

EDUCATION POLICY & SCHOOL REFORM

Introduction to policy theory, research design, and analytic methods

EDUC-260A - Fall 2007-08

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Learning Objectives

This course – serving (mostly) graduate students from various university departments – addresses several learning objectives:

- P To examine *policy debates* that aim to touch the lives of students, families, local educators, and political leaders.
- P To grasp the broader, deep-seated *economic and institutional forces* – characteristic of liberal-capitalist societies – in which government attempts to alter schools and families.
- P To apply historical and theoretical perspective to understand how the school's problems are *constructed* or *framed* by political actors.
- P To delve into the *analytic methods and core intellectual traditions* used by policy analysts (often tacitly), including those working at federal, state, and district levels.

The school institution serves as a prism through which the hopes and aims of human societies are projected – as parents, educators, and political leaders attempt to conserve *or* transform the values and skills passed onto the next generation. So, it's not surprising that public schools get swept up into all kinds of social and economic debates.

When the schools fall short, the problems or causes of “ineffectiveness” are framed in various ways. Sometimes these conceptions of the problem are based on evidence, other times they express an ideology (ideals, causal theories) about how schools *should* work.

Americans historically have expressed high hopes for the schools' ability to remedy a variety of societal ills. This ranges from the claim that schools can narrow learning gaps, hurry assimilation, correct kids' sexual and moral behavior, or adjust how parents raise their children. We look to schools to strengthen our particular local community or to advance common aims, from advancing economic growth to making life more civil.

I'm trained in sociology; I work with child developmentalists, ethnographers, and policy analysts. Together, we dig into what life is like on the ground inside small-scale organizations (like charters schools or preschools), as well as families. We can build up from how local actors connect with these organizations and policy parameters. We also will study empirical work on how formal policy moves down from government into a colorful variety of neighborhoods and schools. The universal meets the particular.

My analytic approach is pragmatic: we will examine *contemporary policy debates*, where local activists and central political actors aim to alter schools, kids, or parents. You will be challenged to think carefully about the *causal theory* and *empirical evidence* that supports, or contests, various reforms. Policy represents collective action built on a tacit or explicit theory about how rules, resources, or moral messages are supposed to motivate new behavior or belief on the ground.

In prior lives I have worked for a legislative education committee, a governor, and as a ‘non-economist’ at the World Bank. It’s astonishing – within policy organizations – how sloppy thinking often remains when it comes to underlying theories of policy action and how deeper social and cultural conditions are ignored as government actors pursue their virtuous ideals. In parallel to our discussions of contemporary policy debates we will examine *maps and methods* for inquiring about these deeper forces that constrain children’s learning and the work of teachers.

I emphasize the play of *institutions* in the formulation and implementation of educational policy. By institutions I mean the interest groups, public agencies, and bundles of ideals and assumptions that give shape to public action. These institutions and lobbies need to acquire legitimacy and mobilize support before a discrete policy (public action) can be undertaken. The same goes for political leaders and bureaucrats within the state. So, the practice of mobilization and framing of educational problems is where the story begins. And the role of evidence and logic is necessarily constrained by belief and ideology. That’s why research in politicized settings is so entertaining, unpredictable!

Pedagogical Approach

I operate from two basic tenets about learning. First, it should be fun! It’s more enjoyable when we engage colleagues and new settings. Each student will be randomly assigned to a three-to-four person study teams. *Each team* will collaboratively (1) prepare seminar presentations pegged to major readings, (2) draft a 10-page (single-spaced) design for how to assess the implementation of a discrete education policy, and (3) if helpful, study together for the final exam.

Second, I push hard on how (alternative) theoretical lenses can inform policy options and implementation locally. Alternative causal accounts (that’s all a theory really is) offer frameworks for empirically assessing what works and why, or why not? At the same time, we must bring to life these theoretical accounts, checking them against real, live cases.

Typically I lecture during the first half of class while encouraging questions and debate over substantive ideas, the clarity of theories of action, and the validity of evidence. My talks will generally help to frame contemporary policy debates and offer the maps and methods that offer powerful analytic tools.

