EDCI 698: Conducting Research on Teaching

Section IH60
Fall 2014 – Spring 2015
Tuesdays
4:30 PM – 7:45 PM

University of Maryland at Shady Grove
Building II, Room 2062

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General Information and Tentative Syllabus

NOTE: Learning Assistance Service at Maryland--If you are experiencing difficulties in keeping up with the academic demands of this class, you are encouraged to contact the Learning Assistance Service, 2202 Shoemaker Building, 301-314-7693. Their educational counselors can help with time management, reading, math learning skills, note taking, and exam preparation skills. All learning assistance services are provided without charge to University of Maryland students. Learning Assistance Service Website: www.counseling.umd.edu/LAS

Enterprise Learning Management System (ELMS) General Information
ELMS (CANVAS) Homepage: http://elms.umd.edu
ELMS Student Help Line: 8:00 A.M. – 6:00 P.M., Mon. – Fri., (301) 405-1400

EDCI 698 Course Description

The College of Education faculty believes that professional teachers need to be reflective about their own practice. EDCI 698: Conducting Research on Teaching provides grounding for Master’s Degree with Certification Program (MCERT) teacher interns to develop and utilize their reflective capacities by examining theory, research, and best practice for them to engage in disciplined inquiry into their own classroom teaching practices during the course of their teaching internship. During fall semester, interns, working collaboratively with their mentor teachers, will examine their School Improvement Plans (SIPs) and their schools’ demographics and data on the Maryland Report Card (http://www.mdreportcard.org) to identify a problem space and research question(s) relevant to their own teaching practice, review the research literature, generate a theory of understanding about their highlighted classroom problem, and identify research-based best practices that can address their target problem and research question(s). Interns will develop and implement a pilot study to improve student learning and achievement in their classrooms, design and implement a research study of their pilot, collect, interpret and analyze classroom data, identify emerging themes, present their pilot research with their preliminary findings, and write an action research/seminar paper.

Conducting research that examines one’s own teaching requires a reflective perspective, because the participant being researched is oneself, which typically includes lack of objectivity (bias), preconceived notions about what works in classrooms (teacher folklore), and other confounding variables that can interfere with valid and reliable research findings. To address these action research issues it is critically important that each intern have the full support of the MCERT community since all interns face the challenge of improving their own teaching by engaging in systematic self-study, which has the potential to improve learning and achievement of their students.

Because it is crucial that MCERT interns tap the resources of a trusted, safe professional community (mentor teachers, professors, intern colleagues, learned others) to research the improvement of their teaching, EDCI 698 will organize interns into triads (groups of three). Interns will be expected to provide generous and professional feedback to their peers throughout the development of each action research study. Interns will also have access to the instructor who will provide feedback and direction with each course assignment that will culminate in the final action research paper report.

Wayne H. Slater, Ph.D.
Teaching & Learning, Policy & Leadership (TLPL)
Office: 2311 Benjamin Building
Office Ph: (301) 405-3128 or (301) 405-3324
Em: wslater@umd.edu or wynsltr@gmail.com
Skype: wayneslatter
Office Hours: After class on Tuesdays and by appointment

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EDCI 698 Course Objectives

(INTASC 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10: Emerging Commitments Equity and Diversity, Advocacy, Reflection, Innovation and Creativity, Responsible for Ethical Action, and Specialist Competence; Conceptual Framework Knowledge of Subject Matter, Pedagogy, Learners, Curriculum, Social and Cultural Contexts.)

EDCI 698 is designed

- To closely examine a dimension of your own practice with a perspective of improving your teaching. (INTASC 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 9; Emerging Commitments Reflection, Specialist Competence; Conceptual Framework Knowledge of Subject Matter, Pedagogy, Learners, Curriculum, Social and Cultural Contexts).

- To develop the tools, knowledge, and skills that support an intentional, systematic, and rigorous investigation of practice (INTASC 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 9; Emerging Commitments Reflection, Specialist Competence; Conceptual Framework Knowledge of Subject Matter, Pedagogy, Learners, Curriculum, Social and Cultural Contexts).

