Special Topics in Psychology: Critical Issues in Educational Psychology

PSY 595 Section 900
3 Credit Hours
Jun. 8 – Jul. 31

Instructor Information

Dr. Kevin Pugh
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Email: kevin.pugh@unco.edu
Phone: 351-2989
Office Hours: I am available via email most of the time except weekends & holidays.

Course Purpose

Is direct instruction or discovery learning more effective? For who and for what? Is it a good idea or bad idea to hold teachers accountable for student outcomes? Why or why not? Should we teach creativity? Can we teach creativity?

These are a few of the critical questions educators face today. The purpose of this class is to help educators develop a deeper understanding of such critical questions by exploring their history and examining current theory and research.

Objectives

• Students will gain a deeper understanding of topics currently being debated in the field of education. Specifically,
  o Students will learn to see these topics from multiple perspectives.
  o Students will learn the latest research pertinent to these topics, helping them to distinguish valid arguments from myths.
• Students will develop interest in learning about and pursuing certain topics.

Course Content and Description

We will start out studying the following hot topics over the first 4 weeks:

• School reform models – accountability vs. capacity building models.
• Instructional models - direct instruction vs. constructivist models.
• Role of assessment in education.

Then I will let you choose to investigate 4 of the following topics (we’ll cover one each week):

• Creativity.
• Critical thinking/21st Century skills.
• Evidence-based practice (what kind of research should guide decision making?)
• Learning styles.
• Moral/character education.
• Technology in education.
• Testing
• Theories of intelligence.
• Another topic the class is interested in.

Emphasis will be placed on understanding these topics from multiple perspectives and in light of current theory and research.

Course Materials


All other reading materials will be made available in Blackboard as PDFs.

Course Requirements

Contribution to Discussion

A primary focus of this course is *discussing* the topics of debate. Each week I will post discussion questions in Blackboard and you will be asked to contribute to the discussion.

Hot Topic Blogs

You get to choose three topics on which you will write a blog. Think of this as if you are a well-known Internet blogger (maybe you are!) and this is your chance to go off on three hot topics. Share *useful information* about the topic (so your audience will become more informed) and share *your opinion, insights, and/or experience* (so your audience will be engaged in what you write). You will post the blogs in Blackboard, but I also encourage you to think about posting them publicly on a blog site or social media site like Facebook.

One requirement of your blog is that I want you to *identify and share at least one information resource* NOT included in my course materials. This resource may be another blog, a YouTube video, a TED Talk, a research article, a book, or other such resource. Either attach the resource to your blog or provide a link. If this is not possible (e.g., if it is a book), then just provide a reference for the resource. The purpose of this is to expand our knowledge base and conversation.

The blog should be the equivalent of about two typed, double-spaced pages.

Course Paper or Project

You have a choice between (1) writing a paper about one of the topics or (2) conducting a project related to one of the topics.

*Paper option:* The paper should be a serious analysis of one of the topics. It should discuss research and theory related to multiple perspectives on the topic. But the paper also needs to take a position and make an argument for that position. Thus, I want you to show you have a sound
understanding of the complexities and varying opinions surrounding a topic of debate, but I also want you to put forth an argument for a certain opinion or synthesis of opinions.

The paper should be 15-20 pages and will be evaluated according to the following criteria:

1. Proper Grammar, Punctuation, and Spelling.
2. Writing Style (e.g., organization of ideas, smoothness of transitions, clarity of expression, proper use of APA style)
3. Validity of Arguments (Are assertions backed up with proper reference to the theory and research; are appropriate citations provided?)
4. Comprehensiveness (Are multiple perspectives and opinions presented in an accurate manner?)
5. Critical Analysis (Are these perspective analyzed in a critical way and a sound argument put forward?)
6. Creative Insight (Are unique ideas put forth, problems identified, or syntheses provided?)

Project Option: Some people are more doers than writers. If you prefer, you can do a project related to one of the topics. This assignment is necessarily more open-ended and less clearly defined than the writing option. If you chose the project option, I will have you discuss your ideas with me. Projects may include such things as,

- Experimenting with a topic (e.g., trying out a creative approach to education or comparing the results of direct instruction approach to a constructivist approach).
- Creating a documentary or short film on a topic (e.g., interviewing students, teachers, administrators, and/or parents about a topic).
- Creating a website that brings together lots of ideas and perspectives on a topic.
- Organizing an action or discussion group (e.g., organizing a group at your school to create a moral/character development plan for the school).

