

THE UNIVERSITY OF LETHBRIDGE  
FACULTY OF EDUCATION  
*Fall 2014*

**Education 5850 Special Topics:  
Professional Practice (Socio-political Issues in Literacy Assessment)**

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**Online**

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**Course Description:**

This course will explore the social consequences of literacy assessment practices (both classroom and large-scale). This course will focus on several key concepts. First, it will focus on the theoretical and philosophical frames that shape current thinking about literacy assessment. Second, it will unpack contemporary validity theory and its implications for literacy assessment design. Third, it will focus on the political dimensions of assessment. Finally, it will examine the challenges involved in reframing current literacy assessment practices.

**Course Objectives:**

Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to:

1. Define a range of perspectives on literacy assessment, linking these perspectives to evolving understandings of concepts central to the discipline.
2. Examine public discourses around literacy assessment issues.
3. Explore current theories of validity and their implications for teachers and assessment developers.
4. Explicate insights into the challenges and affordances of rearticulating assessment practices.
5. Establish critical perspectives as the basis for further action and study.

**Required Resource:**

A course pack of required readings will be provided.

**Statement of Purpose:**

The assessment of literacy is an important aspect of education in Canada. Across the country there are more than 35 large-scale literacy assessments administered by provincial governments to their students. These assessment programs are driven as much by the politics of education as they are the science of education. Much of the research on large-scale literacy assessments in Canada demonstrates that these assessment programs exert a negative effect on literacy learning. Classroom

assessment of literacy has been shown to be equally problematic. The goal of this course is to examine the current research on literacy assessment in Canada, to identify current issues, and to explore possible remedies to these problems.

**Evaluation:**

The course evaluation will consist of:	Module Due	Weighting
1. Response to readings	Module 6	40%
2. Persuasive text on a literacy issue	Module 4	25%
3. Research/synthesis paper	Module 7	35%

Course Alignment Plan

Outcome	Summative Assessment	Learning Focus
Define a range of perspectives on literacy assessment, linking these perspectives to evolving understandings of concepts central to the discipline.	1, 2, 3	• Ongoing
Examine public discourses around literacy assessment issues.	1, 2	• Ongoing
Explore current theories of validity and their implications for teachers and assessment developers.	1, 3	• Ongoing
Explicate insights into the challenges and affordances of rearticulating assessment practices.	1, 2, 3	• Ongoing
Establish critical perspectives as the basis for further action and study.	2, 3	• Ongoing

Response to Readings

Through this assignment you will construct a reflective portfolio that captures your evolving understanding of key ideas in literacy assessment. At the beginning of the course you will be given a package of newspaper clippings that address an issue in literacy assessment. You will select one of these clippings to interact with throughout the course.

Ongoing assessment activities:

1. You will write an initial response to one of the clippings. Your response will express your initial reaction to the ideas put forward in the article. Your response will be no longer than 500 words. You will post this response to our moodle discussion forum at the beginning of our first module.
2. For each module, you will complete a reflection (approximately one page in

- length) in which you explore how the assigned reading for that day challenges, extends or reinforces the thinking you expressed in your initial response.
3. Each module, you will read 3 posts from your classmates and will respond to them (paragraph length, 200 words max)

Summative assessment activities:

4. In the final week of the course you will rewrite your initial response, incorporating into it the ideas you have developed through your reflections during the course. (Maximum 500 words)

Assessment Criteria: Assignment will be graded based on the quality of your posts (both original and responses to colleagues) and your final response. Quality will be determined with respect to your critical engagement with readings.

**Persuasive Text:** After exploring public discourses surrounding literacy assessment issues/practices, you will identify a topic or issue of importance to you. Drawing on research in both the fields of literacy and assessment, you will craft a persuasive text designed to engage in public or professional discourses surrounding this issue. The choice of genre or modality is open (podcast, youtube video, letter to the editor, blog post, poster, painting . . .).

