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Reviewed work(s):
Source: *College Composition and Communication*, Vol. 39, No. 2 (May, 1988), pp. 167-183
Published by: National Council of Teachers of English
Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/358026
Accessed: 28/12/2012 23:21

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Rhetorical Reading Strategies and the Construction of Meaning

Christina Haas and Linda Flower

There is a growing consensus in our field that reading should be thought of as a constructive rather than as a receptive process: that "meaning" does not exist in a text but in readers and the representations they build. This constructive view of reading is being vigorously put forth, in different ways, by both literary theory and cognitive research. It is complemented by work in rhetoric which argues that reading is also a discourse act. That is, when readers construct meaning, they do so in the context of a discourse situation, which includes the writer of the original text, other readers, the rhetorical context for reading, and the history of the discourse. If reading really is this constructive, rhetorical process, it may both demand that we rethink how we teach college students to read texts and suggest useful parallels between the act of reading and the more intensively studied process of writing. However, our knowledge of how readers actually carry out this interpretive process with college-level expository texts is rather limited. And a process we can't describe may be hard to teach.

We would like to help extend this constructive, rhetorical view of reading, which we share with others in the field, by raising two questions. The first is, how does this constructive process play itself out in the actual, thinking process of reading? And the second is, are all readers really aware of or in control of the discourse act which current theories describe? In the study we describe below, we looked at readers trying to understand a complex college-level text and observed a process that was constructive in a quite literal sense of the term. Using a think-aloud procedure, we watched as readers used not only the text but their own knowledge of the world, of the topic, and of discourse conventions, to infer, set and discard hypotheses, predict, and question in order to construct meaning for texts. One of the ways readers tried to make meaning of the text was a strategy we called "rhetorical reading," an active attempt at

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constructing a rhetorical context for the text as a way of making sense of it. However, this valuable move was a special strategy used only by more experienced readers. We observed a sharp distinction between the rhetorical process these experienced readers demonstrated and the processes of freshman readers. It may be that these student readers, who relied primarily on text-based strategies to construct their meanings, do not have the same full sense of reading as the rhetorical or social discourse act we envision.

Some of the recent work on reading and cognition gives us a good starting point for our discussion since it helps describe what makes the reading process so complex and helps explain how people can construct vastly different interpretations of the same text. Although a thinking aloud protocol can show us a great deal, we must keep in mind that it reveals only part of what goes on as a reader is building a representation of a text. And lest the "constructive" metaphor makes this process sound tidy, rational, and fully conscious, we should emphasize that it may in fact be rapid, unexamined, and even inexpressible. The private mental representation that a reader constructs has many facets: it is likely to include a representation of propositional or content information, a representation of the structure—either conventional or unique—of that information, and a representation of how the parts of the text function. In addition, the reader's representation may include beliefs about the subject matter, about the author and his or her credibility, and about the reader's own intentions in reading. In short, readers construct meaning by building multifaceted, interwoven representations of knowledge. The current text, prior texts, and the reading context can exert varying degrees of influence on this process, but it is the reader who must integrate information into meaning.

We can begin to piece together the way this constructive, cognitive process operates based on recent research on reading and comprehension, and on reading and writing. Various syntheses of this work have been provided by Bransford; Baker and Brown; Flower ("Interpretive Acts"); and Spivey. To begin with, it is helpful to imagine the representations readers build as complex networks, like dense roadmaps, made up of many nodes of information, each related to others in multiple ways. The nodes created during a few minutes of reading would probably include certain content propositions from the text. The network might also contain nodes for the author's name, for a key point in the text, for a personal experience evoked by the text, for a striking word or phrase, and for an inference the reader made about the value of the text, or its social or personal significance. The links between a group of nodes might reflect causality, or subordination, or simple association, or a strong emotional connection.

The process of constructing this representation is carried out by both highly automated processes of recognition and inference *and* by the more active problem-solving processes on which our work focuses. For instance, trying to construct a well-articulated statement of the "point" of a text may require active searching, inferencing, and transforming of one's own knowledge. The

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reason such transformations are constantly required can be explained by the "multiple-representation thesis" proposed by Flower and Hayes ("Images" 120). It suggests that readers' and writers' mental representations are not limited to verbally well-formed ideas and plans, but may include information coded as visual images, or as emotions, or as linguistic propositions that exist just above the level of specific words. These representations may also reflect more abstract schema, such as the schema most people have for narrative or for establishing credibility in a conversation. Turning information coded in any of these forms into a fully verbal articulation of the "point," replete with well-specified connections between ideas and presented according to the standard conventions of a given discourse, is constructive; it can involve not only translating one kind of representation into another, but reorganizing knowledge and creating new knowledge, new conceptual nodes and connections. In essence, it makes sense to take the metaphor of "construction" seriously.

