional-development literature in particular. The third strand concerns
understanding schools as contexts in which teachers learn. The fourth strand
concerns issues related to case study research, including how it is
conceptualised and conducted, what its strengths and limitations are, and the
like.

I have never taught this class before, and while I have a general sense of how
the readings and structures I plan to use will work, I am also sure that there will be
times when we need to adjust the content and tempo of our work. I learn a lot
from my teaching; this is especially true when teaching a course for the first time
or using new readings. This version of the syllabus should be considered a rough
draft, and we will revisit it periodically to consider adaptations and alterations.
At the end of the course, I will distribute the final course syllabus to you with all of
the changes we make, and annotated with my weekly notes to you about how to approach the readings.

Reading, Writing, and Discussion: The "Basic Skills" of the Scholary Life

Reading. The work we will be doing depends on reading interactively, on bringing both collective and individual goals to the act of reading, considering, and reconsidering our texts. In its most straightforward expression, this involves bringing questions to think about while preparing to read something, reading a text, and reflexively placing what one has read in the context of both evolving scholarship bearing on a subject and one's own development as a scholar. Below I pose several sets of general questions for all of us to bring to our reading, questions that faculty in our Department have found effective.

• What is the author trying to say?
  What are the author’s principal and subsidiary arguments or theses? What are the important conceptual terms? What do the author’s assumptions seem to be? What sorts of evidence and methods are used? Can you identify specific passages that support your interpretation? Are there other passages that either contradict or appear less consistent with your understanding? What are the strengths and weaknesses of the author’s argument? Can you make sense of, or account for, these differences?

• How has the author constructed the text?
  What clues can you get from the work’s structure? Does the organization give you insights into the argument? Are there patterns in the author’s presentation that help you to locate and understand the most valuable material? What can you do to concentrate your attention on interrogation of the text?

• What is the author’s purpose?
  Who was the author? Why was this work written? To whom was the author speaking and why? What can you know or infer about the author’s motivation? What seem to be the context for the work’s origination? Can you dissect its politics? How does the work’s purpose seem to affect the author’s selection of questions, methods, or interpretation? Was the author trying to confront a body of scholarship with a new interpretation based on new methodologies, or new evidence? Was the work intended to persuade a segment of the public to change its mind or to act on something it already believed?
What are your purposes in reading this?

Different purposes have different requirements: should you skim the piece, acquire mastery or fluency, use it as a source of examples or illustrations?

How do the author's assumptions and ideas fit with your own understanding?

How might your response to the work be affected by values, beliefs, and commitments that you think that you share with the author? Can you read and make sense of the work on its own terms, not just that it confirms your existing thinking or values? Can you consider all of the work, rather than just those passages that you agree with, or which you can label "good," or dismiss as "bad?" Can you approach it with a spirit of discovery and let the story be told in its own right? Can you notice what seems strange or surprising, and accept its offerings as opportunities for discussion?

How do the author's arguments fit within various communities of discourse?

How is a piece of work connected to the efforts of others dedicated to similar purposes? In what community or communities does the author locate him or herself? How can you tell? How might an author's work connect with your own understanding of the work of others, and of your own evolving work on an issue or topic?

NOTE: It is essential that you read all of the required texts for each class meeting. If you are unable to complete the reading, please let me know. I often call on people to participate and I do not want to embarrass anyone who is underprepared.

Discussions. I begin the course with an essay by Schwab that focuses on the critical role of discussions in a liberal education. Throughout the course, I will focus on developing discourse patterns that both connect to students' individual interests and backgrounds while also working on the ideas presented in the readings. In much the same way that reading opens a window onto knowledge, I hope that explicit attention to the work of discussion also sheds light on what it means to know something, and the challenges of creating certain kinds of discourse communities in schools.

We will need to work attentively on norms for the class. Listening carefully, treating ideas with respect and interest, raising and responding to questions, sharing the floor -- all these will matter in construing an environment where satisfying and challenging intellectual work can take place. One part of exploring an idea or an argument is to attend closely to it to understand its logic, intention, meaning. Listening generously, assuming that ideas and claims are made for good reasons, is crucial to thinking well. Another part is to be skeptical, to consider what is missing or logically flawed. Using both -- generosity and skepticism -- contributes to careful unpacking of ideas and to good thinking.
Writing. Writing is an important vehicle for exploring and clarifying ideas, for trying out interpretations and arguments, and for representing ideas and communicating with others. Writing plays a central role in doctoral work, and in educational scholarship. It is an important part of learning to participate in a community of educational scholars who have a specialized discourse. We will work on writing throughout the course, and I recommend one text by Wayne Booth and his colleagues (The Craft of Research) as a supplemental reading for students interested in reading about writing.

