Exploring Students’ Conceptions of Research and Inquiry

Summary of Original Proposal

Barbara Dennis, Peiwei Li, Karen Ross, and Pengfei Zhao (Counseling and Educational Psychology, School of Education)

The purpose of this study is to investigate how graduate students in an introductory research methodology course conceptualize research and inquiry and to examine how these conceptualizations might change as a result of participation in the course. By identifying students’ conceptions of research at the start of the semester and marking their changes throughout participation in the course, the team hopes to improve the course as reflected both in curriculum and teaching and learning practices.

When teaching similar classes in the past the researchers observed how students’ conceptions of research played a central role in their level of engagement and interest in the course. This included a lack of motivation in the class that seemed to be caused by the students’ inability to see the relevance of conducting similar research in their future careers (i.e., teaching, counseling, and higher education administration). Students tended to hold to the idea that conducting research in the social sciences is all about experiments, control group, numbers, and so on.

Specifically the researchers intend to discover how graduate students in an introductory research methods course conceptualize the notion of research and how participating in this course shapes students’ conceptualization and understanding of research. Data will be collected from both face-to-face and on-line sections of the course in Spring and Summer 2013, with the possibility of collecting additional data in additional semesters.
Exploring Students’ Conceptions of Research and Inquiry

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Contact: Barbara Dennis – bkdennis@indiana.edu

Funding level requested: Phase I
Duration of funding period: 1 year (initially)
A. Research Narrative

1. Purpose of the investigation and research objectives

   The purpose of this study is to understand how graduate students in an introductory research methodology course (EDUC-Y520: Strategies in Educational Research) conceptualize “research” and “inquiry,” and to examine whether and how these conceptualizations might change as a result of participation in the course. By better understanding students’ conceptions of research at the start of the semester and changes throughout participation in the course, we hope to improve course delivery as reflected both in curriculum and pedagogy.

   Given our (four instructors who teach such courses) previous teaching experiences in this class, we have come to a consensus that students’ conceptions of “research” play a central role in how they approach learning in this course. For example, we have noticed there is a disconnect between students’ expectations regarding research and their daily (professional and personal) practices. Many Y520 students assume that doing research is irrelevant to their professional experiences (i.e. teaching, counseling, and higher education administration), which often greatly undermines their motivation in this class. We expect that at the most fundamental level, students’ life experiences and identity claims shape their understanding of what research entails and their motivation for learning. Furthermore, students often bring a “positivist-like” understanding of research to class and tend to hold to the idea that conducting research in the social sciences is all about experiments, control group, numbers and so on.

   During this course, students are exposed to a variety of different, even contradictory, ideas about what research entails, reflecting ongoing debates on the paradigms within the field of research methodology itself (Lather, 2006). It is thus crucial for us to understand how students make sense of diverging and competing notions about research. It is also pedagogically important for us as instructors to structure class content and pedagogy in ways that effectively facilitate student learning based on this understanding. All these reasons serve as the impetus for carrying out this study, which asks the following research questions: 1) How do graduate students in an introductory research methods course conceptualize the notion of “research”? 2) How does participating in this course shape students’ conceptualization and understanding of “research”? We will be collecting data from both face-to-face and on-line sections of Y520 in Spring and Summer 2013, with the possibility of collecting additional data in additional semesters.

2. Existing Scholarship

   There is a paucity of existing scholarship relevant to teaching inquiry courses. The empirical literature can be organized into two main categories: 1) effective pedagogical approaches and methods for teaching a research class, and 2) students’ and researchers’ general conceptualizations of the concept of “research.” The first category centers on pedagogical methods for teaching research methods classes in the social sciences. Examples include: “active cooperative learning” (Ball & Pelco, 2006), “student-centered approach” (Barraket, 2005), “student-centered tutor-led approach” (Edwards, 2004), “experiential and heterodoxical approach” (Hubbell, 1994), “problem method” (McBurney, 1995), “group project teaching technique” (Ransford & Butler, 1982), “learning by doing” (Takata & Leiting, 1987; Winn, 1995), and “mixed method approach” (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003).

   As a whole, authors of this scholarship argue for the merits of incorporating problem-based tasks and student-centered learning elements into research methods classes. Despite being pedagogically informative, however, these studies focus primarily on the logistics or outcomes of implementing these pedagogical methods. They are also predominantly grounded in the fields of psychology, sociology and political sciences. Issues surrounding how students and teachers
conceptualize “research” in the context of learning and teaching inquiry, as well as its intersection with pedagogical dynamics have not yet been specifically explored in those studies.

The second body of literature addresses how “research” is conceptualized from the perspectives of students, research supervisors and senior researchers. For example, Meyer, Shanahan, and Laugksch (2005) conducted a survey to explore how doctoral students conceptualize research and they identified seven categories of descriptions on such conceptualization. Two other studies examined research supervisors’ conception of research in general. Bill (2004) identified that university-based research and researchers are privileged in participants’ discourse. Kiley and Mullins (2005) investigated how research supervisors of doctoral students conceptualize research and how they perceive the relationship between their own conceptualization and those of their students. In addition, Brew (2001) also examined how established researchers conceptualize research from qualitatively different perspective. This set of studies is closer to the study we are proposing than the first category of research. Interestingly, this set of literature all comes from universities in Australia – we did not come across many studies conducted on this topic in the U.S..

In our review of the current literature, we found only a few studies related to teaching graduate-level research/inquiry courses. It is clear that our current understanding of students’ conceptualization of “research” as well as the evolution of this conceptualization throughout the course of a semester is weak. Existing studies tend to focus on producers and future producers of research rather than students who will primarily be consumers of research after graduation. We also note many studies are descriptive or prescriptive in nature and not necessarily oriented towards taking action to change and improve teaching practices based on the results. These patterns affirm the need to carry out more student-centered action research in the domain of teaching inquiry courses that focuses both on student understanding and pedagogical innovation. This sets the stage for our project.

