Revised syllabus: Sept. 21, 2014

**Foundations of Literacy**  
ED 500, 2014 (fall)  
Thursdays, 4:00-7:00, Room 2218 SOE

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**Introduction**

The single most compelling fact about literacy is that it is a social achievement...Literacy is an outcome of cultural transmission (Scribner, 1984, p. 6).

Reading literacy is the ability to understand, use and reflect on written texts in order to achieve one’s goals, to develop one’s knowledge and potential, and to participate effectively in society (PISA, OECD, 2002).

The sense of being literate derives from the ability to exhibit literate behaviors. Through these, individuals can compare, sequence, argue with, interpret, and create extended chunks of spoken and written language in response to a written text in which communication, reflection, and interpretation are grounded (Heath, 1996, p. 3).

Literacy is the flexible and sustainable mastery of a repertoire of practices with the texts of traditional and new communications technologies via spoken language, print, and multimedia (Luke, Freebody, & Land, 2001, p.9).

Literacy is not one thing. Rather, there are as many different “literacies” as there are socioculturally distinctive practices into which written language is incorporated (Gee, 2004, p. 81).

Literacy education has become the scapegoat of choice for the economic, social, moral and intellectual fragilities and failings of our society, or at least its immediately impending fragilities and failings, or, at the very least, the fragilities and failings of some groups within the society (Freebody, 2007, p.70).

These quotations are a mere sampling of the conversations that swirl around the topic of literacy. In this course, we will dip into these conversations and generate our own. Together, we will investigate and learn:

- The relationships among theoretical frameworks and how literacy is regarded, described, explained, taught, and measured;
- How to analyze the strengths and limitations of alternative theoretical frameworks for conceptualizing the acquisition and instruction of literacy;
- The major milestones and processes in literacy development;
- How first language, access to resources, and atypical development influence literacy learning and instruction;
- How policy has shaped literacy initiatives;
- How to read and evaluate literacy-related research for its potential to advance our understanding of literacy learning and instruction.
Course Format
The course will be a combination of presentations by the instructor, discussion among the participants, and guided investigations. Presentations will: prepare the participants for each week’s readings, highlight cross-cutting issues, and support our synthesis of the content of the course. Discussions will focus on analysis of selected readings from theoretical, methodological, and/or practical perspectives. We will work to develop our collective ability to thoughtfully examine assumptions and information regarding literacy acquisition and the implications for curriculum, instruction, and assessment. The single greatest problem that the U.S. continues to face is significant disparity in the attainment of literacy as a function of race, culture, and differential access to socioeconomic resources. For this reason, we will work to keep this problem in the foreground throughout the course.

Readings

In addition, selected readings for the course are provided in dated folders under *Resources* on the CTools site for ED 500 14. The readings are labeled with the (first) author’s last name.

Accommodating disabilities
If you think you need an accommodation for a disability, please let me know at your earliest convenience. Some aspects of this course, the assignments, the in-class activities, and the way the course is usually taught may be modified to facilitate your participation and progress. As soon as you make me aware of your needs, we can work with the Office of Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) to help us determine appropriate academic accommodations. SSD (734-763-3000; ssd.umich.edu) typically recommends accommodation through a Verified Individualized Services and Accommodations (VISA) form. Any information you provide is private and confidential and will be treated as such.

