

Culminating Experience
Masters Degree in Curriculum & Instruction (M. Ed.)
Reading Specialist / Literacy Education / Children's & Young Adult Literature

The Culminating Experience in Curriculum and Instruction for a Master's Degree with emphasis concentrations in Literacy Education, Children's and Young Adult Literature, and Reading Specialist is designed to provide degree candidates the opportunity to demonstrate competence and understanding in the theories, practices, and knowledge base in the field of Literacy Education. Candidates also provide evidence of their understandings of significant theoretical concepts in literacy education, educational theory, educational research, and instructional practices consistent with the Master's Degree in Curriculum and Instruction. The final portfolio should be an example of the candidate's best writing. It should be relatively error-free, grammatically appropriate, well organized and reflect a strong commitment to the Masters in Curriculum & Instruction Program at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas.

Purposes for the Culminating Experience:

- To synthesize knowledge, theories and experiences learned in the program
- To connect this synthesis to teaching practice/educational contexts
- To situate the synthesis in professional literature
- To communicate learning and connections through professional writing and/or other media
- To demonstrate the candidate's ability to write, think, discuss, and organize educational theories and practices in a coherent presentation of their learning and experiences

General Guidelines

- The artifacts and writing in the Culminating Experience must be your own work and representative of your personal efforts. Be sure to familiarize yourself with the UNLV Policy on Student Conduct and Integrity at: <http://studentlife.unlv.edu/judicial/integrity.html>
- Proofreading and copyediting are recommended; this is a professional document.
- The artifacts that you select, your directed learning experience and philosophy statement need to address the five IRA Standards for a Reading Professional Professionals (2003). A PDF copy of these standards may be viewed on the IRA website at: <http://www.reading.org/General/CurrentResearch/Standards/ProfessionalStandards.aspx>
- A booklet that contains the standards is available for purchase at: http://marketplace.reading.org/products/IRA_AddProdToCart.cfm?number=545

Degree candidates will construct a portfolio that consists of the following components organized into separate sections in a binder or as part of an electronic portfolio:

1. Introduction and Table of Contents
2. Teaching Philosophy / Platform Statement
3. Learning Artifacts & Reflections
4. Directed Learning Experience (take home question)
5. Final Reflection

1. Introduction

The introduction allows readers / evaluators to understand the constituent components of the portfolio. It serves as a "road map" for the readers / evaluators to locate and evaluate essential components of the Culminating Experience. It is your responsibility to organize materials so that evaluators can easily navigate the contents of the portfolio, and find the required materials and associated reflections.

Introductory Materials

- Table of contents
- Biographical information: Name, email, degree concentration
- A list of courses taken during the Master's Degree Program (Names of courses, not just numbers)
- Academic interests/foci of coursework
- Current educational context (classroom teacher, literacy specialist, graduate assistant, at home, administration, etc.)

2. Teaching Philosophy / Platform Statement

The Philosophy / Platform Statement provides an opportunity for you to articulate your philosophy as it pertains to teaching, learning, and curriculum with a particular focus on literacy education. It allows you to articulate the kinds of teaching you envision in the classrooms and the theoretical philosophies that support such teaching. The 3-5 page Philosophy / Platform Statement must incorporate:

- A minimum of **three** learning and / or literary theories addressed in the master’s program that have influenced your philosophy of literacy, teaching and learning (references required).
- References (5 or more to support your philosophical beliefs) used in the statement should be “scholarly” references and theories citing research to support your assertions.
- A discussion of how these theories align with your philosophy of teaching and learning as well as with your vision of an optimal learning environment and instructional practices related to literacy (either as it exists now in your professional context or as you would like it to exist).
- A discussion of what you see as “next steps” for yourself as a professional as a result of having completed your master’s program. You have the opportunity to explain what your preferred vision of literacy teaching looks like through this statement.

Please read and consider the following as you prepare the Philosophy / Platform Statement:

1. Name a minimum of three theorists (and their theories) that you have read and discussed in your degree program; explain how these theories have affected your thinking and instructional practices.
2. How is your classroom organized, and what theories helped you with this organization?
3. What does it mean to be “literate,” and what can teachers do to enhance students’ literacy development?
4. What constitutes “best practices” in reading and writing instruction and how do you support these practices in your classroom or instructional environment?

3. Learning Artifacts and Reflections

Select a minimum of **eight to ten (8-10) artifacts** that represent your learning throughout the master’s program, with particular reference to the *International Reading Association Standards for Reading Professionals* (2003). For each Learning Artifact include a summative reflection that ties it to the IRA standard(s) and to yourself as a learner and teacher.

