Instructors:

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Seminar meets: Tuesdays, 4:30-7:20, Erickson Hall 133D
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OVERVIEW OF THE COURSE

To denounce the failures of teaching and propose remedies is an old American habit. Criticism and reform have been recurrent themes in teaching, in popular discourse about teaching, and in American public life since the 1850s. Since the 1950s, criticism and reform have become regular fixtures in discourse about the profession. In the 1980s the criticism grew even more intense, and proposals for reform grew in number and ambition. The trend seems to be continuing in the 1990s.

We will explore these developments in the third quarter of the proseminar. One justification for such work is that criticism and reform cannot be avoided. Critical commentary on teaching has become so prominent in public, professional, and academic discourse that it is difficult to be informed or thoughtful about education without serious reference to it. And reform now occupies such a large place in education and deliberations about it that one can hardly teach, educate teachers, or study teaching without encountering various reform efforts, and taking account of their aims and operations.

Another justification for our focus is that much can be learned from the study of criticism and reform. Scrutiny of criticism opens windows on what has become one of America's most characteristic ways of attending to teaching. Critiques of teaching reveal much about Americans' understanding of this profession, if we can excavate the assumptions that reformers make about the nature of teaching, the purposes of schooling, the need for reform, and the ways that these may be connected. Additionally, the design, execution, and effects of reform can reveal a great deal about the relations between educational policy and teaching practice. Such work requires the close analysis of reform policies as well as careful analysis of teaching. It also requires analysis of teachers' understanding of reform, and their responses to reform proposals.

These are not simple matters, and some have been little explored. As we examine some instances of reforms, you should expect to grapple with some difficult problems. One of the most important aspects of your work will be to develop an intellectual frame with which to examine the issues, drawing on the readings, on class discussion, and on your experience. If one aim of this course is to improve understanding of teaching and its relation to policy, another is to help members of the class find ways to examine such reforms as they encounter them in future work.

This term of the proseminar also aims to continue your development of capacities for inquiry—for reading thoughtfully, developing cogent arguments that are grounded in evidence, unpacking and examining the arguments of colleagues and authors, and working collaboratively in pursuit of understanding.
COURSE ORGANIZATION

The course has three foci. One will be the analysis of instructional reform. We will do so largely through the study of two cases. One—the California Mathematics Framework—will focus on that state's recent efforts to get teachers to teach math for "understanding". Another case—the post-Sputnik curriculum reforms—will focus on national efforts in the 1950s and 1960s to improve the quality of instruction in science, math, and other subjects. In both cases we will read the texts of reform (the reform programs and manifestoes), as well as analyses of the reform. But most issues concerning instructional reform are open, and many have been little investigated. Much of the class's work will be an effort to understand the purposes, operation, and effects of these reforms. And much of that work will focus on the analysis of various written materials. As we analyze those materials we expect that you will support your interpretations of instructional reform with evidence from the materials assigned from this course, or from others that bear on the issues. After we consider these two cases of reform, we will take a step back and briefly consider the history of reforms, placing the individual cases in their larger political, social, historical, and intellectual contexts. Because these are both instances of using curriculum as a key agent for change, we also will spend a little time exploring assumptions made at other times, in other contexts, about how best to reform teaching.

Learning more directly about policy development is a second focus of the class. The vehicle for this will be a policy workshop. You will be charged with the revision of a state reform policy that seeks to improve the teaching of literacy in Michigan elementary schools. One dominant theme in current reform efforts is to "teach for understanding." This is a vague but compelling notion: Your assignment will be create a strategy for implementing such teaching in Michigan schools. The assignment will be a group task. The class will be divided into several small groups, and each will work out its own strategy. The group work will culminate in a proposed implementation strategy, as well as a rationale for that strategy. We assume that the development of a specific reform strategy will help to surface the complexities of reform in ways that complement our discussions of other reforms. Hence members of the class will be expected to attend to historical, cultural, social, political, organizational, and intellectual aspects of schooling, as well as to the immediate task. We will provide time during most class meetings for the small groups to work together, but they also will require time outside of class.

In order to complete this assignment you will need to read about literacy education, including current thought and historical trends. Because we do not want to limit the possible approaches that each group takes, we will only prescribe some of the reading. In addition to those required readings on literacy, we will offer a bibliography of possibilities. You should use this to uncover other resources, to advance the strategy that you select, and to share resources with others. We will use some time in class to discuss your excursions into literacy. One aim of those discussions will be to probe differences in the purposes, assumptions, and content of different policies that are shaped to solve the same problem.