3. **Significance and impact the study may have upon undergraduate or graduate teaching, learning and assessment**

As a core course required for most of the graduate students in School of Education, Y520 plays a significant role in both exposing students to the fundamental principles of social science research and providing them with hands-on skills to conduct and consume research. In addition, discussions within the Inquiry Methodology Program point to significantly changing the delivery method of Y520 in the coming academic years. We believe that this study will therefore not only offer a platform for us as instructors to reflect upon and improve our own teaching practice, but will also benefit the forthcoming course reform. Moreover, implications will extend beyond Y520, since similar methodological courses are taught campus across a number of different social science disciplines.

Specifically, we anticipate a two-fold impact of this study. First, the research will reveal students’ baseline understanding of research. Using this baseline as a foundation, we can better frame the delivery of Y520. We see this as a particularly urgent need for Y520 students since they are mostly educational practitioners, typically having little or no exposure to social science research. It thus is important to frame the course in a way that enables them to connect research with their daily practice while simultaneously providing critical knowledge about methodology. Second, we hope that tracking changes in students’ understanding of the concept of research over time and reaching a better understanding of how changes occur (i.e., through critical teaching moments vs. other life experiences, etc.) will also help us adjust the course curriculum and choose appropriate pedagogical techniques. In other words, this data will help us better understand what is working about the course content and delivery methods, and what might be improved.
4. Outcomes of the work and how they will contribute to the assessment of student learning at Indiana University

Based on the first phase of this study, we anticipate three primary outcomes:

**Brown-Bag Dialogue.** The Inquiry Program engages in a Brown Bag discussion group that meets once a week. The researchers will share findings with the inquiry community for feedback and to report on student conceptualizations and implications for teaching.

**Course Reflection.** The findings will directly relate to the theoretical groundwork of the course, including better understanding the role assignments play in the development of students’ conceptualizations of research and inquiry. Specific assignments will provide researchers access to learner’s conceptualizations and this will make it possible to use those conceptualizations as a way to reflect on the course content and pedagogy.

**Report to Program.** The Inquiry program faculty has struggled with how to deliver meaningful learning experiences through Y520, and as mentioned above, faculty of the Inquiry Program are presently engaged in rethinking the instructional needs of the class. To facilitate this, a succinct report will be provided to the Inquiry Program Area presenting the results of the study. This report will include analyses enabling reflection on the curriculum and the learners. Analysis of data will provide the Inquiry program with a deeper understanding of student pre-conceptions of research and inquiry and will allow us to identify the conceptual challenges faced by learners. Analysis will also provide us with a deeper understanding of the ways in which class activities serve to promote learning, which can be utilized to develop course curriculum. We will also utilize this report as the basis for producing refereed journal articles and conference presentations.

5. Research methodology

We have designed this study as a critical action research project. Action research design blurs the traditional distinction between researchers and practitioners and effectively shortens the distance of the transformation from academic findings to teachers’ daily practice. In this study, we integrate practice and research, thus taking on a dual-role as both instructors and researchers. The research design is critical in terms that it is framed by the meta-theoretical framework provided by critical qualitative research methodology (Carspecken, 1996). It will also employ a series of techniques developed by critical methodologists for collecting and analyzing the data.

We will collect the data primarily through archived class discussions and student assignments from both face-to-face and online sections of Y520. This includes formal course assignments, in-class discussions (for the face-to-face class) and online postings in the Oncourse forum (for the online sections). We will also conduct individual interviews, approximately one hour in length, using a semi-structured interview protocol. We will record these interviews and transcribe them for analysis.

Our initial analyses will consist of open coding of written course materials and interview transcripts, using open coding techniques. We will utilize the qualitative data analysis software package NVivo to enable collaborative coding and analysis. Meanwhile, we will also utilize critical research techniques such as meaning field analysis and validity horizon analysis (Carspecken, 1996) on some excerpts of the data so that we will not miss rich background meanings of the data. Our analysis as a whole will focus on identifying and further analyzing emergent themes related to students’ understanding of research/inquiry, how their understanding evolves, and in what sense they connect this understanding to their educational practice.

6. Means by which you will measure the success of your project.

The goals of the project are to understand student conceptions of research and inquiry and to understand how these conceptions develop through the engagement in the Y520 course activities. These goals will be measured in the following ways:
• An article accepted for publication in a peer-reviewed journal or research conference where the judgment of peers on the analysis addressing both research questions will indicate scholarly success.
• An outline for the reform of the class and a new text relevant to the reform, particularly attentive to the theoretical development related to student conceptions of research and inquiry. This outline will be reviewed by colleagues in the field for feedback.
• Completion of all required products in the conduct of the study (including report to faculty).
• Researchers will reflect on the research process with the intention of contributing to the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning. Researchers have not yet had an opportunity to fully explore the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, but we intend to investigate the inquiry process itself in ways that should contribute to the SOTL body of literature.

7. Dissemination of results

We plan to disseminate the results of this study in a variety of ways that demonstrate the relevance of our inquiry to multiple circles. Dissemination of the results within the “local” community, such as submitting a report to the program, initiating Brown Bag dialogues and conducting course reflection, have already been mentioned in Part 4 of this narrative. In addition, we intend to disseminate our results in several forums related to the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL). These include SoTL events at Indiana University-Bloomington, as well as submission of a paper proposal to the International Society for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (ISSoTL) 2013 conference in Raleigh, North Carolina, which at least one of the investigators will attend. The 2013 conference theme, *Critical Transitions in Teaching and Learning*, resonates particularly well with our study, which not only investigates student learning but also exemplifies an opportunity for building partnership and collaboration among instructors in reflecting on approaches to assessing teaching outcomes. Based on feedback in SoTL and other forums, we intend to submit a manuscript for submission at a SoTL-oriented journal, such as *College Teaching*.

We also hope to disseminate the results of this study beyond the SoTL community. Tentatively, we plan to present results of this study at the 2014 *International Congress on Qualitative Inquiry* and will submit a manuscript for publication in a journal focused on methodology (e.g., *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*). Ultimately, we would like to use this project as the foundation for producing a new textbook oriented towards the teaching of graduate-level introductory research methodology courses.

