



CHAPTER 26

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A Close Reading of Close Reading

What Does the Research Tell Us about How to Promote the Thoughtful Interrogation of Text?

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So what's the deal with close reading anyway? Is it even anything new?
—A colleague, commenting on this chapter's topic

The practice of close reading has experienced a recent “revival” in adolescent literacy instruction, due to its appearance in the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects (CCSS; National Governors Association for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers [NGA & CCSSO], 2010) and the Revised Publishers' Criteria for the Standards (RPC; Coleman & Pimentel, 2012), an influential curriculum development guide. The first anchor standard for reading asks students to “read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text” (NGA & CCSSO, 2010, p. 10). *Close reading*, or a synonym of close reading (e.g., careful examination), appears more than 50 times in the RPC.

Upon reading the CCSS and RPC, and considering the broad implications of these documents for classrooms across the United States, many scholars and educators are asking the question our colleague poses in the opening epigraph: What's the deal with close reading? Is it a brand new practice, is it the resurrected ghost of a bygone practice from midcentury New Criticism, or is it a practice that has never really disappeared from classrooms? And how will Common Core era close reading affect adolescent literacy instruction?

Though school districts across the country are now enacting the RPC's vision of close reading instruction, many scholars and practitioners are questioning the theory

and research underlying this vision (Applebee, 2013; Pearson, 2013; Smith, Appleman, & Wilhelm, 2014; Snow & O'Connor, 2013). We worry, along with others (e.g., Beers, 2013; Compton-Lilly, 2013), that in an attempt to revive critical engagement with texts in classrooms, the authors of the RPC have swung the pendulum too far away from considerations of the reader's background knowledge and culture, and have marginalized the role of the sociocultural contexts in which texts are written and read. Curriculum developers, school leaders, and instructors who follow