

Inquiry and Research in Educational Leadership

Dr. Alexandra Freidus
EDLR 6055
Spring 20202 | Tuesdays, 4:00-6:30pm

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Nam June Paik, *Electronic Superhighway: Continental U.S., Alaska, Hawaii*, 1995

Course Description and Objectives

Educational leaders regularly make decisions with large pedagogical, financial, and social implications. Should the district adopt a new mathematics program? How should teachers and administrators be evaluated? What is the best approach to prevent students from dropping out of high school? To make these and other important decisions, educational leaders need a sound understanding of practice, theory, *and* research. This seminar provides an introduction to research design and data collection to solve practical problems in schools and districts. Students in this course will explore the knowledge and skills required for educational leaders to be sophisticated and critical consumers and producers of educational research.

Course goals and outcomes:

- Develop as informed readers of empirical studies who can analyze the implications of findings for educational research for policy and practice
- Understand the research process as a series of decisions in which some things are lost and some things are gained
- Understand the relationship between research questions and methods
- Identify the strengths and limitations of various research designs
- Name and grapple with positionality, power, and ethics in research design
- Demonstrate familiarity with basic qualitative data collection skills

Ongoing pandemic objectives:

- To care for ourselves and each other as a community
- To communicate openly about our expectations, goals, and concerns

Course Requirements

The overarching objective of this course is for each participant to develop a deeper understanding of how research design and methods can and cannot be used to address problems of practice. To accomplish this goal, students must read attentively, participate in class, and put strong efforts into class assignments. We are a community of learners and, as such, the class will be structured in ways to encourage students to provide critical support and feedback to one another.

We will use Zoom when we meet remotely this semester. Please see my emails and/or check HuskyCT for the class link. Please post all assignments as Word documents on HuskyCT.

Class Preparation and Participation

This is a discussion and workshop-based course. Our success and shared learning – both your own and your peers’ – depend on you. Please arrive on time and ready to think through the week’s reading. Listening actively, asking questions, commenting on the thoughts of others, or discussing tentative ideas are just as important to our shared learning as stating original, fully-formed thoughts.



As part of class participation, you will annotate assigned readings. Our class will use perusall.com, an online reading and annotation tool, to share notes, questions, and ideas. *You will need to set up a free account and log in with the course code: FREIDUS-CGV9P.* The goal of this social reading platform is to engage in the texts and share how you are grappling with new ideas, both in the texts and from your peers – not to show how you have “mastered” the main ideas. **Please post your comments by 9am on Monday mornings**, so that I can use your ideas and questions to prepare for that week’s class.

If you wish to know my assessment of your participation and understanding of readings, you are encouraged to seek a conference for that purpose. I will notify any student if there is cause for concern. If you *must* miss a class or be late with an assignment, please let me know as soon as possible. You don’t need to explain what’s going on, but don’t hesitate to ask if there’s any support I can offer. I will ask you reach out to your peers to make sure you catch up on what you missed. If you are not in class or you are late to class, you are still responsible for the assigned work, including any updates I might make to assignments, deadlines, etc. Please don’t miss more than two classes during the semester if at all possible.

Fieldwork

Qualitative research is best learned through trial and error. In order to develop your skills, you will practice. I expect you to struggle with some of these assignments, and that’s the point. What matters is that you engage in the struggle, learn from your experience, and reflect on what you are learning. I will share detailed expectations for the assignments below before their due dates.



- A researcher identity memo due 2/22
- CITI certification (which will allow you to apply for IRB approval in the future) due 3/8
- An interview guide, transcript, and reflective memo due 3/29 and 4/19
- A field observation and reflective memo due 4/12

Book Groups

This assignment will allow you to engage deeply with one recent qualitative study of educational leadership, policy, or practice. You will choose one book to read with several others in the class, meet as a group to discuss the book, and work collaboratively to plan a class discussion of the book.