8. Reflective teaching practices

As a group, all investigators of this study have been engaged in a variety of reflective practices since this study was first conceived. These practices relate to this project, specifically, but also more broadly to our individual and collective efforts as instructors of Y520. As instructors of this course, our reflective practices so far have included the following:

• Individual reflections on our own conceptualizations of research and assumptions regarding research/teaching research, as well as a group discussion on these written reflections
• Individual reflections on our own expectations and pedagogical assumptions regarding teaching Y520, as well as group discussions and comments to one another on these written reflections
• Individual reflections on our perceptions regarding learning objectives for Y520, both at the overarching course level and in terms of specific objectives for each topic covered in the class, and group discussions about these individual reflections.

Through our discussions, we have succeeded in coming to consensus regarding our objectives for Y520 as a course as well as objectives for teaching about different content area
topics, such as ontology/epistemology and objectivity/subjectivity in research. Further reflection has enabled us to decide upon readings, activities, and assignments that we feel will help us best meet those objectives during the Spring 2013 and future semesters during which we teach this course.

As we begin the Spring 2013 semester, we are engaging in ongoing reflection to jointly reflect upon our experiences utilizing new tools for teaching this introductory research methodology course. We plan to continue reflecting as a group throughout this and future semesters, and have discussed possible approaches for creating a structured forum where Y520 instructors (who change from year to year) can engage in joint reflection and learning on a continuing basis.

References:
B. Budget narrative

During our first year conducting this study, we anticipate costs to total slightly more than $2000. These costs include the following:

- NVivo (qualitative data analysis software): NVivo is available at a discounted rate through IU at a rate of $75/year for students. Barbara Dennis, principal investigator, already has access to this software. Thus, student access is needed for the 3 co-investigators. Total cost: $75*3 = 225

- Transcription costs: We plan to pay for the transcription of approximately 10 interviews collected with former Y520 students. We anticipate that interviews will last approximately 30-60 minutes (average length: 45 minutes). At a cost of $1/minute, transcribing 10 interviews will cost a total of approximately $450.

- Graduate assistants: Funding from a SoTL research grant will be utilized to help support work of the three graduate investigators on data analysis during Summer 2013, at a rate of $500/graduate investigator. Total cost: $500*3 = 1500.

- We intend to send at least one investigator from this project to the 2013 conference of the International Society for Scholarship of Teaching & Learning in Raleigh, North Carolina. Anticipated costs for this conference include registration ($200, estimated based on the 2012 ISSoTL conference); housing ($180, estimated at a rate of $60/night for 3 nights); and travel ($250, estimated flight cost). Total cost = $630.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Budget Item</th>
<th>Cost</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NVivo software</td>
<td>$225</td>
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<tr>
<td>Transcription costs</td>
<td>$450</td>
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<tr>
<td>Graduate assistant funding</td>
<td>$1500</td>
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<tr>
<td>Conference funding</td>
<td>$630</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>$2805</strong></td>
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C. Research plan and timeline

Over the coming year, we plan to collect our initial set of data and conduct analyses that we will use to inform future semesters of Y520 instruction. Since Y520 is taught during every semester (including summer), our data collection and analyses processes will overlap and inform each other in an iterative manner.

Our research timeline during 2013 and 2014 is as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Semester</th>
<th>Activities</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Spring 2013</td>
<td>• Initial data collection from 3 sections of Y520</td>
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<tr>
<td>Summer 2013</td>
<td>• Data collection from 1 section of Y520</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Preliminary analysis using data collected during Spring 2013 semester</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Revision planning for future Y520 semesters</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fall 2013</td>
<td>• Data collection from multiple sections of Y520, based on revisions made</td>
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<td></td>
<td>during Summer 2013 semester</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Continued analysis based on data from Spring and Summer 2013 semesters</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Revision planning for future Y520 semesters</td>
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<tr>
<td>Spring 2014</td>
<td>• (Possible) data collection from multiple sections of Y520, based on</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>revisions made during Spring 2014</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Analysis and write-up of results from Spring, Summer, Fall 2013 semesters</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Submission of materials for publication</td>
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<tr>
<td>Summer 2014 and onwards</td>
<td>• Continued data collection and analysis based on Y520 teaching during</td>
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<td></td>
<td>these and previous semesters</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Continued revision of Y520 instruction based on previous analyses</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
BARBARA DENNIS
(formerly Barbara Dennis Korth)

201 N. Rose Ave.
School of Education, Room 4016
Bloomington IN 47405
(812) 856-8142 (office)

email: bkdennis@indiana.edu

EDUCATION

Ph.D. (1998)  Educational Psychology, University of Houston. (Dissertation “A Reformulation of Care as a Pragmatic Concept: A Qualitative Study of an Adult Friendship Group). Areas of Expertise (1) qualitative research methods, methodological theory, critical theory and method; (2) sociocultural diversity and schooling (multiculturalism); and (3) care theory, rationality, feminist theory; racism.

M.Ed. (1987)  Curriculum and Instruction (Special Education), University of Houston-Victoria

B.S. (1982)   Elementary Education (Concentration: Psychology), University of Houston-Victoria

POSITIONS AT INDIANA UNIVERSITY

Associate Professor  Inquiry Program Area, School of Education, Indiana University (Promoted with tenure August 2008)

Clinical Associate Professor  Curriculum Studies and Inquiry, School of Education, Indiana University (2004 – 2007 Clinical Assistant, promoted in 2007)

Visiting Assistant Professor  Multicultural Education and Qualitative Inquiry, School of Education, Indiana University (2001-2004)

PREVIOUS POSITIONS  1998 - 2001

Assistant Professor  Educational Leadership and Cultural Studies, College of Education, University of Houston in Multicultural Education, Social Theory, and Qualitative Research (1999 – 2001)

Research Faculty  The Virtual Environments Research Institute, University of Houston. Coordinate and conduct all research involving human subjects in virtual environments as Director of Human Factors (1998 – 1999)

SELECT PUBLICATIONS


Dennis, B. (2010). Ethical dilemmas in the field: The complex nature of doing education ethnography. Ethnography and Education, 5(2), 123-127.


SELECTED PEER-REVIEWED PROFESSIONAL PRESENTATIONS


Korth, B. (2005, April). "The Death of the Subject: Gender and the Death Penalty." Gender Studies Conference, Purdue University, April 5-8, 2005.


INVITED PAPERS


INVITED WORKSHOP

Dennis, B. (November, 2012). Critical Participatory Action Research. An Introduction. 3 day workshop with the “Sacred Little Ones” Bureau of Indian Affairs Project, Albuquerque, NM, November 14 – 16.

