Education 551. Analyzing School Organizations and the Policy Environment
Winter 2015, Educational Leadership and Policy section (v.1/6/15)

Class meetings: Wednesdays 5-8 in 2229 School of Education Building

Instructor: Angeline Spain
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Catalog description: Reviews important contributions to organization theory and emphasizes their application to the administration of schools. Discusses the structure of organizations, the management of work, and the nature of psychological and interpersonal processes in the workplace.

Course overview: With current policy environments pressing American public schools to ensure academic success for all students, educators are increasingly engaging in the collaborative practice of continuous improvement. The collaborative practice of continuous improvement is intended to guide a cyclical process of inquiry, action, and reflection. Key ingredients of this practice include:

- Evaluating instructional practice and student outcomes, by identifying broad patterns of achievement (and non-achievement) and by examining the instructional dynamics that explain those patterns;
- Evaluating the extent to which essential systems are developed, coordinated, and support students' academic success;
- Crafting and implementing programs and strategies to develop and coordinate these interdependent systems; and
- Monitoring instructional performance and outcomes and adapting improvement strategies to further increase students' academic success.

This type of cyclical, continuous improvement is the foundation for "school improvement processes" as mandated by the Michigan Department of Education and many other state departments of education, as well as federal and philanthropic foundation-funded reform initiatives. It also parallels the Deming quality circles commonly seen in the business sector.

Carrying out this leadership work is complex and takes on challenges amply illustrated by efforts to reform public education throughout the 20th and, now, 21st century. To analyze key leadership constraints and opportunities, we turn to theories developed in organizational studies (called in its early years administrative behavior) to guide our analysis of school organizations, the actions of the people that inhabit them, (including teachers, distributed leadership team members, and students), and environmental relationships and resources.
In module 1 of this course we develop familiarity with theories developed in organizational studies and explore how different theories focus our attention on some features of organizations and downplay others. Next, in modules 2-4, we use these frames to explore and assess how educational scholars have characterized the challenges of organizing for instruction and improvement and develop our own analysis of the school's essential systems. In module 2, we focus on the core work of schools: the delivery of the instructional program. In module 3, we hone in on prominent change strategies that have guided instructional improvement efforts in the United States over the past two decades, paying particular attention to dynamics of professional community in implementation processes. With module 4, we conclude with an investigation into the relationships between the policy environment and education organizations. Throughout the course, we will attend to how these systems are developed, coordinated, and function to support ambitious visions for instruction and improved student learning outcomes.

All other required assigned readings will be available on our course CTools site.


Objectives: One objective of EDUC 551 is to establish understandings of a "systems model" of school organization. A second objective is to develop your capabilities to analyze schools' essential systems and their relationships to instructional practice and outcomes. In EDUC 551, you will develop the knowledge and capabilities needed to:

- Analyze a school's instructional program (e.g., curricula, assessments, instructional designs, and instructional technologies), identify areas of improvement or decline in relation to the existing school improvement plan, and recommend revisions to the school improvement plan.
- Analyze a school's professional community (e.g., culture, professional norms, expectations for students, relationships among staff), identify areas of improvement or decline in relation to existing school improvement plan, and recommend revisions to the school improvement plan.
- Analyze the relationship between the school's instructional program and culture (on the one hand) and environmental decisions, trends, and initiatives (on the other) in order to recommend strategies for sustaining school improvement efforts.
Michigan Leadership Standards Addressed: EDUC 551 addresses the elements of Standards 1 and 2 that are focused on the school as an organization, as well as elements of Standard 6 focused on understanding and anticipating decisions, trends, and initiatives in broader environments.

- **1.3:** Candidates understand and can promote continual and sustainable school improvement.
- **1.4:** Candidates understand and can evaluate school progress and revise school plans supported by school stakeholders.
- **2.1:** Candidates understand and can sustain a school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning through collaboration, trust, and a personalized learning environment with high expectations for students.
- **2.2:** Candidates understand and can create and evaluate a comprehensive, rigorous, and coherent curricular and instructional school program.
- **2.4:** Candidates understand and can promote the most effective and appropriate technologies to support teaching and learning in a school environment.
- **6.2:** Candidates understand and can act to influence local, district, state, and national decisions affecting student learning in a school environment.
- **6.3:** Candidates understand and can anticipate and assess emerging trends and initiatives in order to adapt school-based leadership strategies.

