Reading Through Connections: A phenomenographic study of student connections to scholarly text
Why help students read more effectively?

we ask them to read scholarly articles all the time

the articles aren’t written for undergraduates

reading is their way in to discipline conversations
Why read with connections?

connecting new material to prior knowledge is important

connections can help students see the relevance of information

academic reading is a process of connecting that students are expected to practice but rarely see
This study (richer detail on handout)

30 students in a 3rd-yr. PR research methods class

at MRU most students are from Calgary surrounding area
⇒ some familiarity with oil industry/farming

study occurred during a session on reading scholarly articles

most students had not read past the abstract in advance
How students were encouraged to make connections:

students were asked to
read a portion of the text,
write down connections,
mark the text that sparked the connections
So let’s try this with the paragraph on p.4.

How did it feel to read with connections?
Basic data from the in-class exercise:

Students made from 2-8 connections

132 connections were made

Connections, not students were the units of analysis

Phenomenography
Research approach based in the study of learning

Used in educational and information literacy research

Describes qualitatively different, logically related categories of experience
What I was looking for:

What students were connecting to – academic material, pop culture, life, etc.

What I found:

**WHAT** students connected from indicated **HOW** they were reading
## Categories and connections:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SPARK</th>
<th>CONNECTION</th>
<th>READING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Word</td>
<td>Word Association</td>
<td>Surface</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Word &gt;&gt;&gt; Text</td>
<td>Context Association</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Text &gt;&gt;&gt; Meaning</td>
<td>Summarization</td>
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<tr>
<td>Meaning</td>
<td>Analogy</td>
<td>Integration</td>
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Reading the words – connecting as word association:

*Sundre* – this reminds me of billboards advertising this place on the highway

learned about *2-way symmetrical* in Intro PR

Thought of a book about women involved with the gold rush I read around grade 7
Reading from the words to the text: Connecting as context association:

Many of my neighbours went through this, oil companies paying to use their land. Sometimes it went well, sometimes not so much

Movie in the states that talked about people/property being *bought off* then pissed off

Reminds me of a friend at her work
Reading from the text to the meaning; Connecting through summarization:

Common stereotype of rural Alberta vs. Big Oil

When the farmers became more established they became discontent with the oil company... complaints, frustration, dissatisfaction

The dialogue between community/industry members was explored in ATP/Downstages play “Good fences”
Reading the meaning: Connection as analogy:

Thought of ... developing countries. Diamond mining comes to mind and cell phones and gorillas

when settlers came to North America to find native aboriginals conflict was ignored and left unresolved causing tensions that still exist today

Reminds me of Blackberry – so many complaints, the company ignores and doesn’t address problems

I wonder if unhappy citizens were labeled eco-terrorists or foreign interlopers such as those in Keystone
Reading the meaning: Connection as Integration:

Believe PR would have been considerably easier in the 50’s when both farmers and oil companies felt they were benefitting

Building positive relationships between oil companies and the community in Alberta is difficult, because issues associated with these relationships are rooted in the past. To get the big picture we must go back several years ago and understand how it all started.
Reading the meaning: Connection as critique:

I believe this background content should be in the intro, since it’s important to understand reasoning behind the study.

In a scientific article, I usually expect to see non-biased reporting of results. The quoted ‘helped out’ and ‘difficult times’ start to highlight the researcher’s opinion
Implications for teaching:

The findings echo Marton’s work on deep and surface reading

...THAT has implications for what, how, and how long information is retained, and how well it can be re-used

SO... we need to think about helping students understand different ways of reading for different purposes

AND ... we need to be clear about how we want them to read
- respond to words, memorize facts, etc.

OR

- respond to meaning – remember key concepts, analogies, expand understanding, integrate into knowledge
Thanks!

Hope I’ve left time for some discussion

Thanks are also due to the *Institute for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*, fellow NEXEN SoTL scholars, colleagues (especially those who let me play with the students), and most of all, to the students themselves.