SELECTED PROFESSIONAL SERVICE EXPERIENCES

Regional Editor. Ethnography and Education. International peer-reviewed journal.


Board Member, Project TEAM, Indiana University program for supporting People of Color who chose a career in teaching. 2001 – present.

GRANT PROPOSALS FUNDED


College of Education Faculty Research Opportunity Award. “A Study of Cyber Culture in the Case of Educational Chat: Sociological and Methodological Issues.” (Fall, 1999.) $6,000.00

Educational Connections. Stages Theatre, Houston TX. (Funded through Early Stages by MET Life. (Spring 2000) $350,000.00

Peiwei Li, M.S.
1218 S. Fess Ave., Bloomington, IN, 47401 ♦ Phone: 812-606-4146 ♦ Email: peili@indiana.edu

Education:

8/2006 - present
Double Major Ph.D. Programs in Counseling Psychology and Inquiry Methodology
Dept. of Counseling and Educational Psychology, School of Education, Indiana University Bloomington. Anticipated: August, 2014.

Master of Science in Biochemistry, Interdisciplinary Biochemistry Program, Indiana University Bloomington (IUB).

9/1999 - 7/2003
Bachelor of Science in Chemistry, Department of Chemistry, Xiamen University, China.

Teaching Experience:

Associate Instructor:
Graduate Course:
  An introductory course to social inquiry and educational research primarily for master’s students, focusing on a basic conceptual understanding of research process and general types of research methodologies.

Undergraduate Course:
- Fall 2011, 2010: Y420 Approaches and Issues in Education Research (Primary instructor)
  An introductory research seminar offered to senior students in special education; the primary goal is to develop their capacity to be critical research consumers.

- Summer 2006: L312 Cell Biology Lecture, Biology Dept. (Assistant instructor)
  A lecture-based class for junior and senior biology majors and students from related fields; a typical class size is about 200 students.

  A group-based lab class for junior and senior biology majors, helping students develop a variety of lab skills, techniques and experiment designs in cell biology, and leading discussion groups.

Guest lecturer/Speaker:
- Fall 2012 - Invited speaker: Working with Eastern Asian international students, Kelley Business School, Indiana University.
- Fall 2011 - Invited presentation: cross-cultural identity development, Dream Corp learning series, IU Chapter.
- Spring 2011 - Guest speaker: International students’ experiences in the U.S., IU Union Board spring retreat.
Peiwei Li, M.S.
1218 S. Fess Ave., Bloomington, IN, 47401  ♦  Phone: 812-606-4146  ♦  Email: peili@indiana.edu

- Spring 2009 - Invited workshop on stress reduction and relaxation techniques, Monroe County Health Department, Indiana.
- Fall 2009 - Guest lecturer: G523 Laboratory Counseling and Guidance

Professional Development Related to Teaching:
- Fall 2012, 2011, Y660 Affinity group: Teaching Seminar in Inquiry
- 2011-12, Associate Instructor Training, School of Education
- 2010-11, Associate Instructor Training, School of Education
- Summer 2010, teaching apprenticeship supervised by Dr. Barbara Dennis with Y520 (online)
- Fall 2005, Associate Instructor Training, Biology Dept.
- Fall 2004, Associate Instructor Workshop, Biology Dept.

Other teaching related experiences:
- 2008-present, Peer mentor, IU Counseling Psychology Program
- 2007-2010, Student mentor, ethnic minority and international students, IU Counseling Psychology Program.
- 2008-2010, Clinical supervisor, master’s level counseling practicum and internship, IU Counseling Psychology Program.
- Summer 2009, Chinese tutor, Chinese Flagship Program, Indiana University
- 2000-2003, English and Chemistry tutor, high school and elementary school students, Xiamen, China
- 2000-2002, Peer English tutor, Chemistry Department, Xiamen University, China
- 1999-2000, Extracurricular mentor, Zhen Cuo An Elementary School, Xiamen, China

Leadership Experience:
- May 2008 – August 2010, Coordinator for students of color and international students, Counseling Psychology Program, IU.
- Summer 2008-Spring 2010, Assistant Director, IU Center for Human Growth.
- July 2009 – August 2010: Coordinator, Outreach and Support for International Students and Scholars (OASIS).

Publications:


Peiwei Li, M.S.
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Research Activities:

01/2012 – present, Doctoral dissertation in progress: Pursuing Emancipation on a Spiritual Path: Understanding self, Identity and Mindfulness

10/2011 – present, Inquiry methodology project: A critical reconstruction of “evidence”; in collaboration with Yu-ting, Su, M.S., and Pengfei Zhao, M.A.

11/2011 – 05/2012, Inquiry methodology project: Using researchers’ own narratives as a methodology tool to enhance research on identity and culture; in collaboration with Bita Zakeri, M.S.

05/2010 – 12/2011, Research project: International students experience of graduate school in the U.S.; in collaboration with Claudius Rodgers, M.S. and Yimin Wang, M.S.

2009 - 2010, Practice informed research project: Professional identity, organizational culture and multicultural competency in clinical supervision; in collaboration with Dr. Lynn Gilman and Dr. Julia Arany.
Peiwei Li, M.S.
1218 S. Fess Ave., Bloomington, IN, 47401 ♦ Phone: 812-606-4146 ♦ Email: peili@indiana.edu

2008 - 2011, A survey on ethnic minority students’ attitudes towards mental health counseling and their psychological needs; in collaboration with Dr. Paul Toth at IU Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) and funded by IU Health Center.

2007 - 2009, Asian mental health counseling research team, lead by Dr. Joel Wong
Research projects: 1) Asian American suicidality; 2) cross-cultural conceptualization of subjective well-being.

