

Rhode Island College
 Feinstein School of Education and Human Development
 Educational Studies Department
Introduction to Classroom Research
FNED 547-01 Spring 2011
W 4-6:50 p.m.

Instructor: Dr. Janet Johnson
 Email: jjohnson@ric.edu
 Office hours: T 1-4; by appt.

Office: HBS 218
 Office ph: 456-8701
 Class location: Gaige 213

Course Information

Course Description:

The skills of research are central to the educational model of reflective practice. Becoming a part of the intellectual conversations of your field by reading other people's research and conducting your own can be a rewarding part of your professional development. This course examines research methods appropriate to the critical analysis of the teaching and learning process within educational settings and will emphasize the methods and methodologies of critical qualitative research — more specifically *teacher research* or *action research* — as a means of creating educational change. **Action research “is a disciplined process of inquiry conducted *by and for* those taking the action. The primary reason for engaging in action research is to assist the ‘actor’ in improving and/or refining his or her actions”** (Sagor, p.3, 2000).

In this course, then, we will explore how action research can be the means for us to produce knowledge, not just consume it. Often, we are told what to do by administrators or researchers who have no idea what goes on in the contexts of our unique classrooms. Action research offers each of us the opportunity to try on a new identity—that of public intellectual. By examining our practices closely, developing appropriate questions, engaging in systematic and critical inquiry, and sharing our findings with others, we will be able to transform our own practices and have an impact on the practices of others.

We will talk broadly about why and how we teach. We will analyze the effects of the day-to-day and long-range decisions we make about teaching and interacting with students. Further, we will lay the theoretical groundwork for doing research in educational settings with students. As you think about possibilities for research, be sure to consider the following:

- The thought collective of the profession: what teachers and researchers have to offer;
- Students' needs, rights, and backgrounds;
- Your individual personal and professional context; and
- Mandated curriculum and standards.

By the middle of February, you will develop your own research question and begin conducting original research “in the field” of your own classroom (or other relevant space). We will also spend time exploring studies that other researchers have conducted in

educational settings. Ultimately, you will work with your own data and prepare to write them up as a study of your own teaching for the Professional Impact Project (PIP), a requirement of all Advanced Programs in the FSEHD.

Course Texts and Materials

Hubbard, R. and Power, B. *The Art of Classroom Inquiry: A Handbook for Teacher-Researchers*.

Other readings will be on e-reserve at the library, sent by email, or provided in class.

Course notebook and teaching journal (can be digital or paper)

Course Objectives

Objectives. Students/teachers will:	Conceptual Framework	Assessments
Reflect and analyze how his/her background and lived experiences has shaped his/her identity as a teacher.	Knowledge, Professionalism, Diversity	Fieldnotes #1
Examine his/her own classroom as a text in order to analyze assumptions and discover possible teacher research questions.	Knowledge, Professionalism, Pedagogy	Fieldnotes #2; #3; Teaching Journal
Engage in the process of researching his/her own practice in order to promote the incorporation of research into the recursive process of planning, action and reflection.	Knowledge, Professionalism, Pedagogy, Diversity	All Fieldnotes; Final Paper (Professional Impact Project or PIP)
Work in research partnerships to promote collegial support networks in the process of teacher research.	Knowledge, Professionalism	Class Participation (in-class and online)
Understand and appreciate the role of “teacher as researcher” in their processes of professional development as educators and promoters of success for all learners in educational settings.	Knowledge, Professionalism, Pedagogy, Diversity	All Fieldnotes; Final Paper (PIP)
Review different types of methodologies related to educational research.	Knowledge	Fieldnotes; Class Participation
Explore and analyze research in the field of education in order to apply it to their own instructional and classroom practices.	Knowledge, Professionalism, Pedagogy	Literature Review; Final Paper (PIP)

Accommodations

If you are seeking reasonable classroom accommodations, please register with Disability Services in the Student Life Office (Craig-Lee 127; 456-8061). Students with special needs should make an appointment with me as soon as possible. I will do everything I can to ensure that this class will be a worthwhile experience for you.