A third focus of the class also will be to explore "teaching for understanding," but differently than in the study of implementation strategies. Many of us have little or no experience with this sort of teaching. Hence we have little sense of what such work might entail for teachers and learners. We have designed the small group work in part so that it will offer a chance to explore some of the opportunities and difficulties that may be encountered as one tries to teach and learn for understanding. For instance, the class assignments have been structured in ways that invite you to work on and frame messy problems, rather than solving those that have been tidily pre-set by instructors. Our analysis of your work in the studies of reform and the policy workshop, and our evaluation of it, will be keyed to your capacity to construct understanding of the issues, to assist others in the development of their understanding, and to comment thoughtfully on your own and others' teaching and learning. We will ask you to keep track of your own learning and teaching, as
individuals and groups, and to analyze the issues that arise and how you handle them. Each group will be asked to prepare a memorandum on this feature of the class, to devise a way to familiarize the rest of the class with its contents, and to solicit comments from the class. The workshop in developing policies for teaching for understanding also will be an instance of such teaching and learning. We intend this to offer you opportunities to reflect on the problems of developing large scale policies while reflecting on the problems of enacting such teaching and learning.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING

Because the course will be a seminar, your attendance and participation are especially important. All members of the class are expected to attend and participate in class discussions, and they are expected to do so in a manner that is considerate of others.

Three specific tasks are intended to enhance your participation in the small groups, and in the large group discussions.

Journals. As you prepare for the seminar each week, we will ask you to write informally about the reading. We will pose some initial questions to guide your thinking, but we encourage you to pose and answer questions about the readings that are relevant and compelling to you. One purpose of these journals is to offer another context in which we can hear your voice. Since much of the intellectual work of the course will take place in small groups, and because there will be times when not everyone participates in large group discussions, we want to provide opportunities for everyone to speak their mind. But the journals also offer you a chance to cultivate your own thinking. Writing can be an important help to thought; we hope that you will use the opportunity to reflect on what you think you understand, as well as that which confuses you. Every couple of weeks we will collect your journal entries (see Course Outline for particular dates). We will alternate reading and responding to your journals, so that you have the opportunity to hear from both instructors over the course of the quarter.

Small group participation. The role that you choose to play in your group will be an important element in your work in this class. We will ask you to evaluate your participation, as well as that of your colleagues, at the end of the class.

Studying learning and teaching. We expect you to keep track of your learning and teaching, and to analyze the issues that arise and how they are managed. Based on these records, each group will prepare a memorandum on their experience in teaching and learning for understanding, and will devise a way to instruct the rest of the class about their analysis. In this way, members of the class will be invited to explore directly some of the puzzles of teaching for understanding, and their relations to the policy issues that we will be studying.

We also have a few words on three other course requirements.

Midterm and final exams. There will be two exams, one at mid-term and one at the end of the course. These will be take-home exams designed to help you integrate the readings, and to connect the reading with experiences in policy development.

Policy development project. Members of the proseminar will develop and justify a policy aimed at the reform of teaching literacy in Michigan elementary schools. Each group will prepare a written report of the policy and its rationale, and will make oral presentations to the rest of the class. Our evaluation of your project will be based on our observations of your work during class sessions, your oral presentations, and the written product. Each member of each group will receive the same grade.
Your final grade in the course will be determined as follows:

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<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Midterm</td>
<td>25%</td>
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<td>Final</td>
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<tr>
<td>Policy project</td>
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<tr>
<td>Class participation (discussions and journals)</td>
<td>25%</td>
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**Note:** There will be no incompletes for the course. Given the interdependence among students in a course that makes small group tasks its centerpiece, it is especially important that everyone keep up with the coursework. **Any work that is not completed by June 4th will not be accepted thereafter, and course grades will be adjusted accordingly.**
April 2: Session 1: Relations between policy and practice: Exploring assumptions

Large group discussion: Introduction to the course. Discussion of course content, requirements, policies.

Discussion of teachers and policymaking.

A first case: Curriculum reform in California. There is a great deal of talk in current state and national reforms about "teaching for understanding." This week's discussion will focus on our first case of policy--that of the 1985 California Mathematics Framework--in which such teaching was urged. The readings include a copy of that Framework, and case studies of three teachers in California. The Framework raises a number of questions: What, for example, do the authors of this Framework mean when they speak about "teaching for understanding"? What assumptions are being made about the roles of teachers and students? About the role of policy? About the process of changing teaching and learning?

These questions will become more acute when you read the case studies of teachers' responses to the Framework. As you study the Framework and the cases, we also encourage you to think about the temporal, social, cultural, political, and intellectual context of this reform. Written in 1985, how does it reflect assumptions, concerns, values of policymakers and the public in the 1980s? How do the teachers' responses reflect their social situations? And what might we infer from these readings about the relations between instructional policy and classroom practice?

Readings:


Writing assignment: Write a 2 to 3 page (typed) essay reflecting on your experiences as an educational policymaker. In what ways have you participated in the design, shaping, or implementation of educational policies? How have you seen your instructional work in relation to such policies? (Educational policies are made at all levels of the governing structure in education. We prefer that you write about state or federal policies -- i.e., PL 94-142, or Chapter I, or state curriculum requirements. But there may be cases in which it would be more appropriate to consider school or district policies.) If you have taught or been a school administrator but do not feel that you have had any connection with educational policy in these roles, you might write about the source of that perception, and consider what it might tell us about teachers, or the structure of public education, or both.
April 9: Session 2: The case of California continues

Large group discussion: Continuation of the first week's discussion of the California case.

