

EPSY 2130: Exploring Learning & Teaching
Spring, 2008 – Alison Harbin
10:10-11:00 & 11:15-12:05
MWF

Basic Info:

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Office Hours: Wed. 12:30-1:30, Thurs. 11-12

Required Text: *Educational Psychology*, custom edition for the University of Georgia.

Web-CT site—After drop/add, I will be adding your name and email to the course WebCT site, which you will need to check each day for announcements, assignments, etc. You will also send me email and turning any electronic assignments on this site. If you have never used WebCT, please check with OIT (232 Aderhold) to find out how to access and use it.

What this course is about:

This course is primarily intended for people who are considering a career in education, but it is also be very appropriate for those planning to work in other professions dealing with people, such as medicine, law, or even sales. Finally, it is a course for anyone who wants to know more about how people (including themselves) learn, develop, and are motivated. Therefore, we will be studying the psychology of “education” cast very broadly; teachers educate, but so do dieticians, doctors, nurses, therapists, lawyers, good salesmen, and, of course, parents. In this course, you will read about, discuss, and investigate theories, ideas, and research that address the following key questions:

1. How have I myself learned in and outside of school, and how do I learn most effectively?
2. How do personal factors (e.g., motivation, family and cultural background, temperament and learning preferences, prior knowledge and experiences) impact people’s learning in various educational settings?
3. How do instructional practices and structures impact people’s learning in various settings?
4. How do other factors in the learning environment impact learning in various settings?
5. How may I use this knowledge as a future professional to inform my professional planning and decision-making so as to maximize learning of all types in all students or clients?

Your role:

You will be doing a number of different readings, written assignments and in-class activities during this course. In all of them, I want you to *try to understand* what you hear and read, but also to *think about* what you hear and read--to ask questions, to agree or disagree, to connect it with other things you have heard or read in your life and in this class. Finally, I will ask you to *share your thinking* both in class discussion and in writing. Sharing your thinking can feel very risky; we all have felt the fear that we will ask some stupid question (There are no stupid questions!) or put forward some naive or unpopular idea. But I will expect you to take those risks anyway. It may help to know that I will *not* expect you necessarily to agree with me, with your classmates, or with any of the writers we read. If you find yourself disagreeing (and I myself disagree with some of the different ideas presented in the course), I ask only that you disagree with respect for others' ideas and do your best to explain *why* you disagree--explaining is how you will help the rest of us learn. Also, many assignments will have elements of choice, to let you pursue some of your own questions and interests.

More specifically, the course requirements include:

Readings - The assigned readings are an essential part of this course. You will need ideas and information from the readings to complete journal assignments, take exams, and above all, to participate in and benefit from class lectures, discussions, and activities, which will focus mainly on applying and discussing issues that arise from the readings, rather than "covering" or restating what you have already read. A schedule of the readings and assignments for the class is attached. Daily reading assignments will also be posted on the Calendar section of the class WebCT site.

Daily Class Participation - (60 points possible) - People tend to understand things best when they have a chance to talk or write about them, preferably both, so I consider your participation in class discussions and activities to be a very important part of your learning. Therefore, you will be doing some in-class activities each week, often in small groups. There will be at least 20 of these activities during the semester and each activity will count 3 points toward the class participation portion of your grade. Individuals or groups who turn in activities showing focused thoughtful engagement will earn all 3 points. Those whose work shows less focus or thought will earn 1-2 points. Students who are absent or turn in no work for that activity will earn no points.

Journals - (60 points possible) - You will be writing eight biweekly journals about the readings and/or discussions we have had in class. These journals have two purposes: to give you a specific occasion to think more deeply about particular aspects or issues we are covering, and to help me get an idea of what you are thinking about, what interests you, what seems confusing, etc. To these ends, in each journal entry I will ask you to do two things:

1. Address a specific question that will be posed for each journal. Every student in the class will address this one question, which will be posted on the class WEB-CT site, AND
2. Discuss issues or examples or ideas that really struck you in previous weeks' readings or discussion. In discussing these, talk about why they seemed significant to you and whether and why you agreed/disagreed with the authors/speakers. Many times you will want to draw connections between the idea you are writing about and things we have already read or discussed, things you have read outside of this class, or your own personal experiences. NOTE: Real life experiences are *at least* as important to consider in discussing the ideas we will study as other academic writings or theories.

Journals should be typed/word-processed and double-spaced for ease of reading. They are intended to be partial records of your own thoughts during the course, so I do *not* want a summary of the readings. I will read and comment on each journal and return it to you. In this way, I hope to be able to address questions you still have and also to get to know each of you better than I can during class discussions. Each of the eight journals you will write is worth eight (8) points. Every journal entry that *thoughtfully* addresses *all* of the requirements outlined above will earn the full 8 points; I expect most people will earn 8's on most journals. Journals that do not address all the requirements or seem to show only perfunctory thought in addressing them will earn less than the full 8 points. Although there is no official page limit, it would be difficult to write a decent journal entry that was less than two pages.

Outreach project - (60 points possible) - This project is intended to help you extend your learning beyond the boundaries of this class. There are many different ways to do this--see the Outreach Project description that has been handed out and is posted on WebCT.

In-class Midterm - (60 points possible) - More information about this exam will be forthcoming.