Your responsibilities as facilitators include:

- Work with your group to assign *one* chapter of your book for the rest of the class to read. Develop discussion questions to share with the chapter. See the end of this syllabus for guidance on what these questions can and should look like.

- Send me your chapter selection and discussion questions **no later than 9am Monday the week before your group facilitates** so that I can scan and share the chapter/questions with the class.
- Plan a brief introduction (no more than 20 minutes, max) that offers context for the assigned chapter and helps the class understand how the chapter fits into the book overall.
- Use your discussion questions to lead a 25-30 minute discussion that challenges the class to think more deeply about the chapter and connect the book to other topics we have explored.

Research Critiques

In order to develop and refine your skills as a critical reader of educational research, you will write critiques of course texts. These critiques will identify both what studies do well and how they could be stronger (or in some cases, extended). You will write four critiques by the end of the semester:



- **2 empirical article critiques.** (3-5 double-spaced pages each. You select an empirical article from the class readings and submit the critique no later than one week after the class discusses the article. Both critiques due by 2/15.) Your critique will focus primarily on research design and methodology and should address some or all of the following questions:
 - Alignment: What are the researcher's goals? Does the study achieve these goals? Are the research methods appropriate for the research question? Does the theoretical framework support or advance the analysis required to answer the question?
 - Data and methods: Does the data answer the questions presented in the paper? Does the analysis? What are the strengths and limitations of the data? How does the analysis address those strengths and limitations? How does the researcher address their own positionality in relation to the research question and/or participants?
- **1 book study critique.** (5-7 double-spaced pages. Due one week *after* your group facilitates class discussion.) Critique the book as you would an article, using the guiding questions above, as well as:
 - Consider the implications of the book for educational policy and/or practice. In what ways is the book useful or not useful for people working in the field?
 - Reflect on the class discussion. Summarize the main points, highlight insightful comments, discuss debates, and/or otherwise connect the class conversation to your own critique of the book.
- **1 capstone critique and reflection.** (5-7 double-spaced pages. Due by 9am May 2. More details to come.) In lieu of a final paper, you will critique an EdD capstone project. This critique will look very much like article critiques, but it will also consider the constraints inherent to a capstone project. You will also reflect on your own position and goals as you consider possibilities for your own capstone project.

Required Texts

The only text you need to purchase for this group is your book group selection. You will rank your choices and I will assign groups by the second week of class. You will also be assigned required articles and book chapters on a weekly basis. All of these materials will be posted on perusall.com.

Recommended Resources

You are NOT required to buy or expected to use all of these sources, but they are useful reference tools for questions that might come up in class.

- Writing resources:
 - APA Handbook ([Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, 7th edition](#))
 - Purdue Online Writing Lab [page on APA formatting](#)
 - Graff, G., Birkenstein, C & Durst, R. (2021). *They Say, I Say: The Moves that Matter in Academic Writing*. W.W. Norton.
 - Becker, H. (2020). *Writing for Social Scientists* (3rd edition). University of Chicago Press.

- Reference texts on qualitative research methods:
 - Maxwell, J. A. (2013). *Qualitative research design: An interactive approach* (3rd ed.). Sage. (IF YOU CHOOSE TO BUY ONE BOOK, GET THIS ONE!)
 - Tisdell, Elizabeth & Merriam, Sharan. 2016. *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation*. 4th Edition. Jossey-Bass
 - Cresswell, J. & Poth, C. (2017). *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches*. Sage.
 - Lareau, Annette. 2021. *Listening to People: A Practical Guide to Interviewing, Participant Observation, Data Analysis, and Writing it All Up*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
 - Gerson, Kathleen, and Sarah Damaske. 2021. *The Science and Art of Interviewing*. Oxford University Press.
 - Emerson, R. M., Fretz, R. I., & Shaw, L. L. (2011). *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes* (2nd edition). University of Chicago Press.

Tentative Course Schedule – Please stay tuned for updates!

