

DRAFT

**WWS 528c: Issues in Education Policy**  
Spring 2008

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Robertson 216

Wednesday, 1-4 p.m.  
**Except February 27**  
Robertson TBD

This course will focus on why public policies and practices have failed to close or significantly narrow the achievement gap between affluent and poor, white/Asian and Black/Latino students. Forty years of national commissions, educational presidencies and governorships, and the expenditure of trillions of dollars have produced mainly disappointment. While recent federal policies, most particularly No Child Left Behind, leverage the influence of national policy, the policies that affect schools and districts most are set by the fifty state governments. How all of this works its way into the classroom to influence instruction is usually not a question that policymakers address. Nor do they typically acknowledge the origins and magnitude of the achievement gap or the difficulties of narrowing it classroom by classroom. The seminar will.

*Requirements:* Students are expected to attend all twelve seminar sessions, complete the required reading prior to the seminar, and complete three policy analyses.

*Grading:* 50% on seminar participation, 50% on three policy analyses of a length that might be read by a busy policy-maker.

**Readings.**

Most readings will be available on e-reserves or directly through the web sites listed. Reading assignments may be supplemented or revised as the course unfolds.

Chapters of the following books will be required reading; they are worth reading in whole.

Jennifer Hochschild and Nathan Scovronick, *The American Dream and the Public Schools*, Oxford University Press, 2003.

Richard Rothstein, *Class and Schools: Using Social, Economic and Educational Reform to Close the Black-White Achievement Gap*. Teachers College Press. 2004

Christopher Jencks and Meredith Phillips, *The Black-White Test Score Gap*, Brookings, 1998.

## Week-by-Week

### **February 6: Introductions, overview of the course, and the origins and magnitude of The Gap.**

\*Hochschild and Scovronick, *The American Dream and the Public Schools*. Chapter 1.

\*Moynihan and Mosteller, *On Equal Educational Opportunity*. Chapter 1. Note Moynihan's felicitous writing, even when the subject is statistical analysis.

\*Richard Rothstein, *Class and Schools: Using Social, Economic and Educational Reform to Close the Black-White Achievement Gap*. Teachers College (2004), Chapter 1.

Paul E. Barton and Richard J. Coley, "The Family: America's Smallest School." Educational Testing Service. Policy Information Report. (September 2007). Available at [www.ets.org/Media/Education\\_Topics/pdf/5678\\_PERCReport\\_School.pdf](http://www.ets.org/Media/Education_Topics/pdf/5678_PERCReport_School.pdf)

### **February 13: The Kindergarten Gap and why most schools never close it (with predictably devastating results). Is the gap different for black v. Latino children?**

\*Valerie Lee and David Burkam, *Inequality at the Starting Gate: Social Background Differences in Achievement as children Begin School*. (2002) Economic Policy Institute, Introduction and Chapter 1.

Donald Rock and A. Jackson Stenner, "Assessment Issues in the Testing of Children at School Entry." In *School Readiness: Closing Racial and Ethnic Gaps*. The Future of Children.

\*Greg J. Duncan and Katherine Magnuson, "Can Family Socioeconomic Resources Account for Racial and Ethnic Test Score Gaps?" in *School Readiness*

\*Hart and Risley,

\*E.D. Hirsch, Jr. "Building Knowledge," *American Educator*, Spring 2006, available at [http://www.aft.org/pubs-reports/american\\_educator/issues/spring06/hirsch.htm](http://www.aft.org/pubs-reports/american_educator/issues/spring06/hirsch.htm)

### **February 20: What high-poverty schools with high results do that others do not. There is wide agreement about the characteristics of effective schools, but little about how to make more schools effective.**

Lawrence W. Lezotte, "Revolutionary and Evolutionary: The Effective Schools Movement."

Hochschild and Scovronick, Chapter 4

\*Rothstein. Chapter 2.

Survey the websites of at least three models of “whole school reform” and look for similarities/differences and be able to identify the trademark of each model. I suggest some of the better known and more widely-used, e.g. America’s Choice (not the A&P brand), Success for All, Coalition for Essential Schools, Accelerated Schools, Comer School Development Model.

Abbingtion Avenue, Ann Street, First Avenue and Branch Brook Park schools all perform consistently above other schools in Newark on 4<sup>th</sup> grade language arts tests (and 8<sup>th</sup> grade and math). Go the “NJ School Report Card” link on the NJDOE website, select “Essex County,” then “Newark” and then the individual schools and see if any possible explanation emerges from the information available. More precise, comparative and comprehensive test data are found by selecting “DOE Data” on the homepage, and then the link for “NJ Statewide Assessment Reports.” The test results are reported alphabetically by county.

