

# Strategies for Increased Understanding: Promoting Active Engagement with Assigned Readings

Presented by Susan E. Elliott-Johns, PhD  
[susanej@nipissingu.ca](mailto:susanej@nipissingu.ca)

Wednesday May 6, 2009  
Opportunities & New Directions Conference (OND), A Research Conference on  
Teaching & Learning  
University of Waterloo

# The Problem

“It is a recurring complaint among faculty that students do not complete their assigned readings or that they read them superficially. Despite the importance of academic reading skills for university success, we seldom teach them the skills as we generally presuppose that students have already acquired them. The reality is that many university students lack academic reading skills and adopt a surface approach to reading...”

Julian Hermida (Algoma U.), STLHE Newsletter, April, 2009.

# Research Literature & References

## (1)

- ▶ Allen, J. (2004). Tools for teaching content literacy. Portland, ME: Stenhouse.
- ▶ Darling-Hammond, L (1996). What matters most: A competent teacher for every child. *Phi delta Kappan*, 78, 193–200.
- ▶ Eanet, M. & Manzo, A. (1976). R.E.A.P. – A strategy for improving reading/writing study skills. *Journal of Reading*, 19, 647–652.

# Research Literature & References

## (2)

- ▶ Keene Oliver, E. (2008). *To understand: New horizons in reading comprehension*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- ▶ L'Allier, S.K., & Elish-Piper, L. (2007). "Walking the walk" with teacher education candidates: Strategies for promoting active engagement with assigned readings. *Journal of Adult & Adolescent Literacy*, 50 (5), 338–353.
- ▶ Neufeld, P. (2005). Comprehension instruction in content area classes. *The Reading Teacher*, 59 (4), 302–312.

# Research Literature & References

## (3)

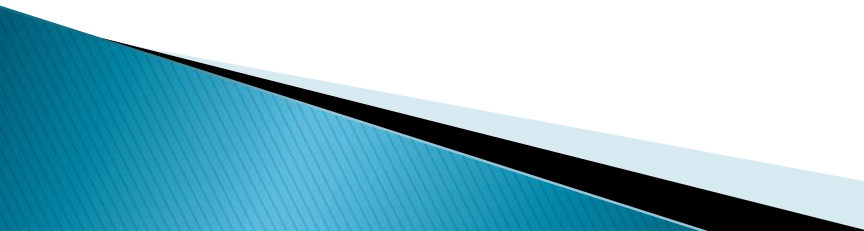
- ▶ Nist, S.L., & Simpson, M.I. (2000). College studying. In M.L. Kamil, P.B. Mosenthal, P.d. Pearson, & R. Barr (Eds.), Handbook of reading research (Vol. 3, pp. 646–666). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- ▶ Pearson, P.D. & Johnson, D. (1978). Teaching Reading Comprehension. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston.
- ▶ Pressley, M. (2002). Reading instruction that works: The case for balanced teaching (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). New York: Guilford.

# Purpose of Inquiry

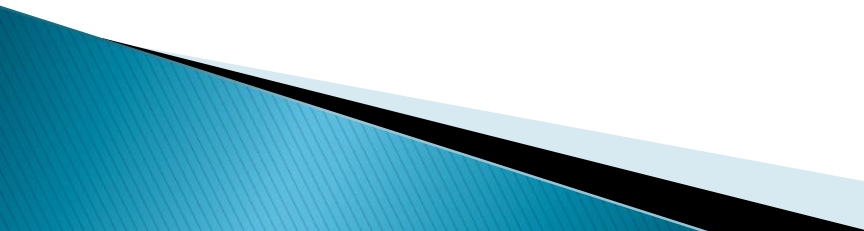
- ▶ To promote more **active engagement** with assigned course readings
- ▶ To facilitate learning and understanding of specific content, concepts, and processes
- ▶ To surface and explore students' own experience as learners – i.e., techniques, strategies, and processes employed in their *active* comprehension of assigned readings
- ▶ **Note:** *“Teacher candidates need to acquire and develop knowledge, practice, and reflection in order to become effective teachers...”*  
(Darling-Hammond, 1996)

“... We have found one of the most effective ways to help teacher candidates understand, value, and thoughtfully apply research-based practices in their (work), student teaching, and ultimately in their own classrooms... is to have them experience and apply the strategies in the coursework as part of their teacher education program.”

(L’Allier & Elish-Piper, 2007)



# ‘Dual processes’ in Action in teacher education classes:

- ▶ Research-based strategies applied in coursework, related class work, and various assignments
  - ▶ Observed to be (more) effective in:
  - ▶ a) **engaging** TECs **more actively** in assigned readings *and*
  - ▶ b) **enabling** TECs to **learn how to teach** using similar strategies in their own classroom practice (at the same time)
- 



# Methods of Inquiry

## CONTEXT:


- ▶ Instructor's initial review of the entire course; selection of a **new text** (current, Canadian, relevant content)
- ▶ Increased opportunities for in-class interactions, and completion of course assignments based on **knowledge and understanding** of assigned readings
- ▶ 3 B.Ed Classes, 38 TECs in each, J/I LA

# Methods of Inquiry (cont'd)

## **DATA COLLECTION & ANALYSIS:**

- ▶ Over one course year, 2008–2009
- ▶ Class participants' voluntary written reflections / responses / assignments
- ▶ In-class observations & instructor's own notes & reflections
- ▶ Systematic search for patterns and themes in initial data
- ▶ To be continued, 2009–2010...

# 4 Key Strategies Explored

- ▶ Alpha Boxes
  - ▶ Making Connections
  - ▶ Double Entry Journals
  - ▶ Text Coding
- 
- ▶ +An ongoing emphasis on **supporting** and **monitoring** comprehension ('self-regulating') through **Pre-During-After** Reading Strategies in preparation for classes.
- 

# Preliminary Findings in Responses

- ▶ TECs' increased awareness of own individual approaches to identify & use 'comprehension strategies' **AND** 'fix-up' strategies, as needed
- ▶ Consistent responses re. increased efforts to understand 'main ideas', but also to interpret and/or summarize ideas in their own words
- ▶ Increased efforts made to predict, question, & analyze (PQA) – *before, during, and after*
- ▶ Increased efforts to “construct meaning” – via active processes of ‘making connections’
- ▶ Learning to teach **AND** “learning to learn”!

# Comprehension Strategies: What Works **for You?**

- ▶ It is insufficient just to “know” the strategy...
- ▶ How do you *use* the strategy/various strategies to help you *understand*?
- ▶ i.e., *What is it you DO to understand?*
  
- ▶ *Define and describe some of the things we know we do to ‘understand’ text*
- ▶ *Define and describe some of the things we know we do a) when we ‘understand’*
- ▶ *b) when we don’t ‘understand’*

# JIGSAW ACTIVITY:

- ▶ 1) 'Expert Groups':
  - A) Alpha Boxes
  - B) Making Connections
  - C) Double Entry Journals
  - D) Text Coding
- ▶ 2) 'Home Groups': Teach/Learn; Discuss
- ▶ 3) 'Whole Group' Discussion

# Further Research & Teaching

- ▶ Extension of inquiry to date, include more formalized observations and data collection e.g., pre- & post- understanding of assigned readings: written responses? interviews?
- ▶ Participants in classes will be invited to offer input re. their experiences with assigned readings during academic year (2009–2010)
- ▶ Ongoing application in shaping course design, and meeting needs as ‘students’ (of teaching) *and* as (prospective) ‘teachers’

Thank you! 😊

