Dr. Stephanie Paterson
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The ordinariness of observing is both its power and the reason that it is problematic... The practices of everyday life in classrooms become so routine that they become implicit. The challenge to classroom observers (supervisors, principals, student teachers, and teacher educators) is to understand and reveal these implicit patterns and routines.

---Carolyn Frank, Ethnographic Eyes

**REQUIRED TEXTS:**

- A course packet containing excerpts from *Ethnographic Eyes: A Teacher’s Guide to Classroom Observations, Voices and Visions* and other selected readings.

**OTHER MATERIALS:**

- Mini-tape recorder
- Notebook for field notes

**COURSE AIDS:**

This course consists primarily of your conducting weekly observations of writing classes. You will learn a great deal from observing how teachers shape daily lessons, how they scaffold writing instruction, and how from time to time they encounter obstacles that interfere with creating a productive learning environment. You will be introduced to some research tools for conducting ethnographic classroom-based research, such as *note-taking, note-making, and note re-making*. You will also become familiar with some of the ethical issues involved in conducting observations and in writing ethnographic reports. Each week, you will give a 5-7 minute presentation highlighting a few of the salient elements of your observation. The aim of our course readings is to provide new lenses for viewing aspects of teaching and learning in the classroom. Ultimately, the goal of ethnographic research is to improve your own teaching, deepen your understanding of writers, and encourage you to “read” educational settings more critically and carefully (Bishop).

Prerequisite: Completion of one of the MA-RTW core courses.

**COURSE QUESTIONS:**

- How do power, authority, and equity figure into a researcher’s relationships with his/her subjects?
• How does a researcher’s identity, subjectivity, (e.g. gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, and class) shape his/her cognition and interpretation of data at the site of inquiry?
• How are ethnographic data transformed into narratives? What happens---what is gained and lost---in this transformation?
• What narratives and rhetorical strategies do authors of ethnographies invoke in their writing---and toward what ends?
• How does gaining an ethnographic perspective expand your awareness of various cultural perspectives?

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER IN THE CLASSROOM:

• What events are occurring?
• What is required to be a member of this class and to participate in socially and academically appropriate ways?
• What evidence do you need to support the claims you wish to make about learning in a given class?
• What are the consequences for members living in a particular classroom?

ONGOING ASSIGNMENTS AND REQUIREMENTS:

✓ Observation Notebook: You are required to do (ten) one-and-a-half hour sessions of classroom observation with assiduous note-taking (descriptive field notes), and note-making (interpretations of what you have observed), and note re-making (questions/ideas for how you might revise or adopt some of these pedagogical practices in writing class of your own). Choose classes that have a strong writing component.

* Please use pseudonyms for instructors and students. You are responsible for arranging your classroom visits beforehand. If you plan to visit a public school, check with the school beforehand; some do not allow observers, and some require observers to undergo training. Do not approach a teacher just before a class and request permission to observe. Whenever possible, gather handouts or lesson plans and consider these materials data that will inform your understanding of the culture of the classroom you are observing.

Assessment:

(√+) Classroom Observation Write-Up: Includes your name, date, the date and the exact times of your observation, and the level of writing class you are observing. Contains three clear columns of 1.) note-taking, 2. note-making, 3.) note re-making related to the 1 1/2 hours of writing instruction you observed. Strong write-ups show evidence that you can make connections between our course readings and your classroom observations. A (√+) response includes thoughtful analysis, interpretation, & questions in the columns devoted to note-making and note re-making. Typed or very legibly written. No typos or errors.

(√) Classroom Observation Write-Up: Includes your name, date, date and exact times of your observation, and the level of writing class you are observing. Contains three clear columns of 1.) note-taking, 2. note-making, 3.) note re-making related to what you observed. A (√) represents an adequate performance. It contains all of the requisite parts that make a √+ but it is “thin” on analysis and interpretation and there may be some errors and typos that distract a reader away from your main points.
(√-) Classroom Observation Write-Up: These observations do not relate directly to writing instruction. There is very little note-making and note re-making, which means very little analysis or interpretation about the significance of what you have observed and how you are making meaning of what you have witnessed. There are no connections to our course readings. Meaning gets lost due to numerous typos, or grammatical errors. The write-up is difficult to read.

Note: (√+)=A; (√)=B; (√-)=C.

You are the researcher who selects the particular details, records informants’ particular voices, chooses what to leave in and what to take out, and decides how to write about the ‘particular’ as it illuminates [what] you studied. Your reader needs to know you as the person who has been there. To create a writing voice, you must invite yourself onto the page. To invite yourself onto the page means to ignore conventions you’ve already learned---the formula for an essay, the passive voice, overuse of the third person, or the taboo against the personal pronoun I.

