Doctor of Education (EdD) Program

Practitioner Inquiry 2: EDUC 3006 Section 1010

Fall 2025

This syllabus is a living document.
We reserve the right to change the syllabus to meet class needs

Class Times	
Please reserve 8 am- 12 pm for face-to-face classes in **Posvar 1501:** Saturday, Sept 6 Saturday, Oct 4 Saturday, Nov 8 Saturday, Dec 6	**Online activities will be conducted** via canvas.pitt.edu and Zoom when necessary. For assistance with instructional technology, contact the University helpline available 24/7, 412-624-HELP.

Instructional Team	
Rachel E. Robertson, PhD Associate Professor Teaching, Learning, and Leading Program Coordinator, Special Education, EdD rachelr@pitt.edu 5154 Posvar Hall **Office Hours:** Schedule Here or by appointment: Email is the best form of communication for me	**Rosa M. Acevedo, PhD** Assistant Professor of Practice Educational Foundations, Organizations, & Policy Program Coordinator, Higher Education EdD racevedo@pitt.edu 5509 Posvar Hall **Office Hours:** By appointment: Email is the best form of communication for me

Grading: Letter

The syllabus is a required text. Please read it carefully!

Mission/Vision of the School of Education

We ignite learning. We strive for well-being for all. We teach. We commit to student, family, and community success. We commit to educational equity. We advocate. We work for justice. We cultivate relationships. We forge engaged partnerships. We collaborate. We learn with and from communities. We innovate and agitate. We pursue and produce knowledge. We research. We disrupt and transform inequitable educational structures. We approach learning as intertwined with health, wellness, and human development. We address how national, global, social, and technological change impacts learning. We shape practice and policy. We teach with and for dignity. We think. We dream. We lead with integrity. We are the School of Education at the University of Pittsburgh.

Doctor of Education (EdD)

The University of Pittsburgh is a center for excellence in professional programs, and the School of Education school-wide Doctor of Education (EdD) program is grounded in this ***commitment to excellence***. The program prepares working professionals to become **leader scholar practitioners** to develop *specialized knowledge in their area of concentration* and *apply their intellectual and practical skills to address and mitigate enduring problems affecting children, families, and communities*.

Program Learning Goals

As a result of attending the EdD program at Pitt, students and graduates become leader scholar practitioners who:

1. Identify problems of practice, including questions of equity, ethics, and justice.
2. Use data to inform decisions in daily operations and improvement projects.
3. Communicate and collaborate to work with diverse communities and build partnerships.
4. Lead change that improves practice.
5. Are committed to using improvement science to address problems of practice.

Course

I. **Rationale:**

Practitioner Inquiry II is the second course in the four-course series designed to teach students to understand and utilize improvement science in the process of improving their actionable problem of practice.

II. **Description:**

Students will engage with qualitative research methods and exercises utilized in improvement science. Students will practice/apply their understanding of improvement science in developing their Dissertation in Practice Plan (DIPP) specific to their individual context and actionable problem of practice.

III. Course Aims and Outcomes:

Aims

This course will move you through the improvement process, focusing on <u>understanding the Problem and seeing the System</u>. In particular, we will define "users" in our context and our positionality in relation to these persons of interest. We will understand the uniqueness of your organization and how that contributes to understanding your actionable problem of practice. We will move deeper into defining your problem of practice based on the work you have completed in year one. We will also introduce you to research methods that will be used to collect and analyze data.

Specific Learning Outcomes:

By the end of this course, students will:

- Understand the perspectives of users (those affected by the problem)
- Conduct empathy interviews to better understand user-centered problem-definition
- Understand how to define your system
- Reflect on and integrate principles of justice and equity in your DIPP, including your positionality within your organization

- Define your system through systems analysis and document analysis
- Understand the research process
- Learn basic methods of qualitative research design, data collection, and analysis
- Conduct an in-depth, semi-structured interview
- Conduct document analysis
- Analyze data from interviews and document analysis to generate an evidence-based root cause analysis of a problem in their site of practice.
- Fishbone your problem of practice using user knowledge, literature, systems understanding.

