

Teaching General Narrative & Reflection

This document is divided into two major sections. Because of the curricular and programming needs I was charged with tackling at both the graduate and undergraduate levels, the first section reads like the history that it is. In the second section, I write a narrative that includes a bit more of my personal story.

Trajectory of My Literacy Courses and Program Improvements

I know that my teaching is intertwined with curriculum and course development. However, I don't really know how to separate them. And, I strongly feel that they've supported each other. As I was going through the process of developing curriculum, my course evaluations helped me hone course materials, and the curriculum process helped me zero in on content for each course. I also discuss both peer and student evaluations and do so in those reflection sections as well.

There has definitely been a clear trajectory across my time teaching here at Ashland. That included needing to learn the literacy programming concurrently with all of the literacy courses. Prior to my first semester, I did not have a contract or a course schedule until late summer. I had only a few weeks in August to prepare four different courses about which I knew very little. I acquired (very old) master syllabi and requested course content and course outlines from present and former colleagues who were willing to share. I discovered the content of those outlines to vary greatly. Much did not match the course descriptions. I am amazed that my course evaluations from Fall 2019 were at all decent. On the other hand, from the start, I was aware that some sort of quality control needed to be in place across all of the literacy courses.

Over the years, I've been faced with the dilemma of a constant back and forth. I've had to juggle improving my own teaching and course delivery with larger curricular and programmatic needs. On one hand, my own courses gave me a platform to try out new course material. On the other, the pressing need was program and curriculum. The first course to really get honed was EDEC 323 because it was changed with the P-5 approval. I deliberately kept that course because it was the P-5 course requiring the most attention. I wanted to design and implement and then reflect on those changes. I would like to be able to do that with other courses

Spring of 2022 was the first I did not have curriculum to improve or a new course to design. By the time I finished with the undergraduate Middle Grades/AYA program updates in Fall 2020, the new literacy M.Ed. courses were being offered. And, I had a new course to write each semester since. I wrote EDUC 780: The Role of the Literacy Professional capstone Fall 2020 for Spring. I wrote EDCI 594: The Psychology of Reading, Language Development, and Reading Difficulties in Spring

2021 for Summer. I wrote EDCI 580: Writing Instruction and Intervention Summer, 2021 for Fall.

While it would have been possible to put off some changes to the graduate and Middle Grades programs, I didn't really feel as though that was an option. Our students needed the advantage of updated curriculum as immediately as possible. Further, it is my name and professional reputation that is connected with literacy programming. I needed to ensure that the programming was occurring as intended. This is particularly critical with the Reading Endorsement.

I do believe, however, that the initial focus on program and curriculum was the correct priority. As each course was designed or revamped, I included a Professional Competency final project to accompany the course. Each Professional Competency has an accompanying rubric and reflects the overall gist of the course. The competencies are also required regardless of instructor. The undergraduate CAEP visit went quite well, the course changes inclusive of the Professional Competencies clarified things for adjunct instructors. The required assessment also ensures that instructors in each course are meeting the ODE and CAEP standards. On the graduate side, each course also has a Professional Competency aligned with standards that should help to maintain quality programming. I also believe the changes to the graduate program initially improved enrollment. The Reading Endorsement courses taught during the school year have all filled until Spring, 2023. When I arrived at AU, I wrote a personal letter to each enrolled literacy graduate student who was and or had been enrolled. Once the literacy MEd. was completed, I wrote a second letter outlining the changes. And, along with the graduate literacy advisor, held a zoom meeting outlining the changes and helping students to determine if they should continue in the old program or switch to the new. The COE also has a graduate student organization page on Blackboard. I housed all information about both the Reading Endorsement and the literacy MEd. in that folder for students and continue to update it as needed.

The program and curriculum improvements also had another benefit. They provided me with a clear focus for updating and altering each course. Prior to the programmatic changes, I did not feel as though I had that 'road map.' That clarity made it easier to design new courses, determine re-design of existing courses, and made it far easier for me to use peer and student comments to improve my own course delivery.