It should be clear that this image of "meaning" as a rich network of disparate kinds of information is in sharp contrast to the narrow, highly selective and fully verbal statement of a text's gist or "meaning" that students may be asked to construct for an exam or a book review. Statements of that sort do, of course, serve useful functions, but we should not confuse them with the multi-dimensional, mental structures of meaning created by the cognitive and affective process of reading.

If reading, then, is a process of responding to cues in the text and in the reader's context to build a complex, multi-faceted representation of meaning, it should be no surprise that different readers might construct radically different representations of the same text and might use very different strategies to do so. This makes the goals of teacher and researcher look very much alike: both the teacher and the researcher are interested in the means by which readers (especially students) construct multi-faceted representations, or "meaning." The study we are about to describe looks at a practical and theoretical question that this constructive view of reading raises: namely, what strategies, other than those based on knowing the topic, do readers bring to the process of understanding difficult texts—and how does this translate into pedagogy?

Seeing reading as a constructive act encourages us as teachers to move from merely *teaching texts* to *teaching readers*. The teacher as co-reader can both model a sophisticated reading process and help students draw out the rich possibilities of texts and readers, rather than trying to insure that all students interpret texts in a single, "correct" way—and in the same way. Yet this goal—drawing out the rich possibilities of texts and of readers—is easier to describe than to reach.

What is "Good Reading"?

The notion of multiple, constructed representations also helps us understand a recurring frustration for college teachers: the problem of "good" readers who

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appear to miss the point or who seem unable or unwilling to read critically. Many of our students are "good" readers in the traditional sense: they have large vocabularies, read quickly, are able to do well at comprehension tasks involving recall of content. They can identify topic sentences, introductions and conclusions, generalizations and supporting details. Yet these same students often frustrate us, as they paraphrase rather than analyze, summarize rather than criticize texts. Why are these students doing less than we hope for?

To interpret any sophisticated text seems to require not only careful reading and prior knowledge, but the ability to read the text on several levels, to build multi-faceted representations. A text is understood not only as content and information, but also as the result of someone's intentions, as part of a larger discourse world, and as having real effects on real readers. In an earlier study, we say that experienced readers made active use of the strategy of rhetorical reading not only to predict and interpret texts but to solve problems in comprehension (Flower, "Construction of Purpose.") Vipond and Hunt have observed a related strategy of "point-driven" (vs. "story-driven") reading which people bring to literary texts.

If we view reading as the act of constructing multi-faceted yet integrated representations, we might hypothesize that the problem students have with critical reading of difficult texts is less the representations they *are* constructing than those they *fail to construct*. Their representations of text are closely tied to content: they read for information. Our students may believe that if they understand all the words and can paraphrase the propositional content of a text, then they have successfully "read" it.

While a content representation is often satisfactory—it certainly meets the needs of many pre-college read-to-take-a-test assignments—it falls short with tasks or texts which require analysis and criticism. What many of our students *can* do is to construct representations of content, of structure, and of conventional features. What they often *fail* to *do* is to move beyond content and convention and construct representations of texts as purposeful actions, arising from contexts, and with intended effects. "Critical reading" involves more than careful reading for content, more than identification of conventional features of discourse, such as introductions or examples, and more than simple evaluation based on agreeing or disagreeing. Sophisticated, difficult texts often require the reader to build an equally sophisticated, complex representation of meaning. But how does this goal translate into the process of reading?

As intriguing as this notion of the active construction of meaning is, we really have no direct access to the meanings/representations that readers build. We cannot enter the reader's head and watch as the construction of meaning proceeds. Nor can we get anything but an indirect measure of the nature, content, and structure of that representation. What we can do, however, is to watch the way that readers go about building representations: we can observe their use of *reading strategies* and so infer something about the representations they build.

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In order to learn something about the construction of meaning by readers, we observed and analyzed the strategies of ten readers. Four were experienced college readers, graduate students (aged 26 to 31 years), three in engineering and one in rhetoric; six were student readers, college freshmen aged 18 and 19, three classified "average" and three classified "above average" by their freshman composition teachers.

We were interested in how readers go about "constructing" meaning and the constructive strategies they use to do so. However, we suspected that many academic topics would give an unfair advantage to the more experienced readers, who would be able to read automatically by invoking their knowledge of academic topics and discourse conventions. This automaticity would, however, make their constructive reading harder for us to see. We wanted a text that would require equally active problem solving by both groups. So, in order to control for such knowledge, we designed a task in which meaning was under question for all readers, and in which prior topic knowledge would function as only one of many possible tools used to build an interpretation. Therefore, the text began *in medias res,* without orienting information about author, source, topic, or purpose. We felt that in this way we could elicit the full range of constructive strategies these readers could call upon when the situation demanded it.

