Course Syllabus
CEP 905: Cultural Perspectives on Learning and Development
Spring 2018
Jack Smith, Instructor

Mondays, 3 to 5:50pm
512 Erickson
132 Erickson
jsmith@msu.edu; 353-6397
Remote participation via Beam
Meetings by appointment (e-mail is best) or at the end of class

Course Overview
This course is a broad overview of the very large collection of phenomena in human development and learning that are influenced, if not shaped by culture. The course serves students in diverse Masters and doctoral programs and attempts to align—at least to some extent—course content to align with students’ interests. One central course activity is close reading in preparation for class discussions. Open, honest, and extensive (across the class) participation in class discussions is valued and actively supported. Writing in the course serves two goals: (1) shorter analytic writing supports richer class discussions (as well as better learning) of course content and (2) longer course projects support students’ exploration of particular interactions of culture and learning & development to advance their interests.

The course has a survey quality, in multiple senses. First, different theoretical perspectives on the nature of culture and its effects are considered. Second, a wide range of learning and developmental phenomena are examined where “culture” (or some element of it) has been seen to play an influential role. The course content reflects the fact that “culture” means different things to different people and is conceptualized at many different levels of organization, from the national and supra-national (e.g., Asian vs. Western) to home, family, and local community. The readings have been drawn primarily from psychology, including social psychology, but will also include books and journals in education, educational psychology, anthropology, and sociology.

The Official MSU Course Description
Since this is a relatively new teaching assignment for me, I include the MSU description to indicate my point of departure in structuring the course.

Theories and research in cultural psychology. Relations among culture, learning, and human development in school and other settings such as family, community, and work. Implications for educational practice.

Course Readings
There are no assigned books to purchase for the course; all readings for the course will be available for download from the course D2L site or in some cases available for on-line reading via the Magic library systems (as “e-books”). Though there is an ocean of high-quality scholarly work on culture and its effects on learning and development and it would be easy to include many more readings than I have, I have generally restricted weekly assignments to a about 50
pages each week. I set this limit because I recognize and take seriously our human limits in reading and comprehending scholarly text. That work takes time and attention, both of which are limited in students’ lives.

An overview of readings for the following week will be given at the end of each class and/or via e-mail between classes. Some readings are chapters from books and may present us with the “book problem” (that is, the challenge of making sense of one piece of a larger argument or text). Depending on your interests, you may become more interested in some readings than others. When your interest rises, see me about pointers to reading that author more widely and/or deeply.

Class Discussions
The core work of the course involves reading and collectively making sense of the assigned texts. Unless I indicate otherwise in advance, you should expect that we will allot time about equally to the ideas in each assigned text each week. You should come prepared to discuss all the readings. As you read the texts, please anticipate the upcoming class discussions and make note of ideas and passages that you want to focus on.

Generally, I will try to manage our discussions each week so that (1) ideas and issues that I see as crucial in each reading get addressed, AND (2) the ideas and passages that you have identified as significant or problematic also get addressed. Managing “the discussion agenda” takes work; I view it as one of the most significant and challenging acts of teaching at the doctoral level. In the course, we will explore various ways of “setting the agenda” before class, which will involve me communicating to you and each of you communicating to me. But do not come to class expecting that I will “lecture” on the readings, because that won’t happen. When I do “present” content, my presentations will be of short duration—and then we will return to discussion.

Analytic Writing (on assigned class readings)
Each student will select at least two assigned readings on two different weeks, write an analytic summary of the article or book chapter, and assist me in directing the class discussion of that reading. This means that everyone needs to review the assigned topics and specific readings listed below to make an informed judgment on two “good” choices. Here “good” relates to content, but it may also involve other factors like the timing of the assigned reading. We will work together to maximize our “coverage” of the entire collection of readings. Perfect coverage may not be possible. Your choices of readings are due by Wednesday, January 24th, in the middle of Week 3. Please submit your choices via e-mail (to the address above).