Because scholarly writing has a public audience and is reviewed critically by peers, I will also ask you to share your writing with and get feedback from at least one other person in the class for each of the three major writing assignments (the midterm, book review, and case study). I will also ask that each of these papers are sent to me in outline or draft form.

Course Requirements and Grading

Attendance and participation. Because the course is a seminar, your participation in discussions is important, not only for your own learning but also the learning of others. What you learn in this course will be influenced by the degree of everyone’s engagement in and contributions to discussions. Of course, not all people are equally comfortable participating in large group discussions, and I will work hard to hear all of you, no matter how quiet you prefer to be in class. This will require that people who are not talking in class find other ways to help me hear what and how you are thinking. Other means might include coming to talk with me or writing me emails about your musings about particular ideas. It will not be sufficient for quieter members to speak only to their peers in small groups or pairs. You will need to find ways to share your thinking with me as well. While I will sometimes prod you to speak to others and with me, you will need to take responsibility for making sure your participation is of high quality.

To further this aspect of our work along, I ask that every class participant write me a memo once a week. It need not be long — two pages are sufficient. In the memo, I would like you to tell me about something you are working on — a problem you have with a reading, a frustration you feel with the class discussion, a confusion you’re encountering in the small group. These should be more like free writes than papers, and I will not read them deeply, or correct prose, spelling, and the like. They are meant to be a way for me to keep track of individual’s thinking. Please label each one as follows: fe971yourlastname.weekX.ref. I will return them to you every week with some minor commentary. These will not be graded.

If you need to miss class, please notify me ahead of time in writing or by calling.

Midterm examination. The course requires that you explore literature that is particularly interesting to you, and that you master some core readings in the field. The
midterm examination will be used to assess your mastery of the readings we have discussed thus far in the course. It will also provide you with some sense of your performance to date in the course. It will be a take-home examination and you are free to work with other colleagues on it, although the final version that you submit should be your own work. It should be submitted electronically and the title should be: te971, your name, midterm.

Book review. You will be asked to read one book of interest to you that bears on issues related to teacher learning in school settings. This might be a book about teacher induction, preservice teacher learning in field experiences, professional development, or schools as organizations in which teachers learn. Other candidate books for review might include texts on schools as organizations, biographies or autobiographies of teachers in K-12 schools or in higher education, other scholarship on adult learning, theoretical work relevant to teacher learning. Still other candidate books might not directly relate to education or K-12 teacher learning and schools. For instance, you might enjoy reading Mary Catherine Bateson’s Composing a Life or Persephona’s Visions, or Jane Tompkins’ A Life in School. You’ll be asked to write a 10-12 double spaced book review in which you both summarize the contents and argument of the book, as well as reflect on how this book helps shed light on, complicate, or question an issue related to teacher learning. These too should be submitted electronically and titled: te971, your lastname, bookrev.

NOTE: If you choose to do a document analysis for the case study project (see below), the book you review for this assignment cannot also be the date for that case study.

Case study. There is an inordinately high interest in case study research in education these days. There are some good reasons for that interest—case studies, well done, allow for an in-depth exploration of a situation, event, person, idea. However, there also are some popular and incorrect assumptions about case study research, say, that it is more valid or easier to do than survey, experimental, quasi-experimental work. There is also considerable variation in the quality of case study research conducted, either in dissertation research or in peer-reviewed publications. Because this is a course within a doctoral program, I have an obligation to help you not only enhance your understanding of teacher learning in school settings; I also have an obligation to help you enhance your understanding of research. Given the high interest in case study research among our own doctoral students, I am choosing to focus on that domain in this course.

Each of you will conduct a modest case study. This will entail five steps. First, you will each concentualize a focal interest/topic/question for your study. That focus ought to be related in some way to teacher learning in school settings. Second, you will each write a brief (2-3 pages single spaced) proposal explaining the what your focus is, why it is of interest to you and others, and what the design of your case study research will be. Because your interests will vary, there are three possible ways for you to conceptualize this research.
(1) Document analysis – You might collect documents about a teacher (biographies, autobiographies, other forms of written material). You will need at least three different sources if this is the approach you want to take.

