EDU 670 Inquiry into Practice I: Developing a Theory of Action
Fall 2025 Syllabus
3 units

COURSE BASICS

Class Meeting Dates (4-6pm PST, Zoom):   8/19, 9/2, 9/16, 9/30, 10/14, 10/28
Small Group Meeting Dates (4-5:30pm PST):   8/28, 9/11, 9/25*, 10/9*, 10/23
                                            *Coaches joining small groups

Instructor:

- David Trautman, Ed.M., dtrautman@hthgse.edu, (978) 387-9534
  - **Office Hours**: Tuesdays, 3:00pm-4:00pm PST
  - **Schedule on Google Calendar** 48 hours in advance

COURSE DESCRIPTION

For the capstone project for the Master's Program, GSE students engage in an ***equity focused leadership improvement project as a way of developing their capacity to serve as leaders for learning in their settings.***

In this course, students develop an *understanding of the principles and tools of human-centered design and continuous improvement* as frameworks for collaborating with colleagues, students, families, and other stakeholders to disrupt predictable patterns of success and failure, and meaningfully and measurably improve teaching and learning. Students *collaborate with colleagues and students* to more fully understand the system/context in which they work and identify an *authentic "felt need" to address and assets to build upon.* They then critically examine relevant research/theory and apply the tools of human-centered design and continuous improvement to:
- gain a *deeper understanding of the root causes* contributing to the issue
- construct a *preliminary theory of action* for moving forward with colleagues and students

In the process, they *engage colleagues and students as collaborators* to develop a shared vision for the project moving forward. Emphasis will be placed on exploring service leadership, learning from diverse users/perspectives, seeing the system, and communicating a vision/ideas clearly.

Students will synthesize and document their work through a written product that outlines their understanding of the issue (details on p. 4-5). The course will culminate in a Presentation of Learning with community stakeholders (colleagues and students and/or families from their school site who will be partners in the work), graduate peers, and the school School Leader/Leader from the student's school site.

Essential Questions

- How might we identify "felt needs" in our communities and use the tools of human-centered design and continuous improvement to collaborate with colleagues, students and families in our efforts to disrupt predictable patterns of success and failure, as well as meaningfully and measurably improve teaching and learning?

- How might we draw on relevant research, craft knowledge and our understanding of the systems in which we work to understand an issue/opportunity and develop a theory of action for creating more equitable, engaging environments for young people and adults?

Learning Outcomes

HTH GSE is committed to developing reflective practitioner leaders who work effectively with colleagues and communities to create and sustain innovative, authentic, rigorous learning environments for *all* students. This shared vision is articulated in our Institutional Learning Outcomes for all HTH GSE students—to *Practice Thoughtful Inquiry and Reflection, Design Equitable Learning Environments*, and *Engage in Leadership for School Change*. Through this course, students will be supported in completing the first stage of the Master's Capstone Project, which serves as a signature assignment for assessing "advanced treatment" of the program learning outcomes italicized below.

Transform Self and Systems (TSS)
1. **Examined Leadership :** Develop a greater understanding of yourself as a leader and a learner by deepening self-awareness, furthering the ownership of the self, and activating courageous leadership.
2. **System Leadership:** Continuously improve teaching and learning that advances equity through root-cause analysis and alignment of system-wide teams and structures.

Design for Liberation and Deeper Learning (LDL)
1. **Pedagogy:** Collaborate with students and colleagues to design learning grounded in deeper learning pedagogy that advances equity and collective advancement.
2. **Instructional Leadership:** Create coherent instructional systems through coaching and adult learning to foster a visible pedagogical culture.

Practice Thoughtful Inquiry & Reflection (IR)
1. **Inquiry and Iteration:** Design, implement and reflect on the results of inquiries to address authentic needs and essential questions from practice.
2. **Connecting Theory & Practice:** Synthesize and connect relevant theory and scholarship to one's own practice and inquiries.

The curriculum for this course is based on the above essential questions and program learning outcomes, as well as a corresponding set of course-level learning outcomes, activities and products. Together, they represent the knowledge, skills, and dispositions for this course.