**February 27: What happens in a high-poverty school and how to spot good pedagogy, or its absence. Seminar will begin with a van pickup at 8:15 a.m. to “walk through” one or two Trenton elementary schools. We will conclude by 11:15 or so and conduct discussions on the van.**

\*Abby Goodnough, *Ms. Moffett’s First Year: Becoming a teacher in America*. Public Affairs. (2004)

This is a story, well told, about how 20 6 year-olds can terrify a perfectly competent adult. I’m interested in how the principal, colleague faculty, the central office, and federal policy/requirements influence the work and effectiveness of classroom teachers (or, at least, Ms. Moffett).

**March 5: The district central office does not exist in most educational policy exchanges. With abundant evidence that the school-by-school approach to system-wide academic improvement is insufficient, the job falls to “downtown.”**

A part of this discussion will be with an incumbent city superintendent.

\*John E. Chubb and Terry M. Moe, *Politics, Markets, and America’s Schools*. Brookings (1990). Chapter 2.

The classic case for vouchers, with a strong argument that the nature of federal, state, and district oversight of schools is incompatible with good instruction.

Diane Massell, “The District Role in Building Capacity: Four Strategies.” CPRE Policy Briefs. September 2000.

\*Jim Spillane, “Standards Deviation: How Schools Misunderstand Education Policy.” CPRE Policy Briefs, June, 2005. Available at [http://www.cpre.org/images/stories/cpre\\_pdfs/rb43.pdf](http://www.cpre.org/images/stories/cpre_pdfs/rb43.pdf)

**March 12: The introduction of state academic standards is changing what is taught, when—or should.**

\**A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform*, The National Commission on Excellence in Education, April 1983. Available from [www.ed.gov/pubs/NatAtRisk/title.html](http://www.ed.gov/pubs/NatAtRisk/title.html)

\*Chester E. Finn, Jr., Liam Julien, Michael J. Petrelli, “2006: The State of State Standards.” The Thomas Fordham Foundation, August 2006. Available from [www.edexcellence.net/foundation/publication/publication.cfm?id=358](http://www.edexcellence.net/foundation/publication/publication.cfm?id=358)

Diane Ravitch, “‘50 Standards for 50 States’ is a Formula for Incoherence and Obfuscation.” *Education Week*, January 5, 2006 available at [www.edweek.org/cw/articles/2006/01/05/17ravitch.h25.html?levelld\\_1000&rale2--](http://www.edweek.org/cw/articles/2006/01/05/17ravitch.h25.html?levelld_1000&rale2--)

The standards movement grew out of the *Nation at Risk* report, which emphasized that the U.S. was falling behind its commercial rivals in the rigor of its public education. Select a state and review its academic standards in terms of their clarity, parsimoniousness, relevance, rigor, concreteness and their consequences for schools/principals/teachers at any one grade level. Be ready to discuss.

**March 19: Spring recess.**

**March 26: The NCLB mandate to test students more frequently against state curricular standards is at the heart of its accountability system. How does it work? Does it work?**

\*W. James Popham, *The Truth about Testing: An Educator’s Call to Action*. ASCD, 2001. Chapters 1-4.

Written before passage of NCLB, the points about the value of continuous assessments and instruction and the danger of standardized testing used for untested judgments would be made, presumably, even more strongly.

\* Rothstein, Chapter 3

\*Alfie Kohn, “Burnt at the high stakes.” *Journal of Teacher Education*, Vol. 51, No. 4, September/October 2000, pp 315-327.

\*The Aspen Institute, Commission on NCLB. “Beyond NCLB: Fulfilling the Promise to Our Nation’s Children.” Pp. xx-yy.

The American Federation of Teachers. "Smart Testing: Let's Get it Right." Policy Brief, July 2006 available at [www.aft.org/pubs-reports/downloads/teachers/TestingBrief.pdf](http://www.aft.org/pubs-reports/downloads/teachers/TestingBrief.pdf)

**April 2: The answer by states, districts and schools to evidence that their students are not performing to standards is "we don't have enough money." The struggle for adequate financing has received more attention than how additional funds might be/are used.**

\*Hochschild and Scovronick, Chapter 3.

Kozol, *Savage Inequalities*, Chapter 4.

\**Abbott v. Burke V*, available at [www.edlawcenter.org/ELCPublic/Publications/PDF/Abbott\\_V.pdf](http://www.edlawcenter.org/ELCPublic/Publications/PDF/Abbott_V.pdf)

This decision represents the high water mark in school funding litigation both for the extent of the funding mandated and delivered, and for the prescriptiveness of how additional funds will be spent.

David K. Cohen, Stephen W. Raudenbush, Deborah Loewenberg Bell, "Resources, Instruction, and Research." *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, Summer 2003, Vol. 25. No. 2 available at <http://www-personal.umich.edu/~dkcohen/ResourcesEEPA2003.pdf>

This analysis points to the difficulty (impossibility?) of tracking the effects of additional resources on achievement.