The text, part of the preface to Sylvia Farnham-Diggory's *Cognitive Processes in Education,* was like many texts students read, easy to decode but difficult to interpret, with a high density of information and a number of semi-technical expressions which had to be defined from context. The readers read and thought aloud as they read. In addition, they answered the question "how do you interpret the text now?" at frequent intervals. The question was asked of readers eight times, thus creating nine reading "episodes." The slash marks indicate where the question appeared, and also mark episode boundaries, which we discuss later. To see the effect of this manipulation on eliciting interpretive strategies, you might wish to read the experimental text before going further. (Sentence numbers have been added.)

> But somehow the social muddle persists.[s1] Some wonderful children come from appalling homes; some terrible children come from splendid homes.[s2] Practice may have a limited relationship to perfection—at least it cannot substitute for talent.[s3] Women are not happy when they are required to pretend that a physical function is equivalent to a mental one.[s4] Many children teach themselves to read years before they are supposed to be "ready."[s5] / Many men would not dream of basing their self-esteem on "cave man" prowess.[s6] And despite their verbal glibness, teenagers seem to be in a worse mess than ever.[s7] /
>
> What has gone wrong?[s8] Are the psychological principles invalid?[s9] Are they too simple for a complex world?[s10] /
>
> Like the modern world, modern scientific psychology is extremely technical and complex.[s11] The application of any particular set of psychological principles to any particular real problem requires a double spe-

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cialist: a specialist in the scientific area, and a specialist in the real area.[s12] /

Not many such double specialists exist.[s13] The relationship of a child's current behavior to his early home life, for example, is not a simple problem—Sunday Supplement psychology notwithstanding.[s14] / Many variables must be understood and integrated: special ("critical") periods of brain sensitivity, nutrition, genetic factors, the development of attention and perception, language, time factors (for example, the amount of time that elapses between a baby's action and a mother's smile), and so on.[s15] Mastery of these principles is a full-time professional occupation.[s16] / The professional application of these principles—in, say a day-care center—is also a full-time occupation, and one that is foreign to many laboratory psychologists.[s17] Indeed, a laboratory psychologist may not even recognize his pet principles when they are realized in a day care setting.[s18] /

What is needed is a coming together of real-world and laboratory specialists that will require both better communication and more complete experience.[s19] / The laboratory specialists must spend some time in a real setting; the real-world specialists must spend some time in a theoretical laboratory.[s20] Each specialist needs to practice thinking like his counterpart.[s21] Each needs to practice translating theory into reality, and reality into theory.[s22]

The technique of in-process probing tries to combine the immediacy of concurrent reporting with the depth of information obtained through frequent questioning. It can of course give us only an indirect and partial indication of the actual representation. What it does reveal are gist-making strategies used at a sequence of points during reading, and it offers a cumulative picture of a text-under-construction.

Aside from our manipulation of the presentation, the text was a typical college reading task. Part of the author's introduction to an educational psychology textbook, it presented an array of facts about the social reality of learning, problems of education, and the aims of research. *Our* reading of the text, obviously also a constructed one, but one constructed with the benefit of a full knowledge of the source and context, included two main facts and two central claims. In a later analysis, we used these facts and claims to describe some of the transactions of readers and text.

Fact: Social problems exist and psychological principles exist, but there's a mismatch between them.

Fact: There are two kinds of educational specialists—real-world and laboratory.

Claim (explicit in text): The two kinds of specialists should interact.

Claim (implicit): Interaction of the two specialists is necessary to solve social problems.

The differences in "readings" subjects constructed of the text were striking and were evidenced immediately. For instance, the following descriptions of three readers' readings of the text suggest the range of readers' concerns and

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begin to offer hints about the nature of their constructed representations of the text. These descriptions were what we called "early transactions" with the text—an analysis based on readers' comments during reading of the first two paragraphs, or ten sentences, of the text.

Seth, a 27-year old graduate student in Engineering, by his own account a voracious reader of literature in his own field, of travel books, history, and contemporary novels, is initially confused with the concepts "physical function and mental one" (sentence 4). He then explains his confusion by noting the nature of the materials: "well, that's got some relationship with something that came before this business."