The IRA Standards for Reading Professionals are organized into the following categories

1. Foundational Knowledge
2. Instructional Strategies and Curriculum materials
3. Assessment, Diagnosis, and Evaluation
4. Creating a Literate Environment
5. Professional Development

The artifacts you select can be taken from course work completed during your program at UNLV. They should represent a variety of courses that showcase a full range of experiences from your master’s program and may reflect classroom/professional implementation. Organize the collected artifacts to address each and every IRA Standard, and demonstrate the connections between artifacts and IRA Standards clearly and thoughtfully in the accompanying reflection.

NOTE: Please be sure to maintain the anonymity of students whose work you include as an artifact (e.g., Case Report, work samples, testing protocols, etc.).

The **summative reflection** attached to each artifact should incorporate the following:

- Label/title of the artifact(s)
- IRA Standard(s) and Element(s) addressed (include the **text** of these standards/elements, not just the number(s) of the standard)
- Explain why this artifact was selected
- Explain how this artifact demonstrates your understanding and competence related to the selected IRA Standard
- Explain what this artifact demonstrates about you as a learner and teacher

Each artifact selected will be evaluated based on its alignment with the *IRA Standards for Reading Professionals* and the quality of the reflection attached. Be sure to make your case for including each artifact and explain its relation to the IRA Standards.

4. Directed Learning Experience / Essay question

The Directed Learning Experience is designed to allow you to demonstrate your ability to conduct and evaluate research through an in-depth focus on a particular area of literacy theory and pedagogy and to communicate that learning to a professional audience. Please consult with your advisor regarding which question you select. While outside readers may comment on your grammar, organization and spelling, this response must be conceived, researched, organized and written by you with no outside support or direction.

NOTE: Approval concerning which question you select needs to occur **BEFORE** proceeding with the portfolio. *You do not need to encase each page in plastic!*

Write an extended written response to one of the nine (9) established questions or to a question created in consultation with your primary advisor. The response MUST:

- articulate a blend of contemporary and relevant educational theories and research-based instructional practices;
- relate to the context of your classroom teaching, if applicable, to support your answers and the implications you describe for classroom teaching;
- include references (minimum of 8 references) to appropriate scholarly research and authorities in the field of literacy education;
- contain a minimum of 12 pages, double spaced, 12 point font ; and
- demonstrate the candidate's ability to use conventions of professional writing (i.e., use of APA style, organizational features, and correct spelling and grammar).

5. Final Reflection

The final reflection is designed to provide an opportunity for you to discuss the impact of reflecting on your experiences in the Literacy Masters Program and the experience of putting together the portfolio for this Culminating Experience. In your reflection, please address the following areas:

- How have the courses completed during your program of study and the associated learning experiences impacted your teaching and learning as a literacy professional? You may also want to address the impact of your program on your future plans as a literacy professional.
- What have you learned about yourself as a learner and about the teaching of literacy as a result of developing the portfolio?

The Evaluation Rubric available at: <http://ci.unlv.edu/files/content/literacy/rubric.pdf>

The Culminating Experience will be evaluated using a rubric that addresses the following six areas:

1. Theory into Practice
2. Professional Philosophy
3. Conduct and Evaluate Research
4. Content and Pedagogical Knowledge
5. Professional Standard Knowledge
6. Presentation and Format

Your portfolio will be read initially by a Literacy Faculty member (in most cases your advisor). In addition, a second faculty member will serve as outside reader if necessary. You may choose to construct your portfolio in notebook form or electronically (on a CD or web-based).

Due Dates are Fall: Nov. 1; Spring: April 1; and Summer: July 1.

Visit <http://ci.unlv.edu/content/literacy> for more information.

Portfolios submitted AFTER the posted date WILL NOT be accepted. Candidates not submitting their culminating experiences by the established dates will be required to register for CIL 715 Culminating Experience in Literacy again the following semester.

Established Questions for Directed Learning Experience / Essay

Question #1: Focus on Early Literacy

In recent years, there has been a renewed focus on early literacy instruction, due in part to the infusion of federal funds and reviews of research, for example the Report of the National Reading Panel. Briefly describe key aspects of a developmentally appropriate program in early literacy. What does research suggest that children need in order to read and write? What are some practices that have been found to be effective in supporting early literacy development? Describe ways that these instructional practices can be adapted to meet the needs of all learners, including English Language Learners throughout primary grade classrooms.