IV. Doctoral Program Requirements:
Students will create and revise the first part of their Dissertation in Practice Plan (DIPP)

V. Format and Procedures:
This is a hybrid course with four face-to-face meetings and weekly assignments and readings in between classes. We expect that you will come to class prepared and ready to engage the materials and your colleagues. In between face-to-face meetings, we expect that you will complete and upload assignments in accordance with the dates outlined in this syllabus.

VI. Course Requirements:

1. Course readings and where they are available:

(a) Required texts are available online:

Booth, W.C., Colomb, G.G., & Williams, J.M. (2008). *The craft of research,* 3rd ed. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press. Access e-book at: https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/pitt-ebooks/detail.action?docID=4785166&pq-origsite=primo

Bryk, A., Gomez, L.M., Grunow, A., & LeMahieu, P.G. (2015). *Learning to improve: How America's schools can get better at getting better.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press. Access e-book at: https://pitt.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/permalink/01PITT_INST/t5l303/alma9992171133406236

Hinnant-Crawford, B. N. (2020). *Improvement science in education: A primer*. Gorham, ME: Myers Education Press. Access e-book at: https://pitt.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/permalink/01PITT_INST/g3767l/alma9998874550006236

Mertens, D. M. (2024). *Research and Evaluation in Education and Psychology: Integrating Diversity with Quantitative, Qualitative, and Mixed Methods* (Sixth edition). SAGE Publications, Incorporated. https://pitt.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/permalink/01PITT_INST/i25aoe/cdi_askewsholts_vlebooks_9781071853788Links to an external site.

Perry, J.A., Zambo, D., & Crow, R. (2020). *The improvement science dissertation in practice: A guide for faculty, committee members, and their students*. Access e-book at: https://pitt.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/permalink/01PITT_INST/g3767l/alma9998620040906236

NOTE: you can access this book by Multi user ebook via pittcat.pitt.edu

(b) Other readings:

Additional readings are available within the Course Canvas site.

2. **Dissertation in Practice Plan (DIPP)**

The course is designed to help you develop Chapter One of your Dissertation in Practice Plan through a semester-long process (referred to as "scaffolding"), creating a comprehensive document by the end of the course. You are expected to submit a well-framed, organized, clear argument, as well as attention to grammar, syntax, and APA style. All sections of the document will be submitted to the course instructors for review and feedback. The course assignments in Canvas indicate when sections are due to the course instructor.

Please keep in mind that with each submission, you are required to address, revise, and rewrite all comments and suggestions made by the course instructor, and then add them to the next section. Please cite relevant literature, do not include unfounded claims, but ground it in evidence (particularly in subsection A of the DIPP). The DIPP will ultimately build a compelling argument for why this problem exists and needs to be addressed, how your organization contributes to it, and who is impacted or involved in its creation. Specifically, you should include:

A. Subsection A: Broader Problem Area + Ishikawa Fishbone Diagram - Draft #1 , **Due September 21, 2025 (10 points)**

In this section, you will introduce your *Problem of Practice* by providing a broad, high-level view. Think of this as describing the issue from a **bird's-eye perspective** before zooming in on the specific details.

This section shows how the specific local problem is connected to enduring problems of practice found in the review of supporting knowledge and what you know in your field as evidence for building your argument to persuade others that this problem is big.

1. **Summarize the broader area of professional practice.**
    - Explain the field or context in which your problem arises.
    - Provide enough background so readers unfamiliar with your area can understand why this matters.
2. **Show how your local problem connects to larger, enduring problems of practice.**
    - Use research (yes, you can pull from your literature review), professional knowledge, or examples to demonstrate that your problem is not isolated.
    - Show what the problem looks like from a "balcony view" (broad/systemic).
3. **Prepare the reader for what comes next.**
    - End this section with a clear overview of your problem.
    - Preview the next section, where you will:
        - Describe the organization where this problem occurs,
        - Identify who is impacted by or contributes to the problem, and
        - Show how the broad issue is specifically playing out in your setting.