Kara, a freshman who does average college work, also thinks the text is confusing; specifically, she says "I don't know what glibness means" (sentence 7). But whereas Seth sets up an hypothesis about both the content of the text and its source—"I think it's part of an article on the fact that the way you turn out is not a function of your environment"—and reads on to confirm his hypothesis, Kara's reading proceeds as a series of content paraphrases—"It's talking about children coming from different homes . . . and women not being happy." She continues to interpret the text a chunk at a time, paraphrasing linearly with little attempt to integrate or connect the parts. She reacts positively to the text—"I love the expression 'what has gone wrong'" (sentence 8)—and, despite her initial confusion with "glibness," she seems satisfied with her simple reading: "I just feel like you're talking about people—what's wrong with them and the world."

Not all the freshman student readers' transactions with the text were as superficial and oversimplified as Kara's—nor were they all as contented with their readings of the text. Bob—an above-average freshmen with a pre-med major—paraphrases content linearly like Kara, but he also sets up a hypothetical structure for the text: "It seems that different points are being brought out and each one has a kind of a contradiction in it, and it seems like an introduction. . . ." Unlike Kara, however, he becomes frustrated, unable to reconcile his own beliefs with what he's reading: "Well, I don't think they're too simple for a complex world. I don't think these are very simple things that are being said here. I think the situations—women, children, and men—I think they're pretty complex . . . so I don't understand why it said 'too simple for a complex world'" (sentence 10).

Our more experienced reader, Seth, also sets up an hypothesis about the text's structure: "Maybe he's [the author] contrasting the verbal glibness with caveman instinct." But Seth goes further: "I think the author is trying to say that it's some balance between your natural instinct and your surroundings but he's not sure what that balance is." These hypotheses try to account for not only the propositional content of the text, but also the function of parts ("contrasting"), the author's intent, and even the author's own uncertainty.

Seth continues to read the text, noting his own inexperience with the area of psychology—"I'm thinking about Freud and I really don't know much

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about psychology"—and trying to tie what he has just read to the previous paragraph: "I guess the psychological principles have something to do with the way children turn out. But I don't know if they are the physical, environmental things or if they're a function of your surroundings and education."

In these "early transactions" with the text, we see a range of readings and vast differences in the information contained in the readers' representations: Kara is uncertain of the meaning of a word and somewhat confused generally; she paraphrases content and is satisfied with the text and her reading of it. If we have a hint about the representations of text that Kara is building it is that they are focused primarily on content and her own affective responses and that they are somewhat more limited than those of the other readers. Bob's comments suggest that he may be building representations of structure as well as content, and that he is trying to bring his own beliefs and his reading of the text into line.

Seth is concerned with the content, with possible functions—both for parts of the text and for the text as a whole—with the author's intentions, with the experimental situation and with missing text; he also attends to his own knowledge (or lack of it) and to his prior reading experiences. What this suggests is that Seth is creating a multi-dimensional representation of the text that includes representations of its content, representations of the structure and function of the text, representations of author's intention and his own experience and knowledge as a reader of the text.

The "texts" or representations of meaning that the readers created as they were wrestling with the text and thinking aloud were dramatically different in both **quantity**—the amount of information they contained—and **quality**—the kinds of information they contained and the amount of the original text they accounted for. However, with no direct access to the internal representations that readers were building, we looked instead at the overt strategies they seemed to be using.

Strategies for Constructing Meaning

The initial transactions with text suggested some differences among readers. Our next move was to more systematically analyze these differences. Each protocol contained two kinds of verbalizations: actual reading of the text aloud and comments in which the readers were thinking aloud. About half of these comments were in response to the question, "How do you interpret the text now?" and the rest were unprompted responses. Each comment was sorted into one of three categories, based on what the readers seemed to be "attending to." This simple, three-part coding scheme distinguished between Content, Function/Feature, and Rhetorical reading strategies. These strategies are readily identifiable with some practice; our inter-rater reliability, determined by simple pair-wise comparisons, averaged 82%. Later, after about 20 min-

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utes' instruction in the context of a college reading classroom, students could identify the strategies in the reading of others with close to 70% reliability.

Comments coded as *content strategies* are concerned with content or topic information, "what the text is about." The reader may be questioning, interpreting, or summing content, paraphrasing what the text "is about" or "is saying." The reader's goal in using content strategies seems to be getting information from the text. Some examples of comments coded as content strategies:

> "So we're talking about psychological principles here."
> "I think it's about changing social conditions, like families in which both parents work, and changing roles of women."
> "I don't know what glibness is, so it's still confusing."

As Table 1 shows, both student and more experienced readers spent a large proportion of their effort using content strategies. On the average, 77% of the reading protocol was devoted to content strategies for students, 67% for the older readers. Building a representation of content seems to be very important for all of the readers we studied.