- To engage students in the process of investigating the nature of the problems faced in daily classroom practice and in generating and evaluating promising solutions from a more deeply informed perspective (INTASC 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 9; Emerging Commitments Internationalization, Reflection, Responsible and Ethical Action, Specialist Competence; Conceptual Framework Knowledge of Subject Matter, Pedagogy, Learners, Curriculum).

- To guide students through the research process in a classroom setting (INTASC 1, 2, 3; Emerging Commitments Reflection, Responsible and Ethical Action; Conceptual Framework Knowledge of Subject Matter, Pedagogy, Learners, Curriculum, Social and Cultural Contexts).

- To help students learn the importance of collaboration in examining their own teaching through membership in a research group (INTASC 9, 10; Emerging Commitments Advocacy, Responsible and Ethical Action; Conceptual Framework Knowledge of Educational Goals and Assessment).

- To show students how research on the improvement of one’s own teaching can have a potentially transformative effect on student learning as well as school improvement and change (INTASC 9, 10; Emerging Commitments Equity and Diversity, Advocacy, Reflection, Responsible and Ethical Action; Conceptual Framework Knowledge of Educational Goals and Assessment).

- To conduct research that allows students to engage in professional conversations with their colleagues about some of the problems, challenges, and dilemmas of teaching and learning in the context of practice (INTASC 9, 10; Emerging Commitments Advocacy, Responsible and Ethical Action; Conceptual Framework Knowledge of Educational Goals and Assessment).

\[1\] INTASC (Interstate Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium) is sponsored by the Council of Chief State School Officers.
Required Texts

Below I have included a list of required texts we will be using extensively in this course. You are not required to purchase them. However, in previous EDCI 698 sections, students insisted that I order copies for everyone. You may decide to share texts or borrow texts to save money. At the same time, if you are planning to build a professional library focused on teacher (action) research, the text specified is the most frequently used and cited in conducting research on teaching (action research). The purchase decision is yours.


Highly Recommended References and Texts


Course Requirements for EDCI 698: Fall 2014 – Spring 2015

Interns earn one (1) credit in the fall semester and two (2) credits in the spring semester for this yearlong course. Intern performance will be evaluated as satisfactory or unsatisfactory (not by letter grades) at the end of the fall semester 2014, based on the completion of five benchmark assignments (refer to 1 – 5 below).

Interns who receive an unsatisfactory evaluation in December will be required to register for three credits in the spring semester. At the end of the yearlong course, students will receive a final letter grade that reflects their successful completion of an action research paper at the master’s degree level (75% of the final grade) as well as a formal presentation of their action research findings (25% of the final grade). Interns will present their inquiry project at their school sites to their colleagues (e.g., school staff/department meeting).

From the beginning of the course this fall (2014) to the completion of the course next spring (2015), interns will be guided through several benchmark assignments that are designed to help scaffold the inquiry process. The benchmark assignments are as follows:

1) Action Research Problem, Research Question(s), and Research Rationale (fall semester, 2014)
2) Research Plan (fall semester, 2014)
3) Data analysis paper (Components include data collection instruments, triangulation, member checks, validity and reliability) (fall semester, 2014)
4) Research Literature Review (fall semester 2014) first draft / spring semester (2015) final draft
5) Action Research Proposal (fall semester, 2014) (Components include revised problem statement, research question(s), rationale for research question(s), research literature review, description of methodology for classroom pilot, instrumentation, validity and reliability checks (triangulation, member checks, etc.), data collection and analysis)
6) Rough Draft of Action Research paper (spring semester, 2015)
7) Action Research Presentation (based on preliminary findings from research) (spring semester, 2015)
8) Final Action Research Paper (spring semester, 2015)
(The Final Action Research Paper will be 35-50 pages long, follow Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (APA, 6th ed.) guidelines, and meet University of Maryland College of Education expectations for master’s seminar papers).

NOTE: All interns must complete every assignment at a satisfactory or higher level to pass EDCI 698.