Guiding Question(s)	Dates	Read and annotate by 9am Monday	Due before class
What makes research “good”?	1/18 Remote	<p>What is the purpose of educational research?</p> <p>Gardner, Howard. 2002. “The Quality and Qualities of Educational Research.” <i>Education Week</i>, September 2002. https://www.edweek.org/leadership/opinion-the-quality-and-qualities-of-educational-research/2002/09.</p> <p>Becker, Howard S. 1983. “Studying Urban Schools.” <i>Anthropology & Education Quarterly</i> 14 (2): 99–108.</p>	
	1/25 Remote	<p>Research Questions: What makes a “good” RQ?</p> <p>Creswell, W. John, and J. David Creswell. 2018. <i>Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches</i>. Sage Publications. CHAPTER 7.</p> <p>Luker, Kristin. 2009. “What Is This a Case of, Anyway?” In <i>Salsa Dancing into the Social Sciences: Research in an Age of Info-Glut</i>. Harvard University Press. PAGES 51-62.</p> <p>Tuck, E. 2009. “Suspending Damage: A Letter to Communities.” <i>Harvard Educational Review</i> 79 (3): 409–28.</p>	
	2/1 In person	<p>Research Questions: What makes a question qualitative or quantitative?</p> <p>Maxwell, J. A. (2013). <i>Qualitative research design: An interactive approach</i> (3rd ed.). Sage. CHAPTER 4.</p> <p>de los Ríos, Cati V., and Arturo Molina. 2020. “Literacies of Refuge: ‘Pidiendo Posada’ as Ritual of Justice.” <i>Journal of Literacy Research</i> 52 (1): 32–54.</p> <p>Dee, Thomas S., and Emily K. Penner. 2017. “The Causal Effects of Cultural Relevance: Evidence From an Ethnic Studies Curriculum.” <i>American Educational Research Journal</i> 54 (1): 127–66.</p>	[Optional empirical article critique]

	2/8 Remote	<p>Quantitative Design: What should I look for when I read quantitative studies?</p> <p>Guest Speaker: Dr. Richard Blissett</p> <p>Ahn, June, Austin Beck, John Rice, and Michelle Foster. 2016. "Exploring Issues of Implementation, Equity, and Student Achievement With Educational Software in the DC Public Schools." <i>AERA Open</i> 2 (4).</p> <p>Viano, S., & Baker, D. J. 2020. How administrative data collection and analysis can better reflect racial and ethnic identities. <i>Review of Research in Education</i>, 44(1), 301–331.</p>	[Optional empirical article critique]
	2/15 In person	<p>Qualitative Design: What should I look for when I read qualitative studies?</p> <p>Tisdell, Elizabeth & Merriam, Sharan. 2016. <i>Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation</i>. 4th Edition. Jossey-Bass. CHAPTERS 2-3.</p> <p>Small, Mario Luis. 2009. "How Many Cases Do I Need?": On Science and the Logic of Case Selection in Field-Based Research." <i>Ethnography</i> 10 (1): 5–38.</p>	Submit 2 empirical article critiques no later than beginning of class
	2/22 Remote	<p>Positionality: Why does it matter who does the research?</p> <p>Rapp, R. 2000. "How Methodology Bleeds into Everyday Life." In <i>Testing Women, Testing the Fetus: The Social Impact of Amniocentesis in America</i>. New York: Routledge.</p> <p>Villenas, Sofia. 1996. "The Colonizer / Colonized Chicana Ethnographer: Identity, Marginalization, And ..." <i>Harvard Educational Review</i> 66 (4): 711–731.</p> <p><i>The Unchosen Me</i> Chapter TBA</p>	Researcher identity memo
	3/1 Remote	<p>Ethics: What ethical questions must be considered in research design?</p> <p>Film: <i>Three Identical Strangers</i> (Hulu)</p> <p><i>Troublemakers</i> Chapter TBA</p>	[<i>Unchosen Me</i> critique]
	3/8 In person	<p>Flex Week: Focus to be chosen by class</p> <p>Readings TBA</p> <p><i>Stuck Improving</i> Chapter TBA</p>	CITI certification [<i>Troublemakers</i> critique]
	3/15 No class	Take a break!	[<i>Stuck Improving</i> critique]
How do people do qualitative research?	3/22 In person	<p>Data Collection & Analysis: What decisions do qualitative researchers have to make?</p> <p>Maxwell, J. A. (2013). <i>Qualitative research design: An interactive approach</i> (3rd ed.). Sage. CHAPTER 5.</p> <p>Luttrell, Wendy. 2000. "'Good Enough' Methods for Ethnographic Research." <i>Harvard Educational Review</i> 70 (4): 499–523.</p> <p><i>Ghosts in the Schoolyard</i> Chapter TBA</p>	