4. **Ishikawa Fishbone Diagram - Draft #1**

    - Considering the literature you have read, your PoP statement, and your own experiences with the problem, generate the first draft of your Ishikawa Fishbone Diagram.
    - Once you have your fishbone, you will write a description of the major and minor causes of your Problem of Practice (2 pages max). Turn in both your summary and your fishbone diagram together.

Page Limit: **No more than 5 pages** for the *Overview of the Problem* + **1 page** for Fishbone Diagram + **no more than 2 page** summary of Fishbone diagram.

B. Empathy Interviews. Due October 19, 2025 (5 points)

Students will conduct 3 short-form empathy interviews in their study site. Each interview should be 10-15 minutes in length. You will conduct empathy interviews to gain quick, varied, informative, and intentionally limited views of your problem of practice.

1. Using the work you have completed around users/concerned parties, finalize a list of people within or outside your organization who can provide perspective about the problem. Remember, the people you select should be impacted or contribute to the problem in some way to help you better understand the problem. Your goal is to understand the problem deeply. Their perspective will show you how they are impacted or contribute to the problem, and what will happen to them if the problem is not solved. Therefore, you want to identify 3 people who have a stake in this problem being solved, and ideally from different user/concerned party groups. Also, **do no**t look for people who can confirm your viewpoint on the problem. You want to broaden your understanding.

2. Finalize your list of 3-5 questions. Keep in mind that you do not necessarily need to ask each person the same questions or in the same order. Depending on their point of view, you may have something different to ask different people. **To help you prepare, you will share your questions and your plans to conduct interviews with your peers in class on October 4th.**

3. You will conduct the empathy interviews between October 5-18. As you meet with each person, you will jot down notes about key ideas, learnings, etc, that will help inform your fishbone and user-description assignments.

4. Use the Mapping Your Empathy Interview Download Mapping Your Empathy Interview document to organize your thinking based on your learning from each interview.

C. Semi-structured interview and transcription. Due October 26, 2025 (5 points)

Students will design, conduct, transcribe, and analyze one semi-structured interview of 30-60 minutes in length (the interview should ideally occur in one sitting). Students are encouraged to identify a respondent whose perspective will be helpful toward developing their applied inquiry plans. The respondent could be someone within their organization, a constituent, a community member, or a professional in a similar organization. The interview is an opportunity to practice qualitative

methodology and to gain an in-depth perspective on the problem of practice. In order to maximize the learning opportunity, do not interview anyone under the age of 18, a family member, or a very close friend. See the calendar for specific due dates for the following components.

Students will develop an interview protocol with the guidance of their instructors and a small group on October 4, 2025. Developing the protocol is an important step in learning and executing qualitative methods. Students will have the opportunity to pilot their interview protocols with their peers in class.

Students will audio-record their interviews and then transcribe their semi-structured interviews with the aid of voice-recognition software (e.g., Zoom transcription, Otter.ai, etc). To learn and reflect upon the process of transcribing, it is important that you do not enlist someone else to transcribe the interview. Be sure to do the following:

(1) Replay the recording to edit the Zoom transcription to get it as close to word-for-word as possible.
(2) Work toward a transcription that captures the interview word-for-word, including your questions and anything else you say. Leave in uhs, ahs, and grammar and syntax mistakes.
(3) To practice anonymity and greater confidentiality, assign pseudonyms to your interviewee and anyone mentioned during the interview.
(4) At the beginning of the transcript, add about a 100-word description of the interviewee, the setting of the interview, and why you chose this person to interview.

Students will submit their protocol and interview transcript by October 26, 2025, by 11:59 PM. **Please note, we will begin the analysis of the transcript in class on November 8th- it is NOT part of this submission.**

[Note: Guidance for how to construct an interview protocol is in Chapter 8 of Mertens (especially starting on p. 253 and in Rosa's PowerPoint slides from the September and October classes.]