Additional short writing may be assigned during the semester, but these assignments (if given) will not require much time to complete.

Course Project
The bulk of your course work described above centers on the readings that we read and discuss collectively as a class. The course project, however, is where you can explore your individual
interests in the relations between culture and learning and development (CLP), with guidance and support from me. Collectively, your projects are the divergent part of the course, as complement to the shared, convergent part—what we work on together. Some class time will be given for learning about each others’ projects—from topic/focus selection to “findings.” Interesting points of overlap and convergence may emerge from these discussions; they have in past semesters. Whether there is convergence of content or not, the insights and readings from your project work will likely help to others in class.

The project is structured in three parts: (1) Identifying a topic/focus, (2) developing a project plan, and (3) writing up your work. An introduction to each part is given below; additional guidance, especially for Parts 2 and 3, may be given in class.

Success on the project will require some discipline from you to allot some time regularly for project work. I have designed the the course with the assumption that you are allotting some thinking, reading, and/or writing time to your course project most every week.

Part I: The first step sounds easy, presuming that I am right and you do have personal interests to explore within CLP. But from doctoral teaching experience, one challenge that you may face is feeling sure about your initial topic/focus early in the semester, because you may have a number of different, if related interests. So I have no problem with flexibility on topics and topic change: You can change your stated focus, as long as it happens pretty early in the semester. Questioning and/or changing topics is no weakness; it is a natural part of learning. But the later a substantial change comes in the semester, the harder it will be to complete parts 2 and 3.

Completion of Part 1 involves composing and submitting a paragraph (~½ a page or more) that describes the CLP phenomenon you want to explore, why you want to explore it, its past history in your work (if there is one), the question or focus that will guide your work, and the kind of published work you are hoping to find, read, and learn from. Please start thinking about this as soon as you can (e.g., as you review the assigned readings and reflect on your own work).

Part 2: I have also learned in my doctoral teaching that some intermediate product (and an associated deadline for submission) leads to better, more satisfying project work. One purpose of Part 2 is to put you in the position where you impose some structure on the topic expressed in Part 1. I hope that structure supports your successful completion of the project (Part 3). Another purpose is to communicate the shape of your inquiry and thinking to me so that I can give you feedback and guidance before “crunch time” in the semester.

Completion of Part 2 involves: (1) listing your references in correct APA format, and indicating which you have read, which you have skimmed, and which you have not yet spent any focused time with; (2) providing an outline of the sections that you intend to include in Part 3; and (3) drafting some sections where you have done enough thinking to write some coherent text (e.g., your motivation to look into your CLP focus).

A word to the wise: The more that you can do in Part 2, the easier it will be to complete your project. Experience has shown that very often students think that they have little to say while they are “in the middle of things.” But once they sit down to write, more content appears than they expected, even as their thinking and reading is still “in process.”
Part 3: The goal for Part 3, the “completion” of your project, is that you produce the best, most useful project you can in the time that you have before the end of the semester. In most cases, your project will really not be complete at the end of the semester, but will have a future in the work that you are pursuing, in and outside of graduate school. Please try to embrace that image of writing a paper as a positive step forward, not as your final thinking on your topic.

The first question that students generally ask about course projects is about how long they should be. This question usually arises from the anxiety attached to writing (e.g., can I write that much?). It is my practice to appreciate the concern behind this question but to deflect it; I stay away from definite answers. For one thing, the written length of projects don’t always correlate strongly and positively with quality. What I want to read (and what I think you want to produce) is a well-structured paper that expresses the significant ideas and findings that you have found in your project work—to date. I think that you will have the experience that many others do when you begin to write: If you have done your work in Part 2, you may be surprised at how much more you have to say in Part 3.

If the plan works well, you can use your Part 2 outline as a good initial structure for Part 3. I say “initial,” because I would be surprised if the process of writing Part 3 did not include some additional content that was not foresee in your Part 2 outline. If so, you just need to adjust your Part 2 plan to accommodate your “new” content.