EDCI 698 Course Expectations

A. Professionalism

Interns are expected to attend all scheduled classes and to arrive on time. If you are unable to attend class for some documented emergency, you must contact the instructor as soon as possible (wslater@umd.edu). Missed class sessions (without prior approval) will affect your final grade in this course by 5% per missed class.

Interns are expected to come to class prepared, having read the assigned readings, taken notes, constructed reader-based questions, and completed any other assignment. Your notes and reader-based questions must go beyond the basic level of comprehension and instead indicate how the readings added to your knowledge or changed your thinking. These notes and questions will serve as a basis for your written assignments and will assist you in participating in class discussions thoughtfully, responsibly, and constructively.

Interns are expected to participate actively in class discussions. Be prepared to share insights each class session that were shaped by the readings and your emerging experiences as an intern working with a mentor teacher. Your participation is important not only for your own growth and learning but also for the learning of others in the course. Class discussions serve as a forum in which interns can sharpen their thinking, test ideas, exchange insights and perceptions with the instructor and with each other, and contribute towards others thinking.

To make this happen, we must all work hard at providing opportunities for all perspectives to be voiced and acknowledged in order to maximize your learning in this course. We will all strive to be tolerant, patient, and respectful of diverse viewpoints.

All papers for this course, and all courses taken in the MCERT program, must represent interns’ original work/ideas, be written in accordance with Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (APA, 6th ed.) guidelines for writing research papers and must be word-processed, double-spaced, Times New Roman (12 point font) with one (1) inch (2.54 cm) margins at the top, bottom, left, and right of every page.

B. Teacher Journal

Every intern is expected to maintain a Teacher Journal for EDCI 698. Interns are expected to bring this journal to every class session (hardcopy and/or electronic version). The journal will guide your action research project by helping you reflect on your own classroom practices. Interns are expected to keep a regular record (daily/weekly) of their responses, ideas, questions, and reflections about their teaching. This journal will serve as one primary source of data for your action research, a running record and commentary of what transpires in your classroom, conversations between you and your students and between you and your mentor teacher and other colleagues, and your sense-making of these interactions. Time will be built into each class session for interns to share their entries with their peers and to engage in dialogue about each intern’s ongoing questions about their practice. Selections from your teacher journal are expected to appear in your final action research paper as evidence of your thinking about your inquiry topic.

C. Data/Sources Folder: Audit Trail

During both semesters of EDCI 698, maintain a data/sources folder (digital (Word files, PDF files, etc.) or 3-ring binder or accordion folder). Organize your data/sources folder chronologically by type of data and type of research article. This folder will serve as your repository for your audit trail. Be prepared to bring it to class for discussion and peer review. Dates will be provided for audits.

Format for Major Papers in EDCI 698

All major papers (and other assignments and requests) will be written in edited Academic English and must be typed and prepared on standard size (8 1/2 x 11) white paper. The required typeface is Times New Roman, with
12-point font size. Papers should be double-spaced with one (1) inch (2.54 cm) margins at the top, bottom, left, and right of every page.

All outside sources used for any paper or project must be listed in a reference section and noted in the text of the paper or project according to an APA (see *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*, 6th edition) format.

Finally, make photocopies of all submitted work for your files. Do not fax papers to me.

**Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) Documents**

Maryland State Department of Education: [http://www.marylandpublicschools.org/MSDE](http://www.marylandpublicschools.org/MSDE)


**Maryland Report Card**

For performance reports by state, by local school system, and by individual schools, check the *Maryland Report Card* website: [http://www.mdreportcard.org](http://www.mdreportcard.org)

**Common Core State Standards Initiative (CCSSI)**

Mission Statement: The *Common Core State Standards* provide a consistent, clear understanding of what students are expected to learn, so teachers and parents know what they need to do to help them. The standards are designed to be robust and relevant to the real world, reflecting the knowledge and skills that our young people need for success in college and careers. With American students fully prepared for the future, our communities will be best positioned to compete successfully in the global economy.


CCSSI APP: Go to iTunes and download the free APP (for iPhone and/or tablet) by MasteryConnect, an endorsing partner of the Common Core State Standards Initiative.

