

ESS Senior Research Seminar

Culture provides the tools to pursue the search for meaning to convey our understanding to others. Consequently, communication cannot exist without culture, culture cannot be known without communication, and teaching and learning cannot occur without communication or culture.

Geneva Gay, *Culturally Responsive Teaching*

An individual's language is intricately bound up with his or her sense of identity and group consciousness. In the history of man's inhumanity to man, it is clearly understandable why the conqueror forces his victim to learn his language, for as black psychiatrist Frantz Fanon said, "Every dialect is a way of thinking." Certainly this has been operative in the history of colonized people, where the colonizer's language and culture occupy a position superior to that of the colonized, even among the oppressed persons themselves.

Geneva Smitherman, "Where It's At"

Listening alone is not sufficient if it is not accomplished by profound changes in what we expect our students to accomplish in school. Even more important than simply *listening* is *assisting* students to become agents of their own learning and to use what they learn in productive and critical ways.

Sonia Nieto, "Lessons from Students on Creating a Chance to Dream"

This course is designed as an introduction to conducting research in the area of literacy teaching and learning. As you work on your own research – the primary focus of the class – we will read a number of different studies, enabling us to examine such research methods as interviews, case studies, focus groups, and critical ethnography.

Many researchers take as a basic assumption that literacy is a social practice that involves the ways in which people use texts for culturally meaningful purposes within culturally meaningful activities. Associated with literacy are ways of interacting, valuing, thinking, speaking, and believing. Language is also associated with *identity*, *privilege*, and *power*. It is inevitable that some practices have been given greater legitimacy than others. As Sylvia Scribner has suggested, "what counts as literacy in our technological society is a matter 'not very well understood.'" In turn, she points out that "[e]ach formulation of an answer to the question 'What is literacy?' leads to a different evaluation of the scope of the problem (i.e., the extent of *illiteracy*) and to different objectives for programs aimed at the formation of a literate citizenry" (p. 71). Here we might say that literacy and language go hand-in-hand.

Central to our analysis will be the ways language interacts with identity and power – how literacy is distributed, who gets to speak and who is silenced – in schooling and in culture. Thus, we will consider such questions as "Does the prevailing distribution of literacy conform to standards of social justice?" and "What policies might promote such standards?"

Learning Goals

By the end of the term, you should be able to accomplish the following goals:

- Analyze existing research with a specific focus or rationale, questions asked, methods used, and conclusions drawn
- Extend your knowledge of research literature, such as the social, cultural, racial, and environmental effects on learning, in instruction, and in policy
- Formulate a researchable question
- Frame your question so that others see it as important and connected to a real problem in education
- Decide on an appropriate method to use in collecting data or evidence
- Explain the benefits and limitations of various research methods such as observation, interviewing, surveys, and text analysis
- Write a research study consistent with the standards of the field of inquiry (e.g., social science)
- Interpret your results appropriately, spelling out limitations and implications of your research
- Discuss and apply ethical standards to your research¹
- Articulate how doing research has influenced your knowledge and beliefs about educational issues.

Required Texts

The Freedom Writers with Erin Gruwell (1999). *The freedom writers diary: How a teacher and 150 teens used writing to change themselves and the world around them*. NY: Doubleday.

Greene, S. & Lidinsky, A. (in press). *From inquiry to argument*. Boston: Bedford Press.

Hess, F. & Petrilli, M. (2006). *No child left behind*. NY: Peter Lang.

Morrell, E. (2004). *Becoming critical researchers: Literacy empowerment for urban youth*. London: Peter Lang.

Nystrand, M., & Gamoran, A. with Kachur, R. & Prendergast, C. (1996). *Opening dialogue: Understanding the dynamics of language and learning in the English classroom*. NY: Teachers College Press.

Valdés, G. (2001). *Learning and not learning English: Latino students in American schools*. NY: Teachers College Press.

Assignments

¹ Ultimately, the way we construct our research agendas, carry out these projects, and disseminate the results of these projects “directly raise questions about who has the power to define whom, and when, and how” (McCarthy & Crichlow, 1993). Thus, it is important to ask the following: How are you representing those you study? What is missing? Which literacy processes make the most sense to you? How do you decide what is significant? How will you decide how to describe what is significant?

