Initiatives in Educational Transformation
Prince William Class of 2011

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

MNPE 704/EDUC 597: Research Methodologies in the New Professionalism
Course begins Summer 2009 and ends August 2010

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Instructors</th>
<th>Office</th>
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<tbody>
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** Teaching Team faculty may also be contacted through Blackboard email.

Office Hours
By Appointment

“Research is nothing but formalized curiosity. It is poking and prying with a purpose.”
Hurston (1927)

I. Course Description

Catalogue Description

**MNPE 704** - Introduces qualitative approach to research as individual school-based projects are undertaken. Draws on “action research,” which starts with participants describing reality as they see it, reflecting on it, and deriving theories and action strategies immediately applicable to concrete situations. Emphasizes understanding and using various research methodologies as innovative approaches to teaching and learning are developed.

Corequisite - EDUC 597.

Hours of Lecture or Seminar per week - 3

Hours of Lab or Studio per week – 0

**EDUC 597** - Provides advanced study on selected topic or emerging issue in American or international education.

Prerequisites - Admission to program in Graduate School of Education.

These two courses are designed to introduce students to teacher research. Teacher research allows teachers to see their classroom as environments to systematically engage in thoughtful investigation to improve their practice and pedagogy.

Teacher research is familiar to anyone who has ever been frustrated by a situation in his/her classroom and has sought to make changes in their practice to increase student learning and development. It also typically involves qualitative research methods. Quantitative research
requires a stance of outside observer, and it requires large enough numbers of research participants to see patterns within the numbers generated through the research.

In this class, we are not focusing on quantitative research because teachers, very much located inside their classrooms, are aware of the particulars of individual classes and students, and often find the assumptions and procedures of quantitative research do not align well with their teaching lives. Qualitative research, on the other hand, seeks to explore the particulars, and it supports the sense of researcher-as-teacher, or participant-as-observer. The qualitative data collection methods of observation, interviewing, and document collection ask you to systematically open your mind to new information about your teaching; the process of writing thick descriptions and careful analyses ask you to step back from your intuitive thoughts and assumptions and bring reasoned theories, experiences, and beliefs consciously to your question.

**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**

In this class you will be expected to conduct an individual yearlong qualitative research project. The aim of this work is for you to both discover what you know and then use that knowledge to improve some aspect of your teaching and/or your students’ learning.

As a result you will be expected to:

1. Learn how to critically examine your classroom practices to understand how to improve it;
2. Understand the framework of qualitative research;
3. Participate in the hermeneutic cycle of questioning, acting, revisiting, and re-questioning;
4. Explore the known and unknown themes and outcomes of systematic research; and
5. Analyze multiple sources of data and ground it in your practice to engage in a transformative exercise geared to improving teaching and your classroom practices.

**III. Relationship to Program Goals and Professional Organizations**

These courses, and the framework of teacher research, offers a way to systematize our examination of our own teaching practices and our own attempts to become better learners and teachers by:

1. Making our questions more visible to ourselves and to our colleagues,
2. Being more rigorous in our gathering of data about the situation, and
3. Being intentional in our quest to find out how our interventions are working.

In this manner, we become students of teaching and thus become learners in the company of our students.

National professional standards as set by the agencies which accredit teachers training and professional development (NCATE, NBPTS, and others) increasingly emphasize reflective
practice, conceptions of teacher accountability based on authentic assessment of student learning, attention to the diverse needs of learners, and developing mutual respect and community in classrooms. In addition such research meets the goals and recommendations of professional standards set by The Partnership for 21st century Skills and aligns with the Core Values of the Graduate School of Education at GMU.


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.

1. Reason Effectively
   • Use various types of reasoning (inductive, deductive, etc.) as appropriate to the situation

2. Use Systems Thinking
   • Analyze how parts of a whole interact with each other to produce overall outcomes in complex systems

3. Make Judgments and Decisions
   • Effectively analyze and evaluate evidence, arguments, claims and beliefs
   • Analyze and evaluate major alternative points of view
   • Synthesize and make connections between information and arguments
   • Interpret information and draw conclusions based on the best analysis
   • Reflect critically on learning experiences and processes

4. Solve Problems
   • Solve different kinds of non-familiar problems in both conventional and innovative ways
   • Identify and ask significant questions that clarify various points of view and lead to better solutions

5. Manage Goals and Time
   • Set goals with tangible and intangible success criteria
   • Balance tactical (short-term) and strategic (long-term) goals
   • Utilize time and manage workload efficiently

