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# Using Planned Reading Circles to Increase Pre-service Special Education Teachers' Content Knowledge

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**Augusta, Georgia**

**Dr. Yvonne Hefner  
Georgia Gwinnett College**





**Using Planned Reading  
Circles to Increase  
Pre-service Special Education  
Teachers' Content Knowledge**



## Research Question

- What are the benefits of participation in wiki-based collaborative reading circles in a pre-service special education course?

# Participants

- ▶ Pre-service Junior/Second Semester students enrolled in the Special Education program at Georgia Gwinnett College
- ▶ Instructional Design and Delivery Class
- ▶ This course focuses on the design and delivery of developmentally appropriate instruction in language arts, mathematics, science, social studies, the arts, health, and physical education in grades P-12 for students with exceptionalities



## The Problem

- ▶ The 2009 National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) revealed that only 24 percent of university students consistently completed course reading assignments (NSSE, 2009).
- ▶ **When it comes to reading at a college level many students may struggle with comprehension of complex reading material**
- ▶ There has been a shortage of empirical studies on the effectiveness of efforts to improve the reading skills of pre-service student teachers before they become teachers.



# Implementation

- Reading Circles will be held for 8 weeks
- Students will read articles and complete roles outside of class
- Students will post their work in the wiki site (PBWORKS.COM)
- Student led discussions about the topics will take place after reading each article



# Literature Circles Redefined = Reading Circles

- ▶ Literature circles became well known in the education world when Harvey Daniels (1994) published *Literature Circles: Voice and Choice in the Student-Centered Classroom*.
- ▶ Goal for students was to have the students read about specific topics related to special education, then respond through technology and face-to-face interaction
- ▶ Literature circles usually include small, student-led discussion groups in which members read the same book. The name, *Literature Circles*, was not appropriate as the students were not studying literature, but rather reading expository text.





# WIKI

- ▶ Reading circles and wikis are an exciting way to study as it allows students to acquire a better understanding of the purposes of reading and the metacognition that takes place during reading
- ▶ Combining wiki technology with the reading circle becomes especially powerful and beneficial, since the wiki fulfills many assessment needs by supplying documentation of each participant's work and allows students to collaborate online and face-to-face.



# Roles

## Roles

**Discussion Director**

**Connector Detector**

**Word Worm**

**Illustrator**

**Prominent Point Person**

**Discussion Debriefers**



# Authentic Student-Led Discussions

- ▶ Each student is given responsibility for leading at least one 25 to 30 minute group discussion.
- ▶ Expectations for how to hold a discussion about a specific topic and stay on topic should be taught before beginning the reading circles.
- ▶ Wikis are a digital forum for collaborative authorship



# Reading Material

- ▶ For reading circles, expository text should be selected as the genre of study.
- ▶ Expository texts identify and characterize phenomena.
- ▶ Expository texts are a combination of writing and reading instruction that is necessary for students to become aware of the informational text structures



# Methodology

- ▶ The data collected will be in the form of online pre and post surveys using a likert scale and open ended questions
- ▶ The surveys contain questions that accurately measure the opinions, experiences, and engagement of the participants in the reading circles.




## What Will I Find Out?

- ▶ Do reading circles help students understand the course content?
- ▶ Does being a member of a reading circles help hold students responsible to read the assigned articles and prepare for class?
- ▶ Does being a member of a reading circles spark more interest in reading future articles on topics related to special education?
- ▶ Does the use of the wiki facilitate communication and discussion in the reading circle?
- ▶ Does the implementation of a reading circle increase the sense of community in the classroom?



## My Thoughts

- ▶ I am excited to find out how students feel about this experience
  - ▶ Structured reading circles are a model for helping students engage in and experience reading as a process that supports and complements understanding key content knowledge for pre-service special education teachers.
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# Reference

- ▶ Daniels, H. (1994). *Literature Circles: Voice and Choice in the Student-Centered Classroom*. Stenhouse Publishers: York, Maine.