George Mason University College of Education & Human Development — Graduate School of Education Advanced Studies in Teaching & Learning — Master of Education Program

EDRD 635, "School-Based Inquiry in Literacy"

Fall 2009 (Arlington 2008 Cohort)

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Class meetings

Wednesday, Truland Building 400 R, 4:30-7:10 pm, Arlington campus. Note that due to the nature of the course, the class does not meet as a whole group each week. Individual meeting times, small group meeting times, and/or discussion online may be required.

Course Overview

Course Description

EDRD 635, "School-Based Inquiry in Literacy" (3:3:0) Prerequisites: EDRD 630, 631, 632, 633, 637, and 634; admission to literacy emphasis; or permission of program coordinator. Capstone course in literacy emphasis focusing on research-based inquiry related to literacy in school settings. This course includes a review of literature and development of a teacher inquiry project. Please note that ASTL/Literacy students must re-take any course in which they receive a grade of C or lower, in order to be eligible for licensure (Please note that the grade of B- is not given). Incompletes must also be cleared before moving to any course for which the course is a pre-requisite.

IRA/NCATE competencies addressed in this course

- IRA 1.2 Demonstrate knowledge of reading research and histories of reading
- IRA 5.2 Continue to pursue the development of professional knowledge and dispositions
- IRA 5.4 Participate in, initiate, implement, and evaluate professional development programs

As the capstone to your master's degree program, this class is designed to support you in using and building on the ideas and content you've encountered in your previous coursework. Most importantly, the course supports you as you consider ways to better support children and youth. In other words, your current and future students are at the center of our work. Toward those ends, the course requires you to conceptualize, design, and begin to implement an original research project in your school/classroom.

Literacy teachers are often encouraged to implement "research-based" practices, required to attend workshops where research findings are presented, provided with lists of books that synthesize research, and asked to suggest changes in practice based on the implications of research. Although these practices have their usefulness, the assumption implicit in much of the discourse surrounding research in literacy education is that teachers are consumers and/or *objects* of research, rather than the *producers* of research. The past decade has seen a growing movement to upend those assumptions through an emphasis on the importance of teacher research. Thus, the research and theory we will read and the methodologies with which we will engage are those associated with "teacher research" (i.e., research conducted by teachers for professional purposes). Teacher research positions teachers as *producers* of knowledge—professionals who can learn about and improve their practice by studying important questions that grow from their own experiences and observations.

Through our readings, discussions and research, we will pursue the following goals:

• Study and implement teacher research as a key tool for professional development

- Conceptualize and implement a research project that demonstrates understanding of and knowledge about an issue related to your literacy teaching practices
- Understand and appreciate the research process as an important component of engaged teaching that seeks to provide supportive, equitable, successful classrooms for all students
- Understand methods of rigorous inquiry commonly employed in teacher research

Although the work required to achieve these goals is intensive, the course is designed to provide you with much support. You will need to hit the ground running, starting your research project early, and working on it steadily. Through our readings, we will explore research methodologies, analyses of the history and impact of teacher research, and the efforts of other teacher researchers. Our readings and discussions will help you develop your own rationale and "road map" for your inquiry project. We will dig into readings together, write often and share our writing with one another, and support each other in our research goals.

Instructor Introduction

I believe that the best teachers of literacy know themselves as literate people. I will ask you also to know yourselves as professionals with a variety of literacies, including those of photographers, visual sociologists, and community constituents. Teachers must be resilient individuals who are willing to take risks to let school literacies matter to themselves, their students, and the broader community. I will expect you to be your best, brightest, most thoughtful, and most creative selves. I intend that this course will be one you remember, and that you'll care passionately about the work we do here. I will have uncompromising professional standards for your behavior, participation, and openness. At the same time, I will do everything possible to ensure that you meet these standards. My hope is that we'll experience much intellectual camaraderie, engaging discussion, and laughter as we proceed. I encourage you to take risks and celebrate the risks taken by your colleagues.