Course Learning Outcomes mapped to program learning outcomes	**Activities/Products**

IR 1: Inquiry and Iteration: Design, implement and reflect on the results of inquiries to address authentic needs and essential questions from practice.	Feedback on progress from peers, instructors, and community; Final Paper
IR 2: Connecting Theory & Practice: Synthesize and connect relevant theory and scholarship to one's own practice and inquiries.	Annotated Bibliography; Final Paper
TSS 1: Examined Leadership: Develop a greater understanding of yourself as a leader and a learner by deepening self-awareness, furthering the ownership of the self, and activating courageous leadership.	Exploration of liberatory design + positionality; Final Paper

COURSE TEXTS

You will need to acquire access to the following three texts for this course.

1. Hinnant-Crawford, B. N. (2020). *Improvement science in education: A primer.* Myers Education Press.
2. Safir, S. & Dugan, J. (2021). *Street data: A next-generation model for equity, pedagogy, and school transformation.* Corwin.

COURSE ASSIGNMENTS AND ACTIVITIES

In general, weekly you should expect to engage in **approximately 6-8 hours of work outside of class,** including reading, fieldwork. analysis/writing (journaling, fieldwork notes, synthesis of literature), meeting with your small group, and providing feedback on peers' work.

Weekly Activities

Readings
Readings indicated in the course syllabus should be completed **prior to the following class** (e.g. the readings listed in the Class 1 Action Items should be completed by Class 2).

Individual Action Items (Fieldwork, Writing, Feedback)
Individual actions listed in the syllabus should be completed either by the following class *OR* by the date indicated in red. Action Items in purple should be scheduled as far in advance as possible (this is a fast-paced course). Each week, you should be engaging with academic research, adding 1-2 resources to your annotated bibliography, and preparing for your small group time (discussed below).

Small Group
Based on your leadership improvement project focus you will be placed in small groups with whom you will meet weekly in and out of class. With the exception of some extended sessions noted in the syllabus, small groups (composed of your small group) should plan to meet for 60-90 minutes, ___**on off-week Thursdays at 4:00pm PST**___. You are expected to come to your small group meetings prepared to share 2 academic articles related to your research and that week's theme. You are welcome and encouraged to include your team members' articles in your own annotated bibliography where applicable.

Final Projects

Annotated Bibliography
In addition to the assigned readings, you will conduct your own research related to your focus of practice for your project and create an ***annotated bibliography*** to document your learning and take-aways from your

research. An annotated bibliography is an alphabetical list of citations with an additional description or evaluation (i.e., annotation) for each source. Each annotation should be concise and well written, so that it is useful to you and to others. In total, by the end of summer term, your annotated bibliography should contain at least 10 citations from articles and book chapters you have read related to your topic. The citations should represent a diversity of authors (consider gender, race, academic orientation, etc.) and provide multiple (and sometimes conflicting) perspectives on the topic. For more information on accessing academic resources, please see this document.

For each annotation, we recommend 1-2 paragraphs (200-400 words)(example 1, example 2) that include the following:
- *APA citations of the source*
- *Summary:* What are the central ideas from this text? What is the purpose of the text? What does the author want you to know? Who is the intended audience?
- *Relevance:* How might this work inform your research/practice? What quotes stand out to you?
- *Comparison*: Compare or contrast this work with another you have cited; **this is an opportunity to inform (or write!) the literature review section of your final paper.**

Theory of Action
The final product for this course will be a written ***Theory of Action*** which includes a discussion of the issue/focus of practice, the root causes to address and assets to build upon, and an initial theory of action (*Rubric*; Sample Paper). This work should be deeply grounded in the voices of those engaged with and impacted by your project. This paper serves as a formative assessment of IR1, IR2, and IR3 and contains the sections outlined below. **All lengths below are *maximums*. Work that exceeds page limits will be returned to the student to be revised and submitted.**

- *Issue/Focus of Practice* (1-2 paragraphs): *What is the equity issue you want to improve (your "problem of practice"? Why is this a significant "felt" need in your school/classroom context, and more broadly? What relevant information is important to know about your context to understand this issue?*
    - Provide a clear problem statement, why it matters to the context, and how this work will enhance equity for students in the organization.
    - Briefly present any background information on the school/context relevant to the focus of practice. This may include the school's philosophical approach, location, faculty, and student demographics (i.e. total enrollment, % FRL, ethnic breakdown, ELL, SPED, gender, etc.).

