Michigan State University
College of Education

ED 800 Online
Concepts of Educational Inquiry
Summer 2012

Instructors:
Steven Weiland
Professor of Educational Administration
Michigan State University
Nathan Clason
Director of Alumni Relations
Grand Rapids Theological Seminary

Subject and Goals

This course, the introductory one in the MSU online MAED program, is designed to be foundational. It provides an opportunity to think and write about essential questions of education, including: What are its purposes, traditions, characteristic activities, and recurring problems and efforts at reform? What is most worth knowing and how are individual, institutional, and social views of schooling and the curriculum reconciled? How do we learn, what do we want from teaching, and from education outside of schools and beyond the years of formal schooling? What role does knowledge of human experience unlike our own play in our learning? How do conditions of contemporary life (e.g., "globalization" and the "new information and communications technologies") influence education? What are the most effective ways to study teaching, learning, and educational administration and leadership?

The goal of the course is to familiarize students with essential domains of educational inquiry: 1) philosophy and history of education; 2) classroom-based or teacher research; 3) ethnographic observation with autobiography; 4) biography and history; and 5) theories of the mind and the curriculum. These do not, of course, exhaust the possibilities for inquiry but they provide an opportunity to sample influential and practical forms. Attention to the five domains of inquiry is complemented by a 6th and final unit devoted to the impact of new information and communications technologies on all features of education and educational inquiry.

Our educational inquiries inevitably begin with our own experience and preferences but they don't end there. Thus, the course aims to provide encounters with different forms of inquiry, and their purposes, methods, uses, and meanings. We will study work by a small group of influential writers on education, and make extensive use of online resources via hypermedia, or the course's extensive "web" of electronic links. Thus, ED 800 represents the fact that education, as a subject of inquiry, interpretation, and criticism, is a multi-disciplinary and now multi-media endeavor inviting us to understand the nature of teaching and learning, with administration and leadership, from diverse perspectives.

Format

ED 800 is an unusual course in the College of Education's online MA Program, offered as it is in a *self-paced format*. Students can earn credit for the course by completing the eight units according to a schedule they set for themselves, though within the time frame of the spring semester calendar. Also, while there will be considerable interaction between the instructor and students, the self-paced format means that interaction among students themselves is <u>optional</u> and thus not part of evaluation for grading.

The course is also unusual in the extent to which it uses *hypermedia*, or a course-based network of links to Internet resources: text, video, audio, online exhibits, and more. The units are designed to offer, in the instructor's writing and the links that appear with it, a course-based web of information, opinion, and resources of many kinds in different media. Students in the course become, in effect, *hypermedia readers*, deciding what attention and priority to give to the varied resources, many of them designated as "opportunities" (for inquiry and learning) rather than as "assignments." The web for the course operates as an anchored but mobile network of resources for learning.

Thus, beyond its attention to questions of inquiry, interpretation, and criticism, the course is intended to contribute to students' abilities in what is now called "information [or digital] literacy." Be sure to read in the "Introduction" to the course the accounts of hypermedia and what it means to work in such a format. There is also in the "Introduction" an explanation of the nature of "interactivity" in the course.

What does the self-paced format (including extensive use of hypermedia) mean for students? Primarily that they are responsible for scheduling and completing their work. There are no deadlines, except for completion of all units and their assignments by <u>Thursday, August 15</u> (the last day of classes for the summer semester).

The advantage of a self-paced course is the autonomy it offers--students can do the work according to a schedule that best suits their circumstances. The disadvantage of this format, at least for those for who favor the experience of an online "learning community," is that it limits opportunities for interaction among students because they are doing different parts of the course at different times. Voluntary opportunities remain, via the *Student Forum* and e-mail, for students to interact and work together on questions of interest.

Reading, Viewing, and Listening Assignments

Each of the six course units includes assignments in reading, listening, and viewing. Beyond the primary text--a book or film--each of the units includes additional assignments. There are articles, online exhibits, and audio programs to complement the primary text (or film). There are also resources designed as "Reading Opportunities" (and the same for "Viewing" and "Listening"). Internet-based courses provide opportunities for interacting with a great range of materials. And those resources designated as "Opportunities" are meant to lead, via links, even further into what is available online.