08/2006 – 05/2008, Graduate Assistant, Elementary School Math Assessment Project (EMAP), affiliated with the Center for Research on Learning and Technology (CRLT), Principal Investigator: Dr. Daniel Hickey

10/2005 - 2011, International and HIV/AIDS counseling research team, lead by Dr. Rex Stockton and Dr. Keith Morran, HIV/AIDS counseling and advocacy in Sub-Saharan Africa

Professional Affiliation:

Graduate Student Affiliate, American Psychological Association (APA)

Member, APA Division 17: Counseling Psychology, Division 35: Society for the Psychology of Women, and Division 44: the Society for the Psychological Study of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Issues

Honors and Distinctions:

2012 Outstanding Associate Instructor Award, School of Education, Indiana University
2012 Research Fellowship Award, Counseling and Educational Psychology Department, Indiana University
2011 Nominated for Outstanding Associate Instructor Award by students, School of Education, Indiana University
2010 Paul F. Munger Award for outstanding student, School of Education, Indiana University
2010 Won-Joon Yoon Memorial Diversity Scholarship Award for contribution to diversity, Indiana University
2009 & 2011 Trentham Travel Award (two times), School of Education, Indiana University
2009 Nancy Harvey Bishop Award for contribution to service, Indiana University
2005 Nominated for Outstanding Associate Instructor Award, Biology Department, Indiana University
2003-2004 Graduate Fellowship, Interdisciplinary Biochemistry Program, Indiana University
2001-2002 North Pole Educational Foundation Scholarship for student excellence and achievement, Xiamen University
2000-2003 Outstanding Student Award (three times), Xiamen University
2000-2001 Three-Nine Educational Foundation Scholarship for student excellence and achievement, Xiamen University
EDUCATION

School of Education, Indiana University  
- PhD, Education Policy Studies, Inquiry Methodology (dual major)  
  Expected graduation: June 2013  
  - Doctoral minor: Sociology  
  - Dissertation: Sowing Seeds of Change? Education for Partnership Between Jews and Palestinians in Israel  
  - Master of Science, Comparative & International Education  
  May 2010  

Rothberg International School, Hebrew University of Jerusalem  
- Intermediate-level Colloquial Arabic course  
  July 2009  

Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, Tufts University  
- Master of Arts in Law and Diplomacy  
  May 2005  
  - Areas of study: Conflict Resolution, Evaluation, Peace Education, Human Rights  

Columbia College, Columbia University  
- Bachelor of Arts in Middle Eastern Languages and Cultures, summa cum laude  
  May 2001  

Tel Aviv University  
- Coursework in Middle Eastern Studies, Musicology & Piano Performance  
  1999-2000  

AWARDS & HONORS

2012  
Trentham Travel Award, IU School of Education  
2011  
Richard C. Pugh Inquiry Methodology Award, IU School of Education  
2011  
Palestinian American Research Center Dissertation Fellowship  
2007-2010, 2011  
Faculty Fellowship, IU School of Education  
2010  
Fulbright-Hays Doctoral Dissertation Research Award  
2010  
Outstanding Associate Instructor Award, IU School of Education  
2010  
Achasa Beechler Dissertation Award, IU School of Education  
2010  
Selected Participant, Boyd National Educational Politics Workshop, AERA annual meeting  
Travel Grant, Department of Education Leadership & Policy Studies, IU School of Education  
2009  
Foreign Language & Area Studies (FLAS) Arabic Study Grant  
2008  
Omni Scholar/Activist Travel Grant, Peace & Justice Studies Association  
2003-2005  
Student Scholarship, Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy  
2004  
Summer Funding Award, Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy  
2004  
Workshop Scholarship (Fee Waiver) Recipient, Public Conversations Project  
2000  
Elected to Phi Beta Kappa  
1997-2001  
Dolan Prize recipient, Columbia University  

PUBLICATIONS  (* indicates equal co-authorship)

Submitted/in review/in revision  
Accepted  
PUBLICATIONS (continued)

Peer reviewed


Book contribution


Book reviews/encyclopedia entries


In Preparation


Ross, K. The Third Dimension: Peace Education as Comparative Education. Planned submission to Compare.

Ross, K. Legitimizing School-Based Peace Building in Israel: Measuring Success in Institutional Terms. Planned submission to Journal of Peace Education.

Other publications


CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS AND OTHER TALKS

Panelist


CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS (continued)


Panel organizer/chair/discussant


“Considering the Roles of Teachers in Peace Education Programs and Policy Implementation” (2011). Discussant for panel presented at the annual meeting of the Comparative & International Education Society, Montreal, Quebec.

Other presentations and talks

Invited speaker, Peace Education Network brown-bag lunch, Teachers College, Columbia University (October 2011).

TEACHING

Columbia University

ORLJ 4000: Conflict Resolution in the Schools: Applications in Pedagogy and Curriculum, (graduate)
Co-Instructor

• Full responsibility (with co-instructor) for all aspects of course including design, preparation, instruction, and assessment

Indiana University

EDUC-Y520: Strategies for Educational Inquiry, (graduate, online)
Instructor

• Full responsibility for all aspects of course including design, preparation, instruction and assessment

Associate Instructor

• Responsible for two discussion sections, including moderation of online forums and grading

Teaching Intern

• Responsible for helping moderate online forums and responding to student questions

EDUC-T550: Cultural/Community Forces in the School &
EDUC-M550: Practicum, Ethnic and Cultural Studies, (graduate/advanced undergraduate)
Associate Instructor

• Designed and implemented cross-cultural and global education curriculum for pre-service teachers
• Responsible for preparing and co-teaching lectures (100+ students) and discussion sections (25 students) and for assessing student work, including long-distance supervision of student teachers in Ireland, Australia, England, Kenya & Turkey

EDUC-U212: Social Movements in Education: Schools as Sites for Social, Political, and Cultural Contention, (undergraduate), Co-Instructor

• Full responsibility (with co-instructors) for all aspects of course including design, preparation, instruction, and assessment

COLL-X111: Freshman Interest Group Seminar, Jewish Studies, (undergraduate), Instructor

• Full responsibility for all aspects of course including design, preparation, instruction, and assessment
TEACHING (continued)

Invited Lectures/Workshops

• Peace-building in Israel/Palestine, TASTI Workshop [professional workshop], June 2011 (Indiana University)
• Education in Israel, Education in American Culture [undergraduate course], December 2009, April 2010 (Indiana University)
• Case Study & Organizational-Level Research, Research Methods and Case Studies in Education [graduate course], February 2009 (Indiana University)
• Evaluation of Civic Knowledge and Civic Skills/Dispositions, Inter-American Hemispheric Course on Evaluation of Civic Education [professional course], October 2008 (Organization of American States)