Throughout these materials, I only address the Covid pandemic as needed for explanation. For the pandemic semesters, my teaching improvements directly involved virtual and asynchronous learning. However, Spring and Fall semesters 2020, my planning and organizing time for delivering face to face instruction at least doubled. It was no longer possible just to make copies before class or assume

that you have access to all the necessary materials and technology for an in-person course session. The pandemic affected my graduate and undergraduate students differently. That said, in retrospect, my course evaluations do not appear to have suffered greatly.

Although I had put time into learning zoom over the summer, my first few undergraduate zoom sessions were still less than desirable. I hadn't planned on things that came up. For example, I didn't know you couldn't share-screen in breakouts. Or, if students are on a zoom call or in a breakout, they may not be able to access handouts without leaving the zoom screen. I had to start emailing them ahead. These things improved as the semesters went along. My experience with zoom classes Spring 2020 allowed me to plan how I wanted to implement them in the Fall. I planned to use anchor charts on my wall and learned how to use various forms of technology. I planned for student interaction through breakout rooms and whole class debriefs at the end. I feel like these have been successful while not perfect. For undergraduate zoom sessions, I had to plan twice. In the beginning of the week, I emailed students to let them know what we would be covering together and send them handouts. I then had to review that plan before class and be sure I had all of the correct technology and screens. Ultimately, however, I believe that I've added methodologies to my teaching repertoire that I didn't have in the past. In reflection, it's been a positive learning experience. I am also much clearer about what material can be covered via zoom and how to cover what really should be in person. I still teach some of the virtual undergraduate sections via zoom. I've been able to implement better technology. I found a table mic and a pair of headphones that work well. Zoom now has a drawing board feature that we use often instead of charts on my wall. I believe I'm better at organizing for class sessions and breakouts with debriefs.

I also had to pivot with some of my graduate courses because in-service teachers could not get into their buildings to access curriculum and materials, and were not face to face with students. So alterations had to be made for assignments and for clinical requirements. I still allow my reading endorsement candidates to work with their young students either face to face or via zoom. Candidates choose what works best for them and I believe this option has improved flexibility. My other courses also have alternative options that I've kept when teachers don't have access to curriculum because they aren't in a building or maybe don't have their own classroom. This makes it easier for teachers who don't have classrooms to adequately fulfill requirements. I have also started using zoom meetings in my graduate program, particularly in the literacy capstone. My students have made positive comments and suggested I include more student interaction in the clinical

courses. A goal of mine is to add more student interaction first to the EDCI 715 graduate literacy practicum and assess the results of that.

At the same time this was all happening, I was also aware that my courses as they appeared in Blackboard Learn needed some attention. I took time fall semester 2020 to participate in Blackboard training sessions organized by Dr. Amy Klinger. These were incredibly valuable. I also volunteered to be part of a group to evaluate the new Blackboard Ultra platform. It was through that training that I learned how to do many more things in Blackboard. They also assisted me in learning to use Kaltura. In both graduate and undergraduate courses, I'm now able to more easily include video, images, and other resources. Finally, at a Spring Faculty College, I attended a training on the use of Flipgrid. Fall 2020, I started using this platform for video introductions instead of writing them out on discussion board. These new skills took time to develop, but ultimately will help me improve instruction and they offer engaging alternatives.

I have also been very deliberate about trying to improve my courses and my teaching. Some changes came from student evaluations. However, I also wanted to have each course I'd designed or re-designed peer reviewed for content. Once the new curricula was in place I was systematic in choosing when to ask for peer review and also with who to ask. Judy Miller reviewed EDCI 392 because she teaches it and because disciplinary literacy is an area of expertise for her. I had Dr. Burton review EDEC 323 because of his wealth of ELA experience. I asked Pat Pfarrenkopf to review EDUC 780 capstone because we were working on a new review rubric I thought would work for that course and she also uses critical friends in her courses. I asked Dr. Maria Sargent to review EDCI 594 because of her wealth of knowledge in psychology. And Dave Karl reviewed EDCI 580 because he was enrolled in the course as a student. As discussed in the peer review section, across the semesters, I have made changes to each course reviewed based on feedback from my colleagues. Those changes range from organizational things like Blackboard features and ease of use to content changes such as adding videos, images or explanations.