Text will be assessed based on the following criteria:

1. How effectively the text introduces and how comprehensively it engages with the issue it was designed to address.
2. How effectively the text communicates to the audience it was designed to address.
3. How effectively the text utilizes the affordances that the chosen modality/genre allows. (Texts that are purely or mostly visual will require either an oral or written piece that explains design choices, relating them to the issue being addressed.)

**Research/Synthesis Paper:** During the course we will explore socio-political issues in literacy assessment. Your final paper will be a ten-page exploration of an issue related to literacy assessment that you uncovered during the term. Possible topics include:

- A critical analysis of a current standardized literacy assessment (with a focus either on construct or consequences)
- Develop a literacy assessment tool that reflects contemporary theories of literacy. In addition to discussing the tool's design, your paper will explain how that assessment tool's design reflects contemporary literacy theory.

- A critical analysis of the current frames surrounding literacy assessment practices in Alberta, BC (or elsewhere).

### Marking Criteria

Criteria	Good B-	Very Good B B+	Excellent A- A	Exceptional A+
<b>Depth Discussion and comparison of literacy experiences is thoroughly developed.</b>	Discussion reflects a superficial interaction with referenced material. Theoretical orientation of the discipline is unclear.	Discussion reflects a deep interaction with referenced material. Theoretical orientation of the discipline is clear.	Discussion reflects a deep and thorough interaction with referenced material. Theoretical orientation of the discipline is effectively discussed.	Discussion reflects a deep analysis, understanding and integration of referenced material. Theoretical orientation of the discipline is clear, discussion is of publishable quality
<b>Breadth Discussion of literacy experiences is effectively connected to a theoretical framework, and to course and other readings. Implications for assessment, pedagogy, and theory/research are effectively developed.</b>	Incomplete discussion of literacy experiences and implications for assessment, pedagogy, and theory/research.	Discussion of issue is connected to a theoretical framework, and to course and other readings. Implications for assessment, pedagogy, and theory/research are explored but not extensively developed.	Discussion of issue is connected to a theoretical framework, and to course and other readings. Implications for assessment, pedagogy, and theory/research are well developed.	Discussion of issue is effectively connected to a theoretical framework, and to course and other readings. Implications for assessment, pedagogy, and theory/research are exceptionally well developed.
<b>Coherence All elements of the paper work together effectively to support analysis.</b>	Elements of the paper are weakly linked together. Parts of discussion are irrelevant.	Elements of paper are somehow linked together but reflect some inconsistency	Elements of paper are linked together effectively so that each element supports the others	Elements of paper are linked together effectively so that integration of elements enhances understandings.
<b>Polish Text is polished effectively</b>	Error in formatting, precision, or copy-editing at times impede clarity.	Frequent errors in format, precision, or copyediting can be found.	Minor errors in format, precision, or copyediting can be found.	Paper is highly refined.

### Tentative Course Schedule

**Module One:** The Framing of literacy assessment: theoretical discourses, political discourse, public discourse.

**Module Two:** Theoretical Discourse 1: Understanding Validity Theory

**Module Three:** Political Discourse: Crisis, Economics, and Accountability

**Module Four:** Public Discourse: The Pernicious hold of Positivism

**Module Five:** Theoretical Discourse 2: Revisiting our theories of literacy

**Module Six:** Strategies for Reframing Literacy Assessment

**Module Seven:** Implications for Professional Practice

### **Final Letter Grades:**

The Faculty of Education has a standardized grading schedule for graduate courses. This schedule will be used for determining final grades for graduate students in this course.

<b>Numeric Value</b>	<b>Letter Grade</b>	<b>Grade Point</b>
97 - 100	A+	4.00
93 - 96	A	4.00
90 - 92	A-	3.70
87 - 89	B+	3.30
83 - 86	B	3.00
80 - 82	B-	2.70
<p>Note: Any course with a grade of less than B- cannot be considered for credit in the M.Ed. Program.</p>		
77 - 79	C+	2.30
73 - 76	C	2.00
70 - 72	C-	1.70
67 - 69	D+	1.30
63 - 66	D	1.00
<63	F	0.00

### **Associated Readings**

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