

ABSTRACT: Khanh-Duc Kuttig, University of Siegen.

Designing for Engagement: Academic Reading, Community, and the Gen Z Student

How can higher education move reading from a private act of compliance to a shared practice of participation? This talk explores Academic Reading Circles (ARCs) as a practical framework for making reading visible, social, and purposeful across the semester (Seburn, 2016). Across higher education contexts, collaborative reading is associated with stronger confidence, belonging, motivation, and peer connectedness, while some studies also show gains in comprehension, critical reading, and academic performance (Afdal et al., 2022; Ament et al., 2025; Saville et al., 2023). Reading circle research also suggests that structured peer discussion can reduce anxiety, increase learner autonomy, and make reading more interactive and enjoyable (Cowley-Haselden, 2020; Vartola, 2024; Xu, 2021). For Gen Z students, this matters because reading engagement appears to improve when learning is designed around clear roles, interactive participation, varied texts, and digitally supported collaboration rather than passive transmission. Evidence also suggests that collaborative meaning-making works best when we, as educators, provide scaffolds such as templates, contingent feedback, integrated synchronous and asynchronous structures, and space for students to question interpretations and co-construct understanding (Afdal et al., 2022; Vartola, 2024). Participants will leave with a concrete model for implementing ARCs, practical design principles for role-based and hybrid discussion, and strategies for turning course reading into shared intellectual work that supports agency, engagement, and community

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