In terms of course evaluations, they remain consistent. In my undergraduate EDCI 323 courses, I had two different issues. Spring 2022, I had a plagiarism issue. Half my class copied assignment information directly from websites. It seemed odd that it would be half the class. So instead of immediately instituting sanctions, I spent time figuring out why this occurred. My students were unclear about the rules of plagiarism with digital media and during the pandemic had an instructor who told them to copy. I discussed this with the department chair. She wrote them a letter, and we moved on. However, my course evaluations for that section were low. Course evaluations for my other section were normal. Fall 2022 I again had an issue

in one section. One and/or a small group of students published sent me an email early in the semester and forwarded to a number of students in the class. The student made it sound as if the entire class felt this way. The email referred to any number of things they were unhappy with but had not spoken with me about. Thinking the email had been from the whole class, I published and posted in announcements responses to each of their points. At that point, a number of students reached out to me personally to let me know they did not agree and were not involved. Out of that, two things happened. First, I believe that a division occurred amongst this group of students. Second, I was able to discover that for much of that group, this course was their first course on Blackboard as opposed to Canvas. Blackboard is a very different and not nearly as user friendly system. Upon discovering that, as a class, we went over how Blackboard works and how to use it in general. There is however, also an introduction video posted on course navigation. The same comments I received in that initial email showed up on the course evaluations. Again, however, course evaluations from my other section of the same course were fine.

My graduate course evaluations tend to be consistently high. At one point the evaluations for EDCI 523 were lower. I conducted an analysis to see if there was any reason they might have dropped. I could not find one. My department chair at the time reassured me that these things can happen and to pay attention to future course evaluations. More recent evaluations for EDCI 523 are more consistently higher.

Personal Narrative of Teaching Experiences

My first semester, Fall 2019 was confusing and challenging. My course evaluations were mediocre and reflected that confusion. I wasn't familiar with the program. I had four different courses to prepare for in a very short time. I did not understand that one of my courses aligned with field placement or that I had the same students in the other literacy block course. I felt like I was shooting from the hip all semester. However, as I worked on the curricular pieces, things became more clear. The course I liked best was EDEC 664, the elementary reading intervention course. I did not feel like I was very good at any of the undergraduate literacy courses. I started to believe that I did not like teaching undergraduate programming.

However, while I do prefer teaching graduate, I don't think it's all about undergraduates. I think much is about course content. Since EDEC 323 - Trade Books, Mentor Texts, and Writing Methods was updated and I began teaching the course I designed, I have very much enjoyed teaching it. Spring 2023, I also taught the Middle Grades version of the same course (course by conference) and enjoyed that equally well. I now believe it is as much about where I feel I can have the most impact and where my expertise lies. There is much need to help pre-service teachers

with both non-fiction children's text as well as writing methods. I believe I've pulled those together into a course that works very well and that I truly enjoy teaching. By the end of the semester, my students are talking about and interacting with non-fiction text and writing very differently.

Moving forward, it is these two undergraduate courses I would like to teach and continue to hone. They do reflect my skill set. Further, we have many knowledgeable and talented instructors who can teach the other undergraduate courses equally well.

Below are student comments from Fall 2019 before EDEC 323 was re-designed, and comments from Spring 2023, long after the re-design.

(Prompt) Was this class intellectually stimulating ?

Comment from Fall, 2019

1. Not necessarily, we had to only look into different books and present them in class. I feel like this and the other course were one big class and we could have done without the random work

Comment from Spring 2023

2. Absolutely! This course was hands-down the best one I have had in my Bachelor's Plus program. Dr. Russel was phenomenal at making me think and helping me grow in my thinking. She is very effective at leading us into more of an inquiry-based learning process. She teaches us the framework of something but sets us into major exploration and application in the process. Very effective teaching method!

3. This class was very challenging and I learned quite a bit about teaching writing to students. I was not aware prior to this class of the 6 traits of writing, or that students using phonetic/inventive spelling was actually a good sign. I feel much more prepared to help students with writing now.

I am also including the same comment I included in my course reflection section because I tend to get more unsolicited comments from graduate students. However, I believe this reflects another personal preference of mine. I very much enjoy the virtual sections of students from the Lorrain campus which include Bachelors Plus students returning for a teaching certificate. Those sections also tend to be much more diverse. It gives the class a different personality. This comment is an email from a Bachelor's Plus student in that course:

Hi Dr. Russell.