Course Structure and Schedule

Cuisine. The full seminar meets 15 times. Since we meet at noon throughout the semester, do bring lunch or snacks. (But no sprouts, vegetables, or grains allowed.) We will have two pizza-dinner evenings, given Monday holidays and one travel conflict.

Assignments and grades. Each study team is expected to prepare creative and engaging discussions, even enactments, of chosen readings. Many a political *actor* has been born in this class! I will draft brief emails to offer feedback to each team.

Formal grades are assigned to the study team for work on their policy research proposal (30%), and then each individual student will be awarded a grade on the final exam (50%). You will have a week to write on the exam, consisting of three questions. Discussing the total of six questions in your study team is encouraged, but then each student writes their own responses to their three questions.

Field policy research proposal. We will spend more time examining how education policies play out inside schools and communities, compared with how policy is made or formulated. To enrich your understanding of the former, each study team will develop an empirically based proposal for how the implementation and effects of a particular education policy could be studied. It offers an exercise in research design, useful for drafting qualifying papers and theses down the road. It also will get you into the field to consult with teachers, school staff, local or state policy makers about a particular policy.

Participation in the seminar. This is key to ensuring lively discussions and pushing for mastery of the material. I will gently encourage quieter people to join the fray (20% of your grade). Engaging debates help to clarify theories of policy action and the validity of evidence pertaining to the effects of various policies.

Course Reader & Books. The reader contains articles from scholarly and popular education periodicals. The readings range between argumentation and theoretical accounts, to nitty-gritty empirical tests of causal claims.

We will read major portions of the three books listed below. A copy of each will be on reserve in the Ed-Psych Library, and available for sale at the ASUC bookstore or Ned's. Jonathan Schorr's book, *Hard Lessons* (on charter schools in Oakland) is truly optional. It will supplement readings in unit 3. The reading packet will be available at Central Copy.

P **Collins** (1994) *Four Sociological Traditions*.

P **Fliegel & MacGuire** (1993) *Miracle in East Harlem: The Fight for Choice in Public Education*.

P **Fuller** (2007) *Standardized Childhood: The Political & Cultural Struggle over Early Education*.

P **Schorr** (2005) *Hard Lessons: The Promise of an Inner City Charter School (optional)*.

Communicating. For email and quick questions: b_fuller@berkeley.edu. For more thorough conversation, let's schedule office time.

Readings and Seminar Schedule

Unit 1 – What do Americans want from their schools? What are the big *policy* problems?

August 27 **Course aims, frameworks, and what policy reform means to you...**

- ▣ The public schools: diverse expectations, unequal realities, framing (and politically constructing) “the problem” with schools, families.
- ▣ Which problems can be informed by *empirical research*? Which are *philosophical* in nature (contested ideals, ideologies)?
- ▣ *Levels of analysis* – child, school, government/political, macro political-economy.
- ▣ *Methods of inquiry* – philosophical clarity, quantitative descriptive and ‘causal analysis,’ qualitative illumination of social processes (and the causal account of how policy *should* work).
- ▣ *Types of knowledge*: original texts (theory and argumentation), quantitative or qualitative data reports, policy analysis – does anything go?

Sept. 3 **No class, Labor Day holiday**

UNIT A

What do we want from our public schools? What frameworks are advanced to define public or policy problems?

Sept. 4 **Pizza dinner – 6:00 to 8:30 p.m.**

- Hochschild & Scovronik, The American dream and the public schools.
- Liu, Education, equality and national citizenship.

Sept. 10 The politics and democratic dilemmas of school governance

- Fuhrman & Lazerson – Chapter by Corcoran & Goertz, The governance of public education.
- Kingdon, Agendas, alternatives, and public policies. [map and tools, BF]
- Marshall & Gerstl-Pepin, Reframing Educational Politics. [map]

UNIT 1

Schools could work if educators were held tightly accountable?

