

*EOCS, EDMS, ESCI 4000*  
*Disciplinary Knowledge: Basic*  
*Principles & Ways of Knowing*



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# *EOCS, EDMS, ESCI 4000*

## *Disciplinary Knowledge: Basic Principles & Ways of Knowing*

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### *About This Seminar*

*This seminar is the first of three that you will have as a member of the Context-Based Teaching & Learning Community. The community includes you as an undergraduate education major. It is also extended to faculty across many disciplines at the University of Georgia, five other projects throughout the United States funded by the US Office of Education. In addition, the community includes countless students, teachers, administrators, and even politicians who are affected by this movement.*

### *Purposes of The Seminar*

*There are at least two purposes for this seminar. First we want to encourage you to identify and explore basic principles, concepts and methodologies of several academic and vocational disciplines that form the basis for the core of academic subjects in the P-12 school curriculum. To accomplish this we will engage in contextualized discussions with a variety of experts from a number of disciplines represented across the UGA campus and the Athens, community.*

*A second purpose is to illustrate to the interdisciplinary members of the community the many ways that academic and vocational topics are related. We will discover these connections through observation, periods of oral reflection, and our written work.*

*The principles of context-based teaching & learning (CTL) support this seminar. You can read more about the CTL framework and assumptions at the web site: <http://www.coe.uga.edu/ctl/Pages/framework.html>. If you have never been in a seminar-type class, they are largely student directed meetings that rely on constructed knowledge that is developed members of a learning community through dialogue, consultation, reflection on practice and meaning, and documentation. To set the tone for the seminar, I am going to*

try to anticipate some of your questions here. The anticipated questions focus on: a) the nature of a learning community, b) constructed knowledge, c) rules for communication, and d) the importance of reflection on and meaning of our practices.

*What does it mean to be member of a learning community?* Members of the community will learn by collectively constructing a common understanding of the topic. In this way seminar members will actively participate, establish a form of community practice, and will extract meaning from experiences.

*What is constructed knowledge?* As a group and as individuals, new knowledge will be socially constructed. Each member of the community will begin the seminar with a certain level of prior knowledge and mental frameworks that formulates their understanding of a given topic. These mental frameworks will serve as a beginning point for new ideas and enlargement of current knowledge.

*What are the differences between dialogue & discussion?* When the purpose of a seminar is to develop a common understanding, some communication ground rules are appropriate. An important rule will focus on the use of dialogue as opposed to discussion (Senge, 1990). The distinction is that dialogue can be conceptualized as free exchanges of ideas that can occur when assumptions are suspended. Discussion, on the other hand, can be a form of persuasion. This would imply that in discussion mode, there are “winners” and “losers.” While discussion is clearly a useful tool, in the seminars we are striving for common understandings and coherence. With this in mind, the facilitator (your professor) plays an important role. The ground rules are:

1. All participants will initially “suspend” their assumptions;
2. Common understanding is based on the best available scholarly evidence;
3. All participants must regard one another with courtesy and with respects; and
4. The facilitator assists in interpretation and maintains the “context” of the dialogue.

*Why are we so concerned with reflection & meaning?* CTL is only part of our process. Contextualized experiences must be systematically and “critically examined.” Systematic reflection activities will be systematically embedded in the seminar. Every third week, the experiences of the previous dialogues with experts will be examined for understanding and meaning. Three levels of reflection will be promoted. One, we will reflect while we are in action. We will constantly ask ourselves the question “why are we doing this?” The second level will be reflection on our actions. This might be a very brief reflection period at the end of each seminar or a deeper reflection period every

*three weeks during the semester. Reflections will also be documented in the portfolio. The third and last level of reflection will be activities to make explicit our metacognitive processes – that is our thinking about our individual and community thinking.*

## *Requirements*

*The process and outcomes of the seminar will be documented in portfolios. Your portfolio will document your reflections on an academic, vocational, or multidisciplinary topic(s). In most cases, you are encouraged to explore one of the topics that you will be teaching. Our focus will be on the practice of that topic in a real life context. We are particularly interested in how you might use such a context to create an environment for teaching.*

*Of course, you are encouraged to be innovative and creative. Portfolios can be created in an endless variety of formats. For example, some might opt for a more standard written format in a 3 ring binder with dividers. Others might choose a video documentary. Still others might choose a web page that includes text, graphics, and audio.*

*Some members of the seminar might feel the need for initial structure. If it will help you get started, here is a possible outline.*

- 1. Description of the selected discipline and its applied contexts.*
- 2. After exploring the discipline what did you find most interesting? Why?*
- 3. In what ways were you surprised or not surprised?*
- 4. How can you use context to create meaningful instructional lessons in the future?*

*Regardless of the structure or questions that you use to organize your portfolio, you will need to further organize your work using some type of metaphor. What is a metaphor? It is a figure of speech or an object that invites comparisons. For example, a future science teacher might choose to use the structure of an atom to illustrate their exploration of nuclear power plants. A social studies person might create an historical narrative such as the plight of Native Americans.*

*The other requirements for the seminar are your active participation and attendance. If you are going to get something out of this class you must contribute to the overall CTL community. A contribution will result from your demonstrated commitment and your attendance in class.*

*I have a standard attendance policy. You get one free miss, no questions asked. After your first miss you will be docked one letter grade for each subsequent absence. Only severe personal illnesses, your impending*

*death, or a compelling professional obligation are acceptable reasons to miss class. If you have such a circumstance, please let me know in advance.*

## *Seminar Topics*

*Each member of the seminar will be responsible for working on a multi-disciplinary team to identify a topic for exploration. For example, it will be effective if social studies people work with science or math majors to explore a given topic from different perspectives. It will be up to you to identify topics and contexts that will be of interest to you.*

*To facilitate our progress, we will have a graduate assistant who can make some of the arrangements. But, it is up to you to identify your and negotiate your interests.*