Final Exam - (60 points possible) - More information about this exam will be forthcoming.

Exams will be essay questions only. They will focus on applying the ideas we have been discussing in class to various real-life classroom situations. That is, you will not be asked to *remember* a specific "right" answer from your readings or class discussions, but rather to *construct* and *support* reasonable explanations of and solutions for common classroom problems. You will be given all exam questions ahead of time, and you will always be allowed to bring in a page of notes for reference during the exam.

Hint: Therefore, as you read, you do *not* need to memorize or take traditional notes on what you

read; remember, the exams will not ask you to regurgitate facts from memory. Instead, as you read, I want you to do two things. First, try to really *understand* what the author is saying and why he or she is saying it. Second, "talk with" the author in your head: ask questions where the author seems to be unclear; notice the ideas that seem particularly interesting or horrible to you; remember things in your own life, or that you have read or heard elsewhere, that seem to support or contradict what the author is saying. Be open to new ideas or inspirations that come to you, even if they are only indirectly related to what you are reading. *As you read, note down these thoughts briefly in the margins* (or on separate notebook paper, if you prefer). These notes will be your initial record of the "conversation" you had with this author.

By the way, the same technique applies to note-taking in class. By all means, write down anything I or someone else says in class that really strikes you, but also be sure to write down the questions you develop, the connections you make, and the ideas you get!

Journals, in-class activities, and exams will not be evaluated for grammar or other mechanics of writing; as long as I can tell what you were trying to say, your formal writing ability will not affect these grades. Also, journals and in-class activities CANNOT be turned in late. I will not take these late in part because they are most useful for your learning when they are done as the topics are covered in class, and in part because I simply won't be able to keep up otherwise. If you miss class on a day that we do a class activity, you will simply miss the points for that day (with the exception of UGA pre-approved absences, such as those for religious holidays or sports participation). If you know you will be missing class on the day a journal or other assignment is due, you may have someone else bring your journal to class, turn it in to my mailbox, or even Email your assignment to me through WebCT--so long as I receive it by class time on the day it is due. Exams may be taken early by prior arrangement, but **they can be made-up late only in the case of unforeseen, documented emergencies that can be verified by the UGA Office of Student Affairs.**

My role:

Setting up and focusing: As outlined above, I will be setting up the main readings, classroom activities, and assignments. I am responsible for keeping our whole class discussions (kind of) on track. However, the course is designed to encourage input from you about readings, activities, assignments, and topics. This course will be better if we all think of good questions to ask and discuss than if I try to do all the thinking alone.

Sharing ideas: As you can probably tell, I come to this course, as we all do, with some ideas about how people learn, develop and are motivated. I will also, no doubt, develop more ideas as I reread the readings with you and respond to your reflections and other writings. I will be happy to share these ideas with you, both in class discussion and in my written feedback on your writings. Also, I will often share in class some background information or further explanation on a topic that I think will be useful to you. However, I may sometimes keep a rather low profile, especially at the beginning of a discussion. This is not because I want you to try to guess what I "really" think, or because I am trying to pretend I have no opinions. It is just that, if I am not careful, my voice, as teacher, can get to be too "loud," to the point where the rest of you won't have as much room to think and talk as I want you to. I believe this is a constant danger in teaching, both because of the inherently unequal situation, and because people who become teachers often like to hear themselves talk (as I do).

Helping students: My office hours are listed above. I will also be available outside these hours by appointment, if you cannot come in during these times. During these times I will be happy to discuss, explain, or argue about any of the ideas that have come up in the readings or in class. I will also be happy to clarify my ideas on the various assignments, and give you a "leg-up" in thinking about how to get started, or to discuss my feedback on any completed assignments. I will not pre-read completed assignments in detail or proofread them, as I think this would be unfair to other students, although you should certainly feel free to ask a question about a particular phrase or point you want to make. You also have my home phone above, and I do not mind at all if you call me with brief questions about assignments, etc., although I am not open to helping you construct an entire assignment or having long debates over the phone.

Grading: As you can see, a total of 300 points are possible. Your grades so far and point totals will be listed as they are completed on the class WEB-CT site. Incompletes are rare and are only given with the advice of Student Affairs. Withdrawals will follow the University policy. I anticipate using the following grade distribution for final grades:

A = 270 and over
B+ = 260-269
B = 240 -259
C+ = 230 -239
C = 210 -229
D+ = 200-209
D = 180 - 199
F = below 180

You will *not* be competing against each other on either assignment grades or final grades. I would be perfectly happy to give out all As; indeed, that would be the ideal outcome, if we were all doing our jobs perfectly. Also, although for my self-preservation I am going to stick closely with the late paper policies outlined above, obviously if you end up in the hospital with double pneumonia, something will have to be negotiated. **In such emergency cases, you must contact me as soon as possible!** Also note that the University's policies on academic honesty are followed scrupulously in this course. Please consult "The Student Guide to Academic Honesty" to refresh yourself on these guidelines.

Learning: I am always learning when I teach this class, from each of you and from the discussions we will have together. I will try to compile some of the ideas you generate in small groups and reflections to share with the class as a whole. So if you see me scribble something down while you're talking, don't worry--it's probably just because it was such a good idea!