Other Teaching Experience

Academy of Hope, Washington DC, General Education Diploma (GED) Mathematics Instructor 2006
Sacred Heart Adult Education Center, Washington DC, English as a Second Language Instructor 2006
Tufts University, Fletcher Graduate Writing Program, Writing Tutor 2004-2005
Columbia University, Community Impact Program, GED Social Studies Instructor 2002
Columbia University, Community Impact Program, GED Tutor 2001, 2002

SERVICE ACTIVITIES

Reviewing Activities

• Reviewer, American Educational Research Association Multicultural Education SIG, 2012 annual conference
• Reviewer, Comparative & International Education Society Peace Education SIG, 2010, 2011 & 2012 annual conferences
• Reviewer, Conflict Resolution Quarterly Journal, 2011
• Reviewer, Voices of Teachers Journal, 2011
• Reviewer, Inter-American Journal of Education for Democracy, 2010

Profession

• Co-Chair, Comparative & International Education Society Peace Education SIG (2011-2013)
• Education panel coordinator, Fletcher Inter-University Conference on Forced Migration (2004-2005)

University/Department

• Graduate student representative, School of Education Grievance Committee, Indiana University (2010)
• Founding member/co-moderator, Social Movements and Education Research Group, Indiana University (2008-present)
• Representative, Graduate and Professional Students Organization (GPSO) Awards Committee, Indiana University (Fall 2009)
• Graduate student mentor, Education Policy Studies Program, Indiana University School of Education (2008-2009)
• Emissary for graduate student diversity, Indiana University Alliance for Graduate Education and the Professoriate (2008-2009)
• Member, Teachable Moments sub-committee, Commission on Multicultural Understanding, Indiana University (2007-2009)
• Member, Graduate Student Mentor Award Committee, School of Education, Indiana University (2008)
• Undergraduate mentor, Fletcher Global Women, Tufts University (2004-2005)

Community

• Facilitator/advisor, Jewish Dialogue Group (2005-present)
• Volunteer/mediator, Community Justice and Mediation Center, Bloomington, IN (2008-2010)
• Mediator, Small-claims court, Boston, MA (2004-2005)
Curriculum vitae

Name: Pengfei Zhao
Address: 786N. Woodbridge Apt. Bloomington, IN, 47401
Phone: 812-312-8189
Email: pzhao@indiana.edu

Education:

08/2009~ present  Ph.D. Program in Inquiry Methodology (with an interdisciplinary minor on Social Theory Studies)
Dept. of Counseling and Educational Psychology, Indiana Univ. Bloomington
Anticipated: May 2014.

09/2006 ~ 06/2009  M.A., Literary Theory
School of Chinese Language and Literature, Beijing Normal University

09/2002 ~ 06/2006  B.A., Chinese Language and Literature
School of Chinese Language and Literature, Beijing Normal University

Research Experiences:

01/2012 – 11/2012, independent study project: Intentionality and Creativity: A Critical Study of Hans Joas’s The Creativity of Social Action. (The paper was submitted to Philosophy of Education Society Annual Meeting 2013.)


06/2007, German History of Literary Thoughts in 20th Century (in Chinese), in collaboration with Dr. Cao, Weidong, wrote “Literary Thoughts of Anna Seghers” as one part of the project report.

Publications (In Chinese):

The Expansion of Science: Social Science in 20th Century, (Co-authored with Zhang, Zhengping) Taiwan: Changtan Cultural Media, Aug. 2010, co-authored with Zhang, Zhengping
Eruption of Freedom: Goethe and the Campaign of Storm and Stress, Taiwan: Changtan Cultural Media, Jun. 2009

Conference Presentation

admitted by 8th International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry, May 16-19, University of Illinois Urbana Champaign


**Research Courses Completed:**

- S540 Sociological Theories
- E500 Proseminar on social-cultural anthropology
- Y515 Philosophical Foundations of Educational Research
- Y650 The Logic of Social Sciences
- Y671 Knowledge, Reflection and Critique in Methodological Theory
- Y521 Methodological Approaches to Educational Inquiry
- Y600 Method implication of social and psychological theories
- Y612 - Y613 Critical Qualitative Inquiry I and II
- Y630 Narrative Inquiry
- Y631 Discourse Theory and Analysis
- Y650 Topics in Inquiry Methodology: The Research of Identity
- Y650 Feminist Research Methodology
- Y603 Statistical Design in Education Research
- Y502 Intermediate Statistics Applied to Education
- Y535 Evaluation Models and Techniques

**Teaching and Work Experience:**

**Teaching:**

- 01/2013 ~ present, instructor of Y520, Strategies of Educational Research, section 22272
- 01/2012 ~ present, associate instructor of Y612-613, Critical Qualitative Inquiry I and II, teaching research software NVivo
- 09/2010 ~ 12/2010, one semester internship as an associate instructor of Y515, Philosophical Foundations of Educational Research
- 07/2004 ~ 08/2004, Primary school teacher and project facilitator in Education Assistance Program in Remote Areas, organized by a NGO, Children of Peasants Society

**Working:**

- 09/2010 ~ 06/2011, graduate assistance in Graduate Studies Office, School of Education

**Tutoring:**

- 2006 ~ 2007, Tutor in Education Abroad Program of the University of California, Beijing
Awards:

2012  Summer Pre-dissertation Travel Grant, Indiana University Bloomington
2009 ~ 2013  Education Proffitt and Faculty Fellowship, a four-year full fellowship from School of Education, IUB
2009  Excellent Master Thesis, School of Chinese Language and Literature, Beijing Normal University
2006  Excellent Undergraduate Student, Beijing Normal University
2003 ~ 2005  Academic Scholarship, three times, Beijing Normal University.
2003  Outstanding Social Work, Beijing Normal University

Leadership & Social service:

2012 ~ present  President of Student Brown Bag Committee of Inquiry Methodology Program
2011 ~ present  Vice president of Dream Corps, IU Chapter, a NGO dedicated to promoting reading education among children in rural China
February 10, 2013

Dear Members of the SOTL Review Committee:

I am writing this letter in support of Dr. Barbara Dennis' application for an SOTL grant for her proposal titled "Exploring Students’ Conceptions of Research and Inquiry." The research project described in this proposal is timely and greatly needed to better address and develop beginning graduate students’ understanding of research.

