

Course Name: MEd 428 (TEACH ED 328) Dynamics of Middle School

Course Syllabus

Time: Tuesday, 4:00 – 6:30

Location: Annenberg G02

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Course Description

The objective of this course is for students to understand and explore the dynamic environment of middle schools and young adolescents, and to consider the impact of middle school principles, structures and practices on classroom learning and instruction. Students will examine the unique characteristics of middle school learning and the educational needs of young adolescent learners, and they will compare and contrast a variety of middle school models, including policy statements, visions and reform proposals. Students will share and consider their personal experiences, and those of the entire class, as they investigate the many and varied issues that impact any middle school and its community.

Major topics include public policy issues, adolescent development, standards and curriculum, measures of intelligence, learning differences, school structure and culture, instructional relationships and strategies, literacy and reading in the content areas, the development of critical thinking skills, culturally responsive and equitable practices, interdisciplinary instruction, assessment methods, middle school leadership, and technology. Given the important transitions and cognitive milestones that occur during the middle school years, we will consider efforts to strike a balance between rigorous curriculum standards and developmentally appropriate modes of learning. We will consider the views and proposals of many of the parties with an interest in middle grades reform, and students will be given an opportunity to research and share their knowledge of particular subjects.

Northwestern University Conceptual Framework

As active participants in the field of education, our candidates will strive for improvement and innovation, based on inquiry that is grounded in reflection and research. The candidates will have:

A Vision of Learning that focuses on:

- 1.1. understanding student thinking about the subject matter;
- 1.2. reflection and research as a means of learning;
- 1.3. learning as a social practice, which encourages collaborative learning in which people clarify doubts, examine beliefs and work together to address questions and concerns;
- 1.4. authentic experience, where class sessions/assignments are designed to engage students' interests and to have implication for the student beyond the classroom; and
- 1.5. the use of technology to extend learning opportunities and thinking.

A Vision of Learners that focuses on:

- 2.1 lifelong learning and development shaped by social contexts; and
- 2.2 student diversity as a resource for the educational community.

A Vision of Teaching that focuses on:

- 3.1 connection of theory to practice, where the candidates understand that theories suggest questions and ideas about practice, and practice suggests modifications of theory; and
- 3.2 professional conduct that is responsible and ethical.

Dispositions (as implied by the NUCF):

- 1) Willingness to systematically reflect on one's own practice. (NUCF 1.2, 3.1)
- 2) Commitment to understanding students' thinking about the subject matter. (NUCF 1.1)
- 3) Belief in the value of seeing students as individuals. (NUCF 1.3, 2.1, 2.2)
- 4) Enthusiasm for learning and teaching through collaboration. (NUCF 1.3)
- 5) Willingness to take the risks associated with engaging students' interests through real world experiences. (NUCF 1.4)
- 6) Energy for incorporating innovations in teaching, including the use of new technologies. (NUCF 1.5)
- 7) Commitment to conducting one's self professionally and responsibly. (NUCF 3.2)

Course Objectives

1. To encourage the habits of reflection, questioning, and inquiry. Students will consider their own experiences and share different visions for the nature of middle schools.
2. To develop and articulate a systemic understanding of instructional and curriculum practices in middle school education. Students will examine learner-teacher relationships, culture/community contexts, the unique developmental need of middle grades students, middle school curriculum and standards, and public policy issues.
3. To help teacher candidates guide middle school student learning. Students will examine several components of learning, development, and instruction, including inquiry, metacognition, performance standards, equity, service learning, and assessment.

Teaching Approach

The class will pursue the above objectives through shared discussion and reflection, as well as group activities, presentations, projects, and the exploration of texts, analysis, personal experiences, and public policy statements. The goal of the course is for you to become conversant with the various dynamics that together make a vibrant and viable middle school.

