

San José State University

Teacher Education

Critical Perspectives on Schooling for a Pluralist Democracy (EDTE 260)

Fall 2026

Course and Contact Information

Instructor	Brent Duckor, PhD
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Office Hours	By appointment
Class Days/Time	4:30 pm - 7 pm
Classroom	Sweeney Hall 211 and Online Via Zoom
Course Format	Hybrid rotation across the 16-week semester: Week 1 in person; Week 2 synchronous online via Zoom; Week 3 asynchronous. This three-week format repeats throughout the semester.

Course Description

Critical study of theory, practice and research related to effective communication in cross-cultural, multilingual settings from historical, comparative, and contemporary perspectives.

Core Course Questions and Unit Themes

Across the semester, EDTE 260 asks candidates to examine classroom learning environments as historically situated, socially experienced, deliberately created, and increasingly shaped by emerging technologies. The course follows a recurring line of inquiry:

Seeing schooling → Interpreting schooling → Imagining better learning environments → Examining how teachers create them → Articulating one's own practice → Considering future horizons/implications in the age of AI.

Theme 1 — Seeing Schooling

- What do we notice when we look closely at schools and classrooms?
- How do the routines, relationships, spaces, language, expectations, and interactions of a school shape what students experience?
- What can documentary representations of schooling reveal that descriptions of schooling may not?
- What appears familiar or unfamiliar when we compare schools of the past with our own experiences?

Theme 2 — Interpreting Schooling

- How should we interpret what we observe in a classroom or school?
- How do historical context, research, and different perspectives change what we think we are seeing?
- Whose perspectives are visible in accounts of schooling, and whose may be missing?
- What from earlier eras of schooling continues to matter for teachers today?

Theme 3 — Imagining Better Learning Environments

- What makes a classroom learning environment good, positive, and valuable?
- How might teachers, students, parents/guardians, and other community members answer that question differently?
- Where do these perspectives converge and diverge?
- What qualities do we hope to cultivate—and what do we hope to avoid—in our own classrooms?

Theme 4 — Examining How Teachers Create Learning Environments

- How do teachers deliberately establish conditions for learning?
- What do teachers say and do to prime participation, thinking, relationships, and expectations?
- How do formative assessment moves, routines, norms, and interactions shape students' opportunities to participate and learn?
- Which practices are worth borrowing, adapting, or rejecting in our own teaching?

Theme 5 — Articulating One's Own Practice

- What do I value as a teacher, and how are those values made visible in classroom practice?
- How will my classroom support authenticity and identity, accessibility and belonging, and agency and voice?
- How can professional artifacts communicate what I value to students, families, colleagues, and administrators?
- How do I move from aspirations about classroom community to specific, observable practices?

Theme 6 — Considering Learning Environments in the Age of AI

- How are AI-mediated tools changing classroom learning environments and the work of teachers and students?
- What happens to authenticity, identity, accessibility, belonging, agency, and voice when AI enters the learning environment?
- What should remain distinctly human in the creation and maintenance of classroom communities?
- How should teachers exercise professional judgment about when, how, and under what conditions AI supports worthwhile learning?

Habits of Mind

EDTE 260 asks you to develop habits of observation, inquiry, interpretation, perspective taking, reflection, and professional judgment. Throughout the course, we will practice noticing before judging, asking questions before settling on explanations, examining assumptions including our own, considering multiple perspectives and historical contexts, using evidence from classroom observations and research to support claims, and revising our initial interpretations when warranted.

These habits are especially important when we consider what makes a good learning environment and how teachers create one. Rather than treating a particular routine, pedagogy, technology, or classroom arrangement as inherently good or bad, we will ask what it makes possible, what it may constrain, for whom, under what conditions, and how we would know.

Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs)

Teacher candidates who successfully complete a Credential or Master's program will be able to:

PLO 1: Plan for collaborative relationships with students, leaders, families, organizations, advocates, and / or other community members that center their diverse assets, interests, needs, and expertise in ways that augment students' educational experiences.

PLO 2: Critically examine, design, and implement authentic, asset-based learning environments, curricula, and pedagogical approaches that affirm and cultivate students' diverse cultural, linguistic, cognitive, and socioeconomic resources as disciplinarily relevant instructional and pedagogical resources.

PLO 3: Critically examine, design, and implement ongoing feedback-based approaches to assessment that center formative guidance during the learning process as opportunities for students to revise, expand, and grow as learners.