**University Honor Code**

The University has a nationally recognized Honor Code, administered by the Student Honor Council. The Student Honor Council proposed and the University Senate approved an Honor Pledge. The University of Maryland Honor Pledge reads:

“I pledge on my honor that I have not given or received any unauthorized assistance on this assignment/examination.”

Unless you are specifically advised to the contrary, the Pledge statement should be handwritten and signed on the front cover of all papers, projects, or other academic assignments submitted for evaluation in this course. Students who fail to write and sign the Pledge will be asked to confer with the instructor.

**Religious Observances**

The University System of Maryland policy states that students should not be penalized for participation in religious observances and that, whenever feasible, they should be allowed to make up academic assignments that are missed due to such absences. This policy also states that students are responsible to, within the first two weeks of the semester, hand submit notification of the projected absence(s). This is especially important for final examinations. I take the validity of these requests at face value. An extensive list of religious holidays can be found at [http://www.interfaithcalendar.org](http://www.interfaithcalendar.org). Tests and the due dates of other significant assessment must not be scheduled during:

- **Rosh Hashanah**: Sundown, Wednesday, Sept. 24 - Nightfall, Friday, Sept 26, 2014
- **Yom Kippur**: Sundown, Friday, Oct. 3 - Nightfall, Saturday, Oct. 4, 2014
- **Good Friday**: Friday, April 3, 2015
Passover Sunset, Friday, April 3 - Nightfall, Saturday, April 11, 2015

It is your responsibility to inform me of any intended absences for religious observances in advance and that prior notification is especially important in connection with final examinations, since failure to reschedule a final examination before the conclusion of the final examination period may result in loss of credits during the semester. This problem is especially likely to arise when final exams are scheduled on Saturdays. I understand and adhere to this policy making every feasible effort to accommodate your requests based on attendance of religious observances.

Course Evaluation (CourseEvalUM)

The Course Evaluation (CourseEvalUM) system will be open for course reviews. The website (www) is https://www.courseevalum.umd.edu/

Grading

All major papers and shorter papers will be graded on an A - F basis. Some of the shorter exercises will be graded on a P - F basis. In the rare instance when it is necessary for me to give an Incomplete (I), undergraduates are required to complete the standard UMCP Incomplete Contract form available in the College of Education Access Center, 1204 Benjamin Building.

The university uses the following grading system: A, B, C, D, F, XF, I, P, S, and W. These marks remain as part of the student's permanent record and may be changed only by the original instructor on certification, approved by the department chair and the dean, that an actual mistake was made in determining or recording the grade: A+, A, A- denotes excellent mastery of the subject and outstanding scholarship. In computations of grade point averages, these grades are assigned 4 quality points per credit hour; B+, B, B- denotes good mastery of the subject and good scholarship. Marks of B+, B, B- are assigned 3 quality points per credit hour; C+, C, C- denotes acceptable mastery of the subject and the usual achievement expected. These grades are assigned 2 quality points per credit hour; D+, D, D- denotes borderline understanding of the subject. These grades denote marginal performance, and they do not represent satisfactory progress toward a degree. These grades are assigned a value of 1 quality point per credit hour; F denotes failure to understand the subject and unsatisfactory performance. F grades are assigned 0 quality points per credit hour; XF denotes failure due to academic dishonesty; S is used to denote satisfactory performance by a student in progressing thesis projects, orientation courses, practice teaching etc. S grades are not included in computation of cumulative averages; W indicates withdrawal from a course in which the student was enrolled at the end of the schedule adjustment period. This mark is not used in any computation of quality points or cumulative average totals at the end of the semester; and Pass-Fail - See a description of the grade and the University's policy.

Final Grades in EDCI 698

All work (assignments and final paper) will be taken into account in determining your final grade. The final action research paper will be given greater weight. Class participation will also be a determining factor.

The breakdown is as follows: Action Research Paper: 75%; Formal Presentation of Action Research: 20%; Class participation: 5%.

If you wish to check your final grade, go to the University of Maryland homepage website. Click on Testudo. Then click on Records & Registration. Finally, click on View Your Grades.

