Overview:
NSED 120, Classroom Interactions, explores social, political, economic, and historical contexts of the education system in the nation and in California. The course serves as an introduction to the field of education in general, and schools in particular. The course is not about how to teach or what to teach. It is about why to teach, and what this question means to people in the class, individually and collectively. The Classroom Interactions course is often a pre-requisite to a teacher credential program.

Assigned Readings:
A series of articles and chapters from different books can be found in Resources in CROPS.

Recommended Reading:
California State Content Area Standards: [www.ctc.ca.gov/cstpublication/cstpreport.pdf](http://www.ctc.ca.gov/cstpublication/cstpreport.pdf)

Objectives:
Using the guiding question, “What’s it like?” students will read, discuss, and write about the world of schools, teachers, and diverse student populations. Upon successful completion of this class, students will be able to:
- Describe various forms of human diversity found in schools.
- Explain how individual differences impact teaching and learning.
- Describe methods of teaching across cultural and linguistic differences.
- Interpret observed connections between teaching theory and school practices.

Course Requirements: All assignments are due on the date indicated by the instructor, and may be formatted according to APA, MLA, or Chicago (Turabian) styles. Assignments are to be typed using 12 font and spaced at 1.5 lines unless otherwise indicated by the instructor. Points will be deducted for incorrect spelling, grammar, syntax, or format. ADA students are requested to make an appointment with the instructor during the first week of class in order to assure that necessary arrangements be made.

Academic Integrity:
Each student in this course is expected to abide by the University of California, Merced’s Academic Honesty Policy. For this course, collaboration is allowed in the following instances: Reading Group assignments and the Contemporary Issues and Solutions Project. All other assignments are to be completed by the student submitting the work.

You are encouraged to study together and to discuss information and concepts covered in
lecture and the sections with other students. You can give "consulting" help to or receive "consulting" help from such students. However, this permissible cooperation should

**Syllabus: continued**

never involve one student having possession of a copy of all or part of work done by someone else, in the form of an e-mail, an e-mail attachment file, a diskette, or a hard copy. Should copying occur, both the student who copied work from another student and the student who gave material to be copied will both automatically receive a zero for the assignment. Penalty for violation of this Policy can also be extended to include failure of the course and University disciplinary action.

The information listed above is for individual assignments. There are group assignments in this class which require full cooperation and participation of all group members. If a group member has not completed and/or contributed his/her portion of group work by the due date of the assignment, that group member will neither receive any credit for the assignment nor have any opportunity to make up the work at a later date.

**Accommodations for Students with Disabilities:** The University of California Merced is committed to ensuring equal academic opportunities and inclusion for students with disabilities based on the principles of independent living, accessible universal design and diversity. Students with special needs should contact Angie Cendejas (acendejas@ucmerced.edu) or Jesus Jimenez (jjimenez22@ucmerced.edu) in the School of Natural Sciences Office - Student Advising. Requests for academic accommodations are to be made during the first three weeks of the semester, except for unusual circumstances. Students are encouraged to register with Disability Services Center to verify their eligibility for appropriate accommodations.

**Assignments:**

1. **Attendance and Participation:** It is expected that students attend all direct instruction sessions and to fully participate in the online threaded discussions. In addition, all students will contribute to group assignments, including reading groups, subject matter posters presentations, and the contemporary issues project. (15 points per week x 16 weeks) for 240 points, maximum.) Please note: attendance points will be given for completion of online assignments. See schedule.

2. **Reading Groups:** Students will form small study groups (n=3-4). Each week, each group will divide the assigned reading, and each participant will be responsible for sharing the information, via discussion and a detailed outline that is turned into the week’s Point Person, that he/she read with the rest of the group. Each group will assign a point person for each week. This person will submit in the Assignment Box in CROPS the following: 1) a synopses of each participant’s reading, which may be in either a narrative or a detailed outline form; 2) a response from each student answering the focus questions (s) which includes information from the entire reading, not just the part individuals read; and 3) a statement (a couple of sentences) from the Point Person what each participant contributed to the week’s assignment. If a group member is late turning in the work to the Point Person, then that student will not
receive points for that week’s reading. Each group member will email the point person with any parts of the assignment. The point person will email everything as one package -- one attachment – to the appropriate place under Assignments in CROPS. It is suggested that the point person change each week. Discussion among participants may take place in person or online. If you disagree with the information, please indicate why and what you will do in its place. The intention of this assignment is to do the readings, indicate to the instructor you have done the readings, and that you are engaging in a reflective process to apply the information via activities in class or projects. (30 points per assignment x 9 for 270 points maximum.)