PLO 4: Analyze and critique important intersecting aspects of history, ideology, policy, power, race, class, language, and other facets of culture underlying societal and one's personal values, biases, and practices within education.

PLO 5: Design and apply classroom inquiry cycles to address a problem of practice through culturally sustaining, holistic pedagogical practices and critical self-reflection.

Course Learning Outcomes (CLO)

Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to:

1. Critically analyze the context, structure, and history of public education in California and how it influences the work of developing school culture and classroom learning environments (TPE 6).
2. Describe the connection between observations of classroom practices, research, learning about students as individuals, and learning communities in order to create and maintain sustaining, inclusive, agentic learning environments. (TPE 1, 2, 5, 6)
3. Identify and plan strategies for ensuring safe, inclusive learning spaces (physical and virtual), developing classroom communities that include families/communities as critical partners in the support of student learning. (TPE 1, 2, 3, 5, 6)
4. Reflect on the legal, ethical, and social responsibilities integral to being an equitable professional educator. (TPE 2, 3, 6)
5. Identify and leverage the assets, funds of knowledge, community cultural wealth, and experiences students bring to classrooms in order to ensure culturally sustaining pedagogies as central to both academics and environments for students, families, and communities. (TPE 1–6)

- Promote students' critical and creative thinking and analysis through activities that provide opportunities for inquiry, problem solving, responding to and framing meaningful questions, and reflection (TPE 1).

Texts/Readings

Course readings, films, classroom video cases, and other media will be available through Canvas and/or the SJSU Library. Specific required readings and selected excerpts will be identified in the course schedule and weekly Canvas modules.

The course will draw on documentary films and selected scholarship to place school culture and classroom learning environments in historical and contemporary perspective. Working references currently include: Frederick Wiseman's *High School* (1968) and *High School II* (1995), Kozol (1967), Jackson (1968), Holt (1964),Sizer (1985), Meier (1995), Darling-Hammond (1997), Ladson-Billings (1995), Hollins (2015), and Duckor and Holmberg's (2017) work on priming as driver of classroom learning environments that encourage student agency, authentic engagement and productive struggle. See Canvas Module for Annotated Bibliography.

Course Requirements and Assignments

Detailed directions and rubrics will be available in Canvas ("Assignments"). The assignments are designed to follow the course's conceptual movement from seeing and interpreting schooling toward articulating and reconsidering one's own professional practice.

Assignment/Exhibition #1 — Seeing and Interpreting: The Case of *High School*

Purpose: Use close observation of *High School I* to identify a scene, person, interaction, routine, or feature of the school learning environment that warrants interpretation. Connect what you notice to the historical context of schooling in the 1960s and explain what, if anything, the film can teach teachers today.

Assignment/Exhibition #2 — Seeing and Interpreting: The Case of *High School II*

Purpose: Use close observation of *High School II* to analyze the school learning environment represented in the film. Compare what you notice with *High School I* and with your own experiences of schooling. Draw on selected research or other sources as appropriate to develop and support your interpretation.

Assignment/Exhibition #3 — Imagining a Good Classroom Learning Environment

Purpose: Articulate what makes a classroom learning environment good, positive, and valuable. Consider the learning environment from the perspectives of teachers, students, parents/guardians, and other members of the school community, and explain how you would cultivate, nurture, and sustain the qualities you value.

Assignment/Exhibition #4 — Examining Teacher Practice

Purpose: Analyze classroom video cases (Sarah, Nick and Corey from SJSU’s credential program) to identify how these pre-service teachers establish and sustain positive learning environments through *priming* (e.g., moves, routines, norms, relationships, and interactions). Identify practices you would borrow, adapt, or avoid in your own classroom and explain why.

Culminating Assignment/Exhibition #5 — Articulating My Practice in the Age of AI

Purpose: Develop a personal statement on use of AI in your classroom and a set of professional artifacts (e.g., guidelines, “do’s and don’ts”, learning activities, etc.) that make visible your commitments and concerns as a teacher. Organize your work around one or more course lenses—Authenticity and Identity, Accessibility and Belonging, and Agency and Voice—and reconsider those commitments in light of AI-mediated learning environments. Explain what you value, how those values would appear in practice, and what forms of human judgment and relationship you intend to preserve.