Do hazy learning objectives, inattention to student performance, and education interest groups represent the basic problems?

Sept. 17 Schools have been hijacked by self-interested groups and lobbies

- Chubb & Moe, Politics, markets, and America's schools.
- Wallis & Steptoe, How to fix No Child Left Behind. [map and method]
- EdSource*, two articles – California's new school accountability program (1999), and School accountability under NCLB (2005) [map and tools].

Sept. 24 The mechanical and moral foundations of a tightly coupled school system.

- Collins, Chapter 3, The Durkheimian tradition, pp. 181-224. BF
- Fuller, Gauging growth: How to judge No Child Left Behind?
- Au, High-stakes testing & curricular control: A qualitative metasynthesis. [method]

Oct. 1 No class, travel.

...but please read, Collins on class-conflict theory, pp. 47-76.

Oct. 8 State regulation and resources for social integration.

- Orfield & Frankenberg, The integration decision.
- Tough, What it takes to make a student. [method]
- Hacsí, Is bilingual education a good idea?

**Oct. 15 Who controls teaching...
and a shift toward more motivating theories of state regulation?**

- Ingersoll, Who controls teachers' work? [method]
- Fuller, Democrats split on No Child Left Behind.
- Schiller & Muller, Raising the bar and equity. [method]

UNIT 2

**Schools would work if they were better funded.
How dollars affect classrooms and student engagement? Economic analysis helps.**

Oct. 17 *Pizza dinner* -- Does money matter? Or, *how* does money matter?

- Hacsí, Children as pawns: Does more money make schools better?
- Collins, Chapter 2 – The rational-utilitarian tradition (pp. 121-163).

Oct. 22 How money could matter and the California finance discussion

- Ladd & Hansen, Making money matter. BF
- Stasz & Stetcher, Teaching mathematics and language arts in reduced size classrooms. [method]
- Loeb & Reininger, Public policy and teacher labor markets.

Oct. 29 How to recraft school finance systems? How can financing more effectively invigorate teachers and students?

- Loeb, Bryk, & Hanushek, Getting down to facts: School finance and governance in California. IREPP background note (4 pages) in read. Loeb paper appears at: <http://irepp.stanford.edu/documents/GDF/GDF-Overview-Paper.pdf>
- Odden, Redesigning school finance systems: Lessons from CPRE research.

UNIT 3

Schools could work if we decentralized authority and dollars to local organizations and parents?

Market dynamics and radical decentralization will advance direct accountability between the parent-consumer and (more responsive and diverse) schools?

Nov. 5 Reframing around the local – the neighborhood and cultural contexts that surround schools.

- Steinberg, Beyond the Classroom.
- Fuller, Standardized Childhood (Introduction, Chapters 1-2). [map and tools]

Nov. 12 No class, Veterans Day Holiday

- ...but please read Cutler, Parents and Schools, pp. 1-14, 164-198. [method]

Nov. 19 Learning from decentralized reforms – parental vouchers, new schools, and urban reform.

- Fuller, Policy and place: Learning from decentralized reforms (to be distributed). [methods review]
- Howell & Peterson, The education gap: Vouchers and urban schools. [method]

**Nov. 26 How can the state be effective within pluralistic societies?
How is “effective” being defined?**

- Fliegel & MacGuire, *Miracle in East Harlem* (complete book).
- Optional*: RAND evaluation of charter schools: ‘Charter school operations and performance.’ [method, BF]

Dec. 3 Uniform policy and multiple practices in pluralistic communities.

- Bryk et al., Catholic schools and the common good.
- Fuller, Standardized Childhood (Chapters 3, 5, and 7).

Dec. 10 Macro policy and community reform under pluralistic conditions.

- Sampson et al., Assessing ‘neighborhood effects’. [methods review]
- Fuller, Standardized Childhood (Chapter 8).
- Oakes et al., *Learning power*.

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**Final exam due on Monday, 17th December, 5 p.m.
HARDCOPY ONLY, PLEASE**

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