---Bonnie Sunstein and Elizabeth Chiseri-Strater, Fieldworking

Weekly Reading Responses:

Weekly Reading Responses or “RR’s” are a place to use writing to make sense of course readings. They are not freewriting responses to the reading. Please take the time to shape a response that focuses on a single theme, key concept, or issue raised in the reading as it pertains to the work of conducting classroom observations and writing ethnographic reports. Consider your scholarly peers as your primary readers. I may ask you to exchange reading responses with a classmate to receive peer feedback on the writing, as well as another reader’s point of view and critical questions. Be sure to include:

• A title (signaling to readers the focus of your response).
• A brief block quotation (demonstrating close reading).
• MLA-style citations
• A question or a series of questions (demonstrating critical thinking).
• 12 Font—one typed page minimum, 1 1/2 typed pages maximum.

Please keep all responses with instructor comments.

Though acts of summary are at times useful, what is often wanted in college-level prose is something more: writing that demonstrates not merely a stalwart comprehension of texts surrounding an issue, but that reaches with its analyses and arguments to make new uses of prior texts and positions.

---Van Hillard and Joseph Harris

Grading Reading Responses

(√+) Reading Response: Has an original title that signals a clear focus. Begins with an epigraph (a key quotations from the reading) and then offer readers both a personal & critical reading of the significance of the selected passage. Your writing has been “crafted,” or carefully constructed adhering to MLA style conventions, with clear, grammatically correct prose, and no distracting typos.
Reading Response: May have many of the markers of a (+) response but the explanation for the quote selection is undeveloped. (+) responses tend to be lop-sided. Instead of weaving together strands of the personal, critical, and analytical, they either offer all summary or all personal narrative, but fail to elaborate on the significance of the vignette in terms of highlighting key issues in the reading as they connect to classroom observations. A (+) may raise some questions, and may contain a few typos/grammatical errors.

(−) Reading Response: Lacks purpose, or focus, or critical thought. A (−) may contain numerous distracting errors (spelling, typos, & grammatical errors), that distract a reader away from the main message. A (−) may fail to make a direct reference to the reading. May not include enough reflection/questioning/evidence to be considered a substantive response.

Note: (+)=A; ( )=B; (−)=C.

**DISCUSSION INITIATOR:**

Each week one person will lead us in our seminar discussion of the readings for that day. An “A” presentation includes 1.) a brief synopsis of the key concepts, issues, or ideas presented in the readings, 2.) 2-3 open-ended questions to provoke thinking about how the reading pertains to the work of conducting classroom observations, 3.) getting the whole class involved in some interactive activity that either renders the key concepts, or provides an experience that will demonstrate the key concepts. *With each subsequent presentation I will be looking for evidence of recursive reading, or the ability to make connections between earlier readings and later readings.*

**FINAL PORTFOLIO:**

The final portfolio will be divided into three parts: 1. A letter of reflection synthesizing the key concepts and themes in the course readings and classroom observations; 2. Ten graded classroom observations 3. Ten of your self-selected best Reading Responses with instructor comments.

**ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION:** Your attendance and active participation are important factors in the success of this course. It is expected that you will come to all classes on time and fully prepared. Late reading responses or classroom observations will not be accepted. *If you think repetitive lateness and/or absences will be an issue for work reasons or any other reasons, I recommend that you take this course at another time.*

**GRADING:** This class will employ Plus/Minus Grading Option.

- **20% Mid-Term Exam**
- **20% Presentation/Discussion Initiator**
- **60% Final Portfolio** (each section is worth 20%).
**DISABILITIES:** If a disability may prevent full demonstration of your abilities, please contact me personally as soon as possible so we can discuss accommodations necessary to ensure full participation and facilitate your educational opportunity.

**ACADEMIC INTEGRITY:** If you submit someone else’s writing, published or unpublished, as your own, you have plagiarized and that warrants failure for the course. If you have questions about whether or not you are using a source fairly, ask me.

**TENTATIVE SCHEDULE**
*All readings will come from our course packet.*

**WEEK 1:**
Feb. 16

Introductions. *Create a plan for conducting 1 1/2 hours of writing classroom based research. Seek necessary permissions.*

**WEEK 2: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC PERSPECTIVE**
Feb. 26

Don DeLillo excerpt; “An Ethnographic Perspective” and “Classroom Observations” p.2-15; “Turning In Upon Ourselves: Positionality, Subjectivity, and Reflexivity in Case Study and Ethnographic Research,” Elizabeth Chiseri-Strater, p.195-204; “Ethnography and the Problem of the ‘Other’,” by Patricia Sullivan, pp.205-213. **RR#1**
Presenter #1 on Chiseri Strater and Sullivan ____________________________.

**WEEK 3: REALLY LISTENING AND “THE ETHNOGRAPHY OF LITERACY”**
Mar. 4

Presenter #2 on Szwed & Street ____________________________.