I bring the perspectives of a veteran teacher and teacher educator, as well as the points of view of a community activist and artist. I approach all educational experiences with the goal of helping students to learn to be active, creative, "real world" members of a just society. It is important for us as educators to approach our teaching with a simultaneously critical and creative perspective: when we assess current teaching practices, we also begin to develop new ones. I offer an explicit critique of schooling: as a classroom teacher with more than fifteen years experience, as an active scholar, and as an advocate for youth and public schools, playing a critical role is my right and responsibility. It is my hope that you will take on this same role. Perhaps most importantly to you, I have spent my entire school and university teaching career engaged in classroom inquiry projects (I am currently working with two area teachers on studies of our middle school literacy practices), so I am hopeful that I'll be able to support you with your own research efforts.

Finally, much as you as teachers must be concerned with tenure, assessments of students' learning, and evaluations of your teaching, I am committed to my growth as a teacher educator. I will ask for your support in my research as I study your learning and research processes and your use of visual tools in your research efforts.

General Requirements

Readings and participation

The completion of all readings assigned for the course is assumed. Because the class will be structured around discussion and small group activities pertaining to school inquiry in literacy, it is important to keep up with the readings and to participate in class. It is your responsibility to come to class with insights, questions, comments, and concerns from the readings; I suggest that you keep a reading log that includes both notes on and reactions to each reading. This log could also house the "Mindwork" and "Prepwork" exercises you complete as you are reading our various texts, as well as contain the field notes that you'll take on your classroom as you complete your research project. Class participation will influence your grade.

Class attendance

If, due to an emergency, you will not be in class, please contact me prior to class time; it's best to do so via my mobile phone (216.470.2384). You are expected to email assignments to me regardless of your class attendance on the day that the assignment is due. Students are responsible for obtaining information given during class discussions despite attendance. Attendance will influence your grade.

Assignments

All assignments should be turned in on the due date indicated in the schedule below via both paper copy (in class) and email attachment (by midnight, whether or not you are in class that evening). All projects must be typed, in 12-point font, with one inch margins, double-spaced, in Times New Roman font. Writing quality (including mechanics, organization, and content) is figured into the overall points for each writing assignment, so please proofread carefully. Late papers and projects will not be accepted without penalty, excepting extraordinary circumstances.

General

Please see me with questions and concerns about assignments, expectations, or class activities. I am happy to clarify and lend assistance on projects and assignments, but please come to me within a reasonable timeframe. I will be available for the 15 minutes following class, in my office by appointment, at your school setting on at least one occasion, and by e-mail. I look forward to collaborating with each of you as you work toward your goals.

Course Website

I anticipate that our course website (still under development) will include information and resources important to your successful completion of the course. These may include the course syllabus, an announcement page, any PowerPoint slides that I present in class, assignment descriptions and rubrics, examples of exemplary written assignments from past students, and a bibliography of course readings and web resources.

Taskstream Artifacts

Your final teacher research project is the performance-based assessment for this course; it is required that you upload this project to the Taskstream website at the end of the course. Your Virginia Reading Assessment score is also a required portfolio artifact that you will submit to the program and upload to the Taskstream system. The ASTL/Literacy program advises you to take the VRA sometime between the end of EDRD 633 and the end of EDRD 635; information on the VRA can be found at http://www.va.nesinc.com/. You are required to take the VRA in order to complete the reading specialist program at Mason.

Our Class Routine

In general, we will engage in four activities during our time together:

- 1. Mini-lectures, activities, and discussions related to research methods led by me and supported by our readings from our course text and selected other articles
- 2. Discussions of the week's readings led by course colleagues
- 3. Research group meetings in which you will provide feedback and support for each others' writing and research process
- 4. Individual meetings and small group meetings to discuss your research efforts

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 http://www.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.