Action Research as a Process

During the semester, we will be following specific steps which include:

- Finding a focus
- Clarifying your own theories
- Identifying research questions
- Reading others' theories and experiences with your topic
- Collecting data
- Analyzing data
- Taking informed action
- Reporting results

Course Requirements and Criteria for Evaluation

We are all professionals, and thus I expect you to be present, attentive, and willing to participate, just as you would be for meetings at your school or in other work-related endeavors. No absences are permitted unless an emergency arises. Should such a situation occur, please contact me by phone or e-mail as soon as possible, preferably before class. Unnecessary absences can result in course failure. Please note that leaving early or coming late can contribute to the total sum of your absences. Traffic and parking are problematic at 4 p.m. on this campus, so please take that into consideration.

***For every absence (or its equivalent in time) over one, your final grade will be lowered by one third (an A- would become a B+).**

A Note on Academic Integrity

Students will be held accountable to Rhode Island College's policy in the student handbook regarding academic integrity. Word-for-word plagiarism, patchwork plagiarism, and unacknowledged paraphrases will result in a failing grade and possible disciplinary action. Also, although collaboration is often encouraged, any representation of another student's work as your own is a breach of academic integrity and is subject to the same consequences as plagiarism of published texts.

- **Class Participation**

As a graduate seminar, this course relies on your active participation both in and outside of class. I expect you to read all required texts before coming to class each week and to be prepared to discuss them. Take notes when you read — underline, highlight, write in the margins. Note the key concepts, unfamiliar vocabulary, points of confusion/frustration, “ah-ha” moments... strive to see the details and the big picture. You don't have to be an expert on the reading when you walk in the door — but do be prepared to engage in some exploratory talk about the text. Through the process of talking out the issues and listening to others work out their confusions, we will all come to a richer understanding of the texts and concepts at hand.

Professional Impact Project

In this course, you will create a Professional Impact Project, which is required of all candidates in Advanced Programs in the FSEHD. The PIP includes the following Practice

aspects of the Advanced Competencies: Evidence-Based Decision Making; Technology Use; Diversity; and Professional Identity Development. Through this Professional Impact Project process, graduate candidates provide credible evidence of their ability to facilitate impact on constituent(s) and reflect upon their practice:

Evidence-Based Decision Making

• *Candidate defines area targeted for growth clearly*

- Use data to inform decision making;
- Address target population (constituent dynamics, with emphasis of knowledge of diversity of self and others).

• *Candidate develops a plan of action:*

- Incorporate considerations of other professionals and/or stakeholders while determining plan of action;
- Address target population (constituent dynamics, with emphasis of knowledge of diversity of self and others);
- Aim to contribute to school improvement and/or renewal; or Promotes well-being of children, family systems, school systems, or communities;
- Use knowledge of self and others to design effective practice.

• *Candidate implements action plan*

- Implement action plan;
- Collect and analyzes data;
- Present information.

• *Candidate evaluates impact of action*

- Analyze impact of action;
- Assess degree to which action contributes to school improvement and/or renewal or promotes well-being of children, family systems, school systems, or communities.

• *Candidate reflects on emerging professionalism*

- Examines own emerging, developing or acquired professional knowledge, skills, and dispositions that result in competent practice;
- Creates plan to further professional growth.

As you will see, the following assignments and engagements are designed to support your ability to complete the PIP. In keeping with current FSEHD guidelines, you will upload your work to Chalk and Wire, an online assessment system. I will arrange for all of us to be trained in Chalk and Wire during one of our class meetings.

• **Field Notes #1: Contextualizing yourself within your classroom**

After reading the chapter from Campano, locate yourself within the nested contexts of your classroom; your graduate program; your social, cultural, and economic background; and your professional influences. Consider the following:

- How did your family background influence your worldview on education and how has that changed as you have become an adult/parent/teacher/etc?
- Your classroom, curriculum and relationships with kids and colleagues are

expressions of what you value. In what ways do these aspects of your teaching life accurately represent your values? In what ways do they not? What does this mean?