Mini-Research Paper: These are modest projects that are very limited in focus. For example, the first paper you write this term will focus on the ways the media represents problems facing education. Based on your search of current media, what would you say are the prevailing problems facing educators? Parents? Policy-makers? You need only look at one source of information, and it can be either popular or scholarly. What you write should be 2-3 pages (typed, double-spaced, Times New Roman 12). As a class, we will discuss the extent to which researchers, teachers, policy-makers, administrators, and the like agree in their understanding of the problems facing education.

During the term, I would also like you to do additional types of research to measure what you actually see or study against what you read. For instance, I would like you to locate and discuss one scholarly response to the No Child Left Behind legislation when we read Hess and Petrilli's book. For a related project, I would like you to look up ISTEP scores for local schools. What do these scores tell us about student achievement?

Finally, I would like you to apply some of the ideas we discuss in class to your own work. When we watch a video of classroom interaction, I would like you to apply methods for recording what you see in a classroom you choose to study. What did you pay attention to? What was significant? What was challenging in trying to record what you observed? And when we discuss the context of a study conducted in Chicago schools, I would like you to describe the context of the school for which you reported ISTEP scores.

Response Papers: I would like you to write two brief papers in response to the assigned readings. The primary purpose of these response papers, 2 single-spaced pages, is to help you examine important components of empirical studies that you will need to address in your own research:

- What is the author's purpose? (to correct a misinterpretation? to fill a gap? to modify an existing position?)
- What is the research question(s)?
- What methods (e.g., ethnographic, case study, focus group, text analysis) did the author use?
- Why did the author choose a particular method? Would other methods have been more appropriate? Why? Why not?
- Who are the participants? Why these participants?
- What is the context?
- Why has the author chosen this context?
- What were the results of the study? Did they answer the research questions?
- What claims does the author make? To what extent are these claims supported?
- What limitations are there? Did the author identify and successfully address them?
- What implications does the author draw? To what extent are these implications based on the data?
- What ethical issues were involved? Did the author acknowledge and successfully respond to them?

I'd like you to be as specific as possible in the references you make to the text you cite in answering these questions.

Rhetorical Analysis Paper. I'd like you to choose a substantial paragraph from the reading that you find interesting. Using quotations from a given text, please compose one page (typed, double-spaced) in which you reflect on a given writer's purpose, style, tone, and argumentative strategies. (See Chapter 2 of Greene and Lidinsky's *Inquiry and Academic Writing*.) The idea here is to pay attention to *how* writer's develop their ideas. In turn, you can apply what you learn from others to your own writing.

Research Project. Your project is the central part of the course. I expect that you will base your project on some type of original research, using one or more of the methods we will discuss during the term: observation, field notes, interviews, oral histories, case studies of student writing or development, audio/videotape of classroom interactions, and the like. You should develop what you write by reviewing current research related to the questions you raise, explain the theory that frames your study, and address the consequences of what you find for those you study and for yourselves. The finished paper should be 25 pages. You will work on this in stages, submitting the following during the course of the semester: idea sheets, a research proposal with working bibliography, a revised proposal and annotated bibliography, first draft, second draft, presentation, and final draft. (See pp. 14-15 for a further explanation of this assignment.)

Research Log. As you begin to collect data for your project, you should record what you observe and describe your impressions. You will need to keep these two purposes separate, and we will discuss strategies for doing so.

Grading

Attendance and class *participation* will account for 20% of your grade. As you know from past participation in ESS classes, you learn a great deal from your peers. Participation includes contributing in each class, providing constructive responses in draft groups, and meeting all deadlines. I will lower this grade for those who don't meet deadlines (I am doing this for your own good!) It is especially important to meet these deadlines because you are to complete a research project in a relatively short amount of time; sticking to the schedule is one way to support the quality of your final research effort. One absence will be excused; please inform me if you will not be in class.

Your response papers (10%), mini-research papers (20%), and rhetorical analyses (10%) constitute 40% of your grade and the paper based on original research accounts for the remaining 40% of your grade – including idea sheet, research log, drafts of your proposal, an annotated bibliography, and drafts of your paper based on original research.

Calendar

Identifying Issues and Forming Questions

WED Aug. 29

Introduction to Community-Based Research What is research? What is research for?