Required Texts

- Bell, A. (2008). *The impact of digital photography among low-achieving adolescents.* Unpublished masters teacher research project. Note: This paper will be provided electronically.
- Chiseri-Strater, E. & Sunstein, B. (2006). What works? A practical guide for teacher research. Heinemann. Note: Intro and sample chapter can be found at http://books.heinemann.com/shared/onlineresources/E00713/chapter9.pdf and ordered online at http://books.heinemann.com/products/E00713.aspx.
- Ewaida, M. (2008). Hearing their own voices: The effects of using multicultural literature with English language learners. Unpublished masters teacher research project. Note: This paper will be provided electronically.
- Misiura, K. (2009). Daily teacher book talks: How do they affect third grade students' book selection and reading engagement? Unpublished masters teacher research project. Note: This paper will be provided electronically.
- Myers, E. & Rust, F. (2003). *Taking action with teacher research*. Heinemann. Note: Text can be ordered at http://books.heinemann.com/products/E00544.aspx.
- Raggl, A. & Schratz, M. (2004). Using visuals to release pupils' voices: Emotional pathways into enhancing thinking and reflecting on learning. In C. Pole (Ed.), *Seeing is believing?: Approaches to visual research* (147-162). Emerald Group Publishing. Note: This article will be provided electronically.
- Sayers, A. (2009). The effect of paired writing on an English Language Learner's writing engagement and motivation. Unpublished masters teacher research project. Note: This paper will be provided electronically.
- Zenkov, K. & Harmon, J. (2009). "Picturing a writing process: Photovoice and teaching writing to urban youth." *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*, 52(7), 575-584. Note: This article will be provided electronically.

Additional readings available on-line and/or in class.

Course Requirements and Grading Scale

Class Participation Policy (15 points)

Daily attendance, consistent participation, and regular completion of at least one "Mindwork" activity from the day's reading will earn you the full 15 points for class participation. Each student is allowed one absence, no questions asked. For each session you are absent beyond this one session, 3 points will be deducted from your class participation points up to a total of 15 points. Attendance will be taken beginning on the first class session. Two tardies are equivalent to one absence, and missing 30% or more of our class sessions will result in automatic failure of the class. Participation will also take the form of the "Mindwork" activities described in the *What Works* textbook; these are meant to be informal but useful activities to guide you in completing your research project. As you read each chapter of this book, choose one of the activities to complete in your reading log and bring this activity to class so that we can use it as a point of discussion. I may also ask that you submit these to me on occasion, in order to provide you with feedback.

Discussion Leadership Group (DLG) Presentations (10 points)

Pairs or small groups of students will analyze a research article and lead a related class discussion. Topics should be linked your literacy research focus. Each pair or small group must select a research article, write a two-page critique (with copies for all members of our class), and create notes and questions to lead a 30" group discussion (the full presentation should not exceed 45"). Please email members of our class with an article URL at least one week in advance of the session at which you will present/discuss this reading, so that your peers can read this article. Do your best to use a discussion strategy that you and your peers might implement in their own school settings; provide a brief description of your discussion strategy with your article critique. In this presentation you will summarize the article and lead others in discussing relevant concepts, the research methodology, and

practical implications. We will form groups, determine dates, and discuss a more detailed assignment description in the first weeks of class.

Staff Development Project (15 points)

Each student will develop and implement either a study group or a workshop and write an analysis of the results (You may use the workshop plan developed in EDRD 634). We will discuss this assignment in the first weeks of class so that I can develop the most responsive and detailed description for you. This project can be completed individually, in pairs, or in small groups.

Reading-Related Conference (10 points)

Each student will identify a conference within the first three weeks of class, write a half-page rationale for why this conference is relevant to your potential teacher research questions, share your tentative selection with our class, and have your selection approved by Kristien. The conference cannot take place in your own school and must be at least a half-day. You will then attend this conference and write a two-page summary/analysis, describing the general lessons you took from the event and specific lessons that related to your project. See www.gwrc.net and

<u>http://www.fairfaxea.org/index.cfm?page=events/10272007_lindahoyt</u> for some initial conference resources.

Teacher Research Project (TRP) (35 points)

Each student will complete a teacher research project as the primary assignment for this course. You will write a literature review and proposal for this project, collect and analyze preliminary data, and share the results of your study with both our class and an outside audience in a PowerPoint presentation. Ideally one of your data sources will be images you've taken in your classroom/school setting (as a part of the "Visual Documentation and Reflection" assignment described below); please note that this is a suggestion, not a requirement. I will provide an outline for this project, examples of exceptional projects from prior classes, as well as due dates for various components. You are also encouraged to complete the research and apply to participate in the Virginia State Reading Association conference or any conferences associated with Greater Washington Reading Council (www.gwrc.net).

