

Read 6070
Middle School Reading
Spring 2006
Thursdays, 5:00

Professor Information

Dr. Allison Nealy
anealy@uga.edu
(706) 310 – 1437

My worst nightmare happens every day –my middle school students aren't reading even close to grade level and I am supposed to teach them science. The ones that can read don't want to. Consequently, I find myself trying to avoid reading altogether. I teach around reading in order to make sure students understand science. - Anonymous, Middle School Teacher

The headline-making reading wars of recent years – pitting phonics against whole language – have obscured the less visible but highly critical issue of reading above elementary grades. Among middle schools across the country a quiet crisis is brewing. This crisis focuses on the reading abilities of adolescent students. – Schoenbach, Greenleaf, Cziko and Hurwitz.

Course Description

This course will investigate the theories, research, issues, practices, and complexities of teaching middle school reading. It will call upon students' personal experience, expectations, and perspectives while incorporating readings and class discussions. Students will frame reading strategies within the context of middle school curriculum and be asked to identify potential advantages and disadvantages of these strategies as they relate to the learning characteristics of middle-school students. Specifically, course objectives are as follows:

- a) to provide a framework for thinking about teaching reading in middle school;
- b) to explore current research and writings in the area of middle-school literacy;
- c) to identify appropriate strategies that will engage middle-school readers and allow them to be active readers in all classes;
- d) to compare instructional practices for narrative and expository texts;
- e) to identify and explore current issues in the field of middle school literacy;
- f) to present and discuss perspectives regarding assessment, staffing, delivery models, and materials;
- g) to gain a better understanding of what are often referred to as “non-readers”, students with disabilities that impact reading, and the instructional needs of diverse learners;
- h) to initiate and continue a dialogue on the importance of the bridge from elementary to middle school reading and adolescents as readers

Required Text

Fischer, D. & Frey, N. (2004). *Improving adolescent literacy: Strategies at work*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson.

NOTE: Most readings will be self-selected; the above text is a reference book on strategies.

General Considerations

1) Written assignments must be prepared in a professional manner. "Professional" is defined as following guidelines stated in the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (5th ed.) (2001). All final products must be typed. Products that, in the judgment of the instructor, are unreadable or unprofessionally prepared will be returned ungraded or assigned a lower evaluation.

2) Academic Honesty: to plagiarize is "to steal and pass off as one's own the ideas or words of another" (Webster, 1967, p. 646), or to not acknowledge the author of an idea. If plagiarism is evident, the student may receive zero points for the assignment, and/or a grade of "F" for the course, and may be expelled from the University. For specific information, review the UGA publication *A Culture of Honesty: Policies and Procedures on Academic Honesty* which can be found at: http://www.uga.edu/ovpi/academic_honesty/culture_honesty.htm.

3) Final course grades will be based on the number of points accrued from the submission of required products combined with professionalism points. There is a total of 100 possible points in the course.

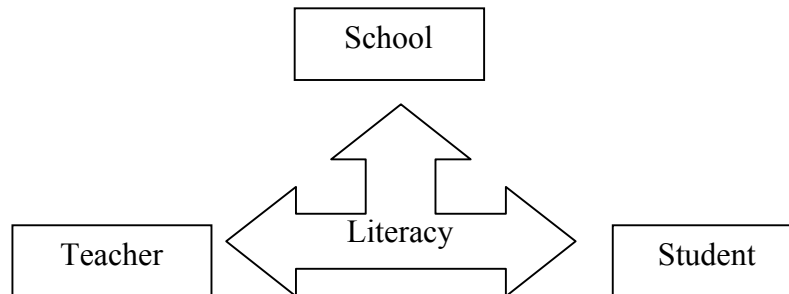
4) The assignment of "incompletes" is discouraged and will be used only in cases of extreme emergencies where satisfactory progress has been demonstrated and a passing grade may be earned. In the event that an "I" grade is appropriate, students should notify the instructor at the time such circumstances arise. Upon notification, a course completion contract between the student and instructor will be developed before the last week of the quarter.

5) Students with disabilities who anticipate a need for special accommodations in this course should meet with the instructor early in the semester.

6) UGA Inclement Weather Policy: Please be aware of the UGA Inclement Weather Policy regarding possible closings of the university. This policy can be found at: <http://www.uga.edu/news/newsbureau/releases/2002releases/0211/021111weather.html>

7) General Plan: The course syllabus is a general plan for the course; deviation announced to the class by the instructor may become necessary.

Literacy is not something that just happens, and it evades many. We will explore the complexities of literacy in the middle grades using the following framework:



What each brings to the table....

School

GPS / QCCs

Curriculum

Materials

Assessments

Setting

Teacher

Theoretical Lens

Beliefs on Reading

Instruction

Experiences

Personality

Student

Affective/Emotional

Characteristics

Ability/Disability

Experiences

Home / Family

We will use this interactive model to investigate the following domains of literacy:

- a) Curriculum / Content (including GPS and QCCs)
- b) Instruction / Strategies
- c) Assessment (both formal and informal)
- d) Learner Characteristics (including ESOL and Disabilities)
- e) Teacher Characteristics
- f) Affective / Emotional Components (including motivation)

We will explore, discuss, and read about each one these domains as a group. However, you will be asked to focus on one for purposes of individual research and presentations.

