

**CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, SAN MARCOS  
COLLEGE OF EDUCATION**

**EDUC 643: Critical Ethnography of Education  
Spring 2006**

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**Office Hours:** Wed., 4-5pm  
**Class Meeting Times/Location:** Wed., 1730-2015; ACD 304

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**College of Education Mission Statement**

The mission of the College of Education Community is to collaboratively transform public education by preparing thoughtful educators and advancing professional practices. We are committed to diversity, educational equity, and social justice, exemplified through reflective teaching, life-long learning, innovative research and on-going service. Our practices demonstrate a commitment to student-centered education, diversity, collaboration, professionalism, and shared governance.  
(Adopted by COE Governance Community, October, 1997).

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**COURSE DESCRIPTION**

This course examines the nature of ethnography as a standard tool of investigation in describing, understanding, and explaining the behavior of individuals. We will use ethnography as a tool to examine and explore public school classrooms and teaching practice from a critical pedagogy perspective. Students will understand the complexity of human learning by making familiar the activities of “other” people and thus, make “strange” our own familiar teaching / learning practices when placed against the “eyes” of other people.

**Course Objectives**

The purpose of this course is to:

- Teach students how to distinguish between the emic and etic perspective (insider / outsider per an anthropological model).
- Examine the purpose of ethnography in public school contexts.
- Apply ethnography as a tool of inquiry in multiple contexts, including classrooms, communities or families.

**GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS**

**Academic Honesty:** It is expected that each student will do his or her own work, and contribute equitably to group projects and processes. If there is any question about academic honesty, consult the University Catalog.

**Appeals:** Every student has the right to appeal grades, or appeal for redress of grievances incurred in the context of any course. Disputes may be resolved informally with the professor, or through the formal appeal process. For the latter, consult Dr. E. Oliver, Associate Dean.

**Ability:** Every student has the right to equitable educational consideration and appropriate accommodation. Students having differing ability (mobility, sight, hearing, documented learning challenges, first language/English as a second language) are requested to contact the professor at the earliest opportunity. Every effort will be made to accommodate special needs. Students are reminded of the availability of Disabled Student Services, the Writing

Center, technology assistance in the computer labs, and other student support services available as part of reasonable accommodation for special needs students.

**Students with Disabilities Requiring Reasonable Accommodations.** Students are approved for services through the Disabled Student Services Office (DSS). This office is located in Craven Hall 5205, and can be contacted by phone at (760) 750-4905, or TTY (760) 750-4909. Students authorized by DSS to receive reasonable accommodations should meet with their instructor during office hours or, in order to ensure confidentiality, in a more private setting.

## **COLLEGE ATTENDANCE POLICY**

The Governance Community of the College of Education adopted the following policy on 12/19/97: Due to the dynamic and interactive nature of courses in the College of Education, all students are expected to attend all classes and participate actively. At a minimum, students must attend more than 80% of class time, or s/he **may not receive a passing grade** for the course at the discretion of the instructor. **Individual instructors may adopt more stringent attendance requirements.** Should the student have extenuating circumstances, s/he should contact the instructor as soon as possible.

### **ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION**

The course deals with complex material processed in a variety of ways. Structured interactions, group processes, oral presentations, guided discussion of readings, and self-disclosure exercises are the norm. **Students are expected to have read assigned materials by the date indicated in the syllabus, and should be prepared to discuss readings individually or in variously structured groups.** The degree of your engagement in these processes forms the basis for points assigned. Due to the fast paced and highly interactive nature of the course, regular attendance and full participation are expected: teaching and learning is difficult (if not impossible) if one is not present for and engaged in the process. Therefore, the above College Attendance Policy is amplified as follows: 1. Missing more than 1 class meeting will result in the reduction of one letter grade. 2. Arriving late or leaving early on more than two occasions will result in the reduction of one letter grade. 3. Illness and emergency circumstances will be considered/negotiated on a case-by-case basis. These measures should not be considered punitive, as students are expected to establish appropriate personal, academic and career-ladder priorities. Therefore these measures should be viewed as taking appropriate individual responsibility for one's own learning in a democratic, collaborative and reciprocal-learning environment.