\*The Education Trust, "Funding Gaps 2006." December, 2006. Available at <http://www2.edtrust.org/NR/rdonlyres/CDEF9403-5A75-437E-93FF-EBF1174181FB/0/FundingGap2006.pdf>

**April 9: If the teacher-student transaction is at the center of improving academic performance, what can policy do to improve the quality of teachers and of teaching?**

\*Steve Farkas, Jean Johnson, and Tony Folleno. "A sense of calling: who teaches and why?" Report of Public Agenda, 2000.

\*Richard J. Murnane and Jennifer L. Steele, "What is the problem? The challenge of providing effective teachers for all children." *Excellence in the Classroom*, The Future of Children, vol. 17, no 1, Spring 2007

\*Linda Darling-Hammond, Deborah J. Holtzman, Su Jin Gatlin, and Julian Vasquez Heilig. "Does Teacher Preparation Matter? Evidence about Teacher Certification, Teach for America, and Teacher Effectiveness." *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, vol. 13, no. 42, October 12, 2005

\*Go to the Teach for America website and examine the layered information available to determine how the Darling-Hammond conclusions might be rebutted. Give attention to the Mathematica evaluation found at

[http://www.teachforamerica.org/assets/documents/mathematica\\_results\\_6.9.04.pdf](http://www.teachforamerica.org/assets/documents/mathematica_results_6.9.04.pdf)

Is this a consequential dispute?

**April 16: The states set the rules (and a lot of them there are), pay some of the bills, and handle USDOE, but what can they do about closing the achievement gap? Students in DE, VA and NJ have shown some movement in narrowing the gap, but do the state departments deserve any of the credit? For total students, MA has worked out the standards-based instruction and testing better than any other state. Does it do something, others do not?**

\*Diane Massell, Michael Kirst, and Margaret Hoppe. "Persistence and change: standards-based systemic reforms in nine states." CPRE Policy Briefs, March 1997, also available at [http://www.cpre.org/images/stories/cpre\\_pdfs/rb21.pdf](http://www.cpre.org/images/stories/cpre_pdfs/rb21.pdf)

\*Diane Massell. "State Strategies for Building Local Capacity: Addressing the needs of Standards-based Reform." CPRE Policy Briefs, July 1998, available at [http://www.cpre.org/images/stories/cpre\\_pdfs/rb25.pdf](http://www.cpre.org/images/stories/cpre_pdfs/rb25.pdf)

\*The Thomas Fordham Foundation, "How Well are States Educating Our Neediest Children? The Fordham Report 2006." Available at <http://www.edexcellence.net/doc/TFR06FULLREPORT.PDF>

Compare the state you selected for the March 12 discussion with one of the states that has shown improved results on NAEP tests. Can one determine any noticeable difference in emphasis, policy, tone and practice by comparing websites? Is it possible that the states deserve none of the credit for improvements? Since MA is the clear leader on NAEP results, everyone should scan its site for clues.

**April 23: The road to (educational) hell may be paved with NCLB testing and accountability measures, but it has put the spotlight on the achievement gap. Does it deserve to be re-authorized?**

\*Kevin Carey, "The Pangloss Index: How States Game the No Child Left Behind Act. The Education Sector. (November 2007). Available at

[www.educationsector.org/usr\\_doc/The\\_Pangloss\\_Index.pdf](http://www.educationsector.org/usr_doc/The_Pangloss_Index.pdf)

A clear explanation of how the NCLB system as designed and implemented undercuts its rhetoric about accountability.

NCLB is in its sixth year. Except for the vast changes created for some students by special education laws and court decisions, and for the segregated states affected by *Brown v. Board of Education*, the federal government has never leveraged its 7% funding more effectively. The Bush Administration claims that NCLB has produced significantly

positive results in achievement. Others claim that it has ruined teaching and learning. Congress has decided to put off the question of re-authorization until 2009.

The seminar discussion of NCLB's value and prospects should be framed by the conclusions and positions of the major stakeholders/players. Inform yourself of the recommendations about NCLB taken by the following:

- The Democratic congressional leadership, particularly Congressman George Miller and Senator Edward Kennedy.
- The leading presidential candidates in both parties.
- The Bush Administration, particularly Secretary Spellings.
- The National Education Association and the American Federation of Teachers.
- Other national educational organizations representing principals, superintendents, school boards.
- The Education Trust, civil rights organizations, and progressive think tanks (Open Society, Center for American Progress, The Century Foundation, e.g.)
- The Chamber of Commerce, Committee for Economic Development, Business Roundtable, and conservative think tanks (e.g. Thomas Fordham Foundation, Cato, American Enterprise Institute, Heritage Foundation)

**April 30: Final Session will be without reading assignments and will be a wrap-up.**