Discuss Strand, Marullo, Cutforth, Stoecker, & Donohue, "Community-Based Research and Higher Education"

MON Sept. 3	<u>Mini Research Project:</u> You can examine books, legal decisions, journals, and newspapers, using the library's on-line catalog or Google	What are the prevalent perceptions of the current education crisis?
WED Sept. 5	Discuss Mary Ronan's Proposal: "A Case Study of One Homeless Child's Education and Lifestyle" in Chapter 11 of Greene and Lidinsky and her final paper (sent electronically)	What are the qualities of an effective proposal? What constitutes a "good" research question?
	and Chapter 3, "Identifying Issues and Forming Questions"	
MON Sept. 10	Discuss Chapters 1-2 of Hess and Petrilli's <i>No Child Left Behind</i> <u>Mini-Research Project:</u> Read and discuss one scholarly response to NCLB.	What do you think of the central innovations of NCLB – its testing provisions that states are required to implement, how the accountability system is designed to work, the law's requirements for schools and school districts that fail to make adequate yearly progress, and the options provided to the parents of children in those schools?
WED Sept. 12	Discuss Chapters 3-5 of Hess and Petrilli's <i>No Child Left Behind</i> <u>Mini-Research Project: ISTEP</u>	What questions does NCLB provoke for you? Report on ISTEP data from one school in the South Bend School Corporation. What do these data tell us?
MON Sept. 17 <i>Idea Sheets Due</i> (See p. 17)		Share in Groups: what is the writer's topic? issue? question?

Interviews, Focus Groups, and the Ethics of Informed Consent

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MON Sept. 24	<p>Discuss Caspe, Lopez, & Wolos's "Family involvement in elementary school children's education" (handout)</p> <p>and</p> <p>Transcripts of teacher interviews on parent involvement (handout)</p>	<p>How can we develop a frame for analyzing data based on interviews? What do the data tell us about what teachers value?</p>
WED Sept. 26	<p>Develop a script and conduct an interview with one person in class, focusing on an educational issue that you find important</p>	<p>What principles can and should inform the analysis of interviews? What are the strengths and limitations?</p>
MON Oct. 1	<p>Discuss "Focus Groups" in Chapter 11 of Greene and Lidinsky</p> <p>and</p> <p>Video-tape of parent focus group</p>	<p>Why use focus groups? What does videotape reveal that a written transcript does not? How would you describe the strengths and possible limitations of focus groups?</p>
WED Oct. 3	<p>Conduct a focus group in class</p>	<p>What do you think are the most significant educational problems facing local schools?</p>
MON Oct. 8	<p>Discuss Greene, Long, Austin-Phillips, and Mangeney's "No Parent Left Behind" (handout)</p>	<p>Why use different research methods in a study? What are some strategies for integrating data from interviews and focus groups?</p>
WED Oct. 10	<p>Discuss Fine, Weis, Weseen, and Wong, "For Whom? Qualitative Research, Representations and Social Responsibilities" (handout)</p> <p>and</p> <p>Guidelines for writing a proposal in Chapter 11 of Greene and Lidinsky's</p>	<p>What do you see as the "social responsibility" that researchers can or should play in both studying educational settings and writing up research?</p> <p>Do you see your study filling a gap? building on others' research? correcting some misconception?</p>

MON Oct. 15
Draft of proposal including working bibliography, consent forms, and drafts of questions

See Ch. 7, “From Summarizing to Documenting Sources” in Greene and Lidinsky’s for APA formatting suggestions

Share proposals in small groups: What is the issue/question? What methods would best answer the question? What are the strengths and weaknesses of these methods?

Observations of Classroom Discourse and Student Learning

WED Oct. 17

Discuss Nystrand, Gamoran, Kachur and Prendergrast’s *Opening Dialogue*

What does the frame of “dialogism” help to bring into focus?

View excerpt of “Off Track: Classroom Privilege for All” based on Fine et al.’s research

How would you characterize the interactions between teacher and students? Among students? Who initiates discussion? How? Who speaks?

Mid-Semester Break
Oct. 22 - 26

Self-Reports and Case Studies

MON Oct. 29

Discuss *The Freedom Writers Diary*

What patterns emerge in the stories that the students and their teacher tell? What are the strengths and weaknesses of self-reports?

View *The Freedom Writers Diary*

WED Oct. 31

Discuss Guadalupe Valdés’s *Learning and not learning English*, pp. 1 – 61

What “lens” or “frame” does the researcher want you to see her study through? What does this frame bring into focus? What does it leave out?

What challenges do students and teachers face? How can non-English proficient (NEP) and limited English proficient (LEP) students best learn the academic skills required to succeed?

MON Nov. 5
Response Paper

Discuss Guadalupe Valdés’
*Learning and not learning
English*, pp. 62 – 159

What do the descriptions of the focal students tell us? To what extent are you hopeful that districts will follow-through on the author’s recommendations?

