

# WEBSTER UNIVERSITY

## COURSE SYLLABUS

Fall 1, 2008

READ 5188.01 Comprehension Strategies

Dr. Phyllis Wilkinson, Professor and Coordinator of Reading Program

Phone: 968-7096 e-mail: wilkinsp@webster.edu

Hours: 3:30-4:45 on Thursdays or by appointment

1. **Course Description: (Student focus, rationale, scope, prerequisites)**

This course has been designed for teachers who want to develop and refine methods to assist students in constructing meaning for what they read and developing critical reading-thinking skills. There is an emphasis on developing research-based instructional plans to implement students' awareness of using strategies *before*, *during* and *after* reading for narrative and expository text. Informed teachers can institute comprehension strategy study in an engaging format to lead students to become lifelong readers. We will explore the reading workshop format and both whole group and small group instruction with ongoing assessments for various grade levels and diverse learners. *Counts for initial certification, reading emphasis, and special (remedial) reading certification.*

2. **Learning Outcomes:**

Through lectures, readings, discussions, demonstrations, and assignments students will:

- a. understand theory and methods (best practices) of strategy instruction, both whole group and small group;
- b. identify strengths and weaknesses of readers' comprehension based on a solid understanding of the comprehension process;
- c. analyze and report on readers' "reading behavior" and strategic approaches; plan an instructional program to refine strategies built on readers' strengths;
- e. learn to apply appropriate research to develop classroom activities with ongoing assessment.
- f. examine, challenge, support, modify, and extend their current beliefs and knowledge about children's literacy development and learning theory.

3. **Schedule of required readings, class preparations and assignments, lectures, discussions, student presentations, and exams:**

**WEEK 1: Examining Beliefs, Practices, and Frameworks**

**Current Theory and Research on Comprehension: "Meaning under Construction"**

- Definitions and conditions for comprehending.
- Helping students construct meaning.
- What proficient readers do and how strategic behavior develops.
- Models to build on: "Guided Comprehension" and "Reading Workshop"

**Readings:** Chapter 1: “Guided Comprehension: Helping Students Transact with Text: “Learning and Constructing Meaning” “Developing a Balanced Literacy Program.”

## **WEEK 2: Instructional Practices**

- How do teachers support development of strategic readers?
- Metacognitive skills: What does this really mean?
- Direct and indirect instruction: moving toward student independence.
- Whole group and small group instruction: reciprocal teaching, workshop and learning centers, literature circles.
- The Guided Comprehension Model (McLaughlin and Allen).
- Strategic reading: prereading activities, during-reading activities, and postreading response.

**Readings:** Ch. 2 “Teacher Directed Whole- Group Instruction” (GR)

## **WEEK 3: Responding to Text within a Caring Community of Learners**

- Being connected to text, self and others: guiding strategic, responsive reading.
- Affective aspects and reader response (efferent and aesthetic responses).
- Developing a community of learners focused on literacy.
- Power, promise, and practice of Literature Study Groups or Circles.
- Environment to promote lifelong reading.

**Readings:** “Teacher Guided Small Groups” (Ch. 3 in GR)

**Assignment due:** Summary (one page or less) and response to research article (2-typed pages) stapled to photocopied article.

## **WEEK 4: Balancing Direct and Indirect Instruction**

- Reading and monitoring as an independent learner: how to get students there.
- Reading expository text: summarizing, inferencing, and applying concepts.
- Questioning as a guiding force: self-questioning, eliciting ideas from others, asking the “real questions that matter.”
- Levels of comprehension: beyond Bloom’s Taxonomy and Barrett’s Taxonomy of Reading Comprehension.
- Teachers’ roles: modeling, generating questions, fostering independence, assessing growth in levels of comprehension.

**Readings:** “Teacher Facilitated Whole-Group Reflection and Goal Setting” Chapter 4 and “Leveled Text” Ch. 5 (GR) .

**Assignment due:** Assessment of a reader’s strategy use, attitude and motivation.

## **WEEK 5: Assessment and Evaluation**

- Principles to guide ongoing assessment.
- Students’ role in assessment of strategies and how their self-monitoring works.
- Informal and formal assessment approaches: fluency, miscue analysis, running records, retellings, responses and all levels of comprehension.