6. Work Independently
   • Monitor, define, prioritize and complete tasks without direct oversight

7. Be Self-directed Learners
   • Go beyond basic mastery of skills and/or curriculum to explore and expand one’s own learning and opportunities to gain expertise
   • Demonstrate initiative to advance skill levels towards a professional level
   • Demonstrate commitment to learning as a lifelong process
   • Reflect critically on past experiences in order to inform future progress

IV. Course Materials
Required Texts


Required Website

Additionally, we will use a web site developed by colleagues in the Graduate School of Education. The URL for the site is: [http://gse.gmu.edu/research/hr](http://gse.gmu.edu/research/hr). You should visit this web site often to answer questions you have about the research process. When you have questions that are not answered by the readings and discussions on this site, bring them to your mentor or to class. We hope to spark lively discussions about the assumptions and possibilities of teacher research.

Required Chapters


Required Additional Material

- Indykids
- Teaching Tolerance
- T.H.E. Journal

* Please note: Other readings, media, films, journal articles and miscellaneous content may be assigned as necessary.
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

1. Student Case Study
   Due Date: Submit electronically in Blackboard under Assignments by November 13th by 11:55p.m.
**Assignment Overview and Rationale.** The Student Case Study Project is designed to expand your understanding of multicultural and moral issues in the classroom through a research study. The process will enable you to examine a situation from multiple perspectives and expand your understanding of the context in which the situation has developed. The project will engage you in the process of critical pedagogy as you name, reflect critically and prepare to act in a moral and responsive way. Through this project you will continue to engage with the key elements of qualitative research: identification of a problem, data collection, data analysis and developing conclusions. In order to fully and systematically explore the moral and cultural issues, you will engage in a process of data collection through observations and conversations with students and parents. You will organize and analyze the data you collect to present evidence needed to construct and support your claims and conclusions.

**Case Study Directions**

In this assignment you will select an issue/topic that influences student learning in your classroom (it may or may not be related to your school community project). You will examine this issue by conducting a case study on one of your students. This is a mini research assignment, for which you will collect data using observations, and conversations with participants. You will need to observe the student in two different settings (e.g. classroom, cafeteria, gym) to understand the various factors that may be influencing the child’s learning experience. In addition, you will converse with the student and his/her parent/s to find out their perspective on the issue. This is an opportunity for you to continue to name, to reflect on socio-cultural and moral issues, and to begin to think about how you can engage in transformative action to help address them. The project is composed of six interrelated components listed below:

1. Articulate the research topic
2. Identify a student for the case study
3. Write the first reflective memo
4. Conduct observations and write down field notes
5. Engage in conversations to seek alternative perspectives
6. Write the second reflective memo

In the following paragraphs you will receive further detailed instruction on each step of the process.

1. **Articulate the research topic**

Drawing on your experience as a classroom teacher and on the information you obtained from the Community – School Connections Project, identify an issue that may be influencing the learning of one or more students. Through the next few steps you will have the opportunity to examine this learning issue through a case study with one of your students.

2. **Identify a student for the case study**

Identify a student for your case study. In choosing a student, consider the relevance of the topic in relation to the participant. Seek permission from the student (if appropriate) and their parents. In September, we will discuss what is required to request permission from parents/children to share data beyond your classroom.
3. Write the first reflective memo

Consider the following questions as you reflect upon and write your first reflective memo on the case study assignment:

- What is the specific issue that you want to investigate within the context of your classroom?
- Why did you become interested in this particular issue?
- What research question do you have on this topic that you will address through the case study?
- What are some moral dilemmas related to this topic?
- Why did you choose this student?

4. Collect data and record observations in field notes

Conduct two 30-minute observations of the student in different settings at school, in which she/he is interacting with peers or other teachers. One of the settings must be a classroom. Write field notes to document your findings. Consider the questions stated below as you gather and make sense of the data.

Descriptive questions:
- Who are the people present other than the student?
- How is the student behaving in this context?

Analytic questions:
(* Answers should have clear connection to the descriptive data.)
- What are the factors that may be influencing his/her learning?
- How can you connect what is happening with the student’s learning?
- What is your reaction to what you observe?

5. Engage in conversations to seek alternative perspectives

You will collect data from two sources, the child and the parent(s)/guardian(s).

Conversation with the child:
Engage in informal discussions with the child to find out his/her perspective on the learning issue. Write down your notes after each conversation.

