

EDUC 330: Politics of Reading Education Winter 2009

Cathy Tower Oehmke
Willis 108
Email: coehmke
Office Hours:
M 10-12; Th 1-2:30
And by appointment

T/Th 8:15-10:00
Willis 114

Course Description

The debate over the best way to teach children to read has raged for decades in the U.S. In this seminar, we will take the National Reading Panel Report (2000) as our entry point into the world of reading instruction, reading research, and the history of both. We will attempt to understand who the players were (and are): who were the members of the National Reading Panel? How were they chosen? Who are the people who have been critical of the panel's work? In order to understand the controversy surrounding the report, we will explore the world of reading research. What research designs are applied to research in reading? What counts as evidence? How does research get translated into practice? We will consider the role of politics in the teaching of reading, in the definition of "research-based", and in the selection of instructional materials. Finally, we will consider the impact that all of this has on teachers and students.

Required Texts

- Allington, R. L. (2002). Big brother and the national reading curriculum: How ideology trumped evidence. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- McCardle, P. & Chhabra, V. (2004). The voice of evidence in reading research. Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Company.
- Other readings as listed in the **course schedule** section. All required readings (except the textbooks) are available on Moodle.

Course Requirements

Your attendance and active participation in class is essential to the success of this course, and thus they are assumed. There will be no excused absences (except for death in the family, family emergency, medical leave or medical emergency). Failure to attend class meetings or to participate will result in a mandatory meeting with me and possible reduction of your grade.

Assignment	Percent of Grade	Due Date
Definitions of literacy	5%	January 8 in class
Presentation of Related Resource	15%	By Feb 5; 1-2 per class session and posting to Moodle
Small group analysis and presentation (“Big Five”)	20%	January 27
Visual Representation	20%	March 10, in class
Research Paper	40%	--Topic approval due Feb 3 (or earlier!) --Outline/first draft due Feb 24 --Peer Conferences, in class Feb 26 --Final paper due Monday, March 16

Explication of Course Assignments

Definitions of Literacy

Find at least four definitions or descriptions of literacy or reading, put them on a handout to share with the class, and post them to Moodle. (Only one of these may be a dictionary definition). One of these may be your personal definition or description of literacy or reading. Cite your sources.

Examples:

- The National Council of Teachers of English defines literacy as: reading, writing, listening, speaking, viewing, and visually representing.
- The following two excerpts are from Ruined by Reading by Lynne Sharon Schwartz (Beacon Press, 1996), which I highly recommend to those who love to read:

“We gaze at marks on a page, put there by a machine, recognizable as words. Each one denotes something discrete but we do not, cannot, read them as such, except in the first days of learning how. They offer themselves in groups with wholes greater than the sum of the parts. As in human groups, the individual members behave in relation to their companions: each word presents aspects of itself suited to the ambiance, amplifying some connotations and muting others. Their respective rankings must change too. A word will be key here, play a supporting role there, and in each successive appearance will be weightier and more richly nuanced. All this we register faster than the speed of light illuminating our page, hardly aware of noting the valence, assessing the role and position, of each word as it flies by, granting it its place in the assemblage.” (p. 117)

“The librarian taught us how to keep a chart of our reading. A narrow column for the date, a wide one for the title of the book, one for the author, and finally, one to note the pages read. It had not occurred to me that the number of pages, the rate, mattered. What could quantity have to do with reading? Yet from that moment there it was, sour and inescapable. In college we groaned ritually over long reading lists—how to get it all done? We calculated our speeds in different subjects (fifty pages an hour for a novel, thirty for history, twenty for philosophy) and parceled out our time. It is a blasphemous way to read, like a Black Mass, mocking the act by denaturing it. What a mercy it was to finish with school and be able to read again.” (p. 106)

Presentation of Related Resource

For this assignment, you will research and present a resource related to our course. You will sign up for a course session and take 5-10 minutes to present your resource to the class. You must also provide a handout and post your resource to Moodle. It is my hope that these resources will be useful to you and your classmates in preparing your research paper. Suggested resources:

- Interview a reading researcher and report to the class
- Interview a reading teacher or reading specialist and report to the class
- Analyze and summarize a reading research-related website and report to the class (contact me if you'd like suggestions on websites)
- Learn about a reading-related journal or other periodical and present it to the class: what topics does it cover? What is the intended audience? What is the length and style of its articles? (again, see me if you'd like suggestions for specific journals—you can find lots of journals in the Educational Studies library)

“Big Five” Presentations

You are responsible for working with a small group to carefully read the NRP Report on one of the “Big Five” areas and summarize and analyze it for the class. Your group will have 20-25 minutes in class to present your findings and lead a discussion. Your presentation should include a handout with summary and analysis of your section of the report. Be brief; use tools such as charts to present the data.

