

Sociocultural Influences on Learning

ALD 327

Spring 2019

SZB 292

Thursdays 1:00-3:45 PM

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course is an introduction to thinking critically about bias and sociocultural factors that influence ourselves, students and their families, and school systems. We will explore how our socio-political, cultural, and historical contexts impact our individual identities as well as the identities of the students and families in our schools. We will also critically examine the role that such sociocultural factors play on the learning process. Specifically, this course will emphasize how sociocultural and linguistic factors, such as race/ethnicity, language, immigrant status, class, etc., intersect with disability. We will apply these understandings to classroom practices, exploring and developing teaching approaches that are responsive to and appropriate for children and youth with disabilities from culturally and linguistically diverse communities. This course is intended to prepare prospective special education practitioners to engage in anti-bias work with culturally and linguistically diverse students with disabilities and their families.

There are two **essential questions** guiding this course:

1. Why do sociocultural influences matter for children with disabilities and their families?
2. What does it mean to be an equitable special education teacher?

By the end of this course, **students will be able to:**

- Identify bias within themselves and develop a critical lens to begin dismantling these biases in their work with students, families, and school staff
- Identify bias within schools and generate approaches for resisting the impact of such bias on the experience of students and families
- Apply their understanding of the sociocultural influences on learning to 1) their own lived experiences, 2) observations of schools and classrooms, and 3) their own future classroom practice

A variety of approaches, including class lectures, discussions, simulations, group activities, and written assignments will be utilized to achieve course objectives.

PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCIES

By the end of the course, students will be able to demonstrate skills in the following domains, as outlined by the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) and the Texas State Board of Education Certification (SBEC) standards:

CEC Special Education Preparation Standards

Learner Development and Individual Learning Differences

- 1.1 Beginning special education professionals understand how language, culture, and family background influence the learning of individuals with exceptionalities.

Learning Environments

- 2.1 Beginning special education professionals, through collaboration with general educators and other colleagues, create safe, inclusive, culturally responsive learning environments to engage individuals with exceptionalities in meaningful learning activities and social interactions.

Professional Learning and Ethical Practice

- 6.2 Beginning special education professionals understand how foundational knowledge and current issues influence professional practice.
- 6.3 Beginning special education professionals understand that diversity is a part of families, cultures, and schools, and that complex human issues can interact with the delivery of special education services.

Collaboration

- 7.0 Beginning special education professionals collaborate with families, other educators, related service providers, individuals with exceptionalities, and personnel from community agencies in culturally responsive ways to address the needs of individuals with exceptionalities across a range of learning experiences.

Texas SBEC Standards

Standard II: The special education teacher applies knowledge of professional roles and responsibilities and adheres to legal and ethical requirements of the profession.

- 2.2 Teachers know personal cultural biases and differences that may affect one's teaching
- 2.4 Teachers respect the culture, gender, and personal beliefs of individual students and families

Standard III: The special education teacher knows how to communicate and collaborate effectively in a variety of professional settings.

- 3.3 Teachers can foster respectful and beneficial relationships between parents/guardians and school community personnel

Standard IV: The special education teacher understands and applies knowledge of the characteristics and needs of individuals with disabilities.

- 4.11 Teachers know the effects of cultural and environmental influences (e.g., cultural and linguistic characteristics, socioeconomic level, abuse/neglect, substance abuse) on the child and family

COURSE TEXTS

Required Books: There are **two** required books for this course. These can be purchased at the University Co-op Bookstore or through other retailers such as Amazon.com.

- (1) *The Dreamkeepers: Successful Teachers of African American Students* by Gloria Ladson-Billings
- (2) *Subtractive Schooling: U.S. Mexican Youth and the Politics of Caring* by Angela Valenzuela

Articles and Book Chapters: All articles and book chapters are available on Canvas.

CANVAS

Our Canvas site is a critical feature of this course. All course materials, including the syllabus, readings, slides, and any handouts used in class can be found on Canvas. You will submit all assignments, receive comments, and track your grades through Canvas. I will also use Canvas to post announcements. You can e-mail me through Canvas or at the address listed above.

EXPECTATIONS AND ATTENDANCE POLICY

Class Attendance: Timely and consistent attendance is critical to your learning, the learning of your peers, and your professional development. For this reason, attendance and participation constitute 30 points of your grade. The attendance policy for this course is described in the Assessments section below.