Function/feature strategies were used to refer to conventional, generic functions of texts, or conventional features of discourse. These strategies seemed closely tied to the text: readers frequently named text parts, pointing to specific words, sentences, or larger sections of text—"This is the main point," "This must be an example," "I think this is the introduction." While content strategies seemed to be used to explain what the text was "saying," function/feature strategies were often used to name what the text was "doing": "Here he's contrasting," "This part seems to be explaining. . . ." In short, the use of these strategies suggests that readers are constructing spatial, functional, or relational structures for the text. Some examples of comments coded as function/feature strategies:

> "I guess these are just examples."
> "Is this the introduction?"
> "This seems to be the final point."

Predictably, these strategies accounted for less of the protocol than did the content strategies: 22% for students, 20% for more experienced readers (See Table 1). And the groups of readers looked similar in their use of this strategy. This, too, may be expected: Identifying features such as introductions, examples, and conclusions is standard fare in many junior high and high school curricula. In addition, these students are of at least average ability within a competitive private university. We might ask if more basic readers—without the skills or reading experiences of these students—might demonstrate less use of the function/feature strategies. Further, these readers were all reading from paper; people reading from computer screens—a number which is rapidly increasing—may have difficulty creating and recalling spatial and

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relational structures in texts they read and write on-line (Haas and Hayes 34-35).

Rhetorical strategies take a step beyond the text itself. They are concerned with constructing a rhetorical situation for the text, trying to account for author's purpose, context, and effect on the audience. In rhetorical reading strategies readers use cues in the text, and their own knowledge of discourse situations, to recreate or infer the rhetorical situation of the text they are reading. There is some indication that these strategies were used to help readers uncover the actual "event" of the text, a unique event with a particular author and actual effects. One reader likened the author of the text to a contemporary rhetorician: "This sounds a little like Richard Young to me." Readers seem to be constructing a rhetorical situation for the text and relating *this* text to a larger world of discourse. These examples demonstrate some of the range of rhetorical strategies: comments concerned with author's purpose, context or source, intended audience, and actual effect. Some examples of rhetorical reading strategies:

> "So the author is trying to make the argument that you need scientific specialists in psychology."
>
> "I wonder if it [the article] is from *Ms.*"
>
> "I don't think this would work for the man-in-the-street."
>
> "I wonder, though, if this is a magazine article, and I wonder if they expected it to be so confusing."

While the groups of readers employed content and function/feature strategies similarly, there is a dramatic difference in their use of the rhetorical strategy category. Less than 1% (in fact, one statement by one reader) of the students' protocols contained rhetorical strategies, while 13% of the experienced readers' effort went into rhetorical strategies. This is particularly striking when we consider the richness and wealth of information contained in

Table 1

Mean Proportion of Strategies Used

	Students	Experienced Readers
Content Strategies	77% (58.1)	67% (58.0)
Feature Strategies	22% (15.8)	20% (18.0)
Rhetorical Strategies	1%* (.3)	13%* (9.3)

*Difference significant at .05 level. Numbers in parentheses indicate the mean number of protocol statements in each category.

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these kinds of comments. For instance, setting this article into the context of *Ms.* magazine brings with it a wealth of unstated information about the kind of article that appears in that source, the kind of writers that contribute to it, and the kind of people who read it.

Rhetorical reading appears to be an "extra" strategy which some readers used and others did not. Mann-Whitney analyses show no significant differences in the use of content or function/feature strategies, and an interesting—$p < .05$—difference between the two groups in use of rhetorical strategies. The small numbers in parentheses indicate the mean number of protocol statements in each category for each group of readers; the significance tests, however, were performed on the proportions of strategies used by each reader.

An example of two readers responding to a particularly difficult section of text reveals the differences in the use of strategies even more clearly than do the numbers.

> *Student Reader*: Well, basically, what I said previously is that there seems to be a problem between the real-world and the laboratory, or ideal situation versus real situation, whatever way you want to put it—that seems to be it.
>
> *Experienced Reader*: Ok, again, real world is a person familiar with the social influences on a person's personality—things they read or hear on the radio. . . . And laboratory specialists is more trained in clinical psychology. And now I think this article is trying to propose a new field of study for producing people who have a better understanding of human behavior. This person is crying out for a new type of scientist or something. (Ph.D. Student in Engineering)

While the student reader is mainly creating a gist and paraphrasing content, the experienced reader does this and more—he then tries to infer the author's purpose and even creates a sort of strident persona for the writer. If readers can only build representations for which they have constructive tools or strategies, then it is clear that this student reader—and in fact all of the student readers we studied—are not building rhetorical representations of this text. In fact, these student readers seem to be focused almost exclusively on content. The student reader above is a case in point: her goal seems to be to extract information from the text, and once that is done—via a simple paraphrase—she is satisfied with her reading of the text. We called this type of content reading "knowledge-getting," to underscore the similarity to the knowledge-telling strategy identified by Bereiter and Scardamalia (72) in immature writers. In both knowledge-getting and knowledge-telling, the focus is on content; larger rhetorical purposes seem to play no role.