In your analysis, it will be important to read not only the text of the report, but also to dig into the appendixes and help us make sense of the data contained there. For example, each appendix lists the studies that the Panel consulted in writing the report. How many studies were consulted? What was the range of journals and other sources from which the studies came? What can you tell us about the authors of the studies?

Your analysis should raise questions for us to consider. For example, in Appendix B of the Phonemic Awareness section, a list of “characteristics of participants” is presented. One characteristic is “Reader Level: at-risk readers, disabled readers, normally progressing readers”. What do these terms mean? Are they defined elsewhere in the NRP report? If so, give us the definitions. If not, raise the question so we can discuss it and perhaps try to find the answer somewhere else. Such questions will help us to make judgments about the validity and usefulness of the NRP report.

Your analysis should also help us to think about what was NOT included in the report. Were there participants, outcome measures, variables, etc that were not included but might have been?

NOTE: This is not a statistics course. Unless you have some particular interest or expertise with statistics, you don't have to worry about reporting the specifics of statistical outcomes.

Visual Representation

For this assignment, you will create a visual representation related to some aspect of our course. Together as a class, we will do a character map of the key players in the debate over the National Reading Panel report. In choosing a topic and format for this assignment, I encourage you to be creative. How can

you display some of your new knowledge and understandings in a visual way? You may use words, too, but much of your meaning should be carried in the visual presentation and organization: through drawings, flow charts, graphs, diagrams, time lines, webs, cartoons, maps, collage, icons, symbols, or the like. Suggestions:

- Visual representation of the NRP report (or a subsection)
- Categorization chart of the criticisms of the NRP report
- A continuum that presents the range of definitions of literacy or reading
- Visual map of the basics of research design (e.g. types of research, issues in research including reliability and validity, examples of each)
- Visual representation of reading assessment (e.g. the range of assessment types, or choose one assessment to represent); could take DIBELS, a highly controversial reading assessment, and display its administration through a series of cartoon drawings, or map its history, or present a table of the arguments pro and con
- Timeline of the work of the NRP and the reaction to its report
- Map something: maybe Reading First sites across the country?
- Visual representation of the topics included in the NRP report and those not included
- A cartoon with a “hero” and a “villain” who fight for the integrity of reading instruction
- Conduct a survey of reading teachers and reading specialists about some aspect of reading instruction and graph the results

Your visual is due at our last class session, when we will share and celebrate them. Give yourself a few weeks into the course to become familiar with the topics we will discuss. Be thinking about this assignment. If you are more comfortable with writing, you may feel that this is a daunting task. Sketch out some possibilities as we go; brainstorm with friends in the course (or interested friends not in the course); meet with me if you are feeling stuck. Be sure to leave yourself a couple weeks at least to work on this, and try not to let it compete with your research paper. If you choose a topic for this assignment that is related to your research paper (which I highly recommend), then you may even appreciate this assignment for its ability to support your work on that paper. NOTE: If you are artistically inclined, you may want to create your own drawings, symbols, icons, etc. If not, it’s fine to borrow from other sources, so long as those sources are cited. It is just as important to cite sources of visuals you borrow as it is to cite books, articles, and websites.

Research Paper

The major assignment for this course is a research paper on a topic related to reading instruction, reading research, or the politics of reading education. Your paper should pose a problem or a question, then present some analysis. It should NOT be simply a summary of information. You may choose to take a position and argue it (being sure to present, and refute, opposing arguments), or you may choose to lay out the range of arguments but not support any one over the others. Either way, your paper should take a critical stance toward the topic. Not all sources of information, nor all opinions, are created equal. What criteria should be used to make decisions about your question or problem? What information, research, and knowledge should be valued? Your paper should help us to understand how you made these judgments. It should also present clear conclusions that you have drawn based on your research.

You should consult a range of resources appropriate to your topic. In addition to print sources such as books and journals, you may choose to consult people (researchers, teachers), websites (being very careful in judging their quality and reliability), documentaries, etc. Resources must be cited in APA format. Possible topics include:

- Analysis of the methodology of the NRP report: What types of studies did they choose to include and exclude? On what basis? What effect did these decisions have on the final product, and thus on policy and instruction?
- Analysis of the history of the NRP
- Analysis of the criticisms of the NRP report
- Argument: What reading instruction should look like (specify a grade range)
- Argument: What reading research should look like
- To what extent should reading instruction be research based?
- Choose an area that was left out of the NRP report and investigate the research (find some good summaries/literature reviews; see me for help) and other information on that area. Then make an argument: should that area have been included?
- History and analysis of the Reading First program
- Trace the effects of the NRP report on reading instruction, funding of reading programs, or some other area
- A report to teachers: What the National Reading Panel had to say about reading instruction, and how its report should affect your teaching
- Reading assessment: How has it been affected by the NRP Report? Perhaps a focus on DIBELS
- Choose a specific topic within reading research (e.g. read aloud, comprehension, phonemic awareness, motivation) and survey some of the research in that area. What can research tell us about that area, and what questions still remain?