Class Participation: Active and thoughtful participation in all class activities is also integral to this course, and is built into your grade (see below). Meaningful participation in this class involves the following:

- Be *present* – Listen to your peers when they speak, listen to your instructor when she speaks, ask questions, share your ideas
- Do the readings in advance of class sessions
- Turn off cell phones and keep them out of sight until the scheduled break
- Use laptops for classwork only
- Communicate with your instructor – Life happens. I do not expect you to check parts of yourself at the door, but please let me know if there are any reasons why you are not able to fully engage with a class session.

Class Norms: In this course, we will discuss topics that may be sensitive for some and will likely bring up personal experiences. Additionally, class sessions will be hands-on, interactive, and collaborative. As such, it is important that we build a community in which we all feel safe to share our thoughts, stories, and questions. In the first week of class, we will collectively write class norms. These will serve as a guide for how we conduct ourselves in our conversations. All students are expected to adhere to these communally agreed upon norms.

Communication with Your Instructor: Please communicate any concerns, questions, or circumstances with me in a timely manner. I will do my very best to be transparent with you, and I hope you will similarly be transparent with me as we navigate this course together. I am more than willing to accommodate your needs as best I can, but I can only do so if you communicate with me. Know that I am easily available via e-mail, text, or phone call, as well as in person before/after class and in office hours.

ASSESSMENTS

Points	Assignment	Due Date
30 points	Class Attendance/Participation	Ongoing
30 points	Anti-Bias Journal Entries (2)	Ongoing before 5/9/19 at 11:59 pm
15 points	Educational Autobiography	3/14/19
25 points	Final Paper	5/14/19

Grade	Percentage	Grade	Percentage
A	94–100%	C+	77–79%
A–	90–93%	C	73–76%
B+	87–89%	C–	70–72%
B	83–86%	F	< 70%
B–	80–82%	*Traditional rounding principles apply.	

Class Attendance/Participation (15 classes each worth 2 points = 30 points)

The success of this course depends on the extent to which you attend to and participate in all class sessions and activities. Timely and consistent attendance of entire class sessions is critical for your own learning and the learning of your classmates. The class also relies on your thoughtful and active engagement in small/large group discussions. This requires that *prior to class meetings*, you will have read and critically considered the class readings and other assignment materials. ***For this reason, please bring all assigned readings to class.***

Your attendance and participation for each class session is worth two points. When you miss a session, these points will be deducted from your course grade. If you are late to two classes, this will be considered an additional absence and two points will be deducted from your grade accordingly. It is understood, however, that over the course of the semester a situation may arise that prohibits your attendance or causes tardiness. ***Please communicate such situations in advance*** to avoid any penalty and to build your professional practice. Communicating your needs is an important aspect of your professionalism as a teacher.

Due: Ongoing

Anti-Bias Journal Entries (2 entries each worth 15 points = 30 points)

Bias is all around us. It takes intentional observation and critical thinking for us to be aware of our own biases and of how bias impacts all of us in our society. This is especially important as teachers of culturally and linguistically diverse learners with disabilities – students who are particularly vulnerable to systemic bias. In this class, we will develop critical lenses necessary for us to engage in anti-bias thinking and practice. You will submit ***two 5-8 page journal entries reflecting on two different themes we discuss in class and how they manifest in your school placements.*** Your journal entries should draw on course materials and discussions.

Below are some questions you might consider addressing in your journal entry:

- How does your theme of choice manifests in the schools/classrooms you observe? How does it impact teaching and learning in your view?
- Have you observed specific instances of bias related to your theme of choice? AND/OR have you observed educators engaging in anti-bias practices related to the theme?
- How might you as a teacher address the theme and engage in anti-bias practices?
- Any lingering questions or thoughts?
- *Be sure to make clear connections to course readings and discussions*

Due: You can submit your journal entries at any point throughout the semester before 5/9/19 at 11:59 PM, **but it must be *after* we've discussed your theme of choice** (e.g., a journal entry discussing biases or anti-bias practices related to immigration status should be submitted *after* we discuss immigration).

Educational Autobiography (15 points)

You will write a ***5-8 page educational autobiography*** in which you reflect on your life experience as it relates to the topics and ideas discussed in the course. You will explore the relationship between sociocultural factors, your identity, and school experiences. To the extent you are comfortable, you should address how you identify yourself (e.g., race, class, gender, religion, etc.), the kinds of schools you attended (e.g., public, private, predominantly white, predominantly students of color, bilingual, etc.), and what your experiences were like in these school settings (e.g., the kinds of learning experiences you had, your relationship with faculty/staff as well as with your peers, and how your own sociocultural background may have contributed to your schooling experiences). The purpose of this assignment is for us to critically examine our educational trajectories and to place our stories in the wider socio-political, cultural, and historical contexts in which we live.