As the Chair of the Counseling and Educational Psychology Department in the School of Education, I am familiar with Dr. Barbara Dennis's scholarship. Her teaching and scholarship focus on the study of inquiry methodology in the social sciences and specifically on the methodological implications of the philosophical and theoretical choices that we make as researchers. Her published work addresses important issues of methodological theory such as, for example, the validity of research claims, researcher’s engagement, the politics of knowledge which she conceptualizes from her continued engagement in fieldwork with students and colleagues who all have profound respect and appreciation for her and her work.

Throughout her career, Dr. Dennis has engaged in collaborative, team-oriented partnership educational research. The project that she proposes here is consistent with her scholarship and she and her research team are well situated to carry-out this study as they have a great deal of collective experience with the teaching of the course under investigation as well as with the study of research methodology. As a professor of inquiry methodology, including critical ethnography and action research, Dr. Dennis is extremely meticulous and reflexive about all aspects of her scholarship and always generously supports and mentors her research partners to aspire to the same standards of practice.

I have no doubt that Dr. Dennis’ proposed research study will contribute significantly to the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning. As always, with whatever Dr. Dennis does, she always shares the benefits of her experience with students and colleagues. Her work will also contribute to the theoretical conceptualization of the Inquiry Methodology Program which has an impact on all graduate students in the School of Education and the many graduate students from other programs in the university who regularly take our Inquiry Methodology courses.
I am confident that the proposal Dr. Dennis and her team have submitted meet the intended goals of the SOTL funding and I am sure of their capability and capacity to successfully complete the project. I strongly support their efforts to secure this funding.

Sincerely,

Ginette Delandshere, Ph.D.
Chair, Counseling & Educational Psychology Department
Professor, Inquiry Methodology
Indiana University
Bloomington, IN 47405
(812) 856-8347
Exploring Students’ Conceptions of Research and Inquiry
Barbara Dennis, Counseling & Educational Psychology, School of Education
Karen Ross, Counseling & Educational Psychology, School of Education
Peiwei Li, Counseling & Educational Psychology, School of Education
Pengfei Zhao, Counseling & Educational Psychology, School of Education
Awarded 2013; Phase 1

Total undergraduate students: 0
Total graduate students: 120

Budget Narrative
We were awarded $2000.00
Graduate Assistant Funding for Summer 2013 (Pengfei, Peiwei, and Karen): 3 ($500.00) = $1500.00
DeDoose Account for four investigators: 4 ($59.13) = $236.52
Travel to AERA Conference = $263.48

Report Narrative
The purpose of this study is to understand how graduate students in an introductory research methodology course (EDUC-Y520: Strategies in Educational Research) conceptualize “research.” By better understanding students’ understanding of this fundamental concept at the start of the semester and changes in this understanding developed throughout participation in the course, we hope to improve course delivery as reflected both in curriculum and pedagogy, as well as student engagement and learning outcomes.

Given our (four instructors who teach such courses) previous teaching experiences in this class, we have come to a consensus that students’ conceptions of “research” and of their own relationship to the research process play a central role in how they approach learning in this course. For example, we have noticed there is a disconnection between students’ expectations regarding the conduct of research and anything they do in their daily (professional and personal) practices. Many Y520 students assume that doing research is irrelevant to their professional experiences (i.e. teaching, counseling, language education, and higher education administration), which often greatly undermines their motivation and engagement in this class. We expect that at the most fundamental level, students’ life experiences and identity claims shape their understanding of what research entails and their motivation for learning. Furthermore, students often bring a “positivist-like” understanding of research to class and tend to hold to a limited idea that conducting research in the social sciences is all about experiments, control group, numbers and procedural elements associated with the scientific method.

During this course, students are exposed to a variety of different, even contradictory, ideas about what research entails, reflecting ongoing debates on the paradigms within the field of research methodology itself (Lather, 2006). It is thus crucial for us to understand how students make sense of diverging and competing notions about research, and how their
understanding relates to their professional and every day life contexts. It is also pedagogically important for us as instructors to structure class content and pedagogy in ways that effectively facilitate student learning based on this understanding. All these reasons serve as the impetus for carrying out this study, which asks the following research questions: 1) How do graduate students in an introductory research methods course conceptualize the notion of “research”? 2) What are the pedagogical implications that emerge from understanding students’ conceptualization of “research”?

To address these questions, we collected data from both face-to-face and on-line sections of Y520 in Spring and Summer 2013, leaving open the possibility of collecting additional data in additional semesters as well. During Phase I of the study, we have primarily focused on the first research question and developed illuminating themes and pedagogical insights that we hope to further investigate during Phase 2.

As a core course required for most of the graduate students in School of Education, Y520 plays a significant role in both exposing students to the fundamental principles of social science research and providing them with hands-on skills to conduct and consume research. In addition, discussions within the Inquiry Methodology Program point to significantly changing the delivery method of Y520 in the coming academic years to better meet the research-consumer identity of most students and enhance their engagement and learning outcomes accordingly. We believe that this study will therefore not only offer a platform for us as instructors to reflect upon and improve our own teaching practice, but will also benefit the forthcoming course reform. Moreover, implications will extend beyond Y520, since similar methodological courses are taught on campus across a number of different social science disciplines. We hope to engage in and facilitate scholarly and pedagogical discussions with other instructors and researchers in this area.

Specifically, we anticipate a two-fold impact of this study. First, this research will reveal students’ baseline understanding of research and how it relates to their identity and motivation. Using this baseline as a foundation, we can better frame the delivery of Y520. We see this as a particularly urgent need for Y520 students since they are mostly educational practitioners, typically having little or no exposure to social science research. It thus is important to frame the course in a way that enables them to connect research with their daily practice while simultaneously providing critical knowledge about methodology and evaluating research. Second, we hope that tracking changes in students’ understanding of the concept of research over time and reaching a better understanding of how changes occur (i.e., through critical teaching moments vs. other life experiences, etc.) will also help us adjust the course curriculum and choose appropriate pedagogical designs and techniques. In other words, this data will help us better understand what is working about the course content and delivery methods, and what might be improved. It will also help us to develop course curriculum and instructional methods that align with students’ identity claims in relation to research and thus optimally enhance their motivation and engagement in the class.