WED Nov. 7
*Revised Proposal with Annotated
Bibliography*

Present your research proposal to your group. Be prepared to talk about the research you are building on and the theory framing your study, your research question, its

importance, and why you are using the methods you chose.

Critical Ethnography

MON Nov. 12

Discuss Ernest Morrell’s,
Becoming Critical Researchers,
pp. 3 – 12, 41 – 85

What kinds of teaching can begin to reverse the cycle of underachievement? What do teachers need to know?

WED Nov. 14
Response Paper

Discuss Ernest Morrell’s,
Becoming Critical Researchers,
pp. 86 – 154

To what extent does “critical ethnography” have the potential to change the inequalities in schools that contribute to the underachievement of urban youth of color?

Writing Time

Consult Chapter 5, “From Formulating to Developing a Thesis” and Chapter 8, “From Ethos to Logos: Appealing to Your Readers” in Greene and Lidinsky

What is your argument? Have you fully contextualized this argument within a discussion of others’ research? In what ways have you specifically appealed to readers’ expectations in developing your argument?

MON Nov. 19

Workday for research and writing

WED Nov. 21

Workday for research and writing

THURS Nov. 22 – SUN Nov. 25
Thanksgiving

- Banks, J. & Banks, C. (1995) (Eds.). *Handbook of research on multicultural education*. New York: Macmillan.
- Bogdan, R., & Biklen, S. (1992). *Qualitative research for education: An introduction*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
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- Denzin, N., & Lincoln, Y. (2001). (Eds.). *Handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed.). Sage Publications.
- Dyson, A., & Genishi, C. (2005). *On the case: Approaches to language and literacy Research*. NY: Teachers College Press.
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- Goodson, I., Sikes, P., & Sikes, P. (2001) *Life history research in educational settings: Learning from lives*. NY: Open University Press.
- Greene, S., & Abt-Perkins, D. (2003). (Eds.). *Making race visible: Literacy research for cultural understanding*. NY: Teachers College Press.
- Herr, K. (1994). Empowerment and practitioner research: An example. In G. Anderson, K. Herr & A. S. Nihlen (Eds.) *Studying your own school: An educator's guide to qualitative practitioner research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
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- Parker, L., Deyhle, D., & Villenas, S. (1999). (Eds.). *Race is . . . isn't: Critical race theory and qualitative studies in education*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Peshkin, A. (2000). The nature of interpretation in qualitative research. *Educational Researcher*, 29, 5-10.

Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1998) (Eds.) *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory*. Sage Publications.

Weis, L., Fine, M. Weseen, S., & Wong, M. (2000). Qualitative research, representations, and social responsibilities. In L. Weis & M. Fine (Eds.), *Speed bumps: A student-friendly guide to qualitative research* (pp. 32-66). New York: Teachers College Press.

2. Literacy

Brandt, D. (2001). *Literacy in American lives*. Cambridge University Press.

Dyson, A. (1993). *Social worlds of children learning to write*. NY: Teachers College Press.

Fleischer, K., & Schaafsma, D. (1998) (Ed.). *Literacy and democracy*. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.

Gee, J. (1996). *Social linguistics and literacies: Ideologies in Discourses*. Philadelphia: Falmer.

Hirsch, E.D. (1987). *Cultural literacy: What every American needs to know*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Kaestle, C. (1983/1999). *Pillars of the republic: Common schools and American society*. NY: Hill and Wang.

Street, B. (1995). *Social literacies*. London and New York: Longman.

3. Education and Under-represented Students

Ayers, W. & Ford, P. (1995). *City kids, city teachers: Reports from the front row*. NY: The New Press.

Ayers, W., Hunt, J., & Quinn, T. (1998). (Eds.). *Teaching for social justice*. NY: Teachers College Press.

Baugh, J. (1999). *Out of the mouths of slaves: African American language and educational malpractice*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.

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- Nieto, S. (1999). *The light in their eyes: Creating multicultural learning communities*. NY: Teachers College Press.
- O'Connor, S. (1998). *Will my name be shouted out? Reaching inner city students through the power of writing*. NY: Touchstone Books.
- Phi Delta Kappan* (December 1999). Special section on urban schools, pp. 291-323.
- Rist, R. (1970/2000). Student social class and teacher expectations: The self-fulfilling prophecy in ghetto education. *Harvard Educational Review*, 40, 266-301.

