Initiatives in Educational Transformation  
Prince William Class of 2011  

George Mason University  
Graduate School of Education  
Master’s in New Professional Studies – Teaching  

IETT 750: Studies in Language and Culture I  
Course begins Summer 2009 and ends December 2009  

Faculty Instructors  
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Office Hours - By Appointment  

I. Course Description  

Catalogue Description - Offers opportunity to view how language shapes realities, including perceptions of children as learners. Explores cultural constraints and transformative possibilities embedded in language.  

Hours of Lecture or Seminar per week - 3  
Hours of Lab or Studio per week - 0  

The language we use to talk about teaching and learning influences our instruction in the classroom. For example, using the language of “multiple intelligences” as a way of talking about teaching and learning frames the way we think about how we should teach and how we should treat our students.  

Language influences how we think and relate to students, parents, administrators, staff and the many cultures that comprise the school community. Language is also the medium through which we construct ourselves. What we name about ourselves reveals our self-images and values. Because these images and values can change over time and from one circumstance to another (at home versus at work versus at the beach), many theorists argue that we construct ourselves through language. Therefore, people cannot change their language without also changing aspects of their identity.  

Language has the power to shape reality, alter perception, and transform relationships. Teachers use language as an integral tool to communicate with students and learning is primarily conducted through language, yet the cultural constraints of language can actively hinder the transformative possibilities embedded in language.  

At this intersection of language, and culture is another complication – that of identity. One’s identity cannot be separated from language and culture, building the notion that all humans are “cultural” beings and all culture is mediated through language. Human beings both shape cultures and are shaped by cultures. We all live in multiple cultures because cultures emerge around shared histories, races, ethnicities, socio-economic status, genders, sexual orientation, religions, professions, and so forth. For each individual person, identities are multiple rather than singular. Language encodes cultural
perspectives but also allows us to question them.

In this course you will be encouraged to look at ways that language shapes consciousness, interpretations, and experiences within and without school walls. You will be asked to look at the connections between language and culture and issues of marginalization.

In addition, teachers in the US are increasingly being exposed to the structures, experiences and pedagogy of international educational systems. The internationalism of American schools takes scholars beyond the traditional lens of multicultural education, and places teachers at the forefront of navigating education that increasingly crosses borders and boundaries. Schools are struggling to understand how to synthesize the knowledge, experiences and allegiances among it's populations - especially in the 21st century where travel, communication, and technology keep people from having to give up their connections to their international communities. Scholars are yet to grasp the full extent of these international influences on the front lines of education, and through this course, teachers will be exposed to structures, policies, and practices that will prepare them to work with the increasingly international student body.

NATURE OF COURSE DELIVERY:

This course includes a variety of learning activities: discussions in seminar format, text-based/multi-media presentation of course materials, experiential learning activities including teacher action research, interactive assignments, cooperative learning group activities, online discussions and activities, and lecture.

II. Student Outcomes

The goals of this course are to:

- Investigate the relationships among language, culture, and schooling.
- Develop an in-depth inquiry into the language and culture of the school and the community in which one teaches.
- Become aware of critical issues in regard to gender, race, and class within classrooms, schools, and the community at large.
- Design lessons and strategies within the classroom to help students understand the language and culture of their school and community.
- Examine one’s own language, attitudes, and biases along with the individual contexts that have shaped them.

III. Relationship to Program Goals and Professional Organizations

In this course we will take a constructivist perspective on language and culture. This perspective argues that language is not neutral. Language reflects the interests of its users and their assumptions about their culture and is never neutral. For example, questions that a theorist would ask in regard to language and culture include the following: Who has power and who doesn’t? What is central and what is marginalized? How do we look at and decide about who successes and who fails in our classrooms and society? Who has a voice and who is silenced?
In this course we will examine the implicit and explicit assumptions of various languages inside and outside of educational discourse by participating in two language and culture projects. We will attempt to uncover, understand, and make use of the varieties of language that affect ourselves, our classrooms, our school culture, and the popular culture of everyday life.

Course experience and readings will explore how language is packed with assumptions, and, through reflection and critical dialogue, we will attempt to unpack the assumptions of languages that are available for talking about teaching, learning, and school culture. One important aim of the course is to raise consciousness about our language and the languages of others. We will also examine how language can promote or limit the practices that lead to teacher autonomy and moral professionalism.


