**Questions on Wallace & Wray: Getting Started on Critical Reading**

1. How do Wallace and Wray define an argument? Why is evaluating arguments important when reading literature on your topic?
2. How can you evaluate the credibility of an argument?
3. What do Wallace and Wray say about second- and third-hand accounts of research? What will this mean for your own research?
4. Compare the examples of arguments (on the reverse of this page). In the first example, the argument is supported with evidence from one person. The authors say that this is appropriate. In the second example, the argument is based on a study of ten children; however, the authors say that the argument is not warranted. Can you explain why?
5. Wallace and Wray describe what makes an argument convincing. Write a convincing argument relevant to your topic. You may need to do some research to gather evidence.
6. The authors deal with the reliability and credibility of sources used when researching a topic. Where will you find reliable and credible sources? What kind of sources should you avoid? What about basing arguments on common sense and common knowledge? Can you give an example of an academic argument based on common sense and common knowledge?

## Example Argument 1

The following passage comes from a report of research into the quality and extent of training experienced by researchers employed on academic projects.

For example, one practitioner researcher commented that “I think that my TLRP [Teaching and Learning Research Programme] experience was very, very positive. It caused me to reflect back on where I was and to accept that I am really happy in FE [further education], that I don't want to be a lecturer in HE [higher education].” Building research capacity is not just about building the next cohort of professors and senior academics, it can also relate to the building of one's own personal capacity to engage with research and practice.

Source: Fowler, Z., Proctor, R., & Stevens, M. (2008). Mapping the ripples: An evaluation of TLRP's research capacity building strategy. *Teaching and* *Learning Research Briefing, 62*. London: Teaching and Learning Research Programme. [www.tlrp.orgjpub/documents/fowlerRB62final.pdf](http://www.tlrp.orgjpub/documents/fowlerRB62final.pdf)

This passage constitutes one of many arguments in the report. The *claim* is in the final sentence: there is more to building research capacity than just making everyone a top expert; it is also about helping individuals to gauge their own potential and ambitions. The *warranting* is the quote in the first sentence, where a researcher reveals that the research experience resulted in a recognition of what sort of future work would be most comfortable for them. Quoting from a respondent is one kind of *evidence* that can be used in warranting. Since this study entailed on-line surveys with researchers and their project managers, quoting in this way is an appropriate form of evidence.

## Example Argument 2

In the reading test, the five children who were taught to read using phonics performed better overall than the five children taught using the whole word method. This shows that the phonics method is a better choice for schools.

The conclusion is a single claim: “the phonics method is a better choice for schools.” Browning offers research evidence as the warranting for his conclusion: “the five children who were taught to read using phonics performed better overall than the five children taught using the whole word method.” It is unclear how he could justify his claim that the phonics method is best for any school on the basis of this small amount of evidence.