EDUC 775  
Research in Teacher Education: Exploring Conceptual Foundations  
Fall, 2014  

Donald Freeman  

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Class Meetings:  

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<tr>
<th>Room</th>
<th>Mondays</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2334</td>
<td>1:00PM – 4:00PM</td>
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<td>School of Education Building</td>
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Office Hours: Tuesday afternoons-- 1:00PM - 3:00PM, or other times by arrangement.

1. COURSE PREMISES AND ORGANIZATION

Preamble: This course explores key foundational concepts that have been central to research and design in teacher education in the U.S. and around the world. Most of the concepts are relatively recent; the majority have come into play in the last 40 years. The concepts, which are often assumed and thus go unexamined, shape the ways in which research is proposed, carried out, and valued, and how teacher education projects are designed and implemented. Examples of these concepts—as applied to teaching and teachers include, among others, thought or thinking, experience, inquiry, reflection, community, practice/practices, knowing or knowledge, learning, and identity. Many of these terms are now so commonplace in the educational vernacular that they are taken for-granted. However, the lack of analytical understanding of the core concept often leads to sloppy or incomplete research and can hamper the effective designs of teacher education.

Core Premises: The core premise of the course is that these concepts are tools that serve in thinking about and articulating the ideas you want to pursue in teacher education. Like any tool, they cannot be used effectively if they are not well understood. Therefore using these concepts in designing good research and useful practices in teacher education requires direct engagement with the foundational ideas. This process begins with close reading of the original articulation of the concept and then follows how it has been used in order to examine how the concept is transformed through research practices and teacher education designs.

Organization: The course is organized around a group of these core ‘foundational’ concepts, which are roughly ordered historically. Each session, we will read an original text closely in order to understand the context, affordances, and limitations of the concept, and then we will follow how it has been used in two domains: research and program design. The particular weighting of these domains will largely depend on you as individuals, and on the collective interests of the class. The intent is threefold: To support habits of close reading of key ideas; to learn to trace these ideas into the domains of research and program design, and thus to deepen and extend understanding of both the ideas themselves and how they have been used.
II. COURSE APPROACH & ANALYTICAL FRAMES

The course is designed to cultivate ways of thinking that support disciplined scholarly and professional work. As with any seminar, the principal avenues are reading, talking, and writing. The work involves using concepts as tools to articulate your own ideas and to interact with the ideas of others in order to develop your thinking. To these ends, we will work with the ideas in the course in several basic ways:

1) Unpacking what is meant by the concept: What assumptions are inherent in the concept? How can we establish when concepts are being used in appropriate vs. (potentially) contradictory ways?
   a. Probing the linguistic and discoursal dimensions: What are the ‘language roots’ of the concept? What language is used with and about it? What terms seem to accompany the concept as compatible or incompatible with it?

2) Studying how it is used in research and program design: How has the concept been ‘taken up’ in formulations of research problems and in the designs of teacher education activities and programs (pre- and in-service, in the US and in other countries)?
   a. Examining sources of evidence: What sources and type(s) of information are taken as evidence for the concept in research and in practice? How do research and program designs support (or contradict) the concept?

In putting the course together, I have selected the concepts for the class; however, I am open to suggestions for additions. In the final project, you will also have the opportunity to select and work on concepts that relate closely to your own scholarly interests. These may include concepts from the course or new ones you identify. Regardless of the source, you will follow the same processes of unpacking the constituents of your chosen concept, probing the roots and linguistic elements, studying and critically analyzing how it has been/is being used in your area of interest or current work, and looking at the evidence used to support this work. The aim is to become clear about the concept in relation to your interests. You will be able to work either independently or collaboratively on this project; often the latter is more productive as it forces articulation of ideas.

III. WORKING IN THE COURSE

The course is intended as an opportunity to build and participate in an intellectual community with other post-graduate students who are involved in teacher education. Each of you brings different life and professional experiences, interests, perspectives, and expertise to this process. This fabric will be the foundation and central resource for the collective work in the course. The nature of the course itself involves interpreting and analyzing texts, both immediate and past experiences, and other materials, framing and revising questions, making conjectures, and testing alternative assertions. This type of work entails a certain amount of intellectual risk. To do so productively, we need to develop a culture in which stretching and being unsure professionally is valued, encouraged, and supported. To this end, I will strongly encourage you to use the class to learn from and with one another. The opportunity to have your ideas challenged, even when the questions may seem tangential or even irrelevant, is crucial to intellectual development. I will expect you to participate in ways that stretch your thinking and make sense for your learning and-- as crucially-- to respect the thinking and contributions of others.
IV. WORKING TOGETHER IN A SEMINAR FORMAT

The course will be conducted as a seminar in which participation in discussions will be critical to your own learning as well as the learning of others. There are several key elements to this participation:

• It all starts with **preparing the readings** carefully, which means coming to class knowing the text itself and having questions, insights, and issues to raise. This preparation is critical to the success of the course. I will make clear how I expect you to prepare the readings.