323 volc sp 23

I am sorry this class has to end. I have absolutely loved every minute of it. I have learned so much from you and the assignments. The conversations have really flowed and been informative and contributed a great deal to my personal growth as a future educator. I just want to thank you for all you have done for us this semester. I am taking an abundance of knowledge and your wisdom with me as I soon venture into the classroom. Thanks again!

Kelly

I now want to turn my attention to my graduate literacy teaching. Prior to being at AU, I taught both graduate and undergraduate courses for other institutions. I loved doing reading clinics, but honestly didn't know that I have a preference. Here at AU, I learned that I absolutely do have a preference. I suspect that's an extension of my numerous years working with in-service teachers in adolescent literacy intervention.

There are a lot of reasons why teaching graduate literacy gives me so much joy and satisfaction. I love helping students work through the program and watching them hone their skills. By the end, I'm getting clinical videos that demonstrate their expertise and the absolutely most amazing Literacy Leadership Projects in capstone. I see them grow and change. I watch them start thinking more like reading interventionists.

Watching that journey is an incredible gift. I know why in-service teachers come back into the graduate literacy program. I was them. Classroom efforts in the teaching of reading are never going to work for every student in a class of 25. What do you do when it doesn't work? That same thing caused me to work on my MEd. in literacy. I've also spent 20 years helping practicing teachers in intervention who have the same concerns.

Our k-12 students desperately need and absolutely deserve skilled and talented reading specialists. That is what I do best. I love the hardest struggling reader cases and still take challenging cases on my own. I am *going* to find a way to turn a student into a reader. No question. I have spent years developing that skill set. I know what different groups of struggling readers look like. I know how to help my clinicians figure out what's going on with their reader and make clinical recommendations for instruction. I also very much enjoy helping them work through their case studies. I dedicate a great deal of time and energy to working one on one with clinicians on their case studies. Often, I identify a reader who is not a 'garden variety' struggling reader but who has other language processing issues. I love helping my clinicians work through those. And, I get as much joy out of watching that struggling reader grow as I do watching my clinicians grow.

I cannot do it all. But I do have a particularly unique skill set as a literacy diagnostician and clinician that cuts across multiple sets of variables including

learning and language issues. This is what I want to pass on to my clinicians. It is actually an extension of how I feel about my ACRI intervention work. This is the way I can give back to our AU students and to k-12.

One of the things I did notice about my Reading Endorsement course evaluations is that they do tend to improve over time as a whole, as do the comments. I believe this is a reflection of my continuing to hone and tweak these courses. Below are comments from EDCI 715 Graduate Literacy Practicum from Fall, 2022

(Prompt) Was this class intellectually stimulating?

1. This class has me re-thinking how I've been instructing students with reading and how I can help them to achieve better outcomes with more effective learning strategies.
3. This course required me to do some significant problem solving. The requirements are not designed with a middle level educator in mind, so I had to work with my professor to find ways to demonstrate my learning while meeting Ohio state requirements. This was difficult; thankfully, Dr. Russell was willing to support me through this process.
4. The class stretched me to think like a reading specialist

I also want to provide some comments from the new courses in the Reading and Literacy MEd. Two of my personal favorites to teach are EDCI 780 Literacy Leadership Capstone, and EDCI 594, the psychology of reading course. The capstone is designed as such because I want my MEd. candidates to leave believing they can make a difference in literacy leadership. There's a way to do that and a way not to do that. They do work through an action research piece, but the focus is on the leadership project itself. The other course, which I believe may be the best course I've ever written, EDCI 594, is also the one I enjoyed designing the most. And I love teaching it.

(Prompt) Was this class intellectually stimulating?

EDCI 780 Spring 2023

1. This class challenged me to apply the information I learned over the past year. This was not easy for me, and it extended me well outside of my comfort zone and, in doing so, caused me to deepen my understanding.
2. This class was intellectually stimulating. I like the flexibility of the assignment project idea. I enjoyed applying what I read in research towards my project in my classroom. It was nice to be able to apply it to real life teaching.
3. This class was stimulating because I was able to spend time completing a project that was meaningful to me.