D. <u>Revised</u> Broader Problem Area + Subsection B Users/Concerned Parties Description + Ishikawa Fishbone Diagram - Draft #2, Due November 2, 2025 (10 points)

Users/Concerned Parties Description
Provide a detailed description of the specific individuals, or group of individuals, who are being impacted by or contribute to the problem.

- How is the problem locally affecting people? Identify the groups or individuals impacted by or contributing to the problem in your system/organization.
- Use empathy interviews, demographic data, coursework, and literature to show who is affected and in what ways.
- Demonstrate the power and influence these people have over the problem or its resolution.
- End this section with a compelling statement about the impact of your problem on these people.

Fishbone Diagram - Draft 2: Considering the document analysis and organizational systems description, add to your understanding of the problem root causes in your fishbone. Provide a summary of how you have revised your fishbone that is no more than 2 pages. This draft will be due <u>with</u> your Organizational Systems Description.

Revisions: Revisions of prior sections(s) should be made via track changes.
Page Limit: No more than 5 pages for Users/Concerned Parties Description; 1 page for fishbone; no more than 2 pages for summary of fishbone revisions.

E. <u>Revised</u> Broader Problem Area & Users/Concerned Parties Description + Subsection C: Organizational System + Subsection D: Statement of the Problem of Practice + Ishikawa Fishbone Diagram - Draft #3 (15 points)

Organizational System
Provides a detailed description of the specific site or organization where the broader problem is playing out.

- Describe the organizational site that is generating the broad problem in a local setting. Provide detail: mission, demographics, geographic context, and distinguishing features that your reader needs to know to understand how the system might be generating the problem.
- Present and interpret findings from improvement tools (e.g., fishbone diagrams, systems maps, process maps, document analysis). Do not simply insert figures—explain what they mean.
- Reflect on how issues of equity and justice have been addressed, or overlooked, within your organization. Consider not only what efforts, policies, or practices are currently in place, but also where there may be gaps, inconsistencies, or missed opportunities that contribute to your problem of practice. Viewing your organization through an equity lens will help you analyze how its structures, culture, or decision-making either advance or hinder justice.
- Highlight evidence showing how the system is creating or reinforcing the problem.
- Discuss your role, influence, and positionality in relation to the problem.
- End with a clear statement showing how the system generates the problem (e.g., referencing Deming's idea that systems are designed to produce their results).

Statement of the Problem of Practice
Bring together and synthesize the above sections to present a clear statement of a localized, actionable problem of practice in your organization.

- Emphasize the significance, urgency, and feasibility of improving the problem.
- Demonstrate your capacity and positionality to influence change.
- You can use any of the tools from the culmination of courses thus far to demonstrate the urgency of this problem in your organizational system (e.g., SMARTIE goals).

Ishikawa Fishbone Diagram Draft #3
Considering your positionality and your empathy interviews with users (persons affected by the problem), add to your understanding of the problem by adding more root causes in your Ishikawa Fishbone Diagram. Include a summary of revisions/additions/changes made to the third draft that is no more than 2 pages. This draft will be due <u>with</u> your User Description.

Revisions: Revisions of prior sections(s) should be made via track changes.
Page Limit: The final submission should be no more than 15 pages in length, excluding the appendix, references, and fishbone 2-page summary. Please follow APA guidelines.

F. Participation and Attendance (5 points)

Online and in-person activities are planned each week that require students' preparation and participation. As part of a learning community, it is expected that students will come prepared to engage in constructive, respectful, and generous discussions in each class. If you must miss an in-person meeting, you will need to complete a make-up assignment to not lose participation and attendance points. You will receive one point for every class you attend in-person and one point for general participation (i.e., discussion board and in-class participation). Please see the attendance policy in the event you are absent from class.