Conversation with the parent(s)/guardian(s):
Engage in informal discussions with the parent(s)/guardian(s) to find out their perspective on the learning issue. Write down your notes after each conversation.

Consider the following questions as you gather and make sense of the data:

- What are some of the relevant lived experiences that the student and parent have shared that help shed needed light on this issue and its impact on the student’s engagement in learning?
- What are the student and the parents’ interpretations of the learning issue?
- How does this information relate to your experience with the student and your field notes from the observation?
- What are some moral issues that emerge from the data?
6. Write the second reflective memo
In this second reflective memo, you will summarize the data collected from the observations and the conversations and offer your reflection on what the data means. Consider the following questions as you summarize and reflect upon the findings:

- What is your interpretation of the data? What did you learn?
- How did the study deepen your understanding of the socio-cultural and moral issues related to this topic?

Project Evaluation
The final grade for the course will be determined by the following factors, as determined by your mentor. We care about the following elements of all your submitted work:

1. Required work is complete and punctual (the latter is important in case revisions are needed).
2. Written work is clear and coherent with attention to grammar, mechanics, style and spelling.
3. Written work reflects familiarity with and reflection on assigned readings.
4. Did you work to surface and question your assumptions?
5. Required work demonstrates efforts on your part to connect what you are learning to your professional practice.
6. Active, knowledgeable (you’ve read assigned readings), reflective, and generous participation as members of a learning community.

Your grade for the student case study will be determined as follows:

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<th>Component</th>
<th>Points</th>
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<tr>
<td>First reflective memo</td>
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<td>Notes from the observations</td>
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<tr>
<td>Notes from the conversations</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Second reflective memo</td>
<td>10</td>
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<td>Total</td>
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2. Performance-based Assessment: Year-long Teacher Research Project and Paper
This is an in-depth research project that builds on knowledge that you are developing over the course of the year. To scaffold your learning, we have divided the project into multiple parts, which will allow you to fully engage in the research process. The different components of your research paper will comprise of these 6 sections:

I. Introduction
II. Significance and context
III. Literature review (between 3-6 references)
IV. Data Collection and methodology
V. Findings/Analysis
VI. Conclusions

A. Research Question (approximately 1-2 pages)
Due Date: Submit electronically in Blackboard under Assignments by November 13th by 11:55p.m.
In the time before the November class day, begin thinking about what issues and/or problems are important to you as a teacher. Think about how you can formulate a question (that does not involve “counting” or “measuring” anything) that is important to you as a teacher in your new class. Also, think about why is this topic/question significant (important) to you.

B. Mid-year Research Report (4-6 pages)
Due Date: Submit electronically in Blackboard under Assignments by January 16th by 11:55 p.m.

By January, you will have conducted enough of your research project to be able to report to your colleagues and mentors about several key components. We’d like you to begin your research paper that includes these key components (listed below) but you should feel free to talk about these pieces in whatever way is most convenient for you, being sure that you ultimately craft some kind of coherent whole paper (rather than a list of bullet points). In this report, please include information about:

- The context of your school and how it impacts your research question (What is your school like? What are the demographics of the students, the faculty? What is the neighborhood like? What about parent/community involvement? What is your particular classroom like? Etc.)
- Your research question (What question did you ask initially? How did that question change and what is the question you’re currently investigating?)
- The significance of that question (Why might this particular question be important to you and potentially to a wider audience?)
- The methods you are using to investigate the question by describing your data collection process (Are you doing interviews? With whom? Why did you choose that method/those people? Are you observing classrooms/hall way conversations/recess? Why did you choose that method/those observation points? Etc.)
- At least three pieces of external literature that helps to inform your research question (What have others who are investigating similar questions discovered in their research? How do their discoveries inform your thinking?)

C. Writer’s Workshop and Draft of Final Research paper
Due Date: Send your Final Research Paper Draft to your partner through Blackboard email AND submit electronically in Blackboard under Assignments by April 9th by 11:55 p.m.

Each of you will be assigned a partner. As an exercise in sharing critical feedback and using our work through the writer’s workshop, please send a copy of your Final Research paper draft electronically via Blackboard to your partner for critical feedback. Please also drop a copy of your Final Research paper draft through Blackboard for your mentor. This version will not be grades, nor will feedback be given to you by your mentor - This exercise is for you to be able to get feedback from another member of your class before you turn in the final paper to your mentor.

