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Reading in Graduate School: Students’ Perceptions and Practices

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Reading in Graduate School
Students’ Perceptions and Practices

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SoTL Commons Conference 2014
Motivation for the study

What are they reading?
How are they reading?
What does reading mean?

Context of the study

Master’s level research methods course
16 SU Conservatory students
Literature reviewing; reading to write
A reading activity

- Take a few minutes to begin reading the excerpt you’ve been given, as you would with scholarly text that is new to you.

- Pay attention to your personal reading strategies. Imagine that you have all the tools (e.g., highlighters, sticky notes) that you like to use.

- Pay attention to your personal reactions to the act of reading the piece – not textual content.
Prior research


- the invisibility of reading
- a private act
- a silent performance
Research questions

What does graduate-level reading mean to graduate students?
How do graduate students manage graduate-level reading?

Research methods

Qualitative, exploratory
Narrative data, spoken and written
Constant comparative analysis
Pedagogy

Metacognition: Thinking about thinking
“Knowledge and cognition about cognitive phenomena” Flavell, 1979.

Scaffolded activities
Writing from and about reading

Organizing and thinking about sources
Musical and textual symbols
Ancestors and descendants
Conversations in the literature
## Literature graphing

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<th>Retrieval practice</th>
<th>Memorization</th>
<th>Performance</th>
<th>Motivic structure</th>
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Prompts to guide journal entries

What does “reading academically” mean to you?

What difficulties have you encountered when reading? How have you handled them?

How has reading to write affected your reading?

How has “thinking about thinking” affected your reading?
Reading academically means

... Reading to learn ...

... to be more knowledgeable in my field and be able to find solutions to problems within [my] subject.

... [to] learn more about a particular subject, draw conclusions, make inferences, and form opinions.

... to sequentially build up knowledge.

Reading is a vehicle for delivering knowledge or buried content (van Pletzen, 2006).
Reading academically means

... *Reading to understand*

Reading academically is synonymous with critical reading, or reading to genuinely understand.

It requires the reader to understand the material rather than memorize.

Reading academically increase[s] one’s knowledge and understanding ... My credibility as a [music] director and [musician] is diminished if I only know the notes on the score.
Their reading practices

Learning “secondary discourses” (Gee, 1996)

Process - pre-reading, rereading, questioning, checking comprehension

- Skimming, then re-reading;
- Scanning for keywords, phrases, known authors;
- Decoding blocks of text;
- Asking questions while reading;
- Reading actively.

Reading strategy categories adapted from Manarin (2012).
Their reading practices

Reading like a Writer

Structure - evaluating narrative and informational structures

- Graphing conflicting or similar concepts;
- Looking for commonalities and differences among sources;
- Reading strategically, identifying major sections, then underlying themes and concepts;
- Asking why authors choose to express their ideas in certain ways.
Their reading practices

**Inference** — connecting reading to prior experiences or knowledge

- Identifying similar formats among research articles help with comprehension;
- Comparing the reading with [my] knowledge;
- Analyzing [my] conclusions, then reflecting on ways to apply them to [my] field;
- Relating [my interests] closely to the reading.

‘I am thankful I could choose my literature review topic. I’m excited about learning!’
What is their sense of graduate-level reading?

Reading academically has become a much more laborious task. ... [The main point of] a literature review is not to gain knowledge per se, which is why I tend to read, but to find patterns and alignments throughout the ... literature and this ... is less rewarding ...

I find that I’m reading something that I’m legitimately interested in, but now it’s become work. That’s very frustrating.
What is their sense of graduate-level reading?

Certain articles, depending on the style and content used, [welcome you to engage deeply] in them.

I think the key in learning how to productively read academic material has been finding out how I best process information. For me, that means visually and kinesthetically working through the text.

How valuable it is to have a purpose when I am reading academically ... This made the reading and writing so much more engaging and enjoyable.
“Perhaps there simply isn’t a better method of improving skills in reading academic works than doing it.”

My “thinking about thinking” has ... changed the way I read.
So what?

Graduate-level reading may be under-valued;

Learners bring many kinds of prior knowledge and many ways of knowing to the graduate reading experience;

Students’ abilities to learn through reading can be strengthened by our making this critical graduate literacy visible.
How do we approach the pedagogy of graduate-level reading?
References


Images from the Jefferson Building of the Library of Congress are from my personal collection and http://www.loc.gov/pictures