21st century standards provide guidance to educators who are working to make sure the K-12 education system provides all students with rich core content and 21st century skills. The framework defined in this document presents a holistic view of 21st century teaching and learning. It presents a vision for 21st century student outcomes (a blending of content knowledge, specific skills, expertise and literacies) and the support systems that are needed to produce these outcomes.

Global Awareness
- Using 21st century skills to understand and address global issues
- Learning from and working collaboratively with individuals representing diverse cultures, religions and lifestyles in a spirit of mutual respect and open dialogue in personal, work and community contexts
- Understanding other nations and cultures, including the use of non-English languages

Communicate Clearly
- Articulate thoughts and ideas effectively using oral, written and nonverbal communication skills in a variety of forms and contexts
- Listen effectively to decipher meaning, including knowledge, values, attitudes and intentions
- Use communication for a range of purposes (e.g. to inform, instruct, motivate and persuade)
- Utilize multiple media and technologies, and know how to judge their effectiveness a priori as well as assess their impact
- Communicate effectively in diverse environments (including multi-lingual)

Collaborate with Others
- Demonstrate ability to work effectively and respectfully with diverse teams
- Exercise flexibility and willingness to be helpful in making necessary compromises to accomplish a common goal
- Assume shared responsibility for collaborative work, and value the individual contributions made by each team member

Apply Technology Effectively
• Use technology as a tool to research, organize, evaluate and communicate information
• Use digital technologies (computers, PDAs, media players, GPS, etc.), communication/networking tools and social networks appropriately to access,
• manage, integrate, evaluate and create information to successfully function in a knowledge economy Apply a fundamental understanding of the ethical/legal issues surrounding the access and use of information technologies

Work Effectively in Diverse Teams
• Respect cultural differences and work effectively with people from a range of social and cultural backgrounds
• Respond open-mindedly to different ideas and values
• Leverage social and cultural differences to create new ideas and increase both innovation and quality of work

IV. Course Materials

Required Texts


Required Chapters


Required Additional Material

• Indykids
V. Course Requirements

In addition to required readings, reflective log entries, and written assignments (see below), the course involves active participation in class meetings and in weekly school-based team meetings.

Readings. Readings are carefully chosen to stimulate thinking and dialogue. Some are chosen to challenge your thinking about particular issues. Others are chosen to dialogue with those challenges. Our hope and intention is that you will engage in dialogue around these readings and others you may want to bring to our deliberations. These readings will not contain answers; rather they are designed to raise questions. Any “answers” we come to will arise out of our deliberations as we compare ideas in readings with classroom experience and practical wisdom. Evidence of incorporation of critical interaction with readings into on-line (Blackboard) discussions, team meetings, reflective log, and papers is the essential element of documenting that one has engaged with the readings.

Weekly team meetings. Teams are expected to meet together at least once a week throughout the year (in their school or in another designated location) to discuss all aspects of the research process and progress. These regular team meetings allow teams to develop a supportive collaborative research space to engage in critical dialogue over research and teaching issues, readings, and assignments. Minutes from these meetings should be turned in to the team’s mentor via email or blackboard as determined by your mentor within 48 hours of your team meeting.

Mentors. Each school team will be assigned a faculty mentor who will work with and support team members and collaborative processes as the research progresses. Your mentor will attend your weekly team meeting approximately two times per semester and will be available on Blackboard or e-mail, phone, or by appointment. If you have any concerns, problems, discoveries, or anything else that you want to discuss with your mentor, please don’t hesitate to contact him/her.

Attendance and Participation in Class Activities are essential. This program is built on the assumption that teachers have much to learn from each other as they bring their experience and practical wisdom to bear on new learning contexts and new problems. Each class day is equivalent to approximately three weeks of class in a traditional program. It is important to be on time and to be engaged. Coming late or leaving early undermines the possibility of learning from your peers and helping your peers learn. Research on learning suggests that students learn best when they are actively engaged with the material to be learned, when they have opportunities to operate collectively and collaboratively, when faculty address students’ various learning styles and multiple intelligences, and when faculty help students see why their subjects and assignments are relevant and important. We plan class days to maximize the likelihood that you will encounter ideas in a variety of ways. We also build a lot of collaborative activity into our class days. When you are absent or not engaged, you deprive yourself and others of the chance to construct knowledge together.

VI. Course Assignments and Evaluation Criteria

1. The Community Walk is designed to make things that are usually invisible within your school community become visible. In other words, the aim of this activity is for you and your
team to come to new and deeper understandings of the community(ies) where your students live. We want you to see things about your school-community that might have otherwise gone unnoticed or remained invisible.