In what ways have you already disseminated the results?

June 2014, v. 1
Scholarship of Teaching and Learning Grants
Completion Report

The first phase of the study has resulted in a number of outcomes that have benefited the teaching and learning community of Indiana University. These outcomes include:

Brown-Bag Dialogue. On Mar. 22nd, 2013, our research team presented the research design of this study in a Brown Bag Seminar of the School of Education Inquiry Methodology Program. Most faculty members and graduate students from the program attended the presentation. The presentation received positive feedback and constructive suggestions from the attendees. It also provided an opportunity for instructors and associate instructors who taught introductory level methodology class to collectively reflect on teaching practices during the discussion following our formal presentation.

Course Reflection. Our presentation on the 25th Annual Ethnographic & Qualitative Research Conference discussed the inter-subjective feature of reflective teaching practice. Applying this finding into our practice with support from other Y520 instructors, our team members formed a supportive group to facilitate each other's reflective teaching. The group worked effectively in exploring innovative online and hybrid teaching approaches. So far we have composed and collected a large pool of online forum discussion questions, critically reviewed several introductory research methodology textbooks, and updated several assignments utilized in the Y520 course.

Insights for the Inquiry Methodology program. Our findings on students' conceptualization of research when first stepping into the Y520 methodology classroom, which will be presented in the upcoming American Educational Research Association conference, facilitated the restructuring of Y520 during the past academic year. The findings provided the Inquiry program with a deeper understanding of student pre-conceptions of research and allowed instructors to identify the conceptual challenges faced by learners. These insights enabled the reflection on the curriculum of the class. Right now Y520 has two online sessions and one hybrid session all with updated curriculum to better cater for students' learning.

We have disseminated the results of this study in a variety of ways. In the second phase of the study, we will continue to circulate our findings at local and national levels. During phase I we disseminated the findings within the local community in several ways, including submitting memos and suggestions to the program, initiating Brown Bag dialogues and conducting course reflections. In phase II, we will continue to closely work with the Inquiry Methodology program and engage actively with Indiana University's scholarship of teaching and learning community.

We also presented or were accepted to present our findings at three different national conferences. As mentioned above, we presented our findings on teacher's reflective practices at the 25th Annual Ethnographic & Qualitative Research Conference in June 2013. In April 2014, we shared our findings on students' conceptualization of research with attendees at the American Educational Research Association annual conference. In May 2014, we discussed the methodological implications of this action research at the 2014 International Congress on Qualitative Inquiry.
Scholarship of Teaching and Learning Grants  
Completion Report

This effort at disseminating our findings would continue in the second phase of the study. Beyond conference presentations, publishing research articles in peer-review journals and writing a textbook are the other two channels to share our findings with the larger intellectual community in the next phase.

In addition, we intend to disseminate our results in several forums related specifically to the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL). These include SoTL events at Indiana University-Bloomington, as well as submission of a paper proposal to the International Society for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (ISSoTL) 2014 or 2015 conference. Based on feedback in SoTL and other forums, we intend to submit a manuscript for submission at a SoTL-oriented journal, such as College Teaching.

We were specifically asked by leaders in the Qualitative SIG for AERA to participate in a panel discussing this collaborative SOTL work at AERA in 2015. We have prepared an abstract for that proposal.

What plans do you have to further this work?

In the second phase of the study, we aim at achieving the following goals to continue to support the teaching and learning at Indiana University:

1. Consolidate the collaborative reflection practice among Y520 instructors and associate instructors.
2. Continue to explore innovative teaching approaches for online and hybrid Y520 classes. Recent years have seen a significant increase in the interest of online and hybrid classes among higher educational institutions. Online and hybrid teaching platforms are still quite new for instructors of research methodology. Still not far from starting point, the recently restructured Y520 course deserves more reflection and facilitation from instructors.
3. Reform the curriculum by writing a new textbook for introductory level methodology class. Our review of popular textbooks for classes like Y520 shows the need for an updated textbook with a more refined understanding of philosophic assumptions of research methodology. We aim to write such a book so that students in introductory research methodology courses will be exposed in a more holistic way to philosophical, methodological, and procedural elements of research.

As a group, all investigators of this study have been engaged in a variety of reflective practices since this study was first conceived. These practices relate to this project, specifically, but also more broadly to our individual and collective efforts as instructors of Y520.

As instructors of this course, our reflective practices prior to and during the early part of Phase I of the grant included the following:

• Individual reflections on our own conceptualizations of research and assumptions regarding research/teaching research, as well as a group discussion on these written reflections.
Scholarship of Teaching and Learning Grants
Completion Report

- Individual reflections on our own expectations and pedagogical assumptions regarding teaching Y520, as well as group discussions and comments to one another on these written reflections
- Individual reflections on our perceptions regarding learning objectives for Y520, both at the overarching course level and in terms of specific objectives for each topic covered in the class, and group discussions about these individual reflections.

Through these discussions, we came to a consensus regarding our objectives for Y520 as a course as well as objectives for teaching about different content area topics, such as ontology/epistemology and objectivity/subjectivity in research. Concretely, these reflections enabled us to decide upon readings, activities, and assignments that we felt would help us best meet those objectives during the Spring and Summer 2013 semesters, as well as future semesters during which we teach this course.

During the Spring and Summer 2013 semesters, we engaged in ongoing reflection to jointly reflect upon our experiences utilizing new tools for teaching this introductory research methodology course. In the Fall 2013 and Spring 2014 semesters, those of us teaching Y520 have continued to engage in reflection about our teaching and have drawn upon our experiences from the Spring and Summer 2013 semesters to make changes to course content and structure. We have also shared our reflections with other Y520 instructors and engaged them in our joint reflection and learning efforts.

As we moved into the Spring 2014 semester, we continued reflecting as a group and anticipate that discussions about our textbook will play an important role in continuing to shape our teaching practices. We also continued reflecting with other Y520 instructors, and took steps to formalize our reflections in the form of a structured forum for sharing reflective and pedagogical materials.