It is useful to see rhetorical reading not as a separate and different strategy but as a progressive enlargement of the constructed meaning of a text. These student readers seldom "progressed" to that enlarged view. Reading for content is usually dominant and crucial—other kinds of strategies build upon content representations. Functions and features strategies are generic and con-

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ventional—easily identified in texts and often explicitly taught. Rhetorical strategies include not only a representation of discourse as discourse but as *unique* discourse with a real author, a specific purpose, and actual effects. This possible relationship between strategies may point to a building of skills, a progression which makes intuitive sense and is supported by what we know about how reading is typically taught and by teachers' reports of typical student reading problems.

The difference in the use that experienced and student readers make of these strategies does not in itself make a convincing case for their value. Rhetorical reading strategies certainly *look* more sophisticated and elaborate, but an important question remains: What does rhetorical reading *do* for readers? We might predict that constructing the additional rhetorical representation—requiring more depth of processing—would be an asset in particularly problematic reading tasks: texts in a subject area about which the reader knows little, or texts complex in structure. It might also be important in those reading tasks in which recognizing author's intention is crucial: propaganda, satire, even the interpretation of assignments in school.

However, let us consider a rival hypothesis for a moment: maybe rhetorical strategies are simply "frosting on the cake." Maybe good readers use these strategies because reading for information is easier for them, and they have extra cognitive resources to devote to what might be largely peripheral concerns of the rhetorical situation.

We suspect that this was not the case, that rhetorical reading is not merely "frosting on the cake" for several reasons: first, in the absence of a rhetorical situation for the text, *all* experienced readers constructed one. Second, the more experienced readers seemed to be using all the strategies in tandem; i.e., they used the rhetorical strategies to help construct content, and vice versa. They did not "figure out" the content, and then do rhetorical reading as an "embellishment." Rhetorical reading strategies were interwoven with other strategies as the readers constructed their reading of the texts.

And third, in the "tug of war" between text and reader which characterizes constructive reading (Tierney and Pearson 34), we found that the rhetorical readers seemed to recognize and assimilate more facts and claims into their reading of the text. Recall that there were two facts and two claims which we felt constituted a successful reading of this text. We used readers' recognition of these facts and claims to gauge and to describe the kind of representation they had constructed.

> Fact: Social problems exist and psychological principles exist, but there's a mismatch between them.
>
> Fact: There are two kinds of educational specialists—real-world and laboratory.
>
> Claim (explicit in text): The two kinds of specialists should interact.

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Claim (implicit): Interaction of the two specialists is necessary to solve social problems.

In recognizing facts in the text, both groups of readers did well. But there were very interesting differences in the patterns of recognition of claims in the text. Readers who used the rhetorical strategies, first, recognized more claims, and second, identified claims sooner than other readers. As we described earlier, our presentation of the text to the readers created nine reading episodes; each asked for the readers' interpretation of "the text so far" at the end of the episode. This allowed us some measure of constructed meaning by plotting the points at which readers recognized each fact or claim. We said that readers recognized a claim when they mentioned it as a possibility. This "recognition" was often tentative; readers made comments such as "So maybe this section is saying the two kinds of scientists should communicate," or "I guess this could solve the stuff at the beginning about social muddle."

The "episode line" in Figure 1 shows the points at which two readers (a student and a more experienced reader) recognized Claim 1, plotted in relation to the point at which the text would reasonably permit such recognition. Figure 2 shows this information for the same readers recognizing Claim 2. Claim 2 is never explicitly stated, it only becomes easy to infer in the final episode. Of all the implicit meanings the text *could* convey, we saw this second claim as central to the coherence of the argument.