- When considering the above and possible topics to research, what are your priorities for student achievement? You can refer back to Sagor p. 15 for ideas.

This reflective piece should be approximately 4-5 pages long (typed, double-spaced). It is informal writing in that it is personal and reflective, but should be accessible to an outside reader (me, or perhaps a classmate) in terms of spelling, structure, organization, etc. We will do work in class the first night that will serve as a springboard for this assignment.

- **Field Notes #2: Photovoice and Photovoice Protocol**

On the second day of class, we will learn how to use Photovoice as a way to see our classrooms, our students, and our teaching in new ways. You will be taking photographs of your classroom, your students, maybe your messy desk, and anything else you see as relevant to your teaching and that interests you as a possible teacher research project. Then we will follow the Photovoice protocol in order to analyze what you are seeing and tell the stories of 2-3 photos of your choice:

- Individually Answer PHOTO(modified from Spears, in Hussey, 2001) questions for the photos you selected
 - Describe Your **P**icture.
 - What is **H**appening in your picture?
 - Why did you take a picture **O**f this?
 - What does this picture **T**ell us about your teaching and students' learning?
 - How can this picture provide **O**pportunities for finding possible teacher research questions?

- **Field Notes #3: Making the familiar strange**

The purpose of this set of field notes is to learn to see the routines, the regularities, the ho-hum dailiness of your teaching life through fresh eyes. That is, try to purposely and thoughtfully see your classroom, your students, and yourself as *texts*—just like we did with the *Freaks and Geeks* episode. We will use Photovoice, which we will learn about on Feb. 2, as a resource for you to write this piece. This will provide a way for you to “read” your classroom context in new ways. This can start with some wonderings and questions (but don’t feel you have to write about all of these—choose what speaks to you):

- What kinds of identity performances do my students engage in? Who has social power, and how does s/he use it? Why does this student have this power, and how do other students respond? How do I respond?
- If I read my classroom as a text, what does it say? What does the classroom set-up say about me and what I value? What is on the walls, how are the desks organized, what are the routines?

- What metaphors or similes are useful for thinking about the community of adults (teachers, administrators, staff, parents) in our school? Who is in charge and why? Who goes out of her way to do things for others? Who takes from others? How do the adults express their care for our students? What are the positive and negative influences on my school?
- If I analyze my curriculum, what does it show? Do I value diversity? Do I take risks? When and where do I resist traditional ideas of teaching? Or do I?

This reflective piece should be approximately 4-5 pages long (typed, double-spaced). It is informal writing in that it is personal and reflective, but should be accessible to an outside reader (me, or perhaps a classmate) in terms of spelling, structure, organization, etc. We will do work in class the first night that will serve as a springboard for this assignment.

- **Teaching Journal**

In this journal, which can be typed or handwritten, begin recording the successes and struggles that have emerged so far this semester. You likely do some of this reflection subconsciously every day as you plan lessons and make decisions about what your students need. I am asking you to formalize and document that thought process. Carefully observe and think about what is happening in your classroom. What is working here? Be specific. Tell stories. Cite specific examples that happen in class. Use rich descriptions and pay attention to details. What is not working here? Try to answer this question with the same detail and care. Try writing for about 10 minutes a day in order to capture the patterns, events and activities that you witness in your classroom. If you get stuck, just write, “I remember in class today...” and keep going. As you pull everything together to hand in, these rememberings will help you begin to develop some potential research questions that you might pursue over the course of the semester. **You should write in your teaching journal every week. Be sure to bring your journal to every class session, as we will refer to it often.**

- **Research proposal**

The research proposal will help focus your project around a particular research question. It should be approximately 2-3 pages long and include a short introduction describing the purpose of your research and why it is important, the question(s) you hope to answer, your data collection and analysis methods, some literature you plan to consult, and a timeline. Specific directions and models will be provided.