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- Rose, M. (1995). *Possible lives*. NY: Penguin.
- Schultz, K., Buck, P., & Niesz, T. (2000). Democratizing conversations: Racialized talk in a post-desegregated middle school. *American Educational Research Journal*, 37, 33-65.
- Tyack, D. (1974). *The one best system: A history of American urban education*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
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- Weiss, L. & Fine, M. (2000) (Eds.). *Construction sites: Excavating race, class, and gender among youth*. NY: Teachers College Press.
4. Teacher Education
- Cochran-Smith, M. (2004). *Walking the road: Race, diversity, and social justice in teacher education*. NY: Teachers College Press.
- Compton-Lilly, C. (2004). *Confronting racism, poverty, and power : classroom strategies to change the world*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann/Greenwood Publishing Group
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Nieto, S. (2002). *Language, culture, and teaching: Critical perspectives for a new century*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers.

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Paley, V. (1979/2000). *White teacher*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Willis, A. (2003). Parallax: Addressing race in preservice literacy education. In S. Greene & D. Abt-Perkins (Eds.), *Making race visible: Literacy research for cultural understanding* (pp. 51-70). NY: Teachers College Press.

5. Standardized Tests

Dutro, E., & Kazem, E. (April 2004). *Children's writing for themselves, the teacher, and the state in an elementary classroom*. Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association.

Jencks, C., & Phillips, M. (1998). (Eds.). *The black-white test score gap*. Washington, DC: The Brookings Institute.

National Center for Education Statistics (2002). *Digest of education statistics: Elementary and secondary education*. <http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d02/tables/dt119.asp>

National Center for Education Statistics (April 2003). *Status and trends in the education of Hispanics*. Washington, D. C.: U.S. Department of Education.

Orfield, G., & Kornhaber, M. (Eds.). (2001). *Raising standards or raising barriers? Inequality and high stakes testing in public education*. New York: The Century Foundation Press.

Research Project Assignment

I would like you to do some research and write a paper on an issue or problem you identify in the area of education (25 pages). You will work on this in stages, and I will meet with you often to help you develop your project to its completion:

Idea Sheets: Sept. 7

Research Paper Proposal with working bibliography and draft of consent form(s): Oct. 15

Revised Paper Proposal with annotated bibliography: Nov 7

First Draft: (Introduction with a clear research question and methods): Nov. 26

Second Draft: (Revised draft with results, discussion, implications, limitations): Dec. 10

Presentations: Dec. 12

FINAL DRAFT: Dec. 17

More than simply reporting what you find in your research, you should use your data to develop an *argument* that encourages readers to think one way or another about the issue out of which your study has developed. The structure of your argument may vary (attempting to discredit another position vs. acknowledging its validity in some scenarios but pointing out its inadequacies in others), but there are several basic strategies that you need to consider. I encourage you to be CREATIVE and ORIGINAL in choosing your issue, framing a relevant question and conducting your research.

- *Identify an issue and explain its importance.* Remember, at the center of an issue (as opposed to a topic) is a fundamental tension that is open to dispute; this tension can lead to a clear research question.
- *Make a claim.* The claim is your thesis, and it is central to the argument. What is your position, or what do you want to convince your reader of? And why should we care?
- *Support your claim(s) with reasons or evidence.* Reasons are the main points of your argument (the “because” part of your argument). Why are you making the claim you are making? Evidence consists of facts, statistics, authorities, personal experiences, and the like, that you use to make your point.
- *Analyze the evidence.* Your reader will not automatically understand how your evidence fits into the larger picture of your paper. By explaining how the evidence backs up your points, you reveal the logic of the argument and convince even the most skeptical reader.
- *Anticipate readers’ counterarguments.* You need to acknowledge and either accommodate or refute counterarguments in order to convince skeptical readers. Assess possible options and outcomes.

Getting Started

To get started, consider the issues that you have read about and discussed in the introduction to Education, Schooling, and Society, as well as other classes: motivation as a factor in learning, school choice, the stratification of schools and the potential value of detracked classrooms, the promise of teaching and learning in democratic classrooms, the pressures of high-stakes testing on both teachers and students, the value of connecting service to disciplinary learning, and so on.

You can also read ahead in the course readings to an article or book that touches upon some of

your interests. Take a look at the reference section to what you read to get some ideas about the issues that researchers are focusing on and whose work seems most prominent. As you read, what question(s) does the author raise? Where do you find contradictions, inconsistencies, incomplete explanations? What questions come to mind for you?