Class Participation

Since class participation is an important part of this course, it will count as a factor in determining your final grade.
Online Writing Centers

Below, I have included information on three important online writing centers.

**HARVARD UNIVERSITY**
Cambridge, Massachusetts

[http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~wricntr/](http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~wricntr/)

**PURDUE UNIVERSITY**
West Lafayette, Indiana

[http://owl.english.purdue.edu/](http://owl.english.purdue.edu/)

**RENSSELAER POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE**
Troy, New York

[http://www.ccp.rpi.edu/resources/](http://www.ccp.rpi.edu/resources/)

World Wide Web (www) Access to the University of Maryland

University of Maryland General Information: [http://www.umd.edu/](http://www.umd.edu/)

University of Maryland Testudo: [http://www.testudo.umd.edu/](http://www.testudo.umd.edu/)


University Book Center: [http://umcp.bncollege.com/](http://umcp.bncollege.com/)

University of Maryland SEATS: [http://www.sis.umd.edu/bin/seats](http://www.sis.umd.edu/bin/seats)

Mandatory CITI Human Subjects Training Requirement in the Dept. of Teaching & Learning, Policy & Leadership (TLPL)

All students in TLPL programs (B.A., B.S., M.A., M.Ed., Ph.D., Ed.D. and all graduate certificate programs) involved in human subject research are required to complete CITI Human Subjects Training. By completing this requirement, students will be allowed to fully participate in individual, class and team research initiatives in the Department.

To complete the CITI Human Subjects Training requirement, go to the CITI Training Website at [https://www.citiprogram.org](https://www.citiprogram.org), fill in the required information, select University of Maryland College Park from the college/university drop down menu, and complete the **Social & Behavioral Research – Basic/Refresher, Basic Course** module.

Students should complete the CITI Human Subjects Training requirement during the first course in their program. Keep in mind that CITI Human Subjects Training is valid for three years and must be renewed for each additional three-year period.

If faculty or students have completed CITI Human Subjects Training (again, Maryland requires the Social & Behavioral Research – Basic/Refresher, Basic Course module) before accepting a position at Maryland or entering a program Maryland, go to your CITI Training Website home page at [https://www.citiprogram.org](https://www.citiprogram.org), find the college/university drop down menu, and change your previous college or university to University of Maryland College Park.
Institutional Review Board (IRB): TLPL IRB and Campus IRB

For all current information and application forms on conducting research with human subjects, I suggest you consult the Campus IRB website: http://www.umresearch.umd.edu/IRB/.

Keep in mind that all research applications to conduct research with human subjects must first be submitted using IRBNet, reviewed and approved by your adviser, and then reviewed and approved by TLPL IRB before submission to Campus IRB.

Recording of Class Lectures

All rights reserved. No part of any lecture may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording or any informational storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the professor.

Mobile/Cell Phones and Electronic Devices

Please turn off mobile phones and other electronic devices during class.

Letters of Recommendation

One of my most important responsibilities is to write excellent letters of recommendations in which I fully support colleagues and students in their professional endeavors. In order to write an effective letter, I need a copy of your current resume; and the full name, professional title, department or unit (with room number, if available), street address, city, state, and zip code of the person to whom I am sending your recommendation. In addition, if you are required to provide me with an evaluation form to accompany the letter, make sure that you complete (type) all of the required information on the form before you give it to me.

I do not write open letters of recommendation (refer to the Buckley Amendment). That is, I do not write public letters for inclusion in professional portfolios, websites, or other published venues. I am always willing to provide you with a copy of the letter that I write for you, but the content of that letter is between you and me. Open (public) letters of recommendation are not worth the paper on which they are written.

Questions or Problems

If you have any questions or problems regarding assignments, papers, or quizzes, please see me about them. By working together, we can resolve any difficulties. Do not hesitate to stop by during my office hours or to make an appointment for some other convenient time.
EDCI 698: FALL 2014 – SPRING 2015

TENTATIVE SYLLABUS and CLASS SCHEDULE

1. Tues., Sept. 9, 2014

Introduction to course
Action Research

EDCI 698 syllabus
ELMS/CANVAS site for EDCI 698

[Bring your reader-based questions to class.]
Ferrance, ACTION RESEARCH (Northeast and Islands Regional Educational Laboratory at Brown University) [Bring your reader-based questions to class.]