Course outline, calendar, and assigned readings

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Reading/Assignment (for the coming week)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>What is literacy and what does it mean to study the <em>foundations of literacy</em>?</td>
<td>Please read: Tracey &amp; Morrow (2012): preface &amp; ch. 1 Alexander &amp; Fox (2004)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Topic</td>
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| 9.22  | What is the *sociocultural* tradition and how has this tradition contributed to the foundations of literacy? | Please read: Gutiérrez (2008)  
Moje et al. (2004)  
Moll & Greenberg (1990)  
Come to the next class with a description of your foundational topic (Stage 1). See guidelines. |
| 10.2  | What is the *critical* tradition and how has this tradition contributed to the foundations of literacy? | Come to class on 10.9 having read and summarized a review paper on your topic (Stage 2). See guidelines. |
| 10.9  | Pausing to consider the landscape of literacy research using our review papers | Please read: Tracey & Morrow (2012): ch. 5  
Adams & Bruck (1995)  
Teale & Sulbzy (1986)  
Come to class on 10.23 having identified five empirical pieces on your topic (Stage 3). See guidelines. |
| 10.30 | What role does *knowledge* (real-world and disciplinary) play in the foundations of literacy? | Please read: Kucan & Palincsar (2013)  
McKeown, Beck, & Blake (2009)  
Paris (2005)  
Come to class on 11.06 with your analyses of five empirical pieces related to your topic completed (Stage 4). See guidelines. |
| 11.06 | What role do *skills* play in the foundations of literacy?            | Please read Chisholm & Godley (2011)  
Wiley (2014)  
Prepare a brief description of your “connections to literacy” project and submit to CTools by 7:00 p.m. 11.19. |
Snow & Uccelli (2009) |
| 11.20 | The role of language in the foundations of literacy                  | Please read: Wixson, Dutro, & |
Athan (2003)
Complete the preparation of your “connections to literacy” presentation and complete your foundational paper, which is due December 11th

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<th>Date</th>
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<tr>
<td>11.27</td>
<td>No class: Thanksgiving break</td>
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<tr>
<td>12.4</td>
<td>No class: Literacy Research Association conference</td>
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<td>12.11</td>
<td>Current issues in literacy policy and their relationship with foundational issues Presentations of “connections to literacy”</td>
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**Course assignments (specific guidelines will be provided for each of the following)**

1. **Participation.** Participation will be assessed in terms of your active engagement in our discussions, your support of the work of others, your thoughtfulness, and your willingness to take intellectual risks with your scholarship. Participation will account for 25% of your course grade.

2. **Thoughtful reading of assigned/selected books and articles,** supported by interactive reading guides. For some readings, specific guiding questions will be provided that will serve us well in class discussion. For the remainder of the readings, you are asked (in one to two pages) to: (a) identify the idea(s) that are most meaningful to you, in the sense that they advance your thinking about issues related to foundations of literacy, (b) identify how these ideas relate to another reading or other learning in which you have engaged, and (c) construct a question that you propose the class wrestle with. This question might be one that you would address to the author; it could be a question that will serve to clarify an issue for you, or it could be a question that will build connections among ideas with which we are working. These entries will constitute 30% of your course grade.

3. **A “foundational” paper.** The definition of a foundation is “a body or ground on which other parts rest.” In this course, you will prepare a paper that will serve as a foundation for other inquiry in which you will engage during your graduate study. We will complete this paper in stages. Stage 1 will be identifying a topic that is of interest to you in the field of literacy. Stage 2 will be identifying and summarizing a review paper that will provide a sense of the landscape regarding your topic. In Stage 3, you will identify a set of empirical studies related to your topic. The set should not exceed ten studies, but must include seven, because I will ask you to analyze and critique each study carefully. In Stage 4, you will analyze the empirical work you have identified. Finally, in Stage 5, you will synthesize and identify the ways in which your review could be foundational to continued work (yours or others’). This paper will constitute 30% of your grade.

4. **Building connections to literacy.** The purpose of this assignment is to help you to begin to see the relationship between your study of literacy and how literacy is realized in every day activity (e.g., in communication, in negotiating every day tasks, or how it is represented in the press (on the Internet, in the popular press, in journalism, film, or television.) I would like you to creative in completing this assignment. You may, for example, choose to present a video, prepare diary entries, or share a visual display. I will ask you to share your plans for this assignment so that we are all on the same page. This assignment will constitute 15% of your grade.

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1 If you are having difficulty with any aspect of this course, or you become aware of something we might do that would enhance your learning, please meet with me as soon as you become aware of this.
References for Reading


Horn, R. A. (2004). The new federal definition of educational research: Implications for educators. The Teacher Educator, 39(3), 196-211. [In class]