- *Root Cause Analysis* (1 page plus Fishbone): *What are you learning about the issue from digging into the research literature, talking with living resources, and learning from people in your system?*
    - Discuss the root causes—both local and at play in the broader education community—contributing to the issue in your context. Integrate quotes and data where appropriate, and includes visual thinking tools/artifacts (i.e. fishbone diagram) that articulate current understanding.
    - Draws on relevant scholarly literature by carefully and succinctly synthesizing the annotated bibliography. Includes *at least* 8 scholarly citations.
    - Present multiple and divergent perspectives on the issue at hand, and at least one relevant counterargument.

- *Preliminary Theory of Action* (1 page plus Driver Diagram): *What is the aim for this work? What is your theory of action for achieving the aim? Who will you engage in this work? How will you know if you are making progress?*

- Discuss a clear aim that is actionable and appropriate for the scope of the project that addresses what is to be improved, for whom, and by when.
- Provide a driver diagram, including primary and secondary drivers, and uses it to clearly articulate a course of action
- Identify and provide a research-base and rationale for high-leverage change ideas to test/refine. Includes *at least* 2 scholarly citations and/or stakeholder-rooted justifications.
- Describe the sources informing the change ideas and initial theory of action, including consultation with colleagues and other living resources, and best practice examples from other contexts. Incorporate the voices of *at least* two different stakeholders through quotation or paraphrasing.
- Discuss how you have practiced leadership by working with *collaborators and allies* within their context to develop the theory of action so far and how you will make the work meaningful and manageable for them moving forward

- *Positionality* (1 paragraph *or* embedded): *How have elements of your personal or professional identity shaped the work? In what ways have you mitigated this to center the experiences of those most impacted by the work?*
  - Discuss how their personal and/or professional identity has shaped the work, including how this may impact how stakeholders and collaborators engage in the work
  - Discuss what steps they took to ensure that the experiences of those most impacted by the proposed project were centered

- *Annotated Bibliography* (at least 10 citations in APA format). The sources should be high-quality and varied, drawing upon seminal texts, recent research/theory, and craft knowledge. As a set, they should represent multiple (and sometimes conflicting) perspectives on the issue.

Presentation of Learning

This Presentation of Learning (POL) will take the form of an Expert Convening within your community. It is an opportunity to "truth test" your understanding of the problem and your preliminary theory of action with people within and beyond your context. It is also a chance to get help thinking through your draft set of measures and ideas for collecting/analyzing data. To that end, you will be asked to prepare a ***5-7 minute presentation*** that articulates the following:

1. The issue and what you've learned about the root causes (fishbone diagram) and assets to build on
2. The aim and preliminary theory of action (driver diagram)
3. A dilemma question you would like to pose for discussion and feedback

Please invite your **school leader**, your **small group** members, and at **least two additional community stakeholders** and **students** from your school site who will be partners in your work. You also need to invite your HTH advisor. POLs need to be recorded and uploaded to Google Classroom.

In our last session, you will be sharing reflections of your POL with the entire class.

Expectations and Assessment

Assessment in this course is discourse-based, combining reflection, peer critique, and instructor response. Final projects and overall course participation are assessed in a "student-led comment" format, where the participant presents a self-assessment and the instructor responds. Contributions to the forum are not assessed formally, but are assessed for completion and serve as an essential component of the ongoing dialogue with peers and the instructor. The instructors recognize that assessment is a two-way street and

invite critique on the course content and process through exit cards following each session and in a course evaluation at the end.

The effectiveness of our learning community depends upon each person's consistent and thoughtful participation. GSE courses are pass/fail. Rather than focusing on grades, we will strive to create our best work. The learning process throughout will be supported through conversation, critique, and multiple opportunities for revision. We will create work that is worth doing and worth sharing, often discussing the idea of the audience and how to make a broader impact on the educational community. Each student's participation in this course will be assessed in accordance with the following criteria:

Pass

Student's class participation and outside work reflect professionalism, effort, and dedication; readings and assignments are completed on time. In order to earn a passing grade, students must achieve the learning outcomes stated on the second page. The final product must "meet" or "exceed" the criteria stated on the rubric and students will be required to revise their work if they "approach" the criteria. Students attend **every** class session, providing advance notice in the event of unavoidable absence and making up for missed work in a timely manner, as approved by the instructor.

