EDUC 706
Youth Literacy, Culture, and Identity

TENTATIVE COURSE PLAN, subject to change!

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Class Hours:     Weds, 9:00 AM-noon
Office Hours:    Tues, noon-1:00, Weds, noon-1:00, or by appointment

Course Description

When I proposed to teach this class as the Literacy Seminar requirement, I was motivated by what I see as a general lack of attention in our society to the social, cultural, political, and educational issues of youth—people of about 10-20 years of age. I wanted to offer a course that focused almost exclusively on youth and young adults. When I chose the three constructs on which we would focus in the course—literacy, culture, and identity—I was motivated to include literacy at least in part because I was offering a literacy seminar, but I also chose to include literacy because it seems to be a contested space, as well as a space where identities and cultures mingle and blur and are implicated in both productive and limiting ways.

Identity seemed like a useful construct to consider in conjunction with a focus on youth literacy, because all sorts of claims are made about youth in terms of their identity development, construction, and representation. But identity, as a construct, is difficult to define. We have little clarity in the field of education or in its contributing disciplines as to what identity really is.

Culture, like identity, is often invoked as an explanation for why youth engage with their social and school worlds as they do. Everything from ethnic to youth to popular culture is named as an explanation for youth literacy and identity practices, with little attention to what they different “types” of cultures might mean, especially to youth, or even to what the general concept means.

So this is what we’ll be doing in this course: We will examine youth in terms of how they use literacy; how they claim, construct, or challenge identities (and subjectivities); and how they shape and are shaped by the different cultural practices they invent or in which they are positioned. We’ll read theoretical pieces from different disciplines or perspectives, we’ll read empirical studies of youth, and we’ll engage in our own analyses of youth and the different kinds of texts to which they have access in their everyday and school worlds. Finally, because much of youth literacy, culture, and identity is fostered and framed in what are often termed “new” or “digital” media, we will examine how these new media demand (or do not) new literacies. And we will explore what this means for literacy teaching in and out of schools and for research on youth literacies.

For more specific details on the nature of these activities, read on.

Course Texts

• Various articles found on the CTools site (see list below).
Course Requirements

Reading responses. Each week (until a certain point in the semester) one half of you will produce and post to the CTools site one question for discussion based on the assigned readings. The other half of the group will write a two-page, single-spaced essay response to the readings, which can take off from the focus questions listed each week on the syllabus, or can take an entirely different direction, as long as the response is related to the texts at hand. For both questions and written responses, you may respond to one reading, to one idea that runs across the readings, or to a series of ideas represented across the readings. The best questions/responses seek integration across the readings, but you can also ask questions or write responses that focus on discrete aspects of individual readings. Whatever focus you choose, you should read all the assigned readings each week and be prepared to discuss them. Please note that these are meant to be formal essays, not stream of consciousness responses. I will often ask people to lead discussions—without advance planning—based on what they’ve submitted, so come prepared to talk about the texts. Both questions and responses should be posted by each Tuesday afternoon at 5:00 PM, to give me time to read them and integrate them into whatever I am planning for each week’s seminar. 30%
Analysis Projects. You will analyze one of two kinds of data. The first will be an analysis of the popular cultural, media, or information texts that youth are likely to access OR that represent youth in some way. The second is an analysis of real youth. Your analysis should reflect and expand the theories and empirical analyses that we’re reading in class. In particular, you should analyze how these texts or youth experiences are shaped by and reflect the effects of globalisation, information technologies, digital environments, and popular culture, but also how they depend on formal, schooled and academic literacy skills and practices. 20%

Culminating project. This project should be something that is relevant to your current work and interests. You might collect some small slice of data in a classroom or school (provided that you already have IRB approval), and use the theories and empirical works we read to analyze that data. If you're just starting your dissertation proposal, you might write a theoretical piece that examines the perspectives on youth, literacy, identity, or culture that we are discussing; craft a literature review that incorporates and goes beyond these readings; or design data collection methods or instruments that reflect both your understandings of YCLI theoretical perspectives and your research aims. Those of you who are involved in dissertation or other research project data collection might use these theories to examine the data you already have, and write a chapter of your dissertation. In every case, the course concepts and readings we do should be a central part of your work. However, do not limit yourself to these readings. Part of your task in this culminating project will be to go beyond the course readings, to integrate related works that build on, challenge, or expand what we have read and discussed.

Because this is to be something relevant to your work and interests, I cannot give you specifications for the project's completion, but I will be happy to discuss your ideas and the form of them with you. Please be sure to set a time in advance of the due date to discuss these ideas with me or email me with your ideas so that I can respond to them in a timely fashion. 30%

Presentation. On the final class meeting of the semester we will present our work to each other in formal presentations. The class size is too large to allow for individual presentations, so we will probably present in small groups or perhaps we can come up with some innovative to handle the numbers and time dilemma. The presentation can take many different forms, so feel free to exercise creative license, but do consider this a formal presentation. That is, prepare handouts, visual aids, Power Point presentations, videos, etc. For those of you scheduled to give papers at NCTE, NRC, MLA, CCCC, or other conferences in the near future we can move the presentation up on the schedule to enable you to have a practice session. 10%

Participation. I’ll evaluate your participation in regard to your attendance and timely arrival to class, but my main evaluation will be based on whether you come prepared to discuss all the readings. 10%

Tentative Course Schedule

9-7  Introductions and Exploration of Constructs

9-14  Examining Perspectives on Literacy, Text, and YCLI
Read:  CTools: Kress, 2003; Moje, 2008; Reading Next Report (skim); Reading at Risk report (skim); Time to Act (skim); The Teen Years (focus on “The Amazing Teen Brain”)
Due:  Response/Questions

9-21  What is a “Youth” and What is Youth Literacy?
Read:  CTools: Franzak; Lesko; Vadeboncoeur
Due:  Response/Questions
9-28 Identity: A Thing, a State, a Process, or Practice?
Read: CTools: McCarthy & Moje; Moje & Luke; Sen; Sfard & Prusak
Due: Response/Questions

10-5 Studying Identity: Achieved, Ascribed, Recognized, Performed, or Enacted?
Read: Identity and agency in cultural worlds (Holland et al. book) ***
Due: Response/Questions

10-12 Youth Literacies, Identities, and Cultures: Analysis Project 1
Read: No readings—Use past readings for assignment
Due: Textual/Media/Popular Culture/Youth Analysis Project and Presentations

10-19 What is the role of culture? What is Culture, anyway? How is Culture related to Identities and Literacies?
Read: CTools: Rosaldo; Psychology of Literacy (Scribner & Cole book)
Due: Response/Questions

10-26 Where Does Popular Culture Fit?
Read: CTools: Dolby; Schmidt & Vandewater; Subrahmanyam & Greenfield
Due: Response/Questions

11-2 What's the Deal with “New” Literacies?
Read: TED videos, Buckingham, Steinkuehler & King
Due: Response/Questions

11-9 Read: Choice Text
Due: Small-group presentations

11-16 Youth literacies, Identities, and Cultures: Analysis Project 2
Read: No readings—Use past readings for assignment
Due: Textual/Media/Popular Culture/Youth Analysis Project and Presentations

11-23 Youth Literacies, Identities, And Cultures: Connections To Schooling
Read: CTools: Moje Developing Socially Just Pedagogy; Stevens, Satwitz, & McCarthy; Willis; Wortham
Due: Response/questions

11-30 NO CLASS: Literacy Research Association Meeting
Please use the time to refine final projects and prepare presentations

12-7 Presentations, Group 1
Due: Final projects

12-14 Presentations, Group 2
Due: Final projects

CTools Citations