- **(At least) Three sets of data (see course outline for due dates)**

Once you have established a research question, you will need to collect data to help you understand what this question means and what possible “answers” might exist. You will be collecting data EVERY WEEK even when you are not writing it up in formal sets of fieldnotes. While you may collect your data in the form of stickie notes, handwritten journals, double entry journals, interviews, charts, student work, photographs, etc, each data set you turn in must be typed up in the form of fieldnotes, memos or interview transcripts. They should be rich in description and should include your “observer comments” throughout the transcript. We will discuss the process of writing up the data

in class. You will be sharing data with a partner(s) for peer feedback. You will likely have several other informal sets of notes that you jot down throughout the semester as you are collecting data at your site. At the end of the semester you will turn in all of your data and fieldnotes with your final project.

➤ **Literature review**

In order to situate your research question in a broader context, you will need to conduct a literature review on your area of inquiry. What is the conversation that researchers are having on this topic? What have others found that will help inform your study? And ultimately, how does your voice fit into the conversation? Your literature review should be approximately five pages in length, and should include at least five sources. You can find peer-reviewed articles from academic journals, books or online sources (though you should limit the number of non-refereed online sources you use).

• **Memo on emerging themes**

Teacher research is data-driven. That means that any claims that you make need to come from the data you have collected. For example, if you want to make the claim that providing more “care” in the classroom increases student achievement, you need to have at least three different forms of data (called “triangulation”) to support your claim. These data might include your teaching journal, individual pieces of student work, checklists, your gradebook, interviews, surveys, etc. Your goal is to convince your reader that what you say is compelling. So, as you begin looking through your data, what do you see? In a 3-5 page memo, discuss three areas of interest that could be the center of your research findings. For each claim, you should write approximately one paragraph describing how you are thinking about the claim and then give several examples from your data to support it. This is a space for exploratory talk about these issues. It will be the skeleton of your final project and is meant to help you sort out your ideas. We will work together to sketch out this memo in our independent meetings prior to this date.

• **Research presentations**

The last week of the semester will be dedicated to student presentations. Each student will have 10-20 minutes to present his or her research to the class. We will talk more about this in class.

• **Final Paper (PIP)**

Your final project for this class should be a 15-20 page paper that lays out your research question and findings. Some of the articles we have read provide possible models for organization and analysis. See the appendix of this syllabus for a project rubric and guidelines on how to structure the paper.

A Note on Grading Distribution:

Because conducting research is a process-based activity, I will not be giving you “grades” for each individual step of this process. I do this to encourage you to try on this new practice of collecting data, writing fieldnotes and analyzing them without penalty. You will receive written feedback along the way, but your grade in this class will be determined by the skills you have gained over the course of the semester as evidenced by your participation in class (50%) and the strength of your whole project (50%). See the rubric at the back of this

syllabus for details on project assessment.

Performance	Percentage of Course Grade	FSEHD Conceptual Framework
PIP Process (course assignments; quality & quantity of data; class attendance & participation)	50%	Knowledge, Diversity, Pedagogy, Professionalism
PIP Final Paper	50%	Knowledge, Diversity, Pedagogy, Professionalism

Course Schedule

*This schedule is subject to change.

Date/Day	Theme/Topic	Readings Due	Assignment Due
Wednesday, 1/26	Conceptual Framework; Exploring the idea of teacher as researcher; what counts as a text?	Analyzing teen relationships: <i>Freaks and Geeks</i>	
2/2	Process and Purpose Using Photovoice to contextualize your teaching world(s); Travel to Dr. Horwitz' class in CL 205 at 4:20 p.m.	Campano, ch. 1; PIP protocol; Photovoice protocol; Wang (pdf)	Fieldnotes #1: Contextualizing yourself in your research
2/9	Clarifying theories: What do I bring to this research? What theories do I have about my topic(s)? Framing things to avoid the Blame Game (Lakoff)	Sagor, Ch. 1-3 (pdf)	Fieldnotes #2: Photos and Photovoice Protocol
2/16	Finding Your Question(s): What makes a good question? What data do I need to answer this question?	H&P Ch. 1& 2	Fieldnotes #3: Making the Familiar Strange
2/23	Collecting Data: What counts as data? How do I get it? Writing a Research Proposal	H&P ch. 3; Sagor ch. 9 (pdf) Nolan & Hoover (p. 115-116-handout)	Rationale & Research Questions Teaching Journal