As Figure 3 illustrates, all student readers got Claim 1, but only at episode

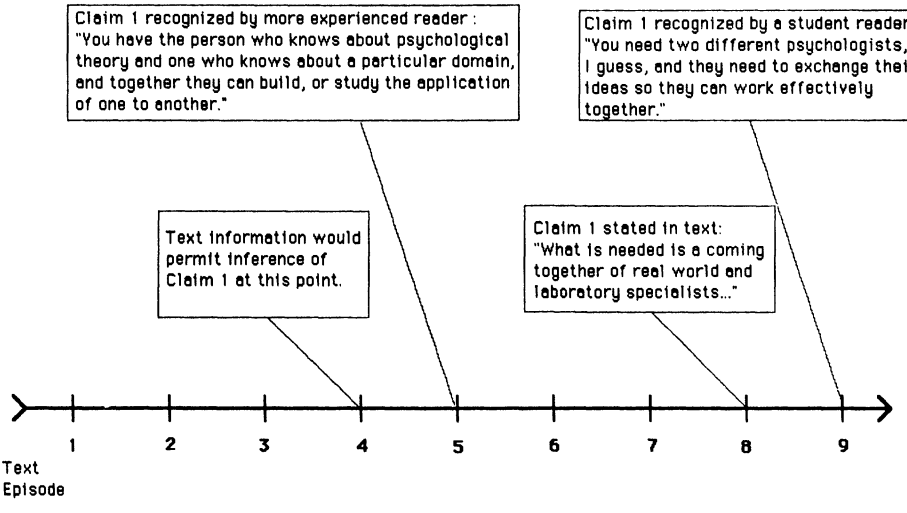


Figure 1. When did a reader recognize Claim 1? "The two kinds of specialists should interact."

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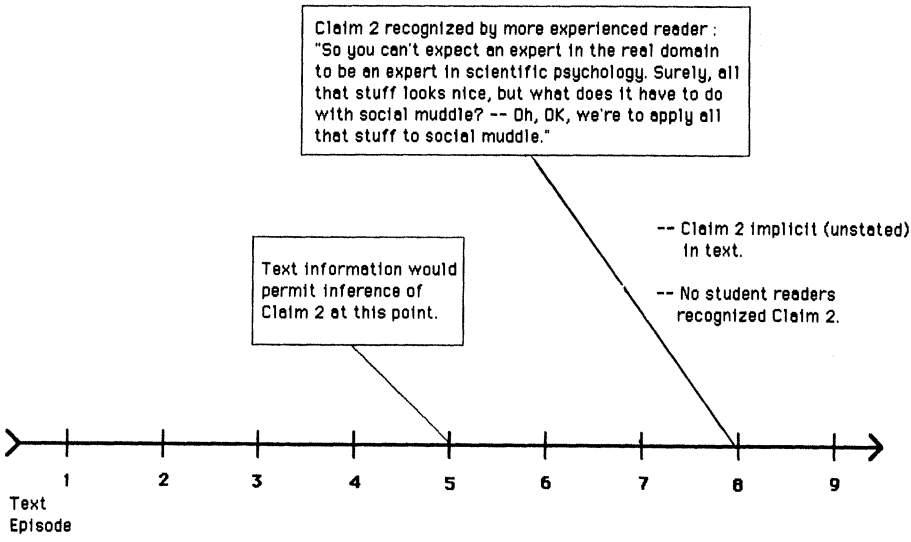


Figure 2. When did a reader recognize Claim 2? "Interaction of two kinds of specialists is necessary to solve social problems."

9, where it was explicitly stated—for the second time—in the text. (Claim 1 is first stated in episode 8.) More experienced readers, on the other hand, had all inferred Claim 1 much earlier—by episode 7. In addition, student readers did not recognize the unstated second claim at all, although all experienced readers inferred it, some as early as episode 8.

At episode 4 (the first point at which it would be possible to infer Claim 1), 25% of the experienced readers had inferred and mentioned this idea. At episode 5, 50% of these readers recognized it, at episode 6, 75% saw it, and by episode 7 all of the experienced readers had inferred Claim 1. In contrast, none of the student readers recognized this claim until episode 8, when it was cued in the text. At that point, 33% of the students noted it. At episode 9, when Claim 1 was restated, the rest of the students recognized it.

Claim 2 was never explicitly stated in the text, but half the experienced readers had inferred this claim at episode 8 and all had inferred it at episode 9. None of the student readers offered any hints that they had recognized this implicit claim. It seems that the rhetorical readers were better able to recognize an important claim that was *never explicitly spelled out in the text*. In sophisticated texts, many important high-level claims—like Claim 2—remain implicit, but are crucial nonetheless.