When you begin each unit you might first print the assigned readings. With them in hand you can maintain continuity as you work through the sections of the unit. You will have to compile these print resources unit-by-unit since access to each unit (except the first, of course) requires that you submit the writing assignment for the previous one. Again, since Unit 1 does not require a book it includes a number of online readings.

Writing Assignments

There is a writing assignment for each of the six units, an essay of approximately 750 words for Units 1-5 and then a longer one for Unit 6. When you submit the writing assignment for a unit you gain access to the next one. The writing assignment for Unit 6 serves as the Final Exam.

Papers should offer a convincing case for whatever point(s) you wish to make in addressing the assignment. It is their persuasive intent that makes the papers different from a writing assignment that asks merely for a personal "response" to, or a "reflection" on, a text or a topic. In order to persuade a reader there should be an order to what you say, and evidence to represent and support your thinking via an encounter with the course resources.

Please consult **ED 800 Writing Assignments: A Guide** (posted in the course *Introduction*) before writing the first paper and then throughout the course as needed. Also, Joseph Williams' and Gregory Colomb's *Style: The Basics of Clarity and Grace* is a "Recommended Book" for those students wishing to have an additional resource for guidance about writing.

Feedback and Grades

Students receive extensive comments on each paper. The comments and grade are available—at the ANGEL course site and via e-mail--usually within a few days of a submission. Papers are graded using the standard MSU scale of 1.0-4.0. E-mail with the instructor is a good way to carry on dialogue about matters of interest deriving from the writing assignments, as is the *Student Forum* when students wish to communicate with each other. But both forms of communication, in the spirit of the course format, are voluntary.

Course grades will reflect performance on writing assignments: *Unit Essays 1-5* (75%) and *Unit Essay 6, a longer assignment* (25%).

Grades of "I" (Incomplete) and "DF" (Deferred) will be available to students at the discretion of the instructor and only to students who have completed a substantial number of the writing assignments.

Student Forum: Comments, Questions, and Connections

For each unit there is a *Student Forum. The Forum* is what is known as an asynchronous tool for interactive learning. That is, individuals use them at different times. This is especially the case in a self-paced online course with variability in the pace at which students complete the units, though each works in the same order (1-6).

No course can be contained within its formal boundaries, there being the need to address what the syllabus ignores or the course itself leaves unexplained. The informal talk of the conventional classroom provides a place where adjustments can be made reflecting comments and questions. This course offers a virtual space for student-to-student interaction of that kind. And each unit includes questions inviting contributions to the *Forum*.

So, what might be posted? The first two categories ("Comments" and "Questions") are self-explanatory. But it may be worth suggesting that both are welcome as they bear on individual units, on themes reaching across the course, and on the writing assignments.

With "Connections" the *Student Forum* can be a place for identifying Internet resources to extend what appears in the hypermedia format of the course. In the end, users themselves will determine the best uses of the *Forum*, or any such device, as they learn more about their own interests and the opportunities for interacting--voluntarily--with other students.

Note: Questions about course operations (e.g., broken links) should go directly to the instructors via e-mail.

Academic Integrity

The faculty at MSU consider academic integrity a most serious matter. All work you submit must be prepared exclusively by you for this course this semester. For further information please see Spartan Life (the MSU student handbook).

On all academic matters see the guide to MSU's *Procedures and Regulations*.

Required Books and Films

Required books are listed below in the order in which they will be studied. All are available in paperback editions from bookstores or online merchants like Amazon and Barnes and Noble.

Vivian Paley, *The Girl with the Brown Crayon* (Harvard University Press)
Mary Catherine Bateson, Peripheral Visions (Harper Collins)
Philip Cusick, *A Passion for Learning* (Teachers College Press)
Howard Gardner, *Truth, Beauty, and Goodness Reframed: Educating for the Virtues in the Age of Truthiness and Twitter* (Basic Books)
Billy Collins, *Sailing Alone Around the Room* (Random House)

Required Film (available from rental outlets or from online book and DVD sellers)

Whale Rider (2002; Directed by Niki Caro)

Recommended Book

Joseph Williams and Gregory Colomb, *Style: The Basics of Clarity and Grace* (4th Edition, 2009; Longman).