### **GRADING**

**Grading Scale:** A=100-96, A-=95-91, B+=90-86, B=85-81, B-=80-76, C+=75-71, C=70-66, C-=65-51, D=50-46, F=545 or lower.

**Submission Schedule:** Work submitted late, but within one week of the due date will be reduced by one letter grade. Work received over one week late receives no credit.

**Grading Emphasis:** Each written assignment will be graded approximately 80% on content and context (detail, logic, synthesis of information, depth of analysis, etc.), and 20% on mechanics (grammar, syntax, spelling, format, uniformity of citation, etc.). All citations, where appropriate, will use APA format. Consult Library Services for the *Manual of Citation of the American Psychological Association*, or <[www.apastyle.org/index.html](http://www.apastyle.org/index.html)>

## COURSE REQUIREMENTS

### Required Texts

Ely, M., Anzul, M., Friedman, T., Garner, D., & Steinmetz, A.M. (1995). *Doing Qualitative Research: Circles within Circles*. London: The Falmer Press.

Prado-Olmos, P.L. (2006) *Reader, Ethnography of Education*, Copy Serve

Spradley, J. (1980). *Participant Observation*. Fort Worth, TX: Harcourt Brace College Publishers.

### Select one of the following:

Ehrenreich, B., Hochschild, A. and Shara, K. (2002). *Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By in America*. New York, NY: Henry Holt & Company.

MacLeod, J. (2003). *Ain't No Making It: Aspirations and Attainment in a Low-Income Neighborhood*. Oxford, GB: Westview Press.

Valdes, G. (2001). *Learning and Not Learning English: Latino Students in an American School*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Weis, L. & Fine, M. (2000). *Speed Bumps. A Student-Friendly Guide to Qualitative Research*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

### Assignments

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|----|-------------------------------------|------------------|
| 1. | <b>Attendance and participation</b> | <b>15 points</b> |
| 2. | <b>Book Review</b>                  | <b>30 points</b> |
| 3. | <b>Hanging around exercise</b>      | <b>15 points</b> |
| 4. | <b>Ethnography in progress</b>      | <b>40 points</b> |

#### **Attendance and participation – (15 points)**

It is expected that everyone will attend class, be prompt and ready to participate in discussions and activities. Please bring all the assigned reading materials to class.

#### **Book Review – (30 points)**

I have listed four books for your consideration above. This assignment asks that you choose one of the four books to review. You, and those who have read the same book as you, will be asked to engage in a discussion of the book. Each group will have 30 minutes in which to conduct their discussion (15%). The group has complete control over how they want to conduct this review. However, it should provide a BRIEF summary of what the book was about. Each individual will also provide a three-page review of the book that should highlight key ideas, questions that emerged, and implications for research/teaching (15%).

#### **Hanging around exercise – (15 points)**

This assignment is designed to prepare you as a future ethnographer. An ethnographer uses a variety of data collection methods and questioning in order to “make sense” of a given setting, event, or set of occurrences. A good ethnographer asks this initial question to guide her inquiry: what is going on here? This is followed by: what is going on here that may be of some sort of significance. Each of these are important questions in that the ethnographer seeks to gain meaning and understanding from events that are often “common” to her set of experiences; the challenge is to address these common occurrences in ways that make the events, setting, individuals involved, etc., “strange” or “uncommon.” It is a challenge to the educational ethnographer to gain meaning and

make sense out of events, situations, settings (e.g., playtime, reading time, sharing time, the school community, a game of jump rope) that are, in fact, “commonplace.” As ethnographers we are asked to look at common events as “exotic” and/or “new.”

An underlying notion of the ethnographic method is to begin to make meaning by describing events, settings, interactions, etc., in ways that are value-free and unbiased. This is our challenge for this assignment – to describe in a value-free context. Good luck!

### Where

You will visit a store that sells groceries. It is up to you to select the type of store, e.g., mini-mart, supermarket, corner grocery, farmers market, etc. You will spend at least 45 minutes in the setting.