2. **Black Board Discussion and Analysis** is a place online where teachers in the course will participate in a variety of discussions. These discussions will focus on issues found in *Teachers as Cultural Workers* (book), *Teaching for Tolerance* (magazine) and the *Indy Kids* (newspaper). Regular (at least twice per week) and timely postings are required and a necessary component in building community and engaging in critical dialogue. **Blackboard opens Oct 17th and closes on Dec 4th.**

3. **The Community-School Connections Project** is designed to raise language and culture issues as we consider connections between the community in which your students live and your classroom. The project will engage you in the process of critical pedagogy as you *name, reflect critically* on, and begin to think about how to *act* in ways that offer empowering learning experiences for you and for your students. Guidelines for the Community-School Connections Project are attached.

4. **National Mall Field Trip**
   
   **A. Team Presentation**  
   **Due Date:** September 19 Class Day  
   
   As a school team (reducing your number back to the school team, if you went with more than one team) prepare a interesting and interactive 5-7 minute presentation that does three things:
   
   a. Explore the context of schooling in national development;
   b. Represent the stories you unearthed at the museums; and
   c. Build a portrait of the United States in the 21st century.

   Feel free to use innovative technology to stretch yourselves.

   **B. Individual Paper**  
   **Due Date:** Submit electronically in Blackboard under Assignments by October 16th by 11:55 p.m.

   This paper should be between 4-6 pages. Prepare an individual paper that addresses:
   
   a. Your own reflection of the ideas presented in the September presentations;
   b. The conflicts, challenges, and stressors on schools and students to do this work in the 21st century; and
   c. An understanding of where we might be going in terms of these issues in schools using the ideas presented in class thus far.

5. **Community-School Connections Project**  
   **Due Date:** Submit electronically in Blackboard under Assignments by September 18th by 11:55 p.m.

   This assignment provides you with an opportunity to gain new knowledge about the relationship between the school and the community in which your students live. You will learn how to obtain such information by engaging in a skilled dialogue with a community member. You will learn about self-reflection, an essential skill for a researcher.
The eight main components of this project are:

1. Identify a topic
2. Develop interview questions
3. Identify a community member (participant)
4. Write the first reflective memo in preparation for the interview
5. Interview the participant
6. Write notes on the interview
7. Write the second reflective memo on the entire process
8. Compile documents and reflect

In the following paragraphs you will receive further detailed instruction on each step of the process. It is important that you carefully follow the steps as they teach fundamental skills for data collection.

1. **Identify a topic (To be completed in class on July 27, 2009)**
   Draw on your experience as a classroom teacher and the information you obtained or were unable to obtain from the community walk as you go through the questions below:
   - What are some issues that intrigue you as a classroom teacher?
   - What are some issues/problems you have faced that may be connected to the community in which the children live?
   - During the community walk what were some questions that came to your mind?
   - What intrigued you?
   - What surprised you?
   - What upset you?
   - What would you like to know about this community?

   Using these questions create a list of topics that are of interest to you. Combine topics if appropriate to create a short list of 3 important topics. Share these topics with your team members. *Together identify one topic that is most important to all members.*

2. **Develop interview questions (To be completed and handed in by the morning of July 30th, 2009)**
   Applying the principles of respect, reciprocity and responsiveness construct a set of 5-6 interview questions as a team. Develop the questions using the guidelines provided by Robert S. Weiss on Interviewing and on the handout on Sample Interview Questions. This will be the interview protocol for the team. Pair up with a non-team member to practice interviewing and to try out your interview questions with each other. The interviewer should take notes. After the interview is completed, have a conversation discussing the interview process and the specific questions. Get back to your original team and modify your questions, if needed, based on your interviewing experience. This will be your final set of interview questions (that may be modified as you conduct the interview).

3. **Identify a community member (participant)**
   Identify a community member who works in an organization or club attended by the students in your school. The interviewee must be a person who has frequent interactions with the students. For example, a priest, a librarian, a football coach, an aftercare teacher. Check with your advisor if you are unsure. Contact this person and introduce yourself, explain the purpose of your project, and make an appointment to interview this person.
4. First Reflective Memo: Write a reflective memo in preparation for the interview (1-2 pages double spaced).