Visual Documentation and Reflection (VDR) (15 points)

You will take a minimum of five photographs for each of five class sessions (identified in the schedule below) to document your research process (identifying the problem you are trying to address, reviewing literature, determining methods, gathering data, etc.). For each of the five sessions listed in the schedule you will then choose one photograph that best illustrates where you stand with this research process and write a one-page reflection of the image and what it represents for your study. You will electronically submit this image and reflection for each class session, as well as bring to each class a printed version of each image and reflection. Your VDR can also closely relate to the "Mindwork" exercises in the *What Works* text.

Grading Scale

A+=	99-100	A- =	90%-93%	В	=	80%-87%
A =	94%-98%	B+=	88%-89%	C	=	75%-79%

Graduation and Licensure

- Virginia Reading Assessment (you must have a passing score on this test before you apply for licensure). See http://www.va.nesinc.com/ for more information. You are required to take the VRA in order to complete the reading specialist program at Mason.
- Meet with GMU Licensure Specialist Joanna Bosik (jbosik@gmu.edu). You will apply for your license immediately after you have completed the literacy coursework and master's degree. If you wait until the following term you may have to pay a fee to re-activate your file. You are required to apply for your license via Mason or your school district; you cannot apply for your license as an individual.

• Review the GMU Registrar guidelines for graduation. You must file an "Intent To Graduate" form several months prior to the end of your certificate or master's program. Note: Do NOT file for the certificate if you are going on for the master's degree. See http://registrar.gmu.edu/gif/index.html for more information. Students may apply for January and May graduation at the beginning of our fall semester.

Resources

GMU Library

http://library.gmu.edu/

Articles

- Cochran-Smith, M., Lytle, S. L (1999). The teacher research movement: A decade later. *Educational Researcher*, 28(7), 15-25.
- Richardson, L. (1998). Writing: A method of inquiry. In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.). Strategies of qualitative inquiry (volume 2). Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Rogers, R., et al. (2005). Professional development for social transformation: The literacy for social justice research group. *Language Arts*, 82(5), 347-358.

Books

- Arhar, J., Holly, M. & Kasten, W. (2001). *Action research for teachers: Traveling the yellow brick road.* Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Merrill Prentice Hall.
- Bell, J. (1993). Doing your research project: A guide for first-time researchers in education and social science. Buckingham, England: Open University Press.
- Burnaford, G., Fischer, F. & Hobson, D. (1996). *Teachers doing research: Practical possibilities*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Hopkins, D. (1993). A teacher's guide to classroom research. Buckingham, England: Open University Press. Hubbard, R. & Power, B. (1999). Living the questions: A guide for teacher researchers. NY: Stenhouse Publishers.
- Falk, B. & Blumenreich, M. (2005). The power of questions: A guide to teacher and student research. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Freeman, D. (1998). *Doing teacher research: From inquiry to understanding*. Toronto, Canada: Heinle & Heinle Publishers.
- IRA. (2004). Preparing reading professionals: A collection from the International Reading Association. Newark, DE: International Reading Association.
- Macintyre, C. (2000). The art of action research in the classroom. London: David Fulton Publishers.
- MacLean, M. & Mohr, M. (1999). Teacher-researchers at work. Berkeley, CA: National Writing Project.
- Mills, G. (2000). Action research: A guide for the teacher researcher. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill.
- Nieto, S. (2003). What keeps teachers going? New York: Teachers College Press.
- Sagor, R. (1993). How to conduct collaborative action research. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Seidman, I. (1998). Interviewing as qualitative research: A guide for researchers in education and the social sciences. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Toll, C. (2005). *The literacy coach's survival guide: Essential questions and practical answers.* International Reading Association: www.reading.org/publications/bbv/books/bk565/