3/29 Remote	Interviewing: Is an interview just talking to someone? Lareau, Annette. 2021. <i>Listening to People</i> . Chicago: University of Chicago Press. CHAPTERS 4 & 5. <i>The Privileged Poor</i> Chapter TBA	Draft interview guide [<i>Ghosts</i> critique]
4/5 In person	Observation: Is an observation just watching people? Emerson, R. M., Fretz, R. I., & Shaw, L. L. (2011). <i>Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes</i> (2 nd edition). University of Chicago Press. CHAPTERS 2 & 3. <i>Dude, You're a Fag</i> Chapter TBA	[<i>Privileged Poor</i> critique]
4/12 Remote	Validity: How can you know whether to trust a qualitative study? Maxwell, J. A. (2013). <i>Qualitative research design: An interactive approach</i> (3rd ed.). Sage. CHAPTER 6. Jerolmack, Colin and Khan, Shamus. 2014. "Talk Is Cheap: Ethnography and the Attitudinal Fallacy." <i>Sociological Methods & Research</i> 43 (2): 1-36.	Field notes & memo [<i>Dude</i> critique]
4/19 Remote asynch	Flex week. Focus to be chosen by the class. Readings TBA	Interview transcript & memo
4/26 In person	Reflections, group critiques, and celebrations	
Capstone critiques due 9am on Monday, 5/2.		

Course Expectations

- **This semester in particular, please expect the unexpected. We will adjust the course schedule based on how things go. Please check your UConn email regularly for updates.**
- **Please be generous with yourselves, your colleagues, and me.** Class plans may need to be adapted. Children and family members may pop up into video screens. You may face unexpected or particularly challenging circumstances. It may be difficult for me to identify students who need extra help. If you need additional support, please reach out when you can.
- **I have set deadlines in order to make sure you work through the assignments in a logical sequence that will promote your learning.** I know there may be challenges; please communicate as proactively as possible if deadlines prove a major challenge. Be sure to back up all of your work.
- **Your success in this class is important to me. If there are aspects of this course that prevent you from learning or exclude you, please let me know so we can work together develop strategies that meet both your needs and the course requirements. If you need official accommodations, you have a right to have these met.** The Center for Students with Disabilities (CSD) at UConn provides accommodations and services for qualified students with disabilities. If you have a documented disability for which you wish to request academic accommodations and have not contacted the CSD, please do so as soon as possible. The CSD is located in Wilbur Cross, Room 204 and can be reached at (860) 486-2020 or at csd@uconn.edu. Detailed information regarding the accommodations process is also available on their website at www.csd.uconn.edu. Please contact either me or the Center for Students with Disabilities if you feel you may be qualified.