3/2	Developing a literature review: Who has done similar work and what did they discover?	H&P, ch. 5	Meet in the library
3/9	Reading Classroom Research Review APA format Sample lit reviews	Read previous students' research (pdf)	Research Proposal Due Teaching Journal
3/16	RIC SPRING BREAK	NO CLASS	Continue to collect data; write up lit review
3/23	Analyzing data: What does my data say? In what ways does it answer my questions or engender new ones? Intro to discourse analysis	H&P ch. 4 Falk & Blumenreich, ch. 7 (pdf)	Literature Review due in class Bring Teaching Journal & other data
3/30	Further data analysis; content analysis	Sagor ch. 10 (pdf)	Bring "cooked" data to class to exchange with partners
4/6	Meet with Dr. J to discuss shape and direction of project	No class: Schedule individual meetings with Dr. J	Bring Teaching Journal & other data
4/13	Writing from data: Prioritizing my findings	Hubbard & Power, ch. 6	Memo on emerging themes
4/20	PUBLIC SCHOOL SPRING BREAK	No Class: work independently on your paper	Optional: individual meeting with Dr. J
4/27	Using data as evidence: Making an argument		Bring all materials to class
5/4	Reporting Results and Action Planning: Presentations in class Course Evaluation		Final Project due
5/12	FINALS WEEK	NO EXAM	

Appendix A Extended Course Information

Catalog Description

Pre-Service and In-Service teachers are introduced to qualitative and quantitative research in education through the interpretation of published studies and through initiation of a study in a classroom.

Relationship to the Professional Program

In-service teachers are introduced to the process of systematic inquiry into teaching and learning. Methods of academic research are introduced and practiced in the context of the course and are discussed in relation to a select research project. The readings provide samples of studies of teaching and learning exemplifying both the form and content of student projects. Literature reviews and research designs are considered in relation to each student's project interests.

Relationship to the Conceptual Framework of the FSEHD

The preparation of reflective practitioners includes the development of skills that enable teachers to examine their own teaching practices, individually and collaboratively within the context of their own classrooms. The reflective practitioner uses both the products and the processes of research in the ongoing and recursive cycle of planning, action, and reflection. In effect, the development of skills in research is a capstone experience in the development of a reflective practitioner. The course encourages life long learning and continued professional development grounded in solid research.

Appendix B

Structuring the Final Paper: A Guide

There are many different models for writing up teacher research. While your personal writing style and demands of your particular project should guide you, I recommend the format below because it will keep you organized and focused on making data driven claims from your study. I suggest that you use subheadings to divide the paper in to sections, as creative, descriptive titles cue the reader to your content and claims.

Introduction:

- Create an inviting title
 - Can be creative — start with a story.
 - Consider your audience. What do they need to know about you and your context in order to want to read about your research?

Argument:

- **Focus your paper with an argument, which functions as the thesis statement.** Your argument is what holds your themes together. Look over the themes you

discovered in your data. Develop your argument statement around those themes. In the broadest sense, what did you learn here? The key is to have a meaningful argument that goes beyond “no-duh.”

- Your argument should be specific to your context, but also offer something to others experiencing something similar.

Examples of arguments:

“In this paper I argue that...”

...inclusion is an important and necessary element of more socially just schooling, but it can only be successful if schools are willing to make structural adjustments in order to support teachers and students in implementing it.

...token economy systems, while controversial in traditional school settings, are important and useful in a school for adolescent boys who are labeled BD because they offer them a sense of agency and responsibility to which they otherwise do not have access.

...adults with disabilities need to be offered substantive opportunities to participate in the community as adults. When not given these opportunities, they are denied the chance to be full participants in society.

Context:

- Describe the space, situation, and students where this research is taking place to explain why this research is relevant. Go back to Fieldnotes #1, #2 and #3.

