Connecting Students to Scholarly Readings
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Thanks to the Institute for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning at Mount Royal University, fellow Nexen SoTL scholars, colleagues (especially those who let me play with the students), and most of all, to the students who participated in the project. (This presentation is based on one I did for ISSOTL 2013.)

Background of the Project:
Research was based on students in two sections of COMM 3855, Research Methods for Public Relations
Of the 50 students registered in the course, 30 consented to allow their in-class exercises to be included.

The connections exercise was part of a class on reading articles where we discussed among other things, jargon, structure, the need to read as a dialogue and ask questions throughout the process, as well as make connections to prior knowledge. The article was chosen because it’s brief, explores issues germane to the course and to the practice of PR, and is based on research done around the conflict between the petroleum industry and landowners with which students might be familiar.

Near the midpoint of the class, students were asked to read a portion of the article, and write down the connections that occurred to them, as well as noting what part of the text sparked the connections.

Analysis included transcription and categorization to develop categories using the phenomenographical method first outlined by Marton, and used extensively in studies of learner experiences. This allowed me to focus on variations in student experiences, using the individual connections (not the students) as the units of analysis. While I began by examining the content of the connections, what emerged was that how students connected to the text indicated different levels of reading.

What I think it means:
The categories I found echo Marton’s work on deep and surface reading which linked these variations to student success. If we can encourage students to make ‘deeper’ connections, that may encourage them to read more deeply, and therefore retain more concept information, and develop stronger knowledge networks.

SO... we need to think about helping students understand different ways of reading for different purposes
AND ... we need to be clear about what those purposes are – do we want them to respond to words, memorize facts, etc. or respond to meaning – remember key concepts, analogies, expand understanding... AND THEN we need to assess in ways that encourage the kind of reading we want them to do.

The project also shows that when prompted, students can make and articulate connections between their prior knowledge and experiences and scholarly articles. These connections may help increase retention, and reuse of the information. However, one session on making connections is clearly not enough to develop the habit.
**Reading the words: Connecting as word association**

Connections are associations sparked by words and phrases in the text. The spark points are words, and connections are made to family background, memories and previous experiences in employment or academic contexts.

**Reading from the words to the text: Connecting as context association**

Connections are associations sparked by larger sections of the text. Connections are made to family background, memories and previous experiences in employment or academic contexts.

**Reading from the text to the meaning: Connecting through summarization**

Connections are summaries sparked by sentences or paragraphs in the text. The student’s focus is on the text, and connections are made to general background knowledge. Students are making some connections within the text to develop summaries that then connect to broader external knowledge.

**Reading the meaning: Connecting as analogy**

Connections are analogies sparked by the text. The student’s focus is on the meaning in the article, and the analogies show connections to situations beyond exact parallels to the text, often to material learned in academic contexts.

**Reading the meaning: Connecting as integration**

Connections show integration with students’ views of practice. The student’s focus is on the meaning in the article, and the statements show connections to professional work and attitudes. Connections tend to be forward-looking and appear as advice for practice.

**Reading the meaning: Connecting as critique**

Connections are critical statements sparked by larger sections of text. The student’s focus is on the meaning, and how the way the text is presented contributes to or interferes with their ability to extract meaning.

**The Outcome Space: Categories of Connecting**

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<tr>
<th>SPARK</th>
<th>CONNECTION</th>
<th>READING</th>
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<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>
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<tr>
<td>Text &gt;&gt;&gt; Meaning</td>
<td>Summarization</td>
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<td>Meaning</td>
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<td>Critique</td>
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Selected readings...
For more, please see http://www2.mtroyal.ca/~mmacmillan/reading.html

Reading


Phenomenography


Collier-Reed, B.I., & Ingerman, A. (2013). Reflections on trustworthiness in phenomenographic research: Recognising purpose, context and change in the process of research. Education as change, 13(2), 339-355. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/16823200903234901


The article presents a study where 4 new lecturers were asked to read an article in their discipline and one on higher education, and compares their reactions to these different readings.

“As such, whilst the higher education research papers are engaged with to gain general knowledge of the text, the papers in the participants’ discipline are read more actively and more selectively for specific information. Comparing these different strategies of comprehensive and selective readings, Du Boulay (1999) suggests that ‘academic reading is often more like the latter than the former’ (154) suggesting that the lecturers’ approaches to reading the higher education research are not ‘academic’ in orientation.

This distinction between academic and non-academic readings has direct implications for the readers’ identities. The counterarguments of a chosen higher education research paper prompt ‘strong agreement or disagreement for me personally but I found I couldn’t really detect how that was researched so it was more based on personal meaning’ (Paul) and the lack of empirical data meant that it ‘felt a bit odd when I was reading it’ (Sarah). Engaging in what are perceived to be unfamiliar, unscholarly acts of reading, then, destabilise these readers’ sense of themselves as academic readers and assert personal, and for these readers therefore inappropriate or uncomfortable responses. Two participants respond to this by strongly challenging the legitimacy of the higher education research as actually a ‘manifesto’ (Martin) or ‘more like reading the Sunday newspaper’ (Sarah).

As Kogan (2000) has suggested, academic identity within higher education depends on the ‘proper performance of the academic tasks of [. . .] the creation and testing of knowledge [. . .] and without them higher education is preaching or journalism’ (208). Although the relative quality of some higher education research in comparison to the examples of research in their own field could make such claims warranted, this strategy of ‘othering’ higher education research in ways that emphasise the superiority of the participants’ primary discipline (Wareing 2009) potentially articulates an intra-psychical response to the threat to their academic identity that reading this research might pose for these lecturers (Breakwell 1986). In the absence of an in-depth understanding of, or familiarity with, the conventions for validating knowledge in higher education research, participants must engage in practices that put into tension their expert academic identity in the context of their discipline and their novice status in relation to the disciplinary values and practices of interpreting higher education research” (p.102).