A Discussion on Reading

1. Research groups as pods
2. Different types of questions
   Poem by Thomas Lux
3. Developing metacognition
   Reading assessment
   Before, during, and after
4. The final word
Research groups as pods

- A week before beginning the research paper I asked the students to read about education in Michigan informally. I asked them to consider the current state of affairs in Michigan education. Over the next few days, I sent them articles I thought would provoke interest.
- The next class period I asked them again informally what they learned. Also during this class period, I shared my experience choosing a school for my own children. For the next class period, I asked them to write about their own school district, and share their experiences with the class.
- At this point, we got in small groups to share our experiences in education. This conversation was very interesting. They talked about diverse topics including computer labs, millages, segregation, and school safety. I contributed questions to keep the discussion lively: What role do the concepts of fairness and equality play in education? This dovetailed nicely with the Alexie text. I think they were surprised to discover learning conditions outside their home districts.
- I asked them to brainstorm issues in K-12 education that they were interested in, and to further constrain this list to topics that lend themselves to meaningful, current research. I also had them evaluate their strengths and weaknesses in a group setting. I reassured them that their grade was not dependent on the group.
- From there I assembled them into pods. I tried to limit it to about 4 in a group. I took the students’ strengths and interests into consideration.
- Some group topics included immersions schools, Michigan school budgets, and technology in the classroom.
- In each section I had only 4 major topics of discussion.
- Each pod nominated a leader. I offered extra credit points early on if they e-mailed a topical article to a leader of a different pod (and to me for verification). Leaders were responsible for distributing incoming e-mails to their members. I only left the extra credit window open for one week.
- In each pod they had a main topic, but each student was free to explore subtopics of personal interest.
- One student in the budget group wanted to break it down further and just look at how his K-12 district made decisions. He interviewed the superintendent. He also went to a district meeting that was reviewing plans on a potential millage.
- Another student wanted to examine how Michigan school districts were distributing money to art and music programs.
- I found it manageable to meet with pods to check on progress.
- The students appreciated that their progress was being reviewed by peers that were simultaneously researching the same topic, but with a different perspective. Each pod member was able to give informed feedback.
THE VOICE YOU HEAR  
WHEN YOU READ SILENTLY

is not silent, it is a speaking-  
out-loud voice in your head; it is spoken,  
a voice is saying it  
as you read. It’s the writer’s words,  
of course, in a literary sense  
his or her voice, but the sound  
of that voice is the sound of your voice.  
Not the sound your friends know  
or the sound of a tape played back  
but your voice  
captured in the dark cathedral  
of your skull, your voice heard  
by an internal ear informed by internal abstractions  
and what you know by feeling,  
having felt. It is your voice  
saying, for example, the word “barn”  
that the writer wrote  
but the “barn” you say  
is a barn you know or knew. The voice  
in your head, speaking as you read,  
ever says anything neutrally — some people  
hated the barn they knew,  
some people love the barn they know  
so you hear the word loaded  
and a sensory constellation  
is lit: horse-gnawed stalls,  
hayloft, black heat tape wrapping  
a water pipe, a slippery  
spilled chirp of oats from a split sack,  
the bony, filthy haunches of cows...  
And “barn” is only a noun- no verb  
or subject has entered the sentence yet!  
The voice you hear when you read to yourself  
is the clearest voice: you speak it  
speaking to you.

~~Thomas Lux
Different types of questions
I use the Thomas Lux poem to introduce the cognitive multitasking that takes place during reading. In addition to recognizing and processing letters and words and phrases, readers must also be asking themselves questions and building on prior knowledge. I am constantly modeling the importance of asking meaningful questions. The first question I have them ask when evaluating an assignment is: What are we going to do with it? I explain that reading can be more effective in the context of a purpose. Good readers understand the text with the perspective of goal: Am I trying to become an expert on this subject? Will there be a test on this? What kind of test? Efficient readers alter their techniques depending on purpose. We usually have a good discussion about why this important.

Form there we talk about the author’s purpose. Is the author trying to inform, persuade, or entertain the reader?

To get all this rolling, I have the students read a short selection. From there I have them construct questions from the reading for me. This often feels a little like test-the-teacher, but it encourages the students to come up with questions as they read. Multitasking is important for effective reading.

After this question and answer activity, I present 4 types of questions:

**Right there**
This is the type of question that can be located in the text. The reader needs to find the answer and write it down.

**Pulling it together**
A question that the answer is located in the text but the reader has to synthesize information from multiple locations for the answer.

**Author and me**
This is the type of question that demands that the student use their own experiences and applies that information to the text. The author provides information that can help answer the question but does not give the answer directly.

**On my own**
The reader does not have to read the text to answer the question but reading the text will inform him on the topic.


An example
I use a classroom analogy to help them get the idea:

✓ Right there
  ➢ What time is it?
  ➢ What color is the recycling bin?
✓ Pulling it together
  ➢ How many women are in the room?
  ➢ What are people writing with?
✓ Author and me
  ➢ What is the best way for the tables to be arranged in this classroom?
✓ On my own
  ➢ Are computers and cell phones helpful tools in a college classroom?

After going over the four types of questions, I have them review the questions they constructed for me. It is helpful to transcribe these questions to the board so we can evaluate and categorize them as a class. Are they asking primarily right there questions? Is their reading voice only asking one type of question?
Developing metacognition
Early in the semester I do an assessment. I give them a short reading assignment and have them read the text and do whatever comes naturally—summarize it, highlight, annotate, or nothing at all.

The reading assignment is followed by a series of questions, including an assessment of the difficulty of the text.

We have some discussion around the importance of having a variety of tools. One tool rarely will do the job.

We do another one later in the semester as we gather some new tools, and measure progress.

Metacognition journal
Having a metacognition discussion often helps students analyze their own habits. I give a small reading assignment and have students write down as many physical details of the process as possible.

I present it to them as a toolbox. We are always adding new tools and addressing tools that don’t work, either through refinement or by discarding them.

What do I do before I read?
- Count the pages
- Look for pictures
- Look to see if there is a summary
- Look at the end to see if there are questions (directions to home)

What do I do while I read?
- Highlight
- Construct outlines or summary statements
- Annotate (start with a few/simple to remember)

What do I do with the text after I read?
- Talk to someone. The reading builds your own knowledge base.
- Argue your opinion
- Take a different side
The final word

- After assigning reading homework for the next class, I tell them to highlight three “golden quotes.” These are passages the student found interesting.

- The next class I assemble them in groups of 4. One member of the group is the time keeper.

- One person shares their quote with the group. The starter picks one out of the three to share. The starter speaks to the group about the selection for 2 minutes. Why was it important? The speaker should continue for the full two minutes.

- Each member of the group then responds to the quote and to the original speaker. Each member speaks for one minute.

- Finally it returns to the starter. Then that person has one additional minute to present the final word on that quote.

- Each member of the group shares their golden quote in turn and the process repeats.

- The exercise takes about 25 minutes. It is important that everyone sticks to their allotted time and that speakers are not interrupted.

What I really enjoy about this activity is that it requires speaking in defense of a written statement and also listening in turn. Some people really struggle to talk for two minutes so I usually tell them before I assign the reading that they will need to feel comfortable with the material and its implications.

This activity requires deep understanding of the selected passages and encourages students to consider their own reactions while remaining sensitive to others’ interpretations.