Due Dates:
- Part 1: **Friday, March 2nd** (week 8)
- Part 2: **Friday, March 23rd** (week 10)
- Part 3: **Wednesday, May 2nd** (Exam Week)

Course Evaluation
In determining your final grade for the course, I will draw on three sources—the quality of your participation in class discussion (including the evidence that you worked hard to understand the content of assigned readings), the grades on your analytic summaries, and the grade on your course project. (I will provide qualitative feedback on Parts 1 and 2 of the projects, but only Part 3 will be assigned a numerical grade.) I will weight participation, analytic summaries, and course project about equally, with somewhat more weight placed on participation because we meet so often and discuss so extensively.

Weather & Other Causes of Absences
MSU calls the semester from January through April the “Spring” semester, but as you know, this is a serious misnomer. “Winter” semester would be entirely more accurate. Because winter in Michigan is real, we must expect that we will have “weather events” on some Monday(s). But a very serious weather event is required for me to cancel class. Unless we are having a blizzard or the roads are all solid ice, I will hold class in 132 Erickson. But because we have class in 132, you can participate remotely if you need to. Everyone in class will open a Beam account to support remote participation via the robots in 132 as needed.

If a extreme weather does happen, I will send a note by noon on Monday canceling class. What is more likely is that what I consider “extreme” weather will not happen, but snow and ice will.
If you feel that you cannot get to class on any Monday evening for any reason, please send me an e-mail **by noon** so that I know you will not be physically in class. In most all cases, you should be able to “beam” in and participate remotely. If for any reason, you cannot participate either physically or remotely, your first step in figuring out what you missed is to talk to a fellow student. This is important so that you can be prepared for the next class meeting. After that discussion, if you have additional questions, check with me.

**Schedule of Class Sessions**
**(Topics & Readings)**

**Week 1, January 8**th: Introduction
To the course
The basic triangle: Culture—learning & development—schooling
Culture: what is it?
   Students’ initial definitions
   Intersections: Culture in/vs. race, gender, and class
Learning and development: two related processes of cognitive
Basic questions:
   • What is culture? What are the elements or tenets of any particular culture?
   • How does culture socialize its members in non-deterministic ways?
   • How does culture shape schooling and people’s views of schooling?
   • How does schooling align or conflict with learning and development outside of school?

**Readings:** Bruner (listed below) sent in advance of class.

**Week 2, January 15**th: NO CLASS, MLK Birthday & University Holiday
Work on your Week 3 readings
Do something good to improve the world
Good day to think about the historical relations among culture & power, learning & development, and schooling, in the U.S. and other countries

**Week 3, January 22**nd: Conceptual and Theoretical Issues: Culture, Learning, and Development
Levels/types of meaning for “culture”
What is a “cultural psychology”?
How does culture influence development? How does it influence learning, particularly via schooling?
Conceptualizations of influence; implicit message and explicit mechanisms
Social practices as a conceptual unit
Intersections in culture: race, gender, and class

**Readings:**

Rogoff (2003). *The cultural nature of human development*, Chapter 1: “Orienting concepts and ways of understanding the cultural nature of human development” (34 pages)

**Other related readings (not required):**


**Week 4, January 29th**: Technology and cognition: Generational effects of digital technology and the internet

- Digital technology and practices in U.S. culture
- Digital “tools” as mediators
- Digital effects on learning and development (cognitive processes and social interactions)
- Dating and mating as a cultural practice being transformed by digital technology

**Readings:**

- Turkle (2001). *Alone together*, Chapter 8: “Always on” [Most of the book is available on-line from MSU (e-book on Magic); Turkle also has TED talk (via Google)]

**Other related readings (not required):**

**Week 5, February 5th**: Overview: Culture, Power, & Schooling

- Exploring the meaning of power in education (especially in the institution of schooling)
- How power is expressed in the shape and practice of schooling
- How social and economic inequality is expressed and addressed in schooling