3. **Threaded Discussions:** There will be three online discussions based on articles related to the objectives of the course. After reading the article, the student will post a one-page response to the article. What is your opinion of the pros and cons of the topic? After posting your initial response, each student will respond to 9 other postings that must be at least ½ page in length. These additional postings may be in response to other students’ initial postings or may be adding a thread to an existing discussion. *Please note: students may make no more than 3 postings in a 24 hour period.* (50 points per threaded discussion for 150 points, maximum.)

4. **“What’s It Like?” Narrative:** Each student will write a 4-5 page narrative paper reflecting his/her personal response to this question. What was education like for you? The response may be a personal perspective or a general one. (Students who came from another country or who have a primary language (first language spoken) other than English are strongly encouraged to tell their experiences in education.) The papers will be posted online. Then students will choose 5 narratives and write a response that is at least ½ page in length. If you disagree with a classmate’s paper, you must do so respectfully. (60 points maximum for the essay and 5 points each for responding to 5 essays for a subtotal of 25 points for the responses for a total of 85 points, maximum.)

5. **School Board Meeting:** Attend a local school board meeting. (In Merced it may be at the elementary level or high school level.) Write a 1-2 page paper what you saw. What was discussed? How were decisions, if any, made? How were non-board members allowed to participate? Overall, what did you learn about how public schools are governed? *Please note: School board meetings are held once or twice a month. You may attend a meeting any time during the semester.* (25 points.)

6. **Contemporary Issues and Solutions Project:** In groups of 3-4, students will choose a schooling issue that is of interest to the group. Examine its historical and contemporary manifestations. Research and then prepare a presentation of the issue which will be presented in class. The purpose of the presentation will be to teach the information each group has gathered and then to stimulate a rousing, intelligent discussion of possible solutions to the issue or problem. Each student will respond
to the presentations other than his/her own by posing possible solutions. The more creative, the better! (200 points maximum for the presentation plus 30 points for Syllabus: continued)

responding to other groups’ presentations for a maximum of 230 points.)

Schedule:
Please note: All assignments are due the NIGHT BEFORE the class each week.

August 29: Opening Session

August 29-September 4: Historical Perspectives to Education
Assignment due on September 4 by 11 PM
Reading Group: Introduction and Chapter 1 from Teaching to Change the World
Focus Questions:
1) In describing the demographic transformation of America’s public schools, Oakes and Lipton assert: “Multiculturalism is simply a fact—a condition of culture. Nonwhite and immigrant voices and languages will be either heard or ignored, but they will not be silenced or assimilated out of existence.” Why might some teachers disagree with this assertion? What might they say about the importance of assimilation? How would you respond to such teachers? What might you say to get them to some teachers demonstrate such resistance to recognizing multiculturalism as a demographic fact?

2) Oakes and Lipton note that economic inequality, inequality in the basics of life, and racial, geographic, and economic isolation characterize the lives of many of America’s schoolchildren. In your opinion, how do these inequalities impact students’ experiences with schooling? What connections do you see between these inequalities and the inequalities that exist within schools? Is it enough for teachers to simply recognize that such inequalities exist? If not, what can teachers do to mitigate the negative impact of these broader economic and social inequalities? Recall your own experiences with schooling. How, if at all, did out-of-school inequalities impact your performance in school?

September 5-September 11: Historical Perspectives to Education
Assignment due September 11 by 11 PM
Reading Group: Chapter 2 from Teaching to Change the World
Focus Question: In discussing Thomas Jefferson’s views on public education, Oakes and Lipton note that his plan for the schooling of slaves was limited to industrial and vocational training and that he “was not confident that African Americans ‘could be made the intellectual equals of white men’.” It was this thinking that supported much of segregation’s legal status until the mid-twentieth century. What is the impact of this legacy on schooling today? In particular, do you think that current disproportionate dropout rates, behavior referrals, and academic underperformance are related to this historically unequal access to educational opportunities? If so,
explain how.

Schedule: continued

September 12-September 18: Historical Perspectives
Assignment due on September 18 by 11 PM
Reading Group: “Democratic Citizen” by Gert Biesta
Focus Questions: In what ways have our schools promoted democracy? Do our schools promote the individual or cooperation among students? In your opinion, what are the pros and cons of both perspectives?