This study, because it is observational rather than experimental, does not allow us to conclude that the rhetorical reading we observed in the more expe-

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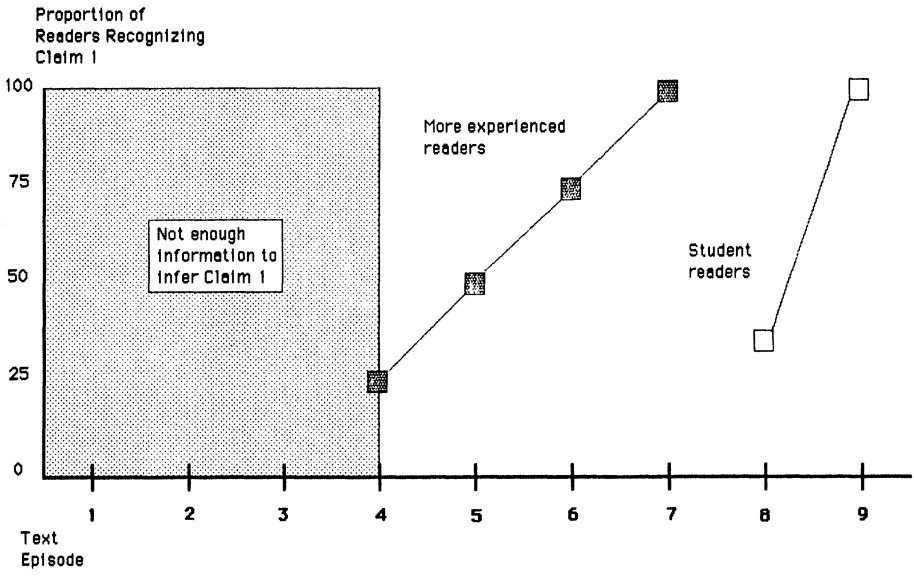


Figure 3. Readers' Recognition of Claim 1

rienced readers—and only in the more experienced readers—was the only or even the dominant cause for their ability to recognize claims. However, it makes sense that readers who are trying to make inferences about author, context, purpose, and effect, who are trying to create a representation of the text as the result of a purposeful action, would be more likely to recognize the claims—both implicit and explicit—within a text.

The Role of Rhetorical Reading

This study suggests that the strategy of rhetorical reading may be an important element in the larger process of critical reading. The constructive process we observed in readers actively trying to understand the author's intent, the context, and how other readers might respond appears to be a good basis for recognizing claims, especially unstated ones the reader must infer. Speaking more generally, this act of building a rich representation of text—larger than the words on the page and including both propositional content and the larger discourse context within which a text functions—is the kind of constructive reading we desire our students to do.

However, is rhetorical reading a strategy students could easily adopt if cued to do so? Being able to see one's own text and the texts of others as *discourse*

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acts—rather than bodies of facts and information—is desirable, useful, and important for reading and writing of all kinds. This is the kind of meaning building we would like students to do, and rhetorical reading is one strategy that may help them do it. In saying this, however, we recognize that this knowledge will do us little good if we can't use it to help students. People must be *able* to construct elaborate representations of meaning, and they must have the strategies to do so. How this is to come about is not clear.

Our first attempt at "suggestive" teaching—introducing the students to the concept of rhetorical reading and encouraging them to use it—found that while students could identify the rhetorical reading strategy in the reading of others, they were less successful at using it. Can we expect merely to hand students tools for building rich representations of text and set them to work? Or will rhetorical reading require active teaching—teaching by direct instruction, by modelling, and by encouraging students to become contributing and committed members of rhetorical communities?

Although the answers to these questions are not yet clear, we offer here our own reading of these results: first, some readers are actively concerned with the situations from which texts arise. These readers seemed to expend some effort in representing the rhetorical situation of a text they are reading. However, reading is a complex cognitive activity. It involves constructing representations on several levels, and student readers, even good students, seem to be bogged down in content: they focus on knowledge-getting while reading.

We believe that teaching students to read rhetorically is genuinely difficult. It is difficult in the way that teaching students to *write* rhetorically is difficult. In fact, this work with student and experienced *readers* provides a potential parallel to research results with student and expert *writers*. While expert writers, like those Flower, Hayes, Shriver, Carey, and Haas have studied, work within a rhetorical framework—imagining audience response, acknowledging context and setting their own purposeful goals—students writers often concentrate on content and information—they "knowledge tell," in Bereiter and Scardamalia's terms. Similarly, these student readers seem to concentrate on knowledge, content, what the text is about—not taking into account that the text is the product of a writer's intentions and is designed to produce an effect on a specific audience.

While experienced readers may understand that both reading and writing are context-rich, situational, constructive acts, many students may see reading and writing as merely an information exchange: knowledge-telling when they write, and "knowledge-getting" when they read. Helping students move beyond this simple, information-exchange view to a more complex rhetorical model—in both their reading and their writing—is one of the very real tasks which faces us as teachers. And research with real readers and writers continues to offer insights into the equally complex ways all of us construct meaning.

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