

**The College of New Jersey -- Regional Training Center
MASTERS PROGRAM in INSTRUCTION**

**CLASSROOM ACTION RESEARCH CORE:
COURSE OVERVIEW**

The TCNJ – RTC Masters in Instruction program is structured around a three-course sequence of linked classes that introduce practicing teachers to the growing field of “teacher research,” also known as “action research” or “classroom inquiry.” According to Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1993), teacher research is “*systematic, intentional inquiry by teachers about their own classroom and school practices.*” -1

The three courses are to be taken sequentially, spaced at beginning, middle and near-end points of the larger instructional program, at intervals determined by the student. The three research courses draw upon other RTC courses, as well as students’ experience, for project ideas and inspiration. Collectively, the research courses introduce students to an exploration of the theory, history, and practice of teacher research before guiding students through the development of their own teacher research project.

Over the course of the three research core classes, students will complete a personal teacher research project of their own design, based on their own emerging questions about teaching. The final project has two main components: 1) A paper that documents the students’ action research project and 2) a final presentation. The presentation is parallel to a “poster session,” often seen at professional conferences. The presentation will be part of a culminating event to which select members of the TCNJ and RTC communities (such as course professors and other students) may be invited. The following is a brief overview of the work and concept of the three courses.

COURSE I. EXPLORATION OF CLASSROOM INQUIRY (EDUC 510)

It is suggested that this initial course be taken early in the students’ program. Through readings, in-class discussions and class assignments, the course addresses several basic questions about teacher research from both practical and theoretical perspectives. The exploration is framed by 4 central questions:

- *What is “teacher research” and what does teacher research look like?*
- *What is the history and philosophy of teacher research as a field?*
- *What are the critical features of teacher research?*
- *How might I begin to prepare to do my own teacher research project?*

Class work will incorporate reading, reflective writing, student discussion, lecture and presentation as a way of enriching the students’ understanding of the role and use of teacher research. Learning goals for the course include:

- Exploration and evaluation of major examples of classroom and teacher research theory and practice
- Examination of assumptions and beliefs about teaching and their relationship to student learning, teacher knowledge, education reform and school culture.

Note: Unlike other RTC courses, this course is taught in alternative formats that may involve class work over three non-consecutive weekends or five non-consecutive days.

COURSE II. MODES OF INQUIRY and RESEARCH (EDUC 601)

This second course is designed to be taken approximately mid-way through the program of studies. The course focuses on the development and implementation of

research questions, guiding students through the initial phases of teacher research including problem statement, research design, data collection activities and literature review. The guiding question of the course is “*How do I do teacher research?*”

As such, this course focuses on the skills, methods, techniques and understandings required for students to develop their own personal teacher research project. A major requirement of the course is the development of a realistic, workable teacher research action plan that students will implement. The course work carries over into the subsequent third course. A variety of research methods and designs will be explored within a collaborative learning model. Students should expect to work closely with other students in developing research questions and action plans. The course is designed to be taught over two, non-consecutive weekends. Assignments are designed to assist the students in completion of research projects. Learning goals include:

- Understanding of relationship between research questions and methodology
- Development of a research question and action plan for classroom inquiry-based study that students will conduct in their own school settings
- Development of personal and critical research skills as teacher researcher and leader

COURSE III. INQUIRY IN PRACTICE (EDUC 602)

This third course is recommended as students approach program completion, although may register after completing EDUC 601 (above). This course involves the completion of the research project previously developed in EDUC 601. The course also includes a forum for student presentation of results and knowledge emerging from the teacher research project. A central question for this course is “*How do I implement and share the findings and knowledge related to my research project?*” Answers to such questions will depend on each student’s teaching contexts.

Although the course functions similar to an independent study, it also includes both collaborative group work (done outside of class) and two whole-class meetings with instructor to address common questions about data analysis and research writing. Schedules are arranged between instructor and students. Although students progress at their own pace, a cohort model is encouraged whenever possible and practical.

Culminating assignments include a paper that documents each student’s research project and process combined with a presentation of their project highlights. The presentation should focus on implications for practice as well as new insights acquired by the student. Learning goals include:

- Preparation of a professional quality piece of classroom-based research
- Development of a “Poster Session” presentation of research project
- Examination of the practical implications of research on multiple levels; classroom-wide, school-wide and systemic.

-1 Cochran-Smith, M. & Lytle, S. (1993) Inside/Outside: Teacher Research and Knowledge New York City: Teachers College Press.