Bring a copy of your School Improvement Plan to class. Bring your draft problem space to class for discussion.

If you have already identified your problem space, bring your problem space and draft action research topic to class.

We will focus on identifying problem spaces and narrowing action research topics at our first class session.

If you have already begun to narrow your action research topic, begin your information search of the research literature by finding relevant journal articles on your draft topic published during the last ten (10) years. Then proceed backwards in increments of ten (10) years.

Use Priddy Library (http://www.shadygrove.umd.edu/library) at the Universities at Shady Grove. Select Education Research Complete (EBSCO), PsychINFO, and ERIC for your searches.

If you have questions about researching your draft topic and need assistance, you are welcome to submit your questions via email to the on-line education reference librarian: Daniel E. Feinberg (Priddy Library: Shady Grove): dfeinber@umd.edu. You are also invited to make appointments to meet with him at a mutually convenient time.

Also, consider using McKeldin Library (http://www.lib.umd.edu/#find/articles) and creating your personal Research Port account. Again, select Education Research Complete (EBSCO), PsychINFO, and ERIC for your searches.

Do not use Quick Search for your action research information searches.

Inquiry group meeting time

Check out these websites focused on action research.

Action Research: http://www.emtech.net/actionresearch.htm
Brown University Swearer Center: http://www.emtech.net/actionresearch.htm
Center for Applied Linguistics: http://www.cal.org/resources/digest/0308donato.html
TeacherResearch.net: http://www.teacherresearch.net

Note: Current, topical readings (from AAA, AERA, APA, etc.) that have major implications for action researchers will be posted in ELMS/CANVAS for reading and discussion throughout the semester.
2. Tues., Sept. 16

   Ethics

   Mills, Chap. 2: Ethics

   Inquiry group meeting time

3. Tues., Oct. 7

   Deciding on an Area of Focus

   Mills, Chap. 3

   Inquiry group meeting time

   **Due: Action Research Problem, Question(s), and Rationale**

4. Tues., Oct. 21

   Data Collection Techniques

   Mills, Chap. 4

   Inquiry group meeting time

   **Due: Research Plan**

5. Tues., Oct. 28

   Data Collection Considerations: Validity, Reliability, and Generalizability

   Mills, Chap. 5

   Inquiry group meeting time

6. Tues., Nov. 18

   Data Analysis and Interpretation

   Mills, Chap. 6

   Inquiry group meeting time

   **Due: Data analysis paper (Components include data collection instruments, triangulation, member checks, validity and reliability)**
7. Tues., Nov. 25

Action Planning for Educational Change

Mills, Chap. 7

Inquiry group meeting time

Due: Research Literature Review (first draft)

8. Tues., Dec. 9

Writing Up Action Research

Mills, Chap. 8

Inquiry group meeting time

Due: DRAFT Action Research Proposal (Components include revised problem statement, research question(s), rationale for research question(s), research literature review, description of methodology for classroom pilot, instrumentation, validity and reliability checks (triangulation, member checks, etc.), data collection and analysis.)


Evaluating Action Research

Bloom’s Revised Taxonomy

Mills, Chap. 9

Inquiry group meeting time

Second Rough Draft of Action Research Proposal is due.

10. Tues., Jan. 13

Evaluating Action Research

Mills, Chap. 9

Final Draft Action/Inquiry Research Proposal is due.

Group feedback on final draft of Action/Inquiry Research Proposal with rubric.
11. Tues., Feb. 3

Evaluating Action Research

Mills, Chap. 9

**Rough Draft of Action/Inquiry Research Paper is due.**

Group feedback on rough draft of Action/Inquiry Research Paper with rubric.

12. Tues., Feb. 24

Evaluating Action Research

Mills, Chap. 9

**Second Rough Draft of Action/Inquiry Research Paper is due.**

Group feedback on second rough draft of Action/Inquiry Research Paper with rubric.