Fail

The student makes little to no progress toward completing course assignments, and fails to achieve the learning outcomes for the course. Assignments are missing, or class participation and/or outside work are below average. The final product is missing, incomplete, or fails to meet the assignment parameters and/or the standards set by the class. As stated in the GSE catalog, if a candidate misses more than 20% of a course (in 12 weeks this is equivalent to more than one class), she/he will be required to take the course the following year. In extreme cases, please talk to the instructors if you must miss class or need an extension.

Credit Hours

This is a 3 credit course (12 consecutive weeks). Each credit represents 45 hours of learning, for 135 total hours. There will be 12 hours of face-to-face instruction, approximately 72 hours of assigned out-of-class work, and an additional 51 hours of fieldwork, research, writing, and final product preparation.

Course Schedule and Action Items

Class Meeting Dates (4-6pm PST, Zoom): 8/19, 9/2, 9/16, 9/30, 10/14, 10/28
Small Group Meeting Dates (4-5:30pm PST): 8/28, 9/11, 9/25*, 10/9*, 10/23
*Coaches joining small groups

Class	Student Action Items	Instructor Action Items

0: Prework	**Readings** [Pre-readings are all linked on Google Classroom in case your books haven't arrived yet]
	☐ Hinnant-Crawford, Ch. 1 + 2
	☐ Safir & Dugan, Ch. 1 + 2
	☐ Schwartz (2018)
	☐ Course Syllabus
	☐ Final Paper Rubric
	
	Individual Actions
	☐ Presurvey (due Aug 14, 2025)
	☐ Mark class and small group dates on your calendar
	☐ Watch ERIC video
	☐ Using (and citing) the course materials you read, write one to two paragraphs answering the following questions and submit to Google Classroom (due Aug 18, 2025):
	    ☐ What is improvement science?
	    ☐ and how will it help <u>you</u> achieve the change you want to see?
		Review
		☐ Survey Results
		
		Assign
		☐ Small groups based on equity Problems of Practice

1: Course Overview Aug. 19, 2025	**Reading** *Prior to small group meeting on August 28, 2025:* ☐ Hinnant-Crawford, Epilogue ☐ hooks, Ch. 11 (on Google Classroom) ☐ Dave Positionality Statement *Prior to class on September 2nd, 2025:* ☐ Toldson, Ch. 1 (on Google Classroom) ☐ Abridged "Sea Change" ☐ Safir & Dugan, Ch. 3-4 ☐ Hinnant-Crawford, Ch. 4-5 **Individual Actions** ☐ Add at least 2 sources to your annotated bibliography ☐ Schedule 1 office hours appointment with Dave (see link at the beginning of the syllabus)	**Review** ☐ Student Feedback ☐ Submission on improvement science ☐ Small Group Notes

	Small Group #1 (August 28, 2025) Goal: Explore positionality as it relates to your practice; discuss HC/Hooks → positionality → look ahead at small group agendas ☐ Complete readings (above) ☐ Come with 2 [academic articles](#) to share/discuss	
2: Liberatory Research and Data Collection Sept., 2nd, 2025	**Reading** *Prior to small group meeting on September 11, 2025:* ☐ None *Prior to class on September 16th, 2025:* ☐ Hinnant-Crawford, Ch. 3 **Individual Actions** ☐ Conduct 4 empathy interviews (at least one student, your [school leader](#) and one [community member](#)) focused on narrowing your understanding of your problem area (due by Sep 16, 2025) ☐ Post a reflection (~2 paragraphs) to Google Classroom on what you have learned from your empathy interviews about your problem of practice and how it reflects an issue of equity by Friday, Sep 19, 2025 ☐ Respond to your small group members' reflections by Monday, Sep 22, 2025 ☐ Add 2 more sources to your annotated bibliography (total: you should have at least 4); Submit to Google Classroom ☐ Watch the [Empathy Interview video](#) (optional) ☐ Schedule your fishbone Truth - Testing (at least 2 stakeholders, ~30 min) during Sep 26, 2025 - Sep 30, 2025 **Small Group #2** (September 11, 2025) Goal: Solidify problem statements and data ☐ Come with 2 [academic articles](#) to share that help define your problem or data collection ☐ Identify 1-2 data points that will be useful for understanding and identifying your equity problem of practice	**Review** ☐ Student Feedback ☐ Small Group Notes
3: Problem Statements and Fishbones	**Reading** *Prior to small group meeting on September 25, 2025:* ☐ None	**Review** ☐ Student Feedback ☐ Empathy Interview