• Then plenary and group **discussions** serve to evolve common thinking; they depend on everyone’s participation and contributions. What you learn in this course will be influenced by the degree to which you and your colleagues engage in these discussions. Building a culture in the class that makes genuine inquiry possible is shared work. We’re looking to build a discussion context in which people communicate and are listened to, in which evidence matters, in which thoughtful questioning of claims is desirable, and in which alternative perspectives and interpretations are valued. You will want to find the balance of contributing and listening that is comfortable for you and is right for the group. Part of my job will be to monitor and give feedback on this balance.

• The aim of these discussions is to make and examine arguments. Whether it is individual or collective, **developing a line of argument** requires making and justifying conjectures. These justifications come primarily from the texts and are based on the logical analysis of a term or set of ideas. At times, the line of argument may reference experience or data more directly. Each of these moves involves specific care and attention to how you reason.

• **Investigating complex topics** is fodder for these lines of argument. Both processes involve trying out ideas that may be only partially developed, which is an important part of developing the capacity to think in a disciplined way.

• How you listen to one another, to assist with the formulation of an interpretation, question, and challenge will all affect the quality of what we can do together. So **listening closely** to reactions to your ideas is also central.

• **Accommodating critique** and questions, revising thinking or, at other times sticking to the analyses, will all help shape the intellectual tenor of the class. If you find yourself defending your line of thinking more than listening to others’ reactions, you will likely be missing an opportunity.

**Balancing generosity and skepticism**

As a class, I will ask you to be attentive to these norms: Listening carefully, treating ideas with respect and interest, raising and responding to questions, sharing the floor. As detailed above, one part of exploring an idea or an argument is to attend closely to it to understand its logic, intention, and meaning. Listening generously entails assuming that ideas and claims are made for good reasons (what Peter Elbow called ‘the believing game’); it is crucial to thinking well. Another part is being skeptical, considering what is missing or logically flawed in a reading, argument, or discussion. Using both – generosity and skepticism – contributes to careful unpacking of ideas and to good thinking; balancing them well is key to productive work together. All of these qualities contribute to constructing an environment in which satisfying and challenging intellectual work can take place.
V. WRITING

Writing well is central to educational scholarship and practice, and it is critical to your learning in this course. We will treat writing as a vehicle to explore and clarify your thinking and will work explicitly with it in this way. I encourage you to try out interpretations and arguments, as well as ways of representing your ideas. In order to create an interchange around what you write, it is most productive to work on short pieces or memos, to which I (and sometimes your colleagues) can respond quickly. The intent of these assignments is to provide structure, guidance, and resources that will support you in articulating your thinking as it is developing. At the end of the course, there will also be a longer essay (10 pages) on the concept you select.

VI. WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS

There are four written assignments for the course:

**Three Response Memos (2 – 4 pages/750-1000 words):** These memos provide opportunities for you to examine your thinking and interests in relation to particular core ideas. The memos will follow a common format; details to follow. The vehicle will be writing in the 1st person, and the emphasis will be on clarity and succinctness. The memos will also be used as a platform to engage your colleagues in your thinking and writing. There will be structured opportunities to do so; I encourage you to take maximum advantage.

**Individual & Collaborative Project** Using the skills and resources developed in the course, the final assignment will investigate a concept/concepts that are important in your own work. The project involves two parts:

- **Part One** is a collective exhibit. You will work with classmates to produce an exhibit to be used in the last class (December 8th) to enable others explore the use and significance of the concept in one (or more) of the domains (research and program design).
- **Part Two** is an individual essay. You will prepare an analysis (10 pages/2500 words maximum) of the concept in relation to your own interests/work and the ways you are currently thinking of using it in your own work. It will be due Friday December 12th by 5PM; further details to follow.

We will develop a list of candidate concepts together, and identify possible partners for the project in class.

**ASSIGNMENT SCHEDULE:**

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<th>ASSIGNMENT</th>
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<tr>
<td>Response Memo #1: Experience in learning to teach</td>
<td>October 3rd</td>
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<td>Response Memo #2: Reflection, dilemmas, and situated knowledge</td>
<td>October 31st</td>
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<td>Response Memo #3: Forms of knowledge and expertise</td>
<td>November 21st</td>
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<td>Collaborative Exhibit</td>
<td>December 8th in class</td>
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<td>Individual Essay</td>
<td>December 12th</td>
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* **PLEASE NOTE:** The Response Memos are due in your Dropbox on c-tools on Friday so that I can review and return them before class.
The Response Memos are equally weighted, while the Individual Essay, which sums up your work in the course, is more comprehensive.

**Submitting Written Work:** Please submit written assignments electronically via your C-tools drop-box feature. **NOTE:** Please use the following titling conventions: `<YOUR LAST NAME_MEMO# .doc>`.

**Revising Memos:** Good writing is unfortunately not something at which many professionals in education excel. Much of what goes on in current educational debates is full of clumsy, obscure, and often jargon-filled prose. Many of the problems are technical and stylistic—overuse of the passive voice, extended verbiage, etc. But other problems are intellectual: arguments that wander, make implausible assumptions, and fail to respectfully consider others’ views.