**Readings:**


**Other related readings (not required):**


**Week 6, February 12th**: Stereotypes and their effects

- Stereotypes as partially invisible phenomena
- Stereotypes as developmental phenomena
- Stereotype threat as an inferred psychological state
- Stereotypes about “ability” and who is likely to be successful in different disciplines and lines of work
- Efforts to counteract stereotype threat

**Readings:**

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Other related readings (not required):

**Week 7, February 19th:** Identity & Ethnicity I: Concepts, Connections, and Educational Effects
How have researchers conceptualized the term of “identity”? How does identity become visible and observable? Relations between surrounding culture and individual identity

Readings:
- Gee (2000). Identity as an analytic lens for research in education, *Review of research in education*. (23 pages)

Other related readings (not required):
- E. Wenger, *Communities of Practice*, selections (1998)

**Week 8, February 26th:** Ethnicity/Identity II: Research on the Effects of Ethnicity/Ethnic Identity
The cultural construction of ethnicity and change over time
The US Census, its effort to classify ethnic identity, and change over time
Ethnicity as a “variable” in psychological studies
Differences in academic achievement within ethnic groups

Readings:
- Phinney (1996). When we talk about American ethnic groups, what do we mean?, *American Psychologist*. (8 pages)
- Jones, N. A. (date?). *Update on the U.S. Census Bureau’s Race and Ethnicity Research for the 2020 Census*.—students don’t have this listed on their copy, but is in D2L

Other related readings (not required):
The MMRI (multi-dimensional model of racial identity)

Course Project, Part I due; Friday, March 2nd.

**SPRING BREAK: NO CLASS ON March 5th**

**Week 9, March 12th:** Ethnicity/Identity III: The Socialization of Ethnicity
How does the surrounding culture shape ethnic identity?
How have psychologists tried to explore and understand different mechanisms of enculturation?

**Readings:**

**Other related readings (not required):**

**Week 10, March 19th: The Nature of Implicit Bias**
- The nature of implicit racial associations (in relation to “attitudes”)
- The difference between stereotypes and implicit racial associations
- Assessing implicit bias
- Implicit bias in the classroom

**Readings:**
- Warikoo et al. (2016). Examining racial basis in education, *Educational researcher*. (5 pages)

**Other related readings (not required):**
- More on the IAT, the *Implicit Associations Test*

**Course Project, Part 2 due; Friday, March 23rd.**

**Week 11, March 26th: Alignment and non-alignment between home/community and school**
- Why “alignment” between home and school is important
- Examples of non-alignment between home/community and school
- Classroom practices that are culturally-specific
- Cultural resources & their organization in the community: “funds of knowledge”

**Readings:**

**Other related readings (not required):**

**Week 12, April 2nd: Critical consciousness and its effects**
- The critical consciousness construct proposed by Freire
- How does critical consciousness relate to political engagement and activism?

**Readings:**
- Freire (1970), *Pedagogy of the oppressed*, Chapter 2. (9 pages)

Other related readings (not required):

**Week 13, April 9th: West & East: “Individualism” vs. “collectivism”; differences in basic cognitive processes**

Is there one universal set of cognitive capabilities or does thinking vary between cultures? How does the culture’s sense of cognitive ability get expressed in its schools?

Readings:

Other related readings (not required):

**Week 14, April 16th: Bi-cultural identity, negotiation and conflict**

What happens to identity when one lives at the intersection of two cultures? What is the nature of a bi-cultural identity? How do people negotiate and experience tension between different aspects of their identity?

Readings:

Other related readings (not required):

**Week 15, April 23rd: Wrap-Up and Course Projects**

Review of our semester’s work
- Highlights and missing issues, and other issues of course evaluation
- Project presentations?

Course Project, Part 3 due; Wednesday, May 2nd.
Full References for Assigned Readings