Reflect on the following questions in your memo:
- What was the participant’s response to my request?
- What are my initial thoughts about the participant based on my brief interaction?
- What are my thoughts and feelings about the interview process?
- What are some socio-cultural and moral dilemmas inherent in the topic that my team identified, that I would like to explore?

5. Interview the participant
Begin the interview by introducing yourself and explaining the purpose of your assignment. Inform the interviewee that his/her name or identification will not be revealed in your report and the information will not be published. Use the interview questions you have developed in class to begin the dialogue. Please feel free to ask additional questions as necessary. You may use a tape recorder with the participant’s permission if you feel it will help you. However, this is not a requirement. Take detailed notes during the interview. Thank the participant at the end of the interview.

6. Write notes on the interview (4-6 pages double spaced)
Type your notes as soon as you can. It is important that you not procrastinate as you will lose valuable data. Describe in detail each of the issues discussed by the community member. It is very important that you write in complete sentences. Provide a few (3-5) direct quotes that capture the participants’ perspective in their own language. At the end of your notes identify two important issues from the participant’s perspective. Do not include any analytic or reflective memos with these notes. Save such memos separately and include them in your second reflective memo.

7. Second Reflective Memo: Write a reflective memo on the entire interview process (1-2 pages double spaced)
Address the following questions in your second reflective memo:
- How did my initial thoughts affect the interview process?
- What are some differences in perspectives between the participant and me?
- Which part of the interview process was most difficult for me? Why?
- What are some socio-cultural and moral issues that emerged from the interview?

8. Compile and reflect
(Assignment due Sept 16th 2009 submit electronically in Blackboard)
Compile the documents from steps 1 through 7 and add an introduction, and preliminary conclusions to the report. The final compilation of the Community-School Connections Project must include the following:
- Introduce the research topic and the community member
- Interview questions
- First reflective memo
- Notes from the interview
- Second reflective memo
- Preliminary conclusion

Summary of Grade
Attendance & Participation  10 points
Community Walk Presentation  10 points
Black Board Discussion and Analysis  20 points
Community-School Connections Project  20 points
National Mall Field Trip Presentation  20 points
National Mall Field Trip Paper  20 points

Total                100 points

Grade Distribution

95-100                  A
94-90                   A-
85-89                   B
80-84                   B-
75-79                   C
74 and below            F

VIII. Policies and Information

Attendance Policy

You have joined this program with a team of teachers with whom you make a commitment of mutual social and intellectual support for the duration of this program. We design our pedagogy to accommodate your busy lives. We check your school division calendars to minimize conflicts with important school division events.

Each of our eight-hour class days is equivalent to three weeks in a regular semester course that meets three hours per week. Faculty and teachers are accountable to the State of Virginia, GMU, and the Graduate School of Education for meeting the expectations of class time and for ensuring that persons awarded the Master of Arts in New Professional Studies – Teaching have met their obligations. By disposition, we are not bureaucratic, neither do we equate hours spent in class as a valid measure of learning. Nevertheless, we do track attendance, so you need to be sure you attend class on class days. You cannot meet your commitments to your teammates and your obligations to the program when you are not in class on class days. To ignore absences is unfair to people who put aside other activities to come. It is a disservice to the work of teams.

We do not want to adjudicate reasons why you may decide to absent yourself from the learning community. If you are going to miss class:

1. We need you to inform us in advance in writing (email will do).
2. You will need to get your team’s agreement to help you recreate the experience you have missed (it is not enough to know what was done; you need to have the experience with your team).
3. The teaching team will require written documentation from the team that the experience has been replicated.
4. Create, complete and turn in a reflection on the alternative learning experience within 14 days of the missed class.
Failing to take this personal initiative and responsibility will result in unsatisfactory completion of the participation requirements embedded in each course.

You are able to miss 8 hours per year without affecting your grade. Beyond the 8 hours all absences need to be discussed with the teaching team in order to continue in the program.

**Inclement Weather Policy**

Check the GMU website [http://www.gmu.edu](http://www.gmu.edu) for closing or call the GMU Information Line (703-993-1000) to hear announcements of any closings. Occasionally, IET will hold classes on Saturdays when the University is officially closed. Please check our Blackboard site for an opening or closing decision from the IET faculty. Make-up class days are worked into IET’s annual calendar.

**Change of Grade Policy**

A policy for graduate students entitled “Change of Grades” is printed in the University catalog. The catalog states: “Additional work of any type submitted to improve a grade after the final grade has been assigned and sent to the Office of the Registrar is never accepted.”