Course Requirements

This course will be based on a total of 100 points broken down into the following components:

A) Attendance and Participation: This is a graduate level course and attendance reflects professionalism. This course will be run as a seminar with group discussions and participation playing a critical role in learning. Therefore, attendance will count as 10 points, or 10% of your grade.

B) Literacy Portfolio: Over the course of the semester, you will keep what we will call a Literacy Portfolio. This portfolio will include your ideas, experiences, concerns, and reflections on the topics we cover. It can include information gained from both readings and class discussions. This portfolio will be collected and reviewed twice – once at midpoint and once at the conclusion of the course. It will be worth 30 points total.

By midpoint, your portfolio should include the following (15 points):

- Three significant events from elementary and middle school that ultimately impacted you as a reader / student
- Your beliefs about each literacy domain and a description of how and why you have come to have these beliefs
- A list of what you think are the most important issues facing middle school teachers and students
- Your view on our interactive model of literacy development. Does one play a more significant role than another? Why or why not?
- A selection of one domain for purposes of your individual research and paper and an explanation of why you chose it
- Weekly, brief reflections (please date) on our class discussions and topics.

By the conclusion of the course, you will add to your portfolio (15 points):

- A revisit to all domains and how, if at all, your understandings of them have changed or been altered by our class discussions, readings, your research, or experiences.
- A list and brief description of classroom strategies effective in aiding middle school readers. These can come from your own experiences or from readings
- Addition of issues that came up in class that you feel are important
- A reflection on your own research: did you gain a deeper understanding of your domain? In what way? How will it impact your teaching?
- Educational suggestions: play Superintendent for a day....

C) Topics and Authors Chart : Each week we will be covering different topics of middle school reading. You will be asked to create a chart that identifies each topic, the most recent trend or findings in the literature on this topic and an author(s) that has written on it in the past 20 years. This will be built upon as we go, and is therefore considered a cumulative product. This assignment serves 2 purposes: (1) provides you an artifact of class topics with related publications, and (2) pushes you into the literature and writers to increase your breadth in the field of middle school reading. This chart can take on any form you prefer and is meant to be a summary. You may do it in lists, graphic organizers, or a chart. We will discuss options in format further in class. This chart will be worth 20 points.

D) Research Log : You will be asked to chose one domain to focus on for purposes of research. Once chosen, you will be asked to identify theoretical and empirical research in this area. This log will help you stay organized and keep track of your studies. You should end up with a total of between 15 and 20 studies that address your chosen domain. In your Research Log, identify the author(s), date of publication, type of study (e.g. quantitative, qualitative, theoretical, meta-analysis), and any findings or suggestions provided. If it was empirical, briefly describe population (e.g. 8th grade students falling below grade level). The purpose of this log is to assist you in gathering and sorting your research. It is meant to be informal and may be formatted according to your preference. It will be turned in with your research project and is worth 15 points.

E) Research Project : You have a choice of research projects. This project will be worth 25 points and due on the final day of class:

a) 8-10 page literature review on your chosen domain. This review should include the studies reflected in your log. If you choose this option, please include empirical studies as well as theoretical ones and focus on the most recent literature possible.

OR

b) teacher-research (with a middle school or middle school students): choose a domain, identify a research question and collect informal data. Ideas include, but are certainly not limited to, interviews with students and/or families, interviews with administrators or other teachers, implementation of a strategy, review and interpretation of reading test scores or assessments in your school or district, or identification of curriculum strengths and weaknesses. If you choose to interview or work with students, please remember to get written permission from the parents. We can discuss this further as a group.

Course Calendar

Wk/Date	Topic	Readings	Due
1 1/12	Introductions Review of Course Syllabus Identifying the Crisis		
2 1/19	School: QCCs, GPS, Curriculum, Materials	Review QCCs/GPS for Grades 6-8	
3 1/26	School: Assessment, NCLB	- Fisher 10 - 1 article on NCLB as it relates to middle school	Bring CRCT scores of your district/school if possible
4 2/2	School: Delivery Models, Collaborative Teaching, Settings, Middle School Designs	-Fisher 1 - an article on the design of GA middle schools	Have first 3 entries in your Topics/Author Chart for class
5 2/9	No Class		
6 2/16	Student: Affective/Emotional, Motivation	- 1 article on affective side of reading and 1 on motivation	Research Log to be checked
7 2/23	Student: ESOL, Special Education, "Non- Readers"	- Handouts on LD - 1 article on "access"	Have 2 more entries in Topics/Author
8 3/2	Student: Fostering Self-directed Reading and Metacognition	- Fisher 2, 9 - SGCH 4	First half of portfolio
9 3/9	Teacher: Theoretical Lens, Beliefs about Reading Instruction	- An inventory on Reading Beliefs	
10 3/16	No class: Spring Break		
11 3/23	Teacher: Professional Development, Teacher Role in Literacy Development	- SGCH 9, 10 A recommended SDU on Reading	Have 3 more entries in Topics/Author
12 3/30	Narrative Strategies: Novel Reading, Short Stories, Selection of Books	- Fisher 3, 4 - List of novels now being read in grades 6-8	Research Log to be checked
13 4/6	No Class		
14 4/13	Expository Text Strategies: Identifying Text Structures, Note Taking	- Fisher 5, 6, 7	Can turn in Topics/Author
15 4/20	Teaching of Research Skills Teaching of Writing Skills: All Genres	- Fisher 8 - Rubric on writing skills: any genre	Second Half of Portfolio
16 4/27	Individual Presentations of Research		-Research Project (with Log)