Due: Thursday, March 14th at 11:59 PM

Final Paper: A Deeper Dive into Sociocultural Influences on Learning (25 points)

Pick a sociocultural influence on learning that is of interest to you. This can be a topic we explored in class, or it can be an area that we did not have time to investigate. You will submit a **10-14 page final paper** that includes the following sections:

What is it and Why it Matters (3-4 pages)

- What is the sociocultural influence on learning that you selected? How is it defined in the scholarly literature? How do you personally define this sociocultural factor?
- What is the socio-political and historical role that this factor has played in schools, specifically for students with special needs?
- Why should special education teachers be aware of this factor? What impact does it have on learning and on the school system? How does it intersect with disability?

Personal Experience (2-3 pages)

- What has your experience been with this sociocultural factor in your own life experience?
- What has your experience been with this factor in your placements/field observations? How have you seen this factor influence learning for students? How have you observed faculty/staff address (or not address) this factor?

Applying it to Your Classroom (3-4 pages)

- How do you plan to address this factor in your own work with culturally and linguistically diverse students with disabilities and their families? What specific frameworks and approaches will you draw from?
- Consider a variety of aspects of your classroom including a) interactions with students, b) norms and classroom climate, c) curricular materials and activities, d) parent communication and collaboration, e) specific topics you may want to integrate into lessons, f) organization of the physical space, g) school-community connections, etc.

Personal Reflection (2-3 pages)

- How has your thinking about sociocultural influences on learning changed over the course of the semester? What has stayed the same for you?
- How do the personal shifts you've made impact your views on the sociocultural factor you chose to explore for this paper?

At a minimum, you must include five scholarly references in your paper. These can include course readings or other works that you find.

Due: Tuesday, May 14th at 12:00 PM (noon)

Formatting: All assignments should be typed in 12-point font and double spaced. Please submit all assignments on Canvas. Any citations should follow the American Psychological Association (6th Edition) format.

Grading: All assignments will be graded as *complete* or *incomplete*. You will receive extensive, qualitative feedback on each assignment. Students will not be able to receive a grade for the class until all assignments are completed. This means that the student has 1) produced an assignment that meets all guidelines and criteria outlined in the syllabus as well as discussed in class, and 2) submitted the completed assignment on Canvas. *If a student submits an assignment that does not meet the guidelines/criteria, then that student will receive an incomplete and will be asked to revise and resubmit the assignment.* Students will also, of course, receive an *incomplete* if the assignment is not submitted at all.

I understand that life happens and that there may be situations in which it is difficult to submit assignments that you feel reflect your best work by the dates/times they are due. In such cases, I am more than happy to work with you on developing a plan for submitting assignments that you feel proud of on an alternative timeline. Please communicate with me in advance. This will allow us to avoid any unexpected surprises and unnecessary stress.

Late assignments (based on the due date or the alternate submission date we agree upon) will be marked down 2 points for each day they are late.

A detailed description of each assignment is provided on the following pages.

WEEKLY SCHEDULE				
#	Date	Main Topic(s)	Readings	Assignments Due
1	1/24	Introduction to course	Syllabus – bring questions! On Point (2005) – Cultural Identity and Teaching Grant & Sleeter (2004) – Race, Class, Gender, and Disability in the Classroom	
2	1/31	Our families, our cultures, our identities	McIntosh (1989) – Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack Britto (2008) – Who Am I? Ethnic Identity Formation of Arab Muslim Children	
3	2/7	Equity, social justice, and bias in schools	Johnson (2018) – Introduction and Ch. 1 in <i>Privilege, Power, and Difference</i> Pollack (2012) – Unpacking Everyday Teacher Talk	
4	2/14	Intersectionality	Connor (2006) – Michael’s Story This American Life (10/20/17) – “Expect Delays” Act 3	Optional anti-bias journal
5	2/21	Race and disability	Tatum (1997) – Defining Racism Blanchett (2006) – Disproportionate Representation	Optional anti-bias journal
6	2/28	Immigration and disability	Valenzuela (1999) <i>Subtractive Schooling</i>	Optional anti-bias journal
7	3/7	Language status and disability	Ruiz et al. (2002) – Bilingual Special Education Classroom Thompson (2015) – Questioning the Long Term English Learner Label	Optional anti-bias journal
8	3/14	Socioeconomic status and disability	Lareau (2011) – <i>Unequal Childhoods</i> Ch. 1 & 13 Park et al. (2002) – Impacts of Poverty on Quality of Life	Educational Autobiography Optional anti-bias journal