Alternatively, go to one of the electronic databases on the library homepage and type in some key words related to your topic (e.g., school finance, high-stakes testing, curricular reforms) or question (e.g., to what extent can school finance insure greater equity in schools? How do low-income minority parents' attitudes support or challenge the rhetoric used to make claims about the black-white achievement gap?)

Finally, consult the list of references that I have included (pp. 9–13). These focus on teaching and learning in classrooms, the organization of schools, and reform. Browse the titles and look up some that seem promising for your interests.

As you read and begin to write your essay, you will find that the real work of writing occurs when you try to figure out the answers to the following questions. Answering these questions is what makes inquiry central to the process of composing:

- What have people been talking about?
- What are some relevant concerns for those whose work I have been reading?
- What are the situations motivating people to write?
- What theories do writers use to construct their arguments?
- Who will be interested in reading what I have to say?
- How can I connect with readers who may be both sympathetic and antagonistic toward my argument?
- What is at stake and for whom in my own argument? (what if things change? what if things stay the same?)
- What kinds of evidence might persuade readers?
- What objections might readers have?

Criteria for Assessing the Quality of Your Project

In coming to terms with what you find, you should address what your study teaches us and what you have learned. You will find models of this type of writing in the studies that we will examine this semester. A successful research paper will combine several key ingredients:

- Responds to a relevant, timely, and compelling question
- Incorporates an explanation of the research relevant to your study
- Provides an analysis of the information in your study, interpreting the data that adds new knowledge to our understanding of a problem
- Uses evidence persuasively
- Demonstrates a clear purpose and achieves it
- Effectively speaks to the target audience (appropriate “voice”, word choice, etc.)
- “Flows” well (i.e., has smooth transitions, logical organization, and effective intro/conclusion);
- Reflects the conventions of academic discourse (i.e., sources are cited judiciously)

Idea Sheets

The purpose of the idea sheet is to get you going. Jot down some ideas about your area(s) of interest, explaining what in particular interests you, why you find this area of interest, and why it might be compelling to others. For example, is there some situation or condition in teaching, teacher preparation, school finance, and the like that concerns you? So what if we don't understand the inequities of school financing? So what if the drop-out rate for low-income minority students continues to grow? So what that we don't know the factors that motivate students to learn? What if the situation remains the same? What would happen if the situation changed?

Follow these steps in composing an idea sheet:

- Step One: Explain your topic
- Step Two: Detail the reasons why you are interested in the topic
- Step Three: Describe what is at issue – what is open to dispute
- Step Four: Describe for whom this issue might be significant or important
- Step Five: Formulate an issue-based question

Formulating an issue-based question can help you think through what you might be interested in writing about. A good question develops out of an issue, some fundamental tension that you identify within a conversation. For example, E.D. Hirsch believes that the best approach to educational reform (the topic or subject about which he writes) is to change the curriculum in schools. In fact, he has argued that a curriculum based on “cultural literacy” is the one sure way to reverse the cycle of illiteracy that he has identified in urban cities. This is Hirsch's position. So what is the issue? The issue emerges in the presence of an alternative position. As a social activist who has written extensively about educational reform, Jonathan Kozol presents an alternative: policy makers need to address reform by providing the necessary resources that all students need to learn. He points out that students in many urban schools are reading textbooks that were published twenty years ago and the conditions in these schools make it impossible for students to learn. In tension are two different views of what kinds of reform can reverse illiteracy. One part of the issue is the view that educational reform should occur through changes in the curriculum; the second part is the view that reform should occur at the level of socio-economic change, change that would insure students have new textbooks and adequate conditions, such as windows that close in winter.

It is important to discuss an issue in the context of a current situation, so that readers will understand why you are raising a particular issue. As a writer, you will need to familiarize yourself with what people are talking and writing about. What is on people's minds? What is at issue for people? What about for you? What do your readers need to know about? In turn, you will need to help readers understand why they are reading your essay and fulfill their expectations that what you are writing about is both relevant and timely.

Your issue-based question should be specific enough to guide inquiry into what others have written and help you accomplish the following:

- Clarify what you know about the issue and what you still need to know
- Guide your inquiry with a clear focus
- Organize your inquiry around a specific issue

- Develop an argument, rather than simply collecting information by asking “how,” “why,” “should” or the “extent to which something is true or not”
- Consider who your audience is

- Determine what resources you have, so that you can ask a question that you will be able answer with the resources available to you

You will have the opportunity to share your idea sheet with others in class and with me before you set out to write a more formal research proposal.