**Readings:** “Assessment and Evaluation in a Balanced Literacy Classroom” (Ch. 11 in Cooper) Handout; “Assessment in Guided Comprehension” Ch. 6 (GR)

**Assignment due:** Learning journal due for first five weeks.

### **WEEK 6: Reading and Writing Across the Curriculum: Constructing Meaning**

- Why literature and thematic units in the content areas and across curriculum?
- Reading to learn and experience new ideas: Lessons that come alive!
- Integrating reading and writing for real interdisciplinary units.
- Facilitating reading to study and learn.
- How writing supports comprehension and meaning construction and critical thinking.
- Reading-writing strategies to support community and independence.

**Readings:** “Classroom Applications” Ch. 7 (GR).

### **WEEK 7: Vocabulary, Concepts and Comprehension**

- Language development in early literacy and beyond.
- Levels and nuances of meaning: connecting the unknown to the known.
- Building on experience: sociocultural aspects of learning language.
- Applying experiences to new texts with complex concepts.
- Strategies based on research that teachers can use to promote development.

**Readings:** “Reflections on Guided Comprehension Model” Ch 8 (GR);

**Assignment due:** Instructional plan designed for classroom. (Guidelines Attached.)

### **WEEK 8: Putting it All Together: Organizing and Managing the Balanced Literacy Classroom**

- Instructional plans designed for classrooms: Presentations by course participants.
- How will your classroom change? How will you influence change in your environment? How will you support other teachers implementing instruction?
- Concluding remarks and evaluations.

**Readings:** “Organizing and Managing the Balanced Literacy Classroom” (Ch. 10 in Cooper). Handout

**Assignments due:** Results from implementation of plan; oral presentation of plan and preliminary results.

4. **Resources:** Journals: *The Reading Teacher*, *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*, *Reading Research Quarterly*, *Journal of Reading Behavior*, *Research in the Teaching English*

**Texts:** McLaughlin, M. & Allen, M. (2002). *Guided Comprehension: A Model for Grades 3-8.* Newark, DE: International Reading Association.  
McLaughlin, M. (2003). *Guided Comprehension for Primary Grades.* Newark, DE: International Reading Association., McLaughlin, M. & Allen (2002), *Guided Comprehension in Action.*

**Audio Visual/Other :** Videotapes: “Reading Comprehension,” “Reading and the Brain (ASCD),” “Literature Study Groups,” “Guided Reading (Taberski)”

**ATTENDANCE:** Attendance at *all 8 sessions is ordinarily required for full participation credit*. If one session is missed due to illness and instructor is contacted, students may complete an additional assignment that demonstrates understanding of session's topics. More than one missed session will result in no credit for the course.

5. **EVALUATION:**

- a) Assessment of reader's comprehension strategy use  
100pts
- b) Instructional plan designed for classroom. Thematic plan; Strategies for *before, during, and after* reading 150pts
- c) Book choices for all reading levels: independent, instructional 30pts
- d) Implementation of part of plan (strategy) and oral presentation  
60pts
- e) Presentation: research topic and practical applications (team)  
40pts
- f) Attendance at all sessions. Participation in whole group and small group activities 10pts

**Supplements:** The following are excellent sources and should be consulted, as needed:  
Keene, E. & Zimmerman, S. (1997). *Teaching Comprehension in a Reading Workshop*. Heinemann.  
Zwiers, J. (2004). *Building Comprehension Habits in Grades 6-12: A Toolkit for Classroom Activities*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association.

**Final Projects:**

Final projects/papers will be returned to students in the following manner:

Projects/Papers will be returned during the last meeting period

Students should provide a self-addressed envelope (appropriate size and postage) to the instructor so project/paper can be returned. X

**This syllabus is subject to change at the discretion of the instructor.  
Therefore, regular attendance is required.**