(2) Interviews – You might select a colleague, acquaintance, or friend to interview. You will need to do two interviews; the protocols for those interviews will be developed in collaboration with me.

(3) Self-study – You might choose to do a case study of your own learning as a teacher. If you choose to do a self-study, you will need to create a small curriculum for yourself and read about the methods of self-study.

The third step in this process will involve collecting and reading the data. The fourth will involve analyzing the data, both by finding several ways to display the data and also by using a theoretical framework with which to explore the data. Finally, in the fifth stage, you will write the case study up for review by one peer and then by me. While writing up your case study, I encourage you to think about how to use the literature we have read as a class to support, enhance, and shed light on your empirical work. The steps will each have their own deadline (see assignment calendar). This document, submitted electronically, should be titled: te971,yourlastname,case.

All assignments need to be submitted electronically. You also need to use a standard style format (APA, Chicago, MLA, that is most appropriate given your interests and disciplinary background).

Final grades in the class will be determined as follows:

* class participation: 20%
* midterms: 20%
* book review: 20%
* case study: 40%

There will be no deferreds granted in this course unless you have a personal emergency beyond your control.

**Required Readings**

Readings for the course will include both books that are readily available online (e.g., Barnes and Noble [http://www.barnesandnoble.com/], amazon.com, abebooks.com, etc.) and in bookstores, as well as articles. Since I used the summer to read and then plan for this course, I did not submit a book list to the student bookstores. If you have trouble locating the books in the first week of class, please let me know.
Books (You should order these books ASAP.)

Required:


Dewey, J. *Experience and education*. (any edition)


Recommended:


Articles and book chapters

Articles for the class are compiled in a reading packet available at Budget Printing Center, 972 Trowbridge Rd., East Lansing, 351.506). For those readings available on line, instructions about how to access them will be given in class. Most are available for downloading for MSU students and faculty at http://er.lib.msu.edu/subject.html?cat=0&type=Electronic%20Journal&subject=Educatio n. To save costs on duplicating, I have not included the readings that you can download in the reading packet.

**Course Schedule, Assignments, and Due Dates**

28 August 2003. *Introduction to the course.*

4 September 2003. *No class meeting.*

11 September 2003. *Learning to participate in discussions. Theory (Take 1).*

Dewey, J. *Experience and education*. (any edition)


We’ll begin this class by discussing Joseph Schwab’s chapter, *Eros and Education*. In this chapter, Schwab describes both the character of a discussion that enhances liberal education, as well as the teaching challenges associated with that discussion. Since I will be using Schwab to orient my own teaching
choices as discussion leader, it will be important for us all to begin exploring the content and character of such discussions, as well as the tensions involved for the participants and the teacher.

We will then move to a discussion of Dewey’s *Experience and Education*, and work on developing our understanding of how his argument might be used a theoretical frame for considering teacher learning. Every Monday, I will send you a note about the readings for the following week with some suggestions about how to focus your attention that week. Sometimes there will be reading tasks or assignments, which I will use to try and support your reading.


Dewey, J. *Experience and Education.*


2 October 2003. The Early Years: Teacher Induction.

9 October 2003. Teacher Induction (continued).


16 October 2003. Case study research.


23 October 2003. Theory (Take 2 continued).


13 November 2003. Professional development


27 November 2003

We will either revisit old readings, catch up with readings we did not pay enough attention to, or decide to add a few more readings.

4 December 2003

We will either revisit old readings, catch up with readings we did not pay enough attention to, or decide to add a few more readings.
## Assignments and other relevant benchmarks.

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<td>8/26</td>
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<tr>
<td>9/2</td>
<td>No class Schedule appt with Suzanne to discuss case study and book</td>
<td>Wells Hall C316</td>
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<td>9/11</td>
<td>Last day for appts with Suzanne</td>
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<td>10/2</td>
<td>Case study proposal due</td>
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<td>10/9</td>
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<td>10/16</td>
<td>Book selected and okayed</td>
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<td>10/23</td>
<td>Case study data collection complete</td>
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<td>10/30</td>
<td>Midterm distributed</td>
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<td>11/13</td>
<td>Book review draft or outline due to Suzanne and one other reader</td>
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<td>11/20</td>
<td>Case study data analysis memo due</td>
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<td>11/27</td>
<td>No class Book review due</td>
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