13. Tues., March 10

Evaluating Action Research

Using Power Point and Digital Media for Research Presentations

Mills, Chap. 9

**Final Draft of Action/Inquiry Research Paper is due.**

Group feedback on final draft of Action/Inquiry Research Paper with rubric.

14. Tues., March 24 (date may change because of spring break)

**Draft Power Point presentation of Action/Inquiry Research Paper findings is due.**

Group feedback on draft Power Point presentation of Action/Inquiry Research Paper findings

15. Tues., March 31 (date may change because of spring break)

Action/Inquiry Research presentations

16. Tues., April 7

Action/Inquiry Research presentations

17. Tues., April 14

Action/Inquiry Research presentations
REVIEW OF THE RESEARCH LITERATURE

What is a review of the literature? A literature review is an account of what has been published on a topic by respected scholars and researchers. In writing the literature review, your purpose is to convey to your reader what knowledge and ideas have been established on a topic, and what their strengths and weaknesses are. As a piece of writing, the literature review must be defined by a guiding concept (e.g., your research objective, the problem or issue you are discussing, or your argumentative thesis). It is not just a descriptive list of the material available or a set of summaries.

Besides enlarging your knowledge about the topic, writing a literature review allows you to gain and demonstrate skills in two areas:

1. information search: the ability to scan the research literature efficiently, using manual or computerized methods, to identify a set of useful articles and books;
2. critical evaluation: the ability to apply principles of analysis to identify unbiased and valid studies.

A literature review must do these things:

a) be organized around and related directly to the thesis or research question you are developing;

b) synthesize results into a summary of what is and is not known;

c) identify areas of controversy in the literature;

d) formulate questions that need further research.

Ask yourself questions like these:

1. What is the specific thesis, problem, or research question that my literature review helps to define?

2. What type of literature review am I conducting? Am I examining issues of theory? methodology? policy? quantitative research (e.g. on the effectiveness of a teaching strategy)? qualitative research (e.g., case studies)?

3. What is the scope of my literature review? What types of publications am I using (e.g., journals, books, government documents, popular media)? What discipline am I working in (e.g., writing research, psychology, sociology, education policy)?

4. How good was my information search? Has my search been wide enough to ensure I have found all the relevant material? Has it been narrow enough to exclude irrelevant material? Is the number of sources I have used appropriate for the length of my paper?
5. Have I critically analyzed the literature I use? Do I follow through on a set of claims and questions, comparing them to each other and the ways scholars articulate them? Instead of just listing and summarizing claims, do I evaluate them, discussing strengths and limitations?
6. Have I cited and discussed studies contrary to my perspective?
7. Will the reader find my literature review relevant, appropriate, and useful?

Ask yourself questions like these about each book or article you include:

1. Has the author formulated a problem/issue?
2. Is it clearly defined? Is its significance (scope, severity, relevance) clearly established?
3. Could the problem have been approached more effectively from another perspective?
4. What is the author’s research orientation (e.g., interpretive, critical inquiry, combination)?
5. What is the author’s theoretical framework (e.g., psychological, developmental, feminist)?
6. What is the relationship between the theoretical and research perspectives?
7. Has the author evaluated the literature relevant to the problem/issue? Does the author include literature that takes positions she or he does not agree with?
8. In a research study, how valid are the basic components of the study design (e.g., sample, intervention, outcome)? How valid and reliable are the measurements? Is the analysis of the data accurate and relevant to the research questions? Are the conclusions derived in a valid and reliable manner from the data and analyses?
9. In material written for a popular readership, does the author use appeals to emotion, one-sided examples, or rhetorically charged language and tone? Is there an objective basis to the reasoning, or is the author merely rehearsing what he or she already believes?
10. How does the author structure the argument? Can you deconstruct the flow of the argument to see whether or where it breaks down logically (e.g., in establishing cause-effect relationships)?
11. In what ways does this book or article contribute to our understanding of the problem under study, and in what ways is it useful for instructional practice? What are the strengths and limitations?
12. How does this book or article relate to the specific thesis or question I am developing?