### What

(a). You will spend the first 5-6 minutes “casing/checking-out” the setting. As you walk around the setting, make note of the:

1. physical lay-out of the store;
2. construct a spatial map and attach to your write-up; participants, food sections, etc.;
3. take notes regarding the setting; and
4. include a one paragraph statement that tells the location, time, & date.

(b). Next, you will observe customers as they shop. Take notes on one particular customer. Record how this customer shops, e.g., what section of the store does s/he begin to shop in? What observable behaviors do you note as your shopper selects her/his purchases? Write at minimum a one page description that objectively describes your shoppers behavior.

(c). Classification scheme: How are store items organized in this setting? (e.g., foods, beverages, dry goods) (1-2 paragraphs).

(d) Social Organization:

1. Who goes to the supermarket?
2. What social rules are used in the setting? (1-2 paragraph.)

(e). Reflective Notes: (separate page) Note your impressions and reflections regarding this experience. Reflections may be stated accordingly: e.g.,

R-1 “I was very tired and had never before shopped at this supermarket. I wondered how everything would turn out.”

(f). Questions: Please note any questions, issues of concern that you might raise if you want to continue as a researcher in this setting.

(g). Synopsis: What did you observe? (1-page)

### **Ethnography in progress – (40 points)**

Students are encouraged to think about an area of concern / interest that you would like to examine in relation to the education of learners in and / or outside of schools in formal and / or informal situations. This paper will be conducted as an educational “ethnography in-progress.” While it will allow you the flexibility to explore issues of personal interest, the guidelines must be followed.

This assignment will involve ethnographic data collection, questioning of the data and recursive analysis along with critical reflection and reflexivity. Minimally, data collection must include observations, field notes and review of related documents. Other means of data collection may include interviews, videotaping, audiotaping, etc.

The dates for submission of the various draft sections for review are intended to assist you in the timely conduct of this ethnography in-progress and will be discussed at the specified class meeting. You are

expected to maintain the timelines for each of the activities. While a “true” ethnography includes data collection over an extended period of time (2-3 years on average), you will be asked to gather data toward the development of an “ethnography in-progress” while applying the ethnographic method. Given the semester schedule, the suggested optimum time for data collection is from early February to late April. Ethnographic data may be collected in a classroom, school, community, or related setting.

**DUE DATE****ETHNOGRAPHY IN-PROGRESS SECTION**

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- Feb. 1 *Focal Area/Research Questions:* This section describes the focal area of interest and states the question/s you are asking and the rationale for the question/s. Why are the questions significant?
- Feb. 15 *Introduction:* Background Information related to the classroom/educational/community setting that you have chosen for study. Provide background information as to why you selected this setting. What is it you are setting out to describe and analyze?
- Mar. 1 *Entry:* Describe your entry into the setting. This section must include a descriptive account of how you negotiated entry into the setting, e.g., letters, e-mail, telephone, meeting. Share how the initial process of making contact and (ultimately) gaining entry (permission) into the setting occurred. If you are conducting this ethnography-in-progress in your classroom please write up your concerns and considerations with respect to the work you are conducting with respect to your students. This “entry” section should include a general overview of how you came to the site, when your “entry” began both officially and unofficially. For example, if you are a teacher in the school, tell how you came to the school. This section must also include a section on role definition, formal characteristics of role, and technical implications of entry and initial role along with ethical implications of entry and role.
- Mar. 15 *Setting:* In this section you will describe the larger community context and classroom, school, class population and the specific group with which you will be working during your ethnographic project. The following must be included: a description of the larger community context, including demographic information (e.g., SES, ethnicity, single family households, ELL, EO); a description of the outer physical plant appearance; structure along with a map of the structure. Tell how you have arranged this “map” and place your focal area of interest in this map; provide an overview of the school’s curricular and instructional emphasis and a description of the students (demographics) who attend the school. *Entering the school:* In this section you need to include a thick description of the actual school/community site AND the classroom environment. This description should guide the reader as if “drawing a portrait.” Include information with respect to the academic program offered in this situation. Provide specific information on those observed in the setting.
- Mar. 22 *Methodology - Data Collection:* For this section you will provide an overview of the data collection procedures, e.g., fieldnotes, videotaping, audio recordings, interviews, etc. Include any questionnaire, survey, interview questions or observational checklist, or whatever other instrument or tool you will use to collect your data. Include interview/observation protocols and schedules.
- Social Structure:* “Social structure stresses not so much the actual relations between persons or groups as the expected realities, or even the ideal relations” (Firth, 1981). Social structure refers to the “expectations” and “idealized beliefs” of what is done. In this section you will describe the structural aspects of social relations in the setting you have chosen to study.
- Social Organization.* According to Firth (1981) it is necessary to think “separately of social organization in terms of concrete activity. Generally, the idea of organization is that of people getting things done by planned action.” You will describe the social process in operation (in the setting) and how it accounts for how things get accomplished in the organization/setting. You will provide a descriptive account of the main interactants in the setting.
- Social Function.* “Social function can be defined as the relation between a social action and the system of which the action is a part, or, alternatively, as a result of the social action in terms of the means-ends scheme of all those affected by it.” (Firth, 1981). Social function is the way social relations serve given ends. In this section you will describe the prime social function in your setting and responsibilities of each of the interactants in the setting.