Ethical Use of Artificial Intelligence Tools in EDTE 260

Artificial intelligence may be used in EDTE 260 as a tool for inquiry, research, interpretation, design, and professional reflection. Students may use generative AI when appropriate for course activities and assignments, but such use should be purposeful, transparent, and open to critical reflection. For background and guidelines See Canvas home page.

Because the course culminates in reconsidering classroom learning environments in the age of AI, students should be prepared to examine not only what an AI system can produce, but what its use changes about authorship, judgment, participation, relationships, agency, accessibility, and evidence of learning. Specific expectations for disclosure regarding AI use for coursework and reflection will be identified in Canvas.

Grading Information

Assignment weights are under development. The final syllabus will specify the weighting of the course exhibitions, class participation, and any credit/no-credit requirements.

Course Requirement	Weight
Exhibition 1 — Seeing and Interpreting <i>High School</i>	15
Exhibition 2 — Seeing and Interpreting <i>High School II</i>	15
Exhibition 3 — Imagining a Good Classroom Learning Environment	20
Exhibition 4 — Examining Teacher Practice	20
Exhibition 5 — Articulating My Practice in the Age of AI	20
Class Participation	10

Determination of Grades

Final grading weights, late-work expectations, revision opportunities, and grade cutoffs will be specified in the final syllabus. The final version will retain all required SJSU statements concerning grading transparency and expected student workload.

<i>Grade</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
<i>A plus</i>	<i>99 to 100%</i>
<i>A</i>	<i>94 to 98.9%</i>
<i>A minus</i>	<i>90 to 93.9%</i>
<i>B plus</i>	<i>88 to 89.9 %</i>
<i>B</i>	<i>84 to 87.9%</i>
<i>B minus</i>	<i>80 to 83.9%</i>
<i>C plus</i>	<i>78 to 79.9%</i>
<i>C</i>	<i>74 to 77.9%</i>
<i>C minus</i>	<i>70 to 73.9%</i>
<i>D plus</i>	<i>67 to 69.9%</i>
<i>D</i>	<i>63 to 66.9%</i>
<i>D minus</i>	<i>60 to 62.9%</i>
<i>F</i>	<i>0 to 59.9%</i>

This course must be **passed with a B- or better** as a credential program requirement.

Note that all students have the right, within a reasonable time, to know their academic scores, to review their grade-dependent work, and to be provided with explanations for the determination of their course grades.” See [University Policy F13-1](http://www.sjsu.edu/senate/docs/F13-1.pdf) at <http://www.sjsu.edu/senate/docs/F13-1.pdf> for more details.

Per university policy, success in this course is based on the expectation that students will spend, for each unit of credit, a minimum of 45 hours over the length of the course (normally three hours per unit per week) for instruction, preparation/studying, or course related activities, including but not limited to internships, labs, and clinical practica. Other course structures will have equivalent workload expectations as described in the syllabus.

Classroom Protocols

Expectations. Students are expected to participate actively and professionally across all three course modalities: in-person meetings, synchronous Zoom sessions, and asynchronous learning weeks. The modalities serve different purposes in the course: in-person meetings emphasize encounter, observation, and experience; Zoom sessions emphasize collaborative analysis, interpretation, and comparison of perspectives; asynchronous weeks emphasize investigation, synthesis, position taking, reflection, and creation of course assignments/exhibitions

Absences. Because EDTE 260 alternates among in-person, synchronous Zoom, and asynchronous learning experiences, consistent participation across all three formats is important.

Readings and Media. Course readings, films, and classroom video cases provide common evidence for our study of classroom learning environments. Students are expected to complete assigned viewing and reading in preparation for in-person and Zoom discussions as well as asynchronous activities. Students should expect to return to earlier films, cases, readings, and reflections as the course develops.

Course Schedule & Assignments

The schedule below is a working first draft. Exact Fall 2026 dates, required readings, assignment weights, and selected classroom cases will be finalized in the next stage of syllabus development.