Due Date: By April 16th by 11:55 p.m. Please send your assigned partner an electronic copy (via Blackboard) of their paper back to them with your comments and feedback in “track changes.”
D. Final Paper  
**Due Date:** Submit electronically in Blackboard under Assignments by May 7th by 11:55 p.m.

The final paper should have all of the updated sections that have been seen and commented on by your mentor. It should also include the findings/analysis section and the conclusion section.

E. Research Conference

By the May Class Day, you will be matched with other teachers from the class of 2011 who have conducted research projects on similar topics. Together, you will begin to create a workshop that a) showcases the strategies you used (effectively or ineffectively); and, b) opens up a discussion among workshop participants that addresses the issues of teaching and learning you raised in your research. This workshop will be presented to fellow IET teachers in a conference-style format during the first few days of the 2010 Summer Session. We hope the workshop might be something you can share with your individual schools. We will give you all the details by April.

Final Teacher Research Paper Rubric

The following rubric should allow you to understand the sense, scope and expectations for the final research paper. Each of these will be answered by ONE of the following: Meets or Doesn’t Meet Expectations.

A. Preliminaries

Has the author given the report an engaging and an informative title?

Has the author provided a Table of Contents with page numbers which outlines for the reader the major sections of the paper?

Has she/he included an abstract for the report on a separate page, single spaced, of approximately 200 words or less and, placed after the title page)? Does it include a concise description of your inquiry, context, data sources, and an overview of what was learned?

Is the abstract informative and does it engage the reader’s interest?

B. Use of Literature (Outside Sources)

Is the research informed by the questions and concerns of critical pedagogy?

Is the research put into dialogue with educational research and policy?

Has he/she woven at least five relevant literature sources throughout the final report?

C. Introduction

Has the author included a statement of the question?
Has the author given an explanation of the significance of this question/problem to himself/herself?
Has the author discussed the broader educational and social significance of the problem?

**D. Context of My Research**

Did she/he provide a context for the project by describing the aspects of classrooms, schools, and/or communities relevant to the research?

**E. Participants**

If specific groups (students, parents, faculty, etc.) have been targeted for the data collection, have they been described and has a rationale been provided for their selection?

**F. Research Interventions/Strategies**

Have they described the interventions they have implemented in their research and their rationale for implementing these particular interventions?

Has he/she made explicit the behaviors/attitudes/other changes she/he believes will occur as a result of the interventions implemented?

**G. Data Collection**

Has she/he described the precise details of what she/he did to collect data?

Has he/she described the kinds of data collected and why they are relevant to the question?

**H. Data Analysis**

Did she/he describe the processes in specific detail used to make meaning of the data?

Did he/she describe the major categories (with examples) that shaped the analysis of the data?

Has she/he discussed the various perspectives or lenses used to interpret the data?

Has she/he included samples or excerpts of data that illustrate or exemplify key parts of their argument so that the reader can judge independently that the data support the argument(s)?

**I. Understandings and Insights**

Has she/he expressed her/his key understandings as claims about patterns she/he sees in the data?

Has she/he supported claims with data from the study?

**J. Implications of the Inquiry**

Has he/she explained how this project will affect his/her future practice?
Has she/he described what implications the project holds for education in general?

Has he/she suggested what issues might be studied further?

K. Format of the Paper

Has she/he included a References page that follows APA style formats and documents published materials used in the report?

Has she/she placed interview protocols, examples of students’ work, samples of data, or anything else that makes the arguments persuasive and credible in an Appendix?

Have they followed the conventions of professional written documents and meets high standards with respect to the rules of spelling, punctuation and grammar?

L. Holistic Evaluation

Has he/she used writing to paint a picture or tell a story that engages the reader’s emotions as well as her or his intellect?

Is the paper organized so that the main ideas are clear and connected by an explicit logic?

Is his/her “voice” consistent and clear?

M. Overall Considerations

Has she/he used the tools of critical pedagogy throughout the work to enhance the power of the inquiry.

Has he/she described the inquiry in terms to allow the reader to participate in the hermeneutic process (that is, has she/he they shown how each new step builds on assessment, critical analysis and reflection about and from previous steps and assumptions)?

VII. Summary of Grades

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<tr>
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<th>MNPE 704</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Team Meeting Minutes</td>
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<td>Mid year Progress Report</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final Paper</td>
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<td>Research Conference Presentation</td>
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100 100

Grade Distribution

95-100 A
90-94 A-
85-89 B
80-84 B-
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 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.