You are welcome to come up with your own topic; you aren't required to choose from the list above. You must get your topic approved by February 3. This means that you must either meet with me or email me in advance of this date so that you can make any necessary adjustments to your topic proposal before the due date (Feb. 3). A successful topic proposal will be a Moodle post that contains your topic and some of your thoughts about how you will go about researching and organizing to write about it, as well as some possible sources you will consult.

An outline and/or first draft of the paper must be posted to the assignments section of Moodle by February 24. This will allow me to give you feedback early in the process, and it will prepare you to make use of the writers' workshop that is scheduled during class on February 26.

The final paper is due Monday, March 16 and should be posted to the assignments section of Moodle by 5pm.

Topics and Schedule of Readings

NOTE: VOE refers to Voice of Evidence In Reading Research; BBNRP refers to Big Brother and the National Reading Curriculum

<p>January 6: Overview</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review syllabus, course requirements • Discuss expectations for the course • What is literacy? What is reading? What have been our experiences as readers? 	
<p>January 8</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share and discuss definitions of literacy and reading • Introduction to educational research • Model resource presentation: Cathy • Sign up for resource presentations 	<p>--Kaestle article --Seigle reading: Qualitative vs. Quantitative research designs</p>
<p>January 13</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educational research, cont. • Assessment 	<p>--Pearson reading: Assessment --What research has to say, Intro and chapter 1 --VOE chapter 1</p> <p>Resource Presentation</p>
<p>January 15</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading research history, methodology and ideology • Begin character map 	<p>--BBNRC chapter 1 --VOE chapter 2</p> <p>Resource Presentation</p>
<p>January 20</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NRP Report: Introduction and Methodology 	<p>--NRP Report: Chapter 1</p> <p>Resource Presentation</p>
<p>January 22</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preview of the rest of the NRP Report: The “Big Five” • Presentation on PA section: Cathy • Class analyzes Phonics section together 	<p>--NRP Report: PA and Phonics sections --Begin reading your group’s assigned section of the NRP report</p> <p>Resource Presentation</p>
<p>January 27: NRP Report: The “Big Five”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presentation from fluency group • Presentation from vocabulary group • Presentation from comprehension group 	<p>--NRP Report: Fluency and Vocabulary --NRP Report: Comprehension</p> <p>Resource Presentation</p>
<p>January 29: NRP Report: The “Big Five”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stepping back: Discussion of the “Big Five” • Course mid-term evaluation 	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Checking in on topic selection if necessary 	Resource Presentation _____
<p>February 3: Writing the research paper</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Round robin reporting of your research paper topics; brainstorming about researching and writing the paper 	<p>--Tower, Genre Development article (read the abstract and the first section, through p. 17)</p> <p>Resource Presentation _____</p>
<p>February 5: The Reaction and the Controversy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Check in with character map • Begin a chart of criticisms and responses 	<p>--Roller article --Goldenberg article --Cunningham article (Review of NRP Report) --Shanahan <i>Reading Online</i> article --Purcell-Gates <i>Reading Online</i> article</p> <p>Resource Presentation _____</p>
<p>February 10: The Reaction, continued</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More discussion of the research paper • Librarian visit 	<p>--BBNRC chapter 3, 6 --VOE chapter 3, 4, 11</p>
<p>February 12: Phonemic Awareness and Phonics</p>	<p>--BBNRC chapter 4, 8, 9, 10 --VOE chapter 8</p>
<p>February 17: Fluency</p>	<p>--BBNRC chapter 5 --VOE chapter 9</p>
<p>February 19: Motivation</p>	<p>--BBNRC chapter 7 --VOE chapter 14</p>
<p>February 24: So what happens in classrooms?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading First 	<p>http://www.ed.gov/programs/readingfirst/index.html --Inspector General's Report: Read executive summary, skim the rest --Reading First Impact Study: Read the executive report and chapter 1, skim other sections according to your interest --MRP report on Reading First -- http://www.mnreadingfirst.org/default.htm --Toppo USA Today articles (2) --Goodman—two articles (optional)</p>

<p>February 26: Writers' Workshop</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Round robin check-in about your research papers • Peer conferences 	<p>Come prepared to conference about your research paper, and to give and receive support and feedback of writing.</p>
<p>March 3: More on classroom teaching</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visit from a classroom teacher 	<p>--Taylor, The What and the How... --Put Reading First booklet for teachers</p>
<p>March 5: Future Directions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revisit definitions of literacy from the first week 	<p>--VOE chapters 18, 19 --BBNRC chapters 12, 13</p>
<p>March 10: Wrap up and celebration</p>	<p>Share Visual representations</p>