Question #2: Focus on Classroom-Based Assessment

Your principal has just escorted a new student into your already over-crowded classroom. It is apparent that there are no records available at this time. Thus, you will need to make some decisions about how to assess this student so that you can provide appropriate instruction. What will you do and why? In developing your explanation, begin by providing pertinent information about the child (you may choose the grade level and provide a pseudonym and approximate age). Describe the various assessments you will use within the next week or so to come to understand the student's strengths and areas of need in reading and writing. Provide a brief description of the purpose for each assessment you choose, along with a research-based rationale for its use. Be sure to explain the pros and cons of the various assessments selected. Finally, describe how each assessment will inform your instructional decisions for this student as an individual and within small group and whole class settings.

Question #3: Focus on Writing and Writing Instruction

Given the increasing demands on teachers to expand the curriculum and prepare students with increasing breadth and depth, it is easy to understand why writing often takes a back seat and has been referred to as "The Neglected R." Make a case for "why writing matters" as a part of classroom practice. Assume that your principal has asked you to provide a well-articulated rationale to other teachers at your school to support a greater focus on writing. In addition to building a research-based rationale for writing, your response should include, but not be limited to, the following: 1) What are effective practices that support the teaching of writing at your particular grade level or teaching context?, 2) What assessment tools support the development of writing? and 3) What are effective strategies for using writing in all content areas?

Question #4: Focus on the Role of the Reading and Literacy Specialist

Because you are a knowledgeable literacy leader in your school, your principal has asked you to help a group of teachers learn more about effective instruction in an area of literacy. Write a detailed response to the following questions, assuming that you are reassigned from classroom duties for three months. Cite references throughout your response.

- Select an area of literacy that will be the focus of the staff development. Who are the experts that the teachers should know? What are some of the key studies that form the knowledge base for this area?
- Given the length of time you have been to work with the teachers, what are your goals for the staff development?
- A group of teachers has volunteered to be highly involved in the staff development. What information about the teachers will you need for planning staff development? How will you obtain this information?
- Identify 3 forms of staff development and explain how you will incorporate each into your overall staff development plan.

Question #5: Focus on Workshop Approaches to Reading Instruction

Workshop approaches to reading instruction have proliferated literacy educational journals and professional development materials for the past two decades. Explain the theoretical foundations for a workshop approach to reading instruction and how this differs from a traditional transmission-style classroom, citing research and educational theorists to support your statements. How might a workshop approach to reading instruction operate in your classroom? How does a workshop approach support diverse students' needs, interests, and abilities across grade levels? Discuss the various ways of organizing for reading instruction, components of a reading workshop, aspects of a literate environment, and roles of the teacher and students in this instructional framework.

Question #6: Focus on Reader Response Theories and Pedagogies

For several decades, reader response theories have been used to support a student-centered approach to literature study and discussions. Although there are numerous iterations of this theory, there are some concepts central to its framework. Discuss the basic tenets of reader response theory using particular theorists to support your statements. How does reader response theory affect reading pedagogical approaches? Describe how reading instructional approaches based on reader response theories might look in your classroom. What are the challenges for assessing reading comprehension from this theoretical framework?

Question #7: Focus on the Foundations of Literacy and Literacy Pedagogies

Select and describe a specific literacy practice, policy, or issue that currently affects literacy education in your local educational context (school, classroom, district, state). Trace its political, philosophical and theoretical foundations in the broader contemporary discourse of literacy education. Explain how the historical, political and philosophical foundations have led to the practices enacted in contemporary classrooms.

Question #8: Focus on Content Area Literacies in Middle and High School Classrooms

The field of content area literacy began with a relatively narrow focus on ways to improve students' understanding of texts through vocabulary, comprehension, and study strategies. In its present form, content area literacy has broadened this original focus to include expanded notions of text, including print and non-print media (e.g. film, music, and art), as well as more complex renderings of adolescence. In your response to this question:

- Describe the ways in which this expanded view of content area literacy plays out in your classroom
- Include in your response, contemporary theories and authorities that support your teaching within and across subject matter domains
- Indicate those policies (local and national) that support or inhibit your efforts to move your content area teaching into a contemporary framework

Question #9: Focus on Content Area Literacies in Elementary Classrooms

Content area literacy has, in the past, been the domain of middle and secondary classrooms. However, students in elementary multiple subjects also encounter complex texts, including traditional textbooks and Internet material. As an elementary teacher, how do you go about scaffolding students' reading of challenging text material? In your response to this question:

- Include contemporary theories and authorities that support your teaching within and across subject domains
- Indicate those policies (local and national) that support or inhibit your efforts to move your content area teaching into a contemporary framework