Course Requirements

1. Attend and be actively involved at all classes. Classroom discussion, preparation and participation are essential components of this course.
2. Read ahead, and read all assigned texts at least twice before each class. Bring the text to class.
3. In response to each reading assignment:
 - (a) submit a posting to Blackboard (using the Discussion Board and the appropriate Forum) with a two (or three) paragraph description of those parts of the assignment that most intrigue you or suggest a need for further research or consideration, as well as an analysis of some aspect of the reading assignment that can be put to use in your middle school classroom and/or how it is linked to your personal experience in middle schools. These responses should be reflective and analytical (more than a summary of the reading), and must be posted before the end of the day on the Saturday before each class. You are encouraged to ask about things that you would look forward to discussing in class, and may choose to include specific prompts phrased as discussion questions. Please **do not** post responses as a Word document or attachment, but respond by posting your comment directly to the appropriate Forum on Blackboard;

(b) before 9:00 pm on the Monday before each class, log on to Blackboard and respond to one or more of the reflections and/or questions posted by your classmates.

4. At or before the class sessions on April 13 and May 11, submit a written analysis and reflection (limit these responses to 3-4 pages) that summarizes the primary readings to that point, and how they have impacted your understanding of young adolescent learners and middle schools. You may choose to focus on a few specific ideas or to identify common themes, and it is your choice whether the two essays build upon one another or operate as stand-alone commentaries.
5. In-class Presentation. Based on your preferences and other criteria, you will be assigned to research and share with the class your findings on a select topic related to the subject matter of this course. Group assignments and a scoring rubric will be provided.
6. Prepare and submit an eight-to-ten page comprehensive plan for a service learning project that would be appropriate for your middle school students. The project should be designed to involve at least two core subject matter disciplines (such as math and social studies or art) and to engage your students through community interaction, specifically by using the resources and experience of a community service provider. The materials and readings explored in this course, as well as those available from the selected service partner, should be used to prepare a detailed description of two or more of the lessons/activities that will make up the unit. You will also include a comprehensive explanation of why the project is well-suited for middle school students and a description of how the design of the lesson is responsive to the diverse learning styles and abilities of middle grades learners. In addition, the plan should describe the anticipated student outcomes (what students will be able to do) in relation to the integrated curriculum goals, guiding questions and proposed assessments that you choose, and you should explain why you selected the particular service learning/community partner. An interim proposal will be due at the class meeting on April 27th, and a modified proposal incorporating suggested revisions, if any, and new research will be due on May 18th. Further details and an assessment rubric will be provided.

Grading

Successful completion of this course requires attendance at all classes; thorough reading of all assignments; preparing and submitting all discussion and related questions; participating in class activities and discussions; the in-class group presentation; and the final project. Grading rubrics for the in-class presentation and final project will be distributed with those assignments. The final grade will be calculated as follows:

Homework (reading reflections)	25%
Class Participation & Attendance	25%
Group Presentation	25%
Final Project	25%

Assignments and Readings

Weekly assignments and readings will generally be announced at each class session or through group e-mail, and course documents and assignments will be available through the NU Blackboard Course Management System.

<https://courses.northwestern.edu/webapps/login>

Assignment Due Dates: Descriptions of assignments can be found on pp. 3-4 of the syllabus. There are a total of 6 reading reflections. Four are posted to Blackboard and two are written and turned in during class.

- Reading assignments posted to Blackboard for the following dates:
 - April 6
 - April 20
 - April 27
 - May 25

Note: you are encouraged to post to Blackboard and/or to continue commenting on relevant threads, even in weeks where there is no specific requirement. You should also e-mail the instructors with discussion questions at any time.

- Written reading responses turned in for class:
 - April 13
 - either May 4 or May 11, depending on when your group presentation is scheduled.
- Service Learning Project:
 - April 27: Proposals due
 - May 18: Revised proposals/outline due
 - June 1: Final project due (proposals and outline (with instructor comments) must be submitted attached to final paper)
- Group Presentation
 - Presentations in class on one of:
 - May 4 (check in on 4/27)
 - May 11 (check in on 5/4)
 - May 18 (check in 5/11)
 - Presentation outline and bibliography
 - May 4,11 or 18 for all groups