What does "reading" mean?

Kim Starr-Reid | GSI Teaching & Resource Center | gsi@berkeley.edu| 2009

Teaching critical reading:

the challenge

Kim Starr-Reid | GSI Teaching & Resource Center | gsi@berkeley.edu| 2009

☐ "[H]igh schools typically teach students to read receptively, to read for information. Many freshman students have not been taught to read actively or critically, to construct knowledge as they read."
Bosley 2008: 286

□ "Many have not learned to approach texts with a questioning stance that probes for underlying assumptions or intentions. Students often read at surface level; if they do not 'get it' they give up rather than engage in the difficulty of the task."
Bosley 2008: 286

the need

- "Many college instructors assume that high school graduates can 'read,' but much research suggests that, for some students, critical reading strategies must be taught explicitly, and must be reinforced through practice."
  Bosley 2008: 286

not a single, "universal" skill

Would you read all these texts the same way?

- [ ] an introductory chemistry textbook
- [ ] an essay by a prominent social theorist
- [ ] a first-hand account of a historical event
- [ ] a brief lyric poem
- [ ] a magazine advertisement
- [ ] a novel, for pleasure
- [ ] a novel, for literary analysis

a repertoire of strategies & practices . . .

- ☐ for texts when used for different instructional purposes
- ☐ to use with different genres of texts
- ☐ to which the GSI as an expert learner has access
- ☐ *not simply content mastery, but discipline-based skills*

guide the students' journey . . .

from receptive reading

to productive reading

from blank-slate reading

to procedural knowledge

What issues particularly challenge your students as readers in your disciplinary field?

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Teaching critical reading: the humanities

literature

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elements of critical reading (Bosley)

- ☐ read actively or critically

- ☐ construct knowledge

- ☐ a questioning stance

- ☐ probe for underlying assumptions or intentions

- ☐ engage in the difficulty

How do you translate these abstract descriptors into activities students can grasp?

a bit more concrete (Bosley)

- [ ] the reader engages in conversation with the text
- [ ] talks to the book
- [ ] asks questions
- [ ] makes predictions
- [ ] forms connections with prior knowledge and experiences

more concrete:
a physical activity in time

- ☐ mark text: use highlighters, pencils, pens

- ☐ make notes: use post-its, notebooks, computers

- ☐ make a paragraph summary of the contents

- ☐ write down what the text seems to want to achieve

- ☐ list strategies in the text to achieve its goals

- ☐ step back: how well does the text do, in the reader's opinion? locate evidence, tell why

an example from medieval lit

- "The Wooing of Étaín," early Irish tale
- highly foreign to students' world
- unfamiliar terms, practices, modes of expression
- unfamiliar and unpronounceable names
- students can become discouraged

the students' initial take

- this is weird, but I kind of like it

- this is *too* weird – I give up

- nobody loves anybody in this tale; it's all about status or lust

- the gods must be crazy

- too many extraneous geographic details

day 1: noticing

- □ close reading session in class
- □ read aloud (to read aloud, to perform, is to interpret)
- □ model pausing to ask about details
- □ ask what patterns or repetitions students see
- □ model misprision and catching it
- □ exude wonder and the pleasure of sharing it

asking questions

- model pausing to ask questions
- model a variety of kinds of questions, from text queries to tone and feeling
- invite students to toss in more questions
- repeat their questions, valorize them, connect them with expert readers' questions
- as students pose questions, write them on the board as models for further use

looking up unknowns

- have some comprehension info handy

- have a *good* web-based reference work open to demo its use in class

- invite students to do searches for the class

- provide a list of reliable reference works

- model taking notes on lookups for future reference

day 2: making inferences

- "why does it matter that Eochaid has no wife?" – students often pose answers too quickly, with assumptions rather than data

- train students to differentiate evidence, assumption, inference (simplistic but useful)

- model gathering all relevant textual data, noticing gaps in the information

- model acknowledging assumptions and referring to precise words when advancing an inference

making connections

- how do you feel about this textual world? charmed, irritated, alienated, perplexed?

- how does that affect your impression?

- any contemporary stories or characters this passage brings to mind? in what way?

- in what ways do characters jive with your expectations, and in what ways do they thwart them?

challenging assumptions

- "sleeping with" always means fornication: *why then do Eochaid and Étaín talk about a bride price?*

- "paying a bride price" always means the bride is commodified: *does the text support this? can we find out what the customs were in early Ireland? and would this give a different meaning to the bride price stipulated for Étaín?*

day 3: constructing interpretations

involve the class in an exercise:

☐ locate a crux in the text that can reasonably be interpreted at least two different ways; test to push implications and see which interpretation is more intellectually satisfying and why, or

☐ ask how a seemingly odd part of the tale fits together logically with the rest, explain why it's odd and to whom, and propose an answer

negotiating among interpretations

- ask students to respond in writing to the class's discussion (as homework), taking up one interpretive issue and applying original reading and analysis

- incorporate the class's interpretive work into writing assignments if it's up to you to assign formal writing

where does all this happen?

- discussions in and outside of class (physical or virtual gatherings)

- students' study time and notetaking

- office hours

- students' written homework (whether the GSI reads it or not)

- formal papers

some students get their best insights when writing and reading, others when talking and listening, others when drawing diagrams: encourage all!

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a recursive process

- foster among students the recognition that the process of critical reading takes time and practice – and give them concrete activities

- inculcate patience for revisiting steps, getting more information, revising ideas

- remind students that class discussions and homework assignments are places to work out the quality and depth of their reading, both collaboratively and individually

references

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