VIII. Feedback and Grading Procedures:

Feedback:

Feedback is essential for high-quality learning and teaching. We have divided the class into two grading groups. You will have one grading instructor for the duration of the course. We are committed to giving you individual, detailed, and timely feedback so that you can improve your learning on future assignments. Please note assignment descriptions for the type of feedback that students can anticipate. Students can expect to receive instructor feedback online within two weeks of assignment submission. Rosa will grade students with last names A-M, and Rachel will grade students with last names N-Z.

Grading:

A or redo. Grades for assignments will be awarded based on an "A or redo" policy. Specifically, assignments that contain all required parts as outlined in the assignment description in this syllabus will receive an A. If an assignment is missing a required part, or if that part is not completed satisfactorily based on what is described in this syllabus, the assignment will receive a "redo." In this case, the student will need to resubmit the assignment with the requested changes to receive an A. To establish reliability in grading across instructors, instructors will confer with each other and come to an agreement on what is needed prior to awarding a "redo." NOTE: A redo is not necessarily a bad thing! It is a learning opportunity and will not hurt your overall grade once completed. Instructors will collaborate with you to make sure your work meets the criteria for a solid DIPP and sets you up for success.

G grades and I grades. Under certain conditions, you may receive a "G" or an "I" grade for the course. The Graduate Catalog explains the difference between two kinds of Incompletes: the G grade and the I grade as:

G Grade: *The G grade signifies unfinished coursework due to extenuating personal circumstances. Students assigned G grades are required to complete course requirements no later than one year after the term in which the course was taken. After one year has passed, the G grade automatically becomes a non-changeable NG grade (no credit, no impact on grade point average), and the student will be required to re-register for the course.*

I Grade: *The I grade signifies incomplete coursework due to the nature of the course, clinical work, or incomplete research work in individual guidance courses or seminars.*

For this course, a "G" or "I" Grade will be granted only if the student has actively attended to the course requirements but needs extended time to complete the required work to meet minimum expectations. If an Incomplete grade becomes necessary, the instructors will require you to propose a plan of action outlining how you will complete the work within no more than one term from the

end of the course (and preferably a shorter period of time).

Please visit the Pitt Graduate Catalog for the University's grading policy for graduate courses.

IX. Course Format: Hybrid

A hybrid course is not a reduced-time course. According to the University's definition of a credit hour, a one-credit course should have 14 contact hours, where a contact hour is 50 minutes of instruction. Thus a three-credit course should have 2100 minutes of instruction (50 minutes/hour x 14 hours x 3 credits = 42 hours).

X. Policies

Attendance
Regular and prompt attendance at the Saturday class sessions is expected and is essential to the educational experience in the EdD program. Each course meets only four times, so missing one session constitutes a significant portion of face-to face interaction with instructors and peers. Working professionals may find themselves in a circumstance that causes them to miss a class meeting. Exceptions may be made for a required **work-related commitment, illness, or valid emergency**. In such cases, students need to contact the course instructor and be prepared to complete the make-up assignment that is in Canvas.

If you are going to be absent for class because of a required work-related commitment, illness or valid emergency, please follow these instructions:
1. Email the course instructor(s) and your advisor with the reason for missing the class.
2. Complete the course or instructor specific make up requirements for missed classes prior to the next class meeting.
3. Adhere to the acceptable reasons for missing class outlined in the policy above. Please note that they do not include vacation and/or personal events.

Statement on Classroom Recording
To ensure the free and open discussion of ideas, students may not record classroom lectures, discussion and/or activities without the advance written permission of the instructor, and any such recording properly approved in advance can be used solely for the student's own private use.

Disability Services
If you have a disability for which you are or may be requesting an accommodation, you are encouraged to contact both the instructor and Disability Resources and Services (DRS), 140 William Pitt Union, (412) 648---7890, drsrecep@pitt.edu. (412) 228---5347 for P3 ASL users, as early as possible in the term. DRS will verify your disability and determine reasonable accommodations for these courses.