Evaluating your performance in EDUC 551:

*Participation in class discussion and in peer feedback teams (15% of final grade):* The exchange of ideas and ways of thinking is critical to an engaging and stimulating course. In EDUC 551, completion of our assigned readings is key to our collective analysis of educational organizations and their policy environments. You are expected to carefully read the assigned readings before class. I encourage you to take notes on the main ideas and arguments in our readings, as well as connections you see with your own experiences. Please come to class prepared to discuss the guiding questions (see syllabus) for each session.

Writing is another way we will work to build our understandings of core concepts in organizational theories and how an organizational perspective can be productively employed in educational contexts. To support you in developing and refining your analytic writing skills, you will be assigned a peer review team for the semester. We will have in-class time to provide and receive structured feedback on each of the memos assigned in EDUC 551 (see below). To ensure our feedback sessions are robust, you are expected to upload your draft to CTools by 12pm on the due date and bring hard copies for your review team.

*Three-part performance assessment (75% of final grade):* For this course, you will write a series of three analytic memos to the school improvement team in which you critically analyze a school’s essential organizational systems. Each part of the
performance assessment will be anchored in a teaching case (distributed in-class as noted in the syllabus) focused on a school under pressure to improve student achievement due to weak performance on state accountability assessments. Successful memos will demonstrate your capabilities to (a) apply theories introduced in this course and (b) critically analyze a school's essential systems by drawing across multiple sources of evidence.

- **Part 1 -- Analyzing the Instructional Program (25% of final course grade):** Students will (a) identify strengths and weaknesses in the school's instructional program, (b) assess strengths and weaknesses in relation to the current school improvement plan, and (c) recommend priorities for revising the school improvement plan to strengthen the instructional program.

- **Part 2 -- Analyzing the Professional Community (30% of final course grade):** Students will (a) identify strengths and weaknesses in the school's professional community, (b) assess strengths and weaknesses in relation to the current school improvement plan, and (c) recommend priorities for revising the school improvement plan to strengthen the professional community.

- **Part 3 -- Analyzing Environmental Relationships (30% of final course grade):** Students will (a) identify environmental supports for the school's ongoing improvement efforts, (b) identify environmental threats that could undermine the sustainability of school improvement efforts, and (c) propose a strategy for leveraging supports for continuous improvement while managing threats to sustainability.

Assignments submitted late without prior communication with the instructor will receive no credit.

Assignment due dates (submit via CTools by 12pm on date listed)
2/10: Submit Memo 1, *Analyzing the Instructional Program*, for peer review
2/18: Submit Memo 1, *Analyzing the Instructional Program*, to instructor
3/17: Submit Memo 2, *Analyzing the Professional Community*, for peer review
3/25: Submit Memo 2, *Analyzing the Professional Community*, to instructor

Representing others’ research
As part of engaging with the readings and the core themes of this course, I expect you to explicitly draw on ongoing conversations in academic and public discourse in our discussions and in your writing. When you draw on ideas in others’ research in your written assignments, please be sure to attribute that work correctly. For guidance about how to do this, please see the American Psychological Association’s Publication’s Manual.

Student rights and responsibilities
See the UM student handbook, which details student rights and responsibilities: http://www.rackham.umich.edu/policies/academic_policies/. Please contact me regarding any necessary accommodations due to religious holidays, disabilities, or any other special needs. It is university policy to provide, on a flexible and individualized basis, reasonable accommodations to students who have disabilities that may affect their ability to participate in course activities or to meet certain requirements.

Module 1: Conceptual Orientation to Theories of Organization and Organizing

Week 1. January 7th: Why analyze schools as organizations?
• Morgan: Chapter 1 -- "Introduction".

Guiding question
1. What is a school? How would you describe “schooling” to someone that had never participated in a formal education system?

Week 2. January 14th: Rational systems perspectives
• Morgan: Chapter 2 -- "Mechanization takes command: Organizations as machines".
• Morgan: Chapter 4 -- "Learning and self-organization: Organizations as brains" (pp. 71-80).
• Scott & Davis: Chapter 2 -- "Organizations as rational systems". (Focus on the introduction, the section on defining characteristics, and the summary/conclusion.)

Guiding questions
1. What are the defining features and dynamics of organizations as rational systems, according to Morgan and Scott & Davis?
2. How do these defining features/dynamics apply to the case of schools?

Week 3. January 21st: Natural systems perspectives
• Morgan: Chapter 5 -- "Creating social reality: Organizations as cultures" (pp. 115-134).
• Morgan: Chapter 6 -- "Interests, conflict, and power: Organizations as political systems" (pp. 149-155).
• Scott & Davis: Chapter 3 -- "Organizations as natural systems". (Focus on the introduction, the section on basic vs. distinctive characteristics, and the summary/conclusion. Skim the section on selected schools.)