There are three possible scenarios that may result in a grade change: (1) if professors allow students to resubmit improved assignments, these must be handed in prior to the final grade; (2) if there is a medical, personal, or family condition, the student may be given an “IN” (incomplete), which allows extra time to complete work (until the middle of the next semester); and (3) if a student appeals a grade he or she feels is unfair.

**GSE Syllabus Statements of Expectations**

The Graduate School of Education (GSE) expects that all students abide by the following:

Students are expected to exhibit professional behavior and dispositions. See gse.gmu.edu for a listing of these dispositions.

Students must follow the guidelines of the University Honor Code. See http://www.gmu.edu/catalog/apolicies/#TOC_H12 for the full honor code.

Students must agree to abide by the university policy for Responsible Use of Computing. See http://mail.gmu.edu and click on Responsible Use of Computing at the bottom of the screen.

Students with disabilities who seek accommodations in a course must be registered with the GMU Disability Resource Center (DRC) and inform the instructor, in writing, at the beginning of the semester. See www.gmu.edu/student/drc or call 703-993-2474 to access the DRC.
Initiatives in Educational Transformation
Prince William Campus – Class of 2011
National Mall Field Trip
Wednesday, July 29, 2009

“It is far better to see the same place through 100 pairs of eyes, than 100 different places through the same pair of eyes.” -Marcel Proust

Part of the conditioning of a school is to develop a national identity. All over the world, schools do double duty – engagement with the transfer of knowledge and the development of a workforce, as well as the promotion of patriotism, duty to country and the sense of pride in the myths and heroes of the national story.

In a country like the United States – the national story is one of immigration, migration, hard work, and a can-do spirit among others, but the face of the United States has changed dramatically over the last 10 years. Because travel is so easy, contact across borders is cheap, communication is through a network of internet portals where messages are instantaneous, this is the first generation of people who do not have to give up one culture/nationality to celebrate another – so who is American? How do people identify themselves as American? Can you hold an allegiance to the United States as well as another nation-state? Where do we go to feel at home?

In groups of 4-6 (with your school team members and another team to ensure the number is right) your exercise is to go to the National Mall to explore what it might mean to be an American and how that impacts/affects how you see education in the 21st century?

You are tasked to go to 2 Museums at the minimum – you will all go to the National Museum of American History and can then pick a second museum from the following list:

i. African Art Museum
ii. American Indian Museum
iii. Anacostia Community Museum
iv. Freer and Sackler Galleries
v. Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden
vi. US Holocaust Memorial Museum
At each museum – you will do a few things:

1. **Explore** your own perceptions of who an American is. Do you have to have a passport? Do you have to vote? Do you have to say the Pledge of Allegiance? What does “American” mean to you?

2. **Observe** who are the people around. What are the things they are looking at? How do they seem at ease or discomforted? Who are they with? What are they presenting to the world about who they are? How do people show their American-ness? How is “American culture” exhibited?

3. **Interview** people – ask them to share their story about how they see themselves as a “national” (not necessarily American – you are looking at national identity). Don’t be fooled by outward “symbols” of allegiance – not all “foreigners” are foreign. Ask for a quick story to be shared if you can.

4. **Document** what you are seeing and hearing, and how you are reflecting on everything that you are doing. It is not just about covering as much ground as you can – but in understanding what you are learning and how you might be reacting to the information you are gaining.

You should plan on bringing a digital camera and a notebook at the least.

For class you will need to return with the following:

2. **ON FRIDAY** - Each of you should bring one quote from a person that moved you or allowed you fresh insight or a new perspective to share in class on Friday.

3. **IN SEPTEMBER** - As a school team (reducing your number back to the school team, if you went with more than one team) - prepare a interesting and interactive 5-7 minute presentation that does three things:
   a. Explore the context of schooling in national development;
   b. Represent the stories you unearthed at the museums; and
   c. Build a portrait of the United States in the 21\textsuperscript{st} century.

Feel free to use innovative technology to stretch yourselves.

4. **IN OCTOBER** – prepare an individual paper that addresses:
   a. Your own reflection of the ideas presented in the September presentations;
   b. The conflicts, challenges, and stressors on schools and students to do this work in the 21\textsuperscript{st} century; and
   c. An understanding of where we might be going in terms of these issues in schools using the ideas presented in class thus far.

This paper should be between 4-6 pages.