Inclement Weather Policy
Only the Chancellor may officially close the Pittsburgh campus of the University. The University will remain open in all but the most extreme circumstances. Cancellation of classes ***does not imply*** that the University is closed.

The University offers an Emergency Notification Service (ENS) which is used to communicate with subscribers through voice, text, and email messages, as deemed appropriate in the event of an emergency. For instructions on how to register, please refer to CSSD's website: http://technology.pitt.edu/services/emergency-notification-service. Any changes to normal University operations will be announced as early as possible through the ENS, the University's official website (www.pitt.edu), Twitter (@PittTweet), and local news media outlets.

Academic Integrity Guidelines
All students are expected to adhere to the standards of academic honesty. Any student engaged in cheating, plagiarism, or other acts of academic dishonesty are subject to disciplinary action. Any student suspected of violating this obligation for any reason during the semester will be required to participate in the procedural process, initiated at the instructor level, as outlined in the School of Education Academic Integrity Policy. Please read the policy carefully, including the rights and responsibilities of faculty and students.

Departmental Grievance Procedures
The purpose of grievance procedures is to ensure the rights and responsibilities of faculty and students in their relationships with each other. When a student in EFOP believes that a faculty member has not met his or her obligations (as an instructor or in another capacity) as described in the Academic Integrity Guidelines, the student should follow the procedure described in the Guidelines by (1) first trying to resolve the matter with the faculty member directly; (2) then, if needed, attempting to resolve the matter through conversations with the chair/associate chair of the department; (3) if needed, next talking to the associate dean of the school; and (4) if needed, filing a written statement of charges with the school-level academic integrity officer.

Federal and State Background Checks and Clearances
All SOE students are now required to have federal and state child protection clearances on file if they are working with or observing children as part of any university class or requirement. See how students can get their clearances.

Email Communications
Email directly from Canvas or your *Pitt* email. We do not answer emails that are not from a pitt.edu address. Tell us who you are and help us figure out what you need: In the subject line, it helps if you mention what you need, so we can look it up and respond faster. Pitt email addresses are often unidentifiable, so please sign all emails with your name.

To set up an individual meeting, feel free to arrange a phone, Zoom, or in-person appointment. See contact info on the first page for how to arrange a meeting with each instructor.

Emergencies
Do you have Pitt Police saved on your mobile phone? 911 works, or Pitt Police, 412-624-2121

Disability Services
If you have a disability that requires special testing accommodations or other classroom modifications, you need to notify both the instructor and Disability Resources and Services no later than the second week of the term. You may be asked to provide documentation of your disability to determine the appropriateness of accommodations. To notify Disability Resources and Services, call (412) 648-7890

(Voice or TTD) to schedule an appointment. The Disability Resources and Services office is located at 140 William Pitt Union on the Oakland campus.

Student Mental Health
The Counseling Center is located in the Wellness Center in Nordenberg Hall:
https://www.studentaffairs.pitt.edu/cc/ Call **412-648-7930** any time.
For Sexual Assault Response: 412-648-7856
For additional community resources: https://www.studentaffairs.pitt.edu/cars/community-resources/
Faculty and Staff Guide for Helping Distressed Student

Ethical Use of Generative AI
Intellectual integrity is vital to an academic community and for my fair evaluation of your work. All work completed and/or submitted in this course must be your own, completed in accordance with the University's Guidelines on Academic Integrity. You may choose to use AI tools to help brainstorm assignments or projects, or to revise existing work you have written. As a new and rapidly evolving tool that will powerfully affect education and most other social and cultural domains, generative AI presents fundamental concerns about how AI tools can or ought to be used. As those concerns develop and as ways of addressing them emerge and change in turn, we will all need to pivot frequently and reassess how we use those tools. An uncritical use of generative AI tools – one that assumes that AI-generated material is always correct, accurate, fair, and unbiased, for example –can be harmful. Source: University Center for Teaching and Learning