In the context of these problems, revising and rewriting is a critical tool. In the course, you will have the option to revise and rewrite some of your assignments. This is why the memo as a written vehicle is short, and the turn-around quick. Occasionally I may ask you to revise; this is not a penalty. And/or you may want to do so to clarify or develop an argument. Please consider these opportunities seriously as they are invaluable as they are rare in the professional world.

**VII. COURSE EXPECTATIONS**

**Attendance:** I assume that you will make every effort to attend all class sessions. If, for some reason, you have to miss a class, I ask that you please contact me beforehand by email or phone to let me know. It will be your responsibility to make up whatever you miss in a timely fashion.

While ‘Michigan time’ is a local reality, I would like to start class as close to the hour as possible. I’d appreciate it if you could plan to arrive by 1PM. Similarly, we will end punctually at 4PM, but please plan to stay fully present until the end of the class.

**Evaluation and grading:** While evaluation is a basic tool in learning and teaching, I find the practice of assigning grades generally contrary to the rigorous, self-directed intellectual work that should be the norm of advanced graduate study. I come from a tradition that expects participants to work to their limits—intellectually and developmentally—and sees the teacher’s role as stretching and pushing those capacities. I expect you to use your engagements both with me and with one another to deepen your sense of what good work consists of and how to develop it.

The work in this course is primarily close reading and careful analysis. The tools for the latter entail deliberate discussions and clear writing. I will make every effort to make the norms and standards for analysis as concrete as possible, and to lay out visible strategies for achieving them. The intent in this process is for you to assume greater and greater responsibility as critic and editor of your own work. Providing scaffolds through questioning, commenting and giving feedback on what you produce are avenues to help you develop the skills and sensibilities that can serve you successfully in the program.

For these reasons, while being mindful that grades are an artifact of the university setting, I will take a slightly different approach to evaluation. I will assume that the expected grade is an A-. If your work departs from this level, I will let you. If you suspect your work is not meeting that level, you should ask me sooner rather than later (in person, not by email). I’d note that only highly exceptional work could receive an A. If you have any concerns about the grading process, please talk to me.

**Electronic etiquette:** I find laptops and tablets a two-edged sword in teaching. They provide an invaluable means to take notes, consult readings, and verify information. But they can also be distracting and inhibit careful listening and good discussion. Therefore I’d like distinguish between “on” and “off” electronic times in class. During “on” times, you are welcome to take notes. In fact, we may
experiment with collective note-taking through Google docs. There will also be “off” times-- periods when we will have ‘electronics-free’ discussions. I ask that you be responsive to these conventions. Also I ask that you make certain your cellphones are off and away throughout class.
VIII. COURSE TOPICS & READINGS
(Please note that although the topics and sequence is established, some of the readings may change).

The basic structure and organization is listed below. The particulars of assignments—how to focus reading, what to prepare etc.—will be explained in each class for the following class.

Class #1 (September 8)
Why this course? Concepts as tools to design teacher education programs and research

NOTE-- Pre-class Preparation:

Class #2 (September 15)
PURPOSES OF EDUCATION: TWO BIG PICTURE VIEWS


Class #3 (September 22)
MAPPING TEACHING
Jared Aumen and Claudia Cameratti will lead the discussion portion of this class

Re-read:

Jig-Saw Readings (read selected per class arrangements)
On studying instruction

On practice

On connecting teaching and learning

Class #4 (September 29)
EXPERIENCE & TEACHING KNOWLEDGE


> Response Memo #1 due to Dropbox on C-tools on Friday October 3rd.
Class #5 (October 6)


(NOTE—please read these in the order they are listed)


Jig-Saw Readings (read selected per class arrangements)


Class #6 (October 20)

REFLECTION & INQUIRY (1983)


> Working Group #1 (Reflection and inquiry) presentation

Class #7 (October 27)

SITUATED PRACTICES & DILEMMAS IN TEACHING (1980’s)

Lave & Wenger TO COME


> Working Group #2 (Situated practice) presentation

> Response Memo #2 due to Dropbox on C-tools on Friday October 31st.
Class #8 (November 3)
PEDAGOGICAL CONTENT KNOWLEDGE (1987)


> Working Group #3 (PCK) presentation

Class #9 (November 10)
PERSONAL PRACTICAL KNOWLEDGE, NARRATIVE, & KNOWING (1980's)


Class #10 (November 17)
SOCIALIZATION & THE DEVELOPMENT OF EXPERTISE (1986)


> Working Group #4 (Expertise) presentation

> Response Memo #3 due to Dropbox on C-tools on Friday November 21st.

Class #11 (November 24)
DISCOURSES & COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE (1990's)


> Working Group #5 (Communities of Practice) presentation
Class #12 (December 1)

ACTIVITY, PRACTICE, & IDENTITY (1990's)


Class #13 (December 8) LAST SESSION

Summary activities:
Collaborative exhibits & presentations
Course closure & evaluation

> Final Essay due to Dropbox on C-tools on Friday December 12th