Methods:

- What forms of data did you collect and over what time period? Remember, you need to triangulate your data, so you need three sources. Possibilities include your teaching journal, surveys, interviews, pictures, video, student work, etc.
- Describe your methods of analysis. How did you work with the data you collected? What charts did you create, what codes did you use, etc.?
- Discuss the problems you ran into and the subsequent adjustments you made.
- Describe how and why your project shifted and changed over the course of the semester.

Literature Review:

- Option #1: Insert your revised Literature Review as a distinct section that lays out the conversation around the topic you are investigating. Make connections between this section and the previous and next.
- Option #2: Integrate the literature you have found in with your discussion of data, moving back and forth between the literature and your own findings.

Claims and Data Analysis:

- This is the heart of your paper and should be the substantive discussion of your findings.
- You should have **three** claims, each with its own subheading and section.

- For each claim, explain the issue in detail (use literature if appropriate) and then offer substantial, detailed, and descriptive examples from the data to support that claim. **Each claim should have three different types of data that support it, and each must be thoroughly analyzed.**
- Remember that you are attempting to convince your reader that your interpretation of events is viable. You are trying to tell a compelling story about what you have learned here. The more varied and specific data you offer, the more trustworthy your account will be.

Conclusion:

- Connect back to your original argument.
- **How have the actions you took, as a result of your research, effected positive change for your students and yourself as a professional? In other words, what impact has this project had on your teaching and student learning?**
- Offer recommendations for other teachers struggling with the same issues.
- Talk about the implications – what do these findings offer the field?
- Given these findings, what will you change about your practice going forward?

Writing:

- This paper, as your final product, will require revision and editing. I strongly advise that you have another person read it for clarity and conventions before turning it in. Often, what makes sense to us as writers is not clear to our readers. Here is what I expect:
 - Voice. Use first person. This is about your experience, your context, your findings.
 - Organization. Each section should make sense so that your audience doesn't have to struggle to figure out what you mean.
 - Topic Sentences. Make sure the first sentence of each paragraph clues the reader as to what it will be about.
 - Flow. Ensure that each section flows into the next.
 - Conventions. Use "standard" English grammar and spelling, except when quoting others who may use different dialects.
 - APA format. Use correct APA (American Psychological Association) format in order to cite your sources, write up your literature review, and write your bibliography.

Appendix C

Final Project Rubric

	Exceptional 5	Strong 4	Adequate 3	Needs Improv. 2	Absent 1	NOTES
INTRODUCTION: Offers an inviting introduction to the research question.						
ARGUMENT: Makes an argument based on the data collected. Explains why this question and research are important in this context and in the larger field.						
CONTEXT: Describes the relevant space, situation, and students that led to this research.						
METHODS/METHODOLOGY: Explains data collection and analysis methods. Includes reflections on struggles and successes.						
LITERATURE: Uses relevant literature to support the topic at hand.						
CLAIM 1: - Is clearly articulated - Supports the argument statement - Uses three forms of data. Data are rich, descriptive and convince the reader that your interpretation is compelling. - Offers analysis of the data in your own voice to explain <i>how</i> the data supports the theme. Don't expect data to speak for themselves.						
CLAIM 2: - Is clearly articulated - Supports the argument statement - Uses three forms of data. Data are rich, descriptive and convince the reader that your interpretation is compelling. - Offers analysis of the data in your own voice to explain <i>how</i> the data supports the theme. Don't expect data to speak for themselves.						
CLAIM 3: - Is clearly articulated - Supports the argument statement - Uses three forms of data. Data are rich, descriptive and convince the reader that your interpretation is						

<p>compelling. - Offers analysis of the data in your own voice to explain <i>how</i> the data supports the theme. Don't expect data to speak for themselves.</p>						
<p>CONCLUSION: -Describes how the actions you took, as a result of your research, effected positive change for your students and yourself as a professional. -Discusses impact this project had on your teaching and student learning. -Summarizes discussion and offers suggestions for future research.</p>						
<p>WRITING: Organization and voice</p>						
<p>WRITING: Conventions and APA format</p>						
<p>BIBLIOGRAPHY: Cite your sources using APA format</p>						
<p>OVERALL: Project offers evidence of critical and reflective practice</p>						