Week/Date	Modality	Theme / Topic	Guiding Question / Activity	Assignments
Week 1 Aug. 24	In Person ON CAMPUS	Seeing Schooling: <i>High School I</i>	Watch and notice: How did high school in the 1960s look and feel? What resembles schooling we know today?	Initial reflection: What did you notice? Film reflections/analysis
Week 2 Aug. 31	Zoom	Interpreting <i>High School I</i>	Revisit a scene, person, or interaction. What caught our attention, why does it matter, and should it matter to teachers today?	Group analysis + “dos and don’ts” exit reflection
Week 3 Sept. 7	Asynchronous	<i>High School I</i> in Historical Perspective	How true is Wiseman’s depiction, and what can the film teach us about schools today?	Exhibition 1: Drafting and finalizing
Week 4 Sept. 14	In Person ON CAMPUS	Seeing Schooling: <i>High School II</i>	Watch and notice: How did high school in the 1990s look and feel? What changed, and what remained?	Initial reflection: What did you notice? Film reflections/analysis
Week 5 Sept. 21	Zoom	Interpreting <i>High School II</i>	Revisit a scene, person, or interaction and compare perspectives across the two films.	Group analysis + discussion questions

Week/Date	Modality	Theme / Topic	Guiding Question / Activity	Assignments
Week 6 Sept. 28	Asynchronous	<i>High School II</i> in Historical Perspective	How true is Wiseman's depiction, and what can the film teach us about schooling today?	Exhibition 2: Drafting and finalizing
Week 7 Oct. 5	In Person ON CAMPUS	Imagining Better Learning Environments	What makes a good learning environment from teacher, student, and parent/guardian perspectives?	Perspective-taking activity
Week 8 Oct. 12	Zoom	Converging and Diverging Perspectives	Where do our ideas about good learning environments align or conflict, and what can we learn from those differences?	Group presentation + collective question pool
Week 9 Oct. 19	Asynchronous	Cultivating and Sustaining a Learning Environment	How do we create, nurture, and sustain a good, positive, and valuable classroom learning environment?	Exhibition 3: Drafting and finalizing
Week 10 Oct. 26	In Person ON CAMPUS	Examining How Teachers Create Them	What do classroom video cases reveal about priming e.g., moves, routines, and relationships?	What did you notice? Video reflections/analysis
Week 11 Nov. 2	Zoom	Borrowing and Adapting Teacher Moves	Which teacher moves support a positive learning environment? Which would you borrow, adapt, or avoid?	Collaborative clip analysis + exit reflection
Week 12 Nov. 9	Asynchronous	Articulating One's Own Practice	What do I value, and how would those values become visible in my classroom?	Exhibition 4: Drafting and finalizing

Week/Date	Modality	Theme / Topic	Guiding Question / Activity	Assignments
Week 13 Nov. 16	In Person ON CAMPUS	Reconsidering Learning Environments in the Age of AI	What changes when AI enters the classroom learning environment?	AI-mediated learning environment inquiry
Week 14 Nov. 23	Zoom	Authenticity, Accessibility, Agency, Identity, Belonging, and Voice	What should teachers preserve, redesign, or reconsider in AI-mediated classrooms?	Collaborative analysis and peer feedback
Week 15 Nov. 30	Asynchronous	Articulating My Practice in the Age of AI	What do I want my classroom to stand for, and how will I know whether technology supports or undermines those commitments?	Exhibition 5: Drafting and finalizing
Week 16 Dec. 7	Asynchronous			Feedback support and virtual consultations

University Policies and Resources

Per [University Policy S16-9](http://www.sjsu.edu/senate/docs/S16-9.pdf) (<http://www.sjsu.edu/senate/docs/S16-9.pdf>), relevant university policy concerning all courses, such as student responsibilities, academic integrity, accommodations, dropping and adding, consent for recording of class, etc. and available student services (e.g. learning assistance, counseling, and other resources) are listed on [Syllabus Information web page](https://www.sjsu.edu/curriculum/courses/syllabus-info.php) (<https://www.sjsu.edu/curriculum/courses/syllabus-info.php>). Make sure to visit this page to review and be aware of these university policies and resources.

Library Liaison

Mantra Roy Email: mantra.roy@sjsu.edu

Texts/Readings

Darling-Hammond, L. (1997). *The right to learn: A blueprint for creating schools that work*. Jossey-Bass.

Darling-Hammond examines how schools can be organized to create equitable and intellectually rich learning opportunities for all students. Drawing on research and examples of successful schools, she highlights the importance of strong relationships, meaningful curriculum and assessment, and learning environments designed around students' developmental and academic needs.

Darling-Hammond, L., & Oakes, J. (2019). *Preparing teachers for deeper learning*. Harvard Education Press.