**WEEK 4: THE ETHNOGRAPHER’S NARRATIVE DILEMMA**
Mar. 11

**RR #4.** Presenter #3 on Brooke/Lofty & Blot______________________.

*March 1-12 DROP/Withdraw period. March 12 is the last day to drop & qualify for a refund.*
**WEEK 5: ETHNOGRAPHER AS “REALITY BROKER” (NORTH)**
Mar. 18


**RR #5** Presenter #4 on Ferguson and Newkirk

**WEEK 6: THE SIGHTSEEER & THE TOURIST**
Mar. 25

READ: “The Loss of the Creature,” Walker Percy from *Ways of Reading*, Bartholomae and Petrosky, pp.149-155 (and) “Against School,” John Taylor Gatto (a handout). **RR #6** (This week, please turn your RR’s into the main office to be put in my mailbox). Presenter #5 on Percy


**WEEK 7: PRESENTATION OF SELF**
Apr. 1


**IN-CLASS MID-TERM EXAM**

**WEEK 8: NO CLASS---SPRING BREAK.**
Apr. 8

**WEEK 9: THE CLASSROOM AS A CULTURE**
Apr. 22


**WEEK 10: THE PANOPTICON**
Apr. 29

Michel Foucault, “Panopticism” in *Ways of Reading*, Edited by Bartholomae & Petrosky, pp. 132-148. **RR #9** Presenter #8 on Foucault

**WEEK 11: THE IMPORTANCE OF EVIDENCE**
May 6

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1 Stephen North says that ethnographers are “serving as a kind of alternative reality brokers, they deliberately juxtapose one imaginative universe with another, struggling, in the effort, to make both more intelligible---to themselves, to us, to the inhabitants of those alternative universes” (279).
“A Deeper Vision,” from The Return of the Osprey, David Gessner, pp. 214. **RR # 10**
Presenter #9 on Gessner ______________________________.

**WEEK 12: A PEDAGOGY OF DISCOMFORT**
May 13


**WEEK 13: PRESENTATIONS**
May 20
* Ten-minute multi-media or visual final presentations synthesizing what you have read and learned from conducting classroom-based research.

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**QUOTATIONS TO INFORM OUR DISCUSSION**

**VISION MIXES SEEING WITH NOT-SEEING**

- Vision…is not the simple thing it is imagined to be. It has to do with desire and possessiveness more than mechanical navigation…Because we cannot see what we do not understand or use or identify with, we see very little of the world—only the small pieces that are useful or harmless. Each act of vision mingles seeing with not seeing, so that vision can become less a way of gathering information than avoiding it.

  ---“Blindness” in The Object Stares Back

**STUDY CONTEXT**

- Dilemmas are inherent in qualitative research that takes place in classrooms because the context itself is so textured and rich that it would be presumptuous to assume we could control it.

  ---Helen Dale, “Dilemmas of Fidelity”

**SILENT POWER**

- I brought in even more authority by virtue of being the observer of [the] teaching performance; there is a measure of ‘silent’ power simply in being the one who enters a class and takes note of what goes on there. My main research agenda in observing [the] class was to examine how students responded to, made sense of, resisted, and engaged with classroom activities and explanations.

  --- Russel K. Durst and Sherry Cook Stanforth, “‘Everything’s Negotiable’: Collaboration and Conflict in Composition Research”

**FIELD NOTES/ OBSERVATIONS**

- From whom do we speak and to whom do we speak, with what voice, to what end, using what criteria? How should we write our research? The rhetorical, ethical, and methodological issues
implicit in this question are neither few nor trivial. Rather, the question reflects a central postmodernist realization: all knowledge is socially constructed. Writing is not simply a ‘true’ representation of an objective ‘reality’; language creates a particular view of reality. All language has grammatical, narrative, and rhetorical structures that ‘create value, bestow meaning, and constitute (in the sense of imposing form upon) the subjects and objects that emerge in the process of inquiry.

---Laurel Richardson: “Narrative Knowing and Sociological Telling” in Fields of Play.

**WORDS LIVE “SOCIALLY CHARGED LIVES”**

- For any individual consciousness living in [language], language is not an abstract system of normative forms... All words have a ‘taste’ of a profession, a genre, a tendency, a party, a particular work, a particular person, a generation, an age group, the day and the hour. Each word tastes of the context and contexts in which it has lived its socially charged life; all words and forms are populated by intentions. Contextual overtones (generic, tendentious, individualistic) are inevitable in the word.

---Mikhail Bakhtin, “Discourse and the Novel.”

**THE EXPLICIT AND THE IMPLICIT**

- Vintage Williams: the busy, street-smart doctor and hard-working writer merged into the friendly but tough teacher who wanted his younger listener to treasure not only the explicit but the implicit, all the subtleties and nuances of language as it is used, of language as it is heard. He found moments of liveliness in statements that were terse, banal, circumscribed. He could pounce on someone’s adjective or verb; he could be delighted in the confounding exception that undoes the seemingly foolproof conclusion. Continuities and discontinuities, themes that appeared and disappeared, references, comparisons, similes and metaphors, intimations and suggestions, moods and mysteries, contours of coherence and spells of impenetrability.