Sept. 16, 2025	*Prior to class on September 30, 2025:* ☐ Hinnant-Crawford, Ch. 6-7 ☐ Safir & Dugan, Ch. 8 **Individual Actions** ☐ Add at least 2 more sources to your annotated bibliography ☐ Respond to your small group members' empathy interview reflections by Friday, Sep 22, 2025 ☐ Truth Test your fishbone diagram with your community (school leader and a community member) between Sep 26, 2025 - Sep 30, 2025 ☐ Schedule a time to consult your school leader on your Driver Diagram between Oct 10, 2025 - Oct 14, 2025 **Small Group #3** (September 25, 2025)* Goal: Complete fishbone diagrams for all small group members (*Coaches joining small groups) ☐ AGENDA	Postings ☐ Small Group Notes **Feedback** ☐ Annotated Bibliography (4 sources)

4: Driver Diagrams and Change Ideas
 	
September 30, 2025
	Reading
	Prior to small group meeting on October 9th, 2025:
	☐ None
	
	Prior to class on October 14th, 2025:
	☐ Hinnant-Crawford, Ch. 8
	
	Individual Actions
	☐ Add at least 2 sources to your annotated bibliography (total: 8 sources)
	☐ Post your first half draft (**rough**) of your Theory of Action (with fishbone) by Tuesday, Oct 7, 2025
	  ○ Issue focus of practice
	  ○ Root cause analysis
	☐ Consult your school leader on your Driver Diagram between Oct 10, 2025 - Oct 14, 2025
	☐ Make sure your Presentation of Learning is scheduled between Oct 15, 2025 - Oct 28, 2025
	
	Small Group #4 (October 9, 2025)*
	Goal: Complete driver diagrams for all small group members (*Coaches joining small groups)
	☐ No pre-work needed
		Review
		☐ Student Feedback
		☐ Empathy Interview Reflections
		☐ Small Group Notes

| 5:
Measurement Workshop

Oct. 14, 2025 | **Reading**
Prior to small group meeting on October 23rd, 2025:
☐ None

Prior to class on October 28th, 2025:
☐ No reading this week!

Individual Actions
☐ Add at least 2 sources to your annotated bibliography
☐ Prepare a complete draft of your Theory of Action (with at least 10 citations) and post to Google Classroom by EOD Sunday, Oct 19, 2025
☐ Conduct your Presentation of Learning with your community stakeholders by Monday, Oct 28, 2025. Record and upload to Google Classroom.
☐ Provide feedback to 1 peer *outside your small group* by Tuesday, Oct 26, 2025
☐ Be prepared to share back on your Presentation of Learning with a focus on how you have practiced leadership by working with *collaborators and allies* within your context to develop the theory of action by Oct 28, 2025

Small Group #5 (October 23, 2025) | **Review**
☐ Student Feedback

Feedback
☐ First Draft of Theory of Action (with fishbone and driver diagram) |
| 6: **Course Reflections and Launching PDSA Cycles**

Oct 28, 2025 | **Reading**
☐ No reading this week!

Individual Actions
☐ Submit your final Theory of Action, Self-Assessment, and Annotated Bibliography (with at least 10 sources) by Nov 1, 2025

Small Group
☐ No small group this week! | **Review**
☐ Student Feedback

Feedback
☐ Final Project
☐ Annotated Bibliography (10 sources) |