Teacher Research Websites

- http://gse.gmu.edu/research/tr/tr_action/ (GMU teacher research site)
- http://www.accessexcellence.org/LC/TL/AR/ (teacher research site)
- http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/ntrp/ (UK teacher research site)
- http://www.teacherresearch.net/ (International teacher research site)

Professional Organizations

- 1. Greater Washington Reading Council: www.gwrc.net
- 2. Virginia State Reading Association: www.vsra.org
- 3. International Reading Association (IRA) (organization for educators/ and researchers) www.reading.org
- 4. National Reading Conference (NRC) (an international literacy research organization): www.nrconline.org
- 5. National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE): www.ncte.org
- 6. International Visual Sociology Association (IVSA): www.visualsociology.org

Tentative Schedule

Readings: What works? = WW; Taking action = TA; Zenkov & Harmon = ZH; Raggl & Schratz = RS Assignments: Discussion Leadership Groups = DLG; Teacher Research Project = TRP; Visual Documentation/Reflection = VDR

Date	Topic	Assignment due	Reading
Sept 2 nd	 What is teacher research? http://gse.gmu.edu/research/tr/tr_action/ Staff Development Project check-in Thinking about research topics Sign up for Discussion Leadership Groups 	• None	• None
Sept 9 th	Developing research questions	 "Mindwork" activity VDR #1	• WW, xiii – Ch. 2 • ZH article
Sept 16 th	 No class: Individual or small group conferences at school sites Goals of teacher research Researching your idea Data sources and analysis methods 	 Draft of teacher research project questions "Mindwork" activity VDR #2 (due at conference) 	• TA, v-16 • WW, Ch. 3
Sept 23 rd	 Data collection and analysis: "Assuming self and other" and "Pursuing multiple data sources" Discussion Leadership Group #1 	 "Mindwork" activity VDR #3 Reading conference rationale 	 DLG #1 article WW, Ch. 4-5 TA, Ch. 2-3
Sept 30 th	 Katie Misiura and Angela Sayers presentations Overview of methods and methodologies Discussion Leadership Group #2 	"Mindwork" activity	 Misiura article Sayers article DLG #2 article WW, Ch. 6
Oct 7 th	Research timeline	 Draft research timeline (including chart of questions, methods, data sources) VDR #4 	 TA, Ch. 4-5 RS article
Oct 14 th	No class: Individual conferences on Arlington campus	Draft teacher research project introduction and methods section	Independent TRP reading
Oct 21st	 Discussion Leadership Group #3 Preparing the working proposal Literature review sources 	 Four (4) research articles related to teacher research project topic "Mindwork" activity 	 <i>WW</i>, Ch. 7 DLG #3 article <i>TA</i>, Ch. 6-7

Date	Topic	Assignment due	Reading
Oct 28 th	 Literature bibliographies and reviews Introduction to data collection and analysis 	 Annotated bibliography (6 sources) with one paragraph description of each source VDR #5 "Mindwork" activity 	• <i>WW</i> , Ch. 8
Nov 4 th	 Athene Bell and Marriam Ewaida presentations Discussion Leadership Group #4 Interpretation and analysis Reviewing our VDRs 	 "Mindwork" activity Data sources All VDR's	 Bell article Ewaida article DLG #4 article WW, Ch. 9
Nov 11 th	 No class: Individual conferences on Arlington campus Data analysis plan and making sense of data 	• Teacher research project: revised introduction, draft literature review, revised methods section, draft analysis section	Independent TRP reading
Nov 18 th	 Staff Development Projects Sharing and disseminating your work Teacher research and impacting policy 	 "Mindwork" activity Staff Development Project report	• WW, Ch. 10 • TA, Ch. 8
Nov 25 th	No class: Thanksgiving	• None	Independent TRP reading
Dec 2 nd	No class: Individual conferences on Arlington campus	Revised full teacher research projectReading conference summary/analysis	None
Dec 9 th	 Teacher research project PowerPoint presentations Reminders: Graduation, licensure, Taskstream, VRA 	Teacher research project presentation	• None
Dec 16 th	 Teacher research project PowerPoint presentations Course evaluations End-of-semester and program celebration 	Final teacher research project (including all appendices) submitted in both paper and electronic forms	• None