Drawing on examples from innovative teacher preparation programs, Darling-Hammond and Oakes examine how teachers can learn to create equitable, student-centered environments that support deeper learning. The book highlights the relationships among classroom culture, ambitious instruction, meaningful assessment, and students' opportunities to engage in collaborative, inquiry-based learning.

Duckor, B., & Holmberg, C. (2017). *Mastering formative assessment moves: 7 high-leverage practices to advance student learning*. ASCD.

Duckor and Holmberg present seven practical formative assessment "moves" that help teachers make student thinking visible and respond productively in the moment. The book emphasizes how questioning, discussion, feedback, and classroom routines can create learning environments in which students are active participants in monitoring and advancing their own learning.

Duckor, B., & Holmberg, C. (2019). Seven high-leverage formative assessment moves to support ELLs. *Educational Leadership*, 77(4), 46–52.

Duckor and Holmberg show how formative assessment practices can be adapted to support English learners by making classroom participation, thinking, and understanding more visible. The article emphasizes practical moves teachers can use to build inclusive learning environments in which multilingual students have multiple ways to engage, communicate, and demonstrate learning.

Hollins, E. R. (2015). *Culture in school learning: Revealing the deep meaning* (3rd ed.). Routledge.

Hollins examines how culture shapes students' experiences of teaching, learning, and schooling. The book helps preservice teachers understand how culturally responsive learning environments can build on students' identities, knowledge, and communities while challenging inequitable assumptions and practices.

Holt, J. (1964). *How children fail*. Pitman Publishing.

Holt explores how fear, pressure, and conventional classroom practices can interfere with children's natural curiosity and willingness to take intellectual risks. The book invites preservice teachers to

consider how learning environments can either inhibit or support confidence, persistence, and genuine engagement.

Jackson, P. W. (1968). *Life in classrooms*. Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

Jackson examines the often-unspoken routines, expectations, and social dynamics that shape students' everyday experiences in classrooms. The book introduces preservice teachers to the idea of the "hidden curriculum" and invites them to consider how classroom structures influence participation, behavior, identity, and learning.

Kozol, J. (1967). *Death at an early age: The destruction of the hearts and minds of Negro children in the Boston public schools*. Houghton Mifflin.

Kozol documents the racism, inequity, and dehumanizing conditions he witnessed while teaching in Boston public schools. The book challenges preservice teachers to examine how school structures, teacher expectations, and classroom environments can either reproduce injustice or affirm students' dignity and humanity.

Ladson-Billings, G. (1995). Toward a theory of culturally relevant pedagogy. *American Educational Research Journal*, 32(3), 465–491.

Ladson-Billings develops the theory of culturally relevant pedagogy, emphasizing academic success, cultural competence, and critical consciousness as interconnected goals of effective teaching. The article helps preservice teachers consider how learning environments can affirm students' cultural identities while supporting rigorous learning and critical engagement with inequity.

Meier, D. (1995). *The power of their ideas: Lessons for America from a small school in Harlem*. Beacon Press.

Meier draws on her experience at Central Park East schools to show how small, democratic, relationship-centered schools can create powerful environments for teaching and learning. The book invites readers to consider how trust, intellectual inquiry, student voice, and strong school communities shape students' opportunities to learn.

Sizer, T. R. (1985). *Horace's compromise: The dilemma of the American high school*. Houghton Mifflin.

Sizer examines the structures, routines, and compromises that shape life in American high schools, showing how institutional expectations can work against meaningful teaching and learning. The book challenges readers to consider how schools might be redesigned to support deeper intellectual engagement, stronger relationships, and more purposeful learning.

Wiseman, F. (Director). (1968). *High school* [Film]. Zipporah Films. Available at <https://www.kanopy.com/en/product/2332161?vp=sjsu>

Wiseman's observational documentary offers an unfiltered look at the routines, authority structures, and social expectations of an American public high school in the late 1960s. The film invites viewers to examine how institutional culture, discipline, teacher-student interactions, and the hidden curriculum shape students' experiences of schooling.

Wiseman, F. (Director). (1994). *High school II* [Film]. Zipporah Films. Available at <https://www.kanopy.com/en/product/2332163?vp=sjsu>

Wiseman documents life at Central Park East Secondary School, offering a contrasting vision of schooling built around relationships, dialogue, student responsibility, and intellectual engagement. The film provides a rich case for examining how school culture and organizational structures can foster more democratic and humane learning environments.