Apr. 19 *Analysis - Patterns, Categories:* Describe the various patterns uncovered in your preliminary analysis. Next, tell why a pattern became a pattern. Tell how you have categorized your patterns and your thinking involved in creating specific categories. Connect this discussion back to social structure and social organization. Begin a discussion around the original research questions.

*Analysis - Propositions:* Based on your initial and ongoing analysis, you are now ready to make some statements (propositions) about your research. What sense can you make of your data (in the context of your research questions, and, anything else that seems significant to your work?) Place the discussion in the form of “making sense” of the data. State your propositions here, and support with your prior identification of patterns and categories. Also, discuss any other significant findings that have emerged from your analysis. Conduct deeper analysis of social structure vs. social organization.

Apr. 26 *Initial Findings and Reflections on the Process:* In this section you will *reflect* on the process regarding your conduct of the in-progress ethnography. Include *reflections* on concerns associated with the process. Also include *what you would do differently* as you reflect on the process. End with *what you would do next* if you were to continue this ethnographic study.

May 3

## **Ethnography In-Progress Due**

### TENTATIVE COURSE SCHEDULE

DATE	TOPIC	READING ASSIGNMENT
1/18/06	Introduction/Course Overview What is ethnography?	
1/25/06	Grounding – Theoretical Foundations of Ethnography	Reader: Spindler, Wolcott Spradley – Ch. 1
2/1/06	Grounding – Theoretical Foundations of Ethnography <b>Focal Area/ Research Questions DUE</b>	Reader: Heath, Hutchinson Spradley – Ch. 2 Ely – Ch. 1
2/8/06	The Ethnographic Research Cycle <b>Hanging Around Exercise DUE</b>	Spradley – Ch. 3
2/15/06	Starting – Gaining Entry <b>Introduction DUE</b>	Reader: Valdes Ely – Ch. 2, Spradley - Step One
2/22/06	Doing – Participant Observations and Focus Groups	Reader: Morgan Ely – Ch. 3
3/1/06	Doing – Interviews <b>Entry DUE</b>	Reader: Tagg, Goldstein
3/8/06	Doing – Participant Observations	Spradley – Steps Two – Six
3/15/06	Doing & Interpreting – Participant Observations <b>Setting DUE</b>	Spradley – Steps Seven – Eleven
3/22/06	Interpreting – Content Analysis <b>Methodology DUE</b>	Reader: Mostyn
3/29/06	<b>SPRING BREAK</b>	
4/5/06	Work in Groups for Book Review Presentations	
4/12/06	Book Reviews – Presentations <b>Paper DUE</b>	
4/19/06	Interpreting – Content Analysis <b>Analysis DUE</b>	Ely – Chs. 4 & 5
4/26/06	Reflecting	Ely – Ch. 6
5/3/05	<b>Ethnography in Progress DUE</b>	