September 19-September 25: Social Perspectives
Assignment due on September 25 by 11 PM
Please note: No in-class meeting for September 19. Students will take part in an online threaded discussion from September 19-25. All postings are due by 11 PM on September 25. You may make no more than 3 postings per day.
Threaded Discussion #1: Can Public Schools Produce Good Citizens? The article, which lists the pros and cons of the issue is available under course documents in CROPs. Read the article and write a 1 page response that gives your perspectives on the issue. Then make at least 9 responses – each about 1/2 page in length – to responses your classmates have submitted.
Work on What’s It Like Narratives

September 26-October 2: Social Perspectives
Assignment due on October 2 by 11 PM.
Reading Group: Chapter 3 from Teaching to Change the World
Focus Question: Middle-school bilingual coordinator Mauro Bautista states: “As a social justice educator, I challenge the traditional practice of excluding people of color, especially women of color, from the curriculum.” In your view, are people of color (particularly women of color) really excluded from mainstream curricula? Discuss what might be thought of as “multiple meanings” of “exclusion” and the effects of the various forms of exclusion. To what extent are the experiences, contributions, and languages of people of color incorporated into the curriculum?
Work on What’s it Like Narratives

October 3-October 9: Social Perspectives
Assignments due on October 9 by 11 PM
Reading Groups: Chapter 2 from Comprehensive Multicultural Education
Focus Question: The last page of the scanned document has a list to compare and contrast. Do numbers 1-4.
Post What’s It Like Narratives in Discussion Forum, Class Discussion, What’s It Like Narratives

October 10-October 16: Social Perspectives
Assignments due on October 16 by 11 PM
Reading Groups: Chapter 5 from Dismantling Contemporary Deficit Thinking
Focus Questions: In what ways have you seen or experienced deficit thinking, as
described by Richard Valencia, the author of the chapter, in your own schooling?

Schedule, continued

Responses to 5 What’s It Like Narratives. Go to Discussion Forum, Class Discussion, What’s It Like Narrative Responses. Be sure you place your responses in Narrative Responses and not under the original postings of narratives.

October 17-October 23: Political Perspectives
Assignment due on October 23 by 11 PM
Reading Groups: “Still Separate, Still Unequal” by Jonathan Kozal
Focus Question: Kozal teaches in New York. To what extent does the situation he describes in the article exist in California? Support your view.

October 24-October 30: Political Perspectives
Assignment due on October 30 by 11 PM.
Please note: There is no class meeting on October 24. Threaded Discussion #2 will be completed. All postings must be received by 11:00 PM by October 30 to receive credit. You may make no more than 3 responses in a 24 hour period.
Threaded Discussion #2: Can Federal Initiatives Rescue Failing Schools? The article, which lists the pros and cons of the issue is available under course documents in CROPS. Read the article and write a 1 page response that gives your perspectives on the issue. Then make at least 9 responses – each about 1/2 page in length – to responses your classmates have submitted.

October 31-November 6: Political Perspectives
Assignment due on November 6 by 11 PM.
Reading Groups: “A Report Card to Evaluate Educational Capacity” by Howard Coleman and John Fischetti
Focus Question: To what extent do you believe the community should be involved in policy-making in public schools?

November 7-November 13: Political Perspectives
Immigration Panel: Groups prepare and present their issues on immigration. The presentations are given on November 14.

November 14-November 20: Political Perspectives
Assignment due on November 20 by 11 PM
Reading Groups: “School Finance” from “Education Weekly”
Focus Question: Should school financing be determined at the Federal, State, or Local Level? How can financing take place so that each child is provided with an equal education? What does “equal education” mean?

November 21-November 27: Political Perspectives
Students take part in a threaded discussion online. Please note that November 27 is Thanksgiving. You are encouraged to complete the assignment early in order to have a Thanksgiving break.
Assignment due: November 27
Threaded Discussion #3: Do High Stakes Testing Improve Learning? The article, which lists the pros and cons of the issue is available under course documents in CROPS. Read the article and write a 1 page response that gives your perspectives on the issue. Then make at least 9 responses – each about 1/2 page in length – to responses your classmates have submitted.

November 28-December 4: Political Perspectives
Assignment due on December 4 by 11 PM
School Boards: Attend a school board meeting. Write a 1-2 page paper what you saw and learned. What was discussed? How were decisions, if any, made? How were non-board members allowed to participate? Overall, what did you learn about how public schools are governed? Please note: School board meetings are held once a month. You may attend a meeting any time during the semester.

December 5-December 11: Political Perspectives
No assignment due on December 11.
Contemporary Issues Projects Presentations: Time will be spent in class preparing for the final presentations. These presentations should be professional quality, one that could be given at a professional conference.

December 12: Issues and Solutions
Contemporary Issues and Solutions Projects Presentations. Presentations are in class December 12. Solutions to the presentations need to be posted in Discussion Forum, Class Discussions, Solutions in order to receive credit. All Solutions are due by 11 PM December 12.
Course Wrap-up
Please note: The schedule is subject to change due to extenuating circumstances. All due effort will be made to notify students of any changes well in advance of due dates.

Class meeting dates:
August 29
September 5
September 12
September 26
October 3
October 10
October 17
October 31
November 7
November 14
November 21
December 5
December 12

No class meeting dates:
September 19
October 24
November 28 (Thanksgiving break)