	3/21	NO CLASS – SPRING BREAK		
9	3/28	Religion and disability	Blanks & Smith (2009) – Multiculturalism, Religion, and Disability Wertheimer (2015) – Public Schools Shouldn't Preach	Optional anti-bias journal
10	4/4	Gender, sexuality, and disability	Annamma (2018) – Pedagogy of Pathologization Kuklin (2014) – Jessy from <i>Beyond Magenta</i>	Optional anti-bias journal
11	4/11	Teaching culturally and linguistically diverse learners with disabilities (Part 1)	Ladson-Billings (2009) – <i>Dreamkeepers</i>	Optional anti-bias journal
12	4/18	Teaching culturally and linguistically diverse learners with disabilities (Part 2)	Thorp & Sánchez (n.d.) – Why Address Cultural & Linguistic Diversity Vascellaro (2011) – <i>Out of the Classroom and Into the World</i> Ch. 1	Optional anti-bias journal
13	4/25	Partnering with diverse families (Part 1)	Park et al. (2001) – Quality of Partnerships Riojas-Cortez (2011) – Culture, Play, and Family	Optional anti-bias journal
14	5/2	Partnering with diverse families (Part 2)	Harry (2008) – Collaboration with CLD Families Lo (2012) – Demystifying the IEP Process	Optional anti-bias journal
15	5/9	Reflection and celebration	Delpit (2001) – “Skin Deep” Learning NAEYC (2010) – What is Anti-Bias Education?	Final Paper due Tuesday, May 14th at 12 pm (noon)

UNIVERSITY POLICIES

Religious Holy Days

UT Austin policy requires that you notify instructors of your pending absence at least fourteen days prior to the date of observance of a religious holy day. We will together develop a plan for making up work if you must miss a class to observe a religious holy day, or for submitting assignments at a date different than the one listed in the syllabus.

Q Drop Policy

If you want to drop a class after the 12th class day, you'll need to execute a Q drop before the Q-drop deadline, which typically occurs near the middle of the semester. Under Texas law, you are only allowed six Q drops while you are in college at any public Texas institution. For more information, see: <http://www.utexas.edu/ugs/csacc/academic/adddrop/qdrop>

Student Accommodations

Students with a documented disability may request appropriate academic accommodations from the Division of Diversity and Community Engagement, Services for Students with Disabilities, 512-471-6259 (voice) or 1-866-329-3986 (video phone).

<http://ddce.utexas.edu/disability/about/>

- Please request a meeting as soon as possible to discuss any accommodations
- Please notify me as soon as possible if the material being presented in class is not accessible
- Please notify me if any of the physical space is difficult for you

Academic Integrity

Each student in the course is expected to abide by the University of Texas Honor Code:

“As a student of The University of Texas at Austin, I shall abide by the core values of the University and uphold academic integrity.”

This means that work you produce on assignments, tests and exams is all your own work, unless it is assigned as group work. I will make it clear for each test, exam or assignment whether collaboration is encouraged or not. Always cite your sources. If you use words or ideas that are not your own (or that you have used in previous class), you must make that clear otherwise you will be guilty of plagiarism and subject to academic disciplinary action, including failure of the course. You are responsible for understanding UT's Academic Honesty Policy which can be found at the following web address: http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/sjs/acint_student.php

UNIVERSITY RESOURCES

The Sanger Learning Center

Did you know that more than one-third of UT undergraduate students use the Sanger Learning Center each year to improve their academic performance? All students are welcome to take advantage of Sanger Center's classes and workshops, private learning specialist appointments, peer academic coaching, and tutoring for more than 70 courses in 15 different subject areas. For more information, please visit <http://www.utexas.edu/ugs/slc> or call 512-471-3614 (JES A332).

The University Writing Center

The University Writing Center offers free, individualized, expert help with writing for any UT student, by appointment or on a drop-in basis. Consultants help students develop strategies to improve their writing. The assistance we provide is intended to foster students' resourcefulness and self-reliance. <http://uwc.utexas.edu/>

Counseling and Mental Health Center

The Counseling and Mental Health Center (CMHC) provides counseling, psychiatric, consultation, and prevention services that facilitate students' academic and life goals and enhance their personal growth and well-being. <http://cmhc.utexas.edu/>

Student Emergency Services

<http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/emergency/>

ITS

Need help with technology? <http://www.utexas.edu/its/>

Libraries

Need help searching for information? <http://www.lib.utexas.edu/>

Canvas

Canvas help is available 24/7 at <https://utexas.instructure.com/courses/633028/pages/student-tutorials>