4. I so appreciate Dr. Russell treating us as professionals and giving us resources while allowing us to focus on a Capstone project which was important to our unique schools and situations. It allowed me to feel like I made a major contribution to the learning of an entire school of students.

From EDCI 780 Capstone Reflections

Lindsay Kaser Spring 2023 780

[I start] Orton Gillingham training and courses in the fall. I cannot thank Dr. Russell, Ashland University, my friends, and my family enough for the endless support and encouragement throughout my Master's program and capstone project!

Amanda Thirtyacre Spring 2023 capstone

I am not sure what is next for me. I think I am still shocked to have made it to the finish line while working a full-time job, raising 3 children, and just living (sometimes surviving) life over the past almost 2 years. I chose to pursue my Master's degree as a promise to my grandfather who passed away in 2012 and chose Literacy and Curriculum because I had lost my love for teaching reading. Not only did I find my love for teaching reading, I found a better way and more effective way to teach it!

EDCI 594 Summer 2022

1. The class helped me develop an understanding of how our brain and minds work when reading. It brought to light all the parts that go into reading

and how it can be a difficult task for some students.

2. It was, it was complex content that made me dig in and try hard to succeed.

EDCI 594 Summer 2021

1. Absolutely! The choice of texts was perfect, they complimented each other very well.

2. The Willingham book was easier to follow, so I learned more from it. I'm sure it is important to understand what the brain is doing when reading, but

only a few chapters in the Dehaene book felt important to me.

Finally, some of the comments that are the most important to me are those that are an unsolicited surprise. I always enjoy those.

Sarah Feeney4/26/21 3:20 PM 715 sp 21

Thanks for a great semester Dr. Russell! I really enjoyed this experience and I know this work has been very beneficial for my student(s). 715 Case Study Attached Sincerely, Sarah Feeney

Good morning,

My mother has pneumonia, so I will no longer be attending graduation. I was looking forward to meeting you in person. I just wanted to thank you for being my professor and helping me look at reading in a new way. I hope to work with you again one day!

Sincerely,

Brandie Esposito-Yator

The comment below is from EDCI 580 the writing intervention course. This course gets mixed reviews. I think it needs attention. I struggle with what to do. I included it because I continually get comments from teachers about feeling inadequate at teaching writing. I believe students like it. In fact, during a 780 zoom meeting, a student told me how much she liked the writing strategies from EDCI 580 because they were helping her students so much. I have also gotten the comment that they learned ‘most’ of this in undergraduate. If they did their undergraduate here at AU, they probably did. I will start by taking a look at some of the assignments to better align them. I will also consider shortening some of the material we use in undergraduate. However, I do feel many teachers still need that content.

Arianna Holtwick9/25/22 11:24 PM EDCI 580 Modes Matrix Assignment

Thank you again for such a thought-provoking assignment. I hope it's what you were hoping to see from me. Have a great week!

I close out this narrative with considerations and goals for the future. Two things continue to plague me moving forward. The first, across courses, is clarity of assignments. I have made changes to assignments as I get these comments. In my section evaluations, I wrote about creating documents for both EDCI 392 and EDEC 323. Those seem helpful. I continue to work on this. The other thing is due dates. When I first started creating course shells, I put due dates on everything. Not the smartest idea. Now, I have a copy of the course outline from the syllabus listed in “Course Overview.” That is the only place I post due dates. I do so by module/week. I am still trying to remove ‘old’ due dates from courses and figure

out a better system for this. I am a terrible line editor. I miss small things. When something is brought to my attention, I immediately fix it.

In general, over the course of my years here at AU, I have had many opportunities to write curriculum, new courses, alter courses, and then teach them. I've also gotten much better at teaching asynchronously and via zoom. I may well be better at that than I am face to face. But, I'm now doing more online teaching. I am fortunate to have had these experiences and continue to just get so much satisfaction from teaching graduate literacy. Fall 2023 brings a new role as 'official' Literacy Director. Essentially, it means I get a 1.5 buyout per semester. However, I suspect it will also be accompanied by many new opportunities to continue to improve my pedagogical skills.