

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

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Office Hours: By appointment

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Class meetings

Mondays, 4:30-7:10, Johnson Learning Center, room 5. 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.

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 office phone (703.660.8300). 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 30 minutes following class by appointment at an arranged location, and by e-mail. I look forward to collaborating with each of you as you work toward your goals.

Course Website

Our Blackboard site is at <http://courses.gmu.edu> and will include information and resources important to your successful completion of the course. These 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, a bibliography of course readings and web resources, and electronic versions of some required readings.

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/>.

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.
- 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.
- 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.

Reading-Related Conference (10 points)

Each student will identify a conference within the first two 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 Mary Jane. 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 for ideas on upcoming conferences.

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 = 94%-98%

A- = 90%-93%
B+ = 88%-89%

B = 80%-87%
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.
- 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.
- 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.vusra.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
8/31 Class #1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is teacher research? http://gse.gmu.edu/research/tr/tr_action/ • Staff Development Project Brainstorm • Research Project Brainstorm and Clustering • Sign up for Discussion Leadership Groups 	None	None
9/14 Class #2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing research questions • Individual or small group conferences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Mindwork” activity • VDR #1 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>WW</i>, xiii – Ch. 2 • <i>ZH</i> article
9/21 Class #3	Individual Conferences at JLC (No Class) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Goals of teacher research • Researching your idea • Data sources and analysis methods 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TRP: Draft of research questions • “Mindwork” activity • VDR #2 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>TA</i>, v-16 • <i>WW</i>, Ch. 3
9/28 Class #4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data collection and analysis: “Assuming self and other” and “Pursuing multiple data sources” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DLG #1 (on research articles) • “Mindwork” activity • VDR #3 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DLG #1 article • <i>WW</i>, Ch. 4-5 • <i>TA</i>, Ch. 2-3
10/5 Class #5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overview of methods and methodologies • Guest Speaker (tentative) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DLG #2 (on research articles) • “Mindwork” activity • VDR #4 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DLG #2 article • <i>WW</i>, Ch. 6 • Bell TR project
10/13 Class #6	TUESDAY CLASS Individual Conferences at JLC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Mindwork Activities” and VDR #1-#4 • Preliminary results from initial literature search 	Initial Literature Search
10/19 Class #7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Literature bibliographies and reviews • Introduction to data collection and analysis • Reviewing our VDRs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DLG #3 (on research articles) • TRP: Annotated bibliography (6 sources) with one paragraph description of each source 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DLG #3 article • <i>RS</i> article • <i>TA</i>, Ch. 4
10/26 Class #8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preparing the (working) proposal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Mindwork” activity • VDR #5 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>WW</i>, Ch. 7-8 • <i>TA</i>, Ch. 5

Date	Topic	Assignment due	Reading
11/2 Class #9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Data collection and the research plan More on data interpretation and analysis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> DLG #4 (on research articles) “Mindwork” activity TRP: 1) Outline of research plan with preliminary data; 2) literature review (annotated bibliography + 2 additional sources): 8-10 pp, APA-formatted comparison/contrast of sources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> DLG #4 article <i>WW</i>, Ch. 9 <i>TA</i>, Ch. 6-7
11/9 Class #10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sharing and disseminating your work Guest Speaker (tentative) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> DLG #5 (on research articles) “Mindwork” activity Draft teacher research project 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>WW</i>, Ch. 10 <i>TA</i>, Ch. 8 Ewaida TR Project
11/16 Class #11	Individual Conferences (No Class)	None	Individual TRP Reading
11/23 Class #12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff Development Projects Discuss Possible Review Topics 	Staff Development Project report	Individual TRP Reading
11/30 Class #13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review Individual Conferences (6:30-8:10) 	None	Individual TRP Reading
12/7 Class #14	Individual Conferences at JLC (No Class)	None	Individual TRP Reading
12/14 Class #15	Teacher research project presentation day	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Share research plan/findings in PowerPoint; include chart showing questions, data sources, methods and analysis, findings Final research plan 	None
12/21 Class #16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teacher research project presentation day End of course/program celebration Reminders: graduation, licensure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> As above 	None