**Guiding questions**
1. What are the defining features and dynamics of organizations as natural systems, according to Morgan and Scott & Davis?
2. How do these defining features/dynamics apply to the case of schools?

**Week 4. January 28th: Open systems perspectives**

• Morgan: Chapter 3 -- "Nature intervenes: Organizations as organisms".

• Scott & Davis: Chapter 4 -- "Organizations as open systems". (Focus on the introduction, the sections on system levels and emphases, and the summary/conclusion. Skim the section on selected schools.)


**Guiding questions**
1. Please develop 2 guiding questions of your own and bring to class.

**Module 2: Persistent Challenges in Organizing for Instruction**

**Week 5. February 4th: Formal structures of schooling**


• Correnti, R. & Rowan, B. (2007). Opening up the black box: Literacy instruction in schools participating in three comprehensive school reform programs. *American Educational Research Journal, 44*(2), 298-339. (Focus on the charts in the findings section and pp. 303-06)

Memo 1 assignment (Analyzing the Instructional Program) handed out in class

Guiding questions
1. What assumptions do each set of authors make about what it takes to drive instructional reform?
2. Is loose coupling a problem for schools? Why or why not?

Week 6. February 11th: Cultural norms of schooling

Memo 1 draft due; upload on CTools and bring hard copies for your peer review team

Guiding questions
1. The three required readings describe challenges related to the cultural norms of teaching in the 1990s, 2000s, and 2010s. Based on your prior experiences, what aspects of these analyses ring true to you? What falls short?
2. How do this week’s depictions of cultural norms in schooling extend or challenge the conclusions we drew about formal structures of schooling?

Week 7. February 18th: What teachers teach

Memo 1 (final version) due; upload on CTools

Guiding questions
1. What is instructional coherence?
2. What role should instructional coherence play in educational reform, according to the two sets of authors? Looking out at the educational landscape as of 2015, do you agree?

Module 3: Bringing People Back in -- Professional Community and Leadership in Organizing for Instructional Improvement

Week 8. February 25th: Organizing schools for improvement


Guiding questions
1. Based on Peurach’s discussion of the goals and evolution of the Success for All approach in Chapter 1, what was most influential in shaping ideas about reform in U.S. schools? Why?
2. For you, what are the key lessons to be learned from how the organization engaged in this work?

No class meeting March 4th – winter semester break.

Week 9. March 11th: Trust and educational change


➢ Memo 2 assignment (Analyzing the Professional Community) handed out in class

Guiding questions
1. What is the role of trust in forming a school-based professional community? What organizational conditions support its development?
2. Drawing across both readings, how do you think we could see trust functioning as a resource for change in school organizations in today’s environments (e.g. external test-based accountability demands, local community expectations, decreasing willingness to invest in public education)?

Week 10. March 18th: From what teachers teach to what students learn


Memo 2 draft due; upload on CTools and bring hard copies for your peer review team

Guiding questions

1. The Smith and O’Day reading continues to be frequently cited in the literature discussing standards-based reform and is widely viewed as a “classic.” According to this piece, what is systemic reform and what problems does it solve for schools as organizations?

2. Puma et al. and the National Governors Association/Council of Chief State School Officers both discuss the standards-based reform movement in practice. How do these comments extend and challenge the original framework articulated in Smith and O’Day?

Module 4: Organizing for Improvement and Environmental Relationships

Week 11. March 25th: Buffering and bridging the educational policy environment


Memo 2 (final version) due; upload on CTools

Guiding questions

1. Please develop 2 guiding questions of your own and bring to class.
Week 12. April 1st: (Re)mapping external influences on instructional improvement


**Guiding questions**

1. How does Coburn (2005) conceptualize nonsystem actors? Who are they and how do they influence the teaching and learning work that takes place in classrooms?
2. What are the current characteristics of the teaching labor force and how does this compare with the past? At the school and district organizational level, what kinds of consequences does this change have? What strategies do you think would be most helpful in managing this kind of shift in the environment?

Week 13. April 9th: Policy environments and the socio-political nature of change

Readings:


> **Memo 3 assignment (Analyzing Environmental Relationships) handed out in class**

Week 14. April 15th: Synthesis

Readings:

- To be assigned based on class interests.

> **Memo 3 draft due; upload on CTools and bring hard copies for your peer review team**

Memo 3 (final version) due on April 24th