Policies cannot be framed, transmitted and enacted without being filtered through many minds, social networks, public and private agencies, and modes of discourse. In education these include textbooks, state and local school agencies, and teachers' continuing education, among many others. Additionally, teachers cannot respond to policies without understanding them, and connecting them to their ongoing work. Hence the realization of policy in a classroom may seem very different than its statement in official documents. Our discussion will explore the factors that seemed to influence the relations between policy and practice. What do these cases seem to suggest about important influences on this relationship? Are there additional influences that may be important? Were there features of the policy itself that affected teachers' responses (or non-responses)?

Small group task: First meeting of small groups. Invent a range of implementation strategies that might solve the problem of literacy education in Michigan schools. During this initial stage of strategy development you should consider the range of alternative approaches you might take to attack the problem. Generate a list of alternatives and discuss their advantages and disadvantages. Decide on those that you will treat as a serious alternative, and develop a strategy for informing yourselves about their strengths and weaknesses. During next week's class you will have to select one option from among those on your list, and justify that choice. The group's work, then, should include generating alternatives and developing a strategy that will provide you with the information you will need in the following week when you must select the policy you will develop for the remainder of the term.

Readings:


Note: Readings with an * are specifically intended to address concerns of the small group task.

Writing assignment: We will collect your journal entries for this week.
Small group task: Winnow the strategies that you have developed, select one or two (provisionally) that seem especially promising in light of the reading thus far, and justify the selection.

During this week’s small group time, you will need to discuss the week’s reading and other work that will help you select one strategy to develop. After you have selected a strategy, you should develop a justification for it. You also should plan your next steps in the development of the strategy.

Large group discussion: Groups will report on the range of alternative strategies that they considered, and will explain to the class what their final selection was, as well as their rationale (attending to the scholarship on literacy and reading, among other things). During class, we will ask questions and offer suggestions to each group about issues they might want to consider, as they develop their policy.

Readings:

*Field notes on state in-service education to promote the new policy. (to be distributed)
*Field notes on responses to the in-service in two districts (to be distributed)
April 23: Session 4: Policy workshop II

Small group task and large group discussion: Winnow (yet again) the strategies that you have developed. Select one that seems especially promising in light of the readings thus far, and justify the selection. We will be especially interested in the ways that you relate your strategy and justifications to the readings below (including the McLaughlin, Lipsky, and Smith & O'Day pieces), as well as to the previous reading, including those on California.

Readings:


Writing assignment: Your journal entries will be collected this week.

April 30: Session 5. A second case: The reforms of the 50s and 60s.

Large group discussion: The 50s and early 60s were America's first age of national curriculum reform. The reforms of that era focused broadly on improving education, but they are remembered especially for efforts to radically revise the content of public schools' curricula. The reforms took shape in response to a variety of domestic and international concerns and they represented a rapid and unprecedented expansion of federal interest and influence in education. Much effort and money were quickly mobilized. Improving teaching by changing the content of instruction was not a new idea, but the magnitude of the effort, the justifications for it, and the guiding ideas about teaching and learning all were unusual.

During this week's discussion we will examine the views of several advocates of educational reform, and a few commentators on the reforms. As you read, consider what assumptions are being made about the problems with schools? What solutions are proposed? What evidence can you adduce for your answers?

Readings:


Writing assignment: We will collect your journal entries for this week. The midterm will be distributed and is due the following week.
Large group discussion: Although the rhetoric of the 50s and 60s curricular reforms was compelling, the reforms made their way into classrooms in a variety of ways. This week we discuss the research of Sarason, Stake and Easley, and others who documented some of the effects of these policies. We will be interested in your efforts to relate the Lipsky and Elmore readings to other explanations of the classroom effects of the reforms.

Small group task. You will have some time to meet in your groups during class, for continued development of the implementation strategy.

Readings:


Writing assignment: The midterm is due. An assigned group essay (which will contribute to the draft of your final group reports) will be distributed. The groups should spend some time reflecting on that assignment.

May 14: Session 7. Factors that affect the implementation of policy.

Small group task: Continue work on an implementation strategy.

Large group discussion: Groups will report on the development of their policies, difficulties they have been encountering, and will present some tentative ideas for the development of implementation strategies.

Readings:


Writing assignment: The group writing assignment is due.
May 21: Session 8. Situating curricular reform in the larger context of educational reforms

Large group discussion: We have examined two cases of educational reform, and in our discussions we have identified a number of factors that influence how policies are created, what their content is, and how they are implemented. In our final discussion of the reform of education, we take up other approaches to reform in the U. S., and offer a cross-national perspective on the relations between policy and practice.

Readings:


Writing assignment: The final will be distributed and is due on June 4th. Your journal entries will be collected

May 28 and June 4. Sessions 9 and 10. Presentations and commentary

Large group task: Groups will present their completed policies, implementation strategies, and rationales. Each group should incorporate in their presentation the story of the policy's development: The critical decisions that were made, the resources that were used, the assumptions that were made, the disagreements that were resolved, the disagreements that remained unresolved.

Writing assignment: The final report of each group's work will be handed in on May 28. The final exams will be handed in on June 4.