- **Academic Integrity: All work that you submit for this class must be your own. Building on the ideas of others is a critical part of academic work, but you must clearly credit the people whose ideas and/or words you are using every time you use them.** When you paraphrase, include the author and date of publication you are referencing in your text and have complete bibliographic information at the end of the paper; use quotation marks every time you borrow another author's language, even if you also cite them. Student behavior shall be consistent with conduct delineated in the University of Connecticut statement on *Academic Integrity in Graduate Education and Research* contained in the May 2001 edition of the University of Connecticut *Responsibilities for Community Life: The Student Code*. Students are responsible for the understanding: (a) forms of academic and scholarly misconduct described in the statement, and (b) procedures to be followed by an instructor, the Graduate School, and a student in the event of alleged misconduct.
- **Some of you may experience challenges because you cannot afford sufficient food, you lack a safe place to live, or you struggle to balance school with paid work or family responsibilities.** If you are experiencing these or other challenges, I encourage you to reach out to the [Dean of Students](#) for support and referral to services that can help. If you feel overwhelmed or are experiencing anxiety or depression, please reach out to [Mental Health Services](#) for free, confidential support. If you feel comfortable doing so, please let me know so that I can assist you in accessing support.

**How to Ask a Question About a Research Study That Will
Provoke Conversation and Further Discussion from Your Colleagues
(Some starter notes)**

- **Read carefully.** Identify the questions, assumptions, and connections both you (as reader) and the researcher (as writer) are making. Think about the pieces of the text, phrases, expressions, moments that tweak your instincts, that bother and harass you. These intuitions and “feelings” are the ends of intellectual threads that you may want to excavate. Linger over passages that are unclear or that strike you as particularly helpful or that don’t jar well with you. Why do those passages set off your instincts?
- **Contextualize the study.** You should know, and you should share with the class, the following information: who wrote the book; what is their discipline or interdisciplinary nexus; what is/are the study’s central goals and questions; what are the essential features of the study’s design; what is/are the book’s central arguments; who is the writer in conversation with; what are some key passages; what are some key terms; what did you not understand? Make your discussion question(s) simple, straightforward and jargon-free. Proofread so that you catch grammar and spelling mistakes.
- **Make your questions open-ended**, i.e. not answerable with fact or by direct and immediate reference to the text.
- **Make sure your questions don’t rely on information the rest of the class doesn’t have** (or share the information and background the class needs in order to engage with the question ahead of time). Remember to make sure the question is answerable to start with, i.e., is not vague and does not rely on facts or assumptions not addressable within the confines of our class conversation.
- **Make reference to specific parts of the text** with quotes or page numbers: direct the class to look at a relevant passage, read it together out loud, and drill down to get at the problem you are looking at.
- **Reframe some of the problems of the text to think through the consequences, implications and applications of the study.** Questions about “experience” or “responses” or “feelings” tend not to be helpful questions – try to step back from personal responses and instead focus on the shape of the data, analysis, and argument.
- **Often we are tempted to ask the “what about” question:** e.g., what about the people who are excluded from this study? Although not an unreasonable question, asked in this manner it is not really productive because it doesn’t open up conversation. The only answer to “what about” is: they aren’t there. More productive: what choices did the author make in designing this study and what were their consequences; how do the exclusions inherent in this study facilitate certain conclusions, problems or paradigms; what are these paradigms and what happens when we consider this study in a broader context? What would this study look like if conducted with a different sample, different assumptions about learning or leadership, etc.?
- **It’s not the worst idea to make sure you have some thoughts about how to answer your questions before asking your colleagues.** However, sometimes you are just really stumped and need to work through this question with your classmates. That’s okay too. Relatedly, if you can easily answer your question while you are writing it, you probably need to just state your point of view and move on to another question that you have not already fully answered.
- **Sometimes the question you write is simply the jumping-off point for more developed questions the class brings to the reading.** That is fine! The point is to catalyze inquiry, not perform mastery: good pedagogy means letting go of your ego-investments in your own ideas.

These guidelines are adapted from:

Kyla Wazana Tompkins in *Avidly*. September 13, 2016. <http://avidly.lareviewofbooks.org/2016/09/12/we-arent-here-to-learnwhat-we-know-we-already-know>