If you choose the project option, I will have you submit a report explaining what was done. I will also have you submit artifacts illustrating the project.

Points Breakdown

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>#</th>
<th>Pts Each</th>
<th>Total Pts</th>
<th>% of Grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Contribution to Discussions</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>%33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hot Topics Blogs</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>%25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Course Paper/Project</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>%42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>240</strong></td>
<td><strong>%100</strong></td>
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Grade Scale

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>%</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>94% and above</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>90-93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>87-89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>84-86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B-</td>
<td>80-83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C+</td>
<td>77-79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>74-76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C-</td>
<td>70-73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D+</td>
<td>67-69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>64-66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Below 60%</td>
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</tbody>
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# Class Schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Start Date</th>
<th>Readings</th>
<th>Assignments</th>
<th>Due*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Jun. 8</td>
<td><strong>Historical Overview</strong>&lt;br&gt;Reading Assignment: Berliner, <em>Educational Psychology: Searching for Essence throughout a Century of Influence.</em></td>
<td>Weekly Discussion Questions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Jun. 22</td>
<td><strong>Direct Instruction vs. Discovery Learning</strong>&lt;br&gt;Reading Assignment: Hirsch, <em>Reality’s Revenge</em>; Zhao, <em>World-Class Learners (Introduction, Ch. 4-5, 7-8)</em>; Hewitt, <em>We Don’t Need No Education.</em></td>
<td>Hot Topic Blog #1&lt;br&gt;Weekly Discussion Questions</td>
<td>6/26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Jul. 6</td>
<td>TBD</td>
<td>Hot Topic Blog #2&lt;br&gt;Weekly Discussion Questions</td>
<td>7/10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Jul. 13</td>
<td>TBD</td>
<td>Course Project DRAFT&lt;br&gt;Weekly Discussion Questions</td>
<td>7/17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Jul. 20</td>
<td>TBD</td>
<td>Course Project PEER REVIEW&lt;br&gt;Hot Topic Blog #3&lt;br&gt;Weekly Discussion Questions</td>
<td>7/22&lt;br&gt;7/24</td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Jul. 27</td>
<td>TBD</td>
<td>Course Project FINAL&lt;br&gt;Weekly Discussion Questions</td>
<td>7/31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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*By 11:59pm on the listed date.

**Note:** You can complete assignments early, but not late. So if you know you will be gone or without Internet access, work ahead. If a sudden emergency or illness occurs, let me know and I will make exceptions. This schedule is subject to change at the discretion of the instructor.
Reading List


Additional Readings

(the class will choose 4 topics to study and readings will likely come from the options below)

Creativity


Critical Thinking/21st Century Skills


Intelligence


Sternberg, R. J., & Grigorenko, E. L. (2000). *Teaching for successful intelligence: To increase student learning and achievement.* Arlington He


**Learning Styles**


**Measurement/Evidence-Based Practice**


**Moral/Character Education**


**Technology**


**Testing**


Syllabus Statements

The University of Northern Colorado’s Student Code of Conduct
http://www.unco.edu/dos/Conduct/codeofconduct.html and Honor Code
http://www.unco.edu/dos/Conduct/academicIntegrity.html strictly prohibit any form of academic misconduct. Academic misconduct includes but is not limited to plagiarism, cheating, fabrication, and knowingly or recklessly encouraging or making possible any act of plagiarism, cheating, or fabrication. Academic misconduct is an unacceptable activity in scholarship and is in conflict with academic and professional ethics and morals. All incidents of alleged plagiarism or other forms of academic dishonesty will be investigated and violations of academic integrity will result in a consequence that may be as severe as an F in the class and a recommendation for expulsion. For more information on plagiarism and appropriate paraphrasing, please see:
http://www.unco.edu/dos/Conduct/codeofconduct.html (Student Code of Conduct Index / III. Student Conduct / D. Academic Integrity)

Accommodations Statement
Students who believe that they may need accommodations in this class are encouraged to contact the Disability Support Services, voice/TTY (970) 351-2289, or fax (970) 351-4166, or visit www.unco.edu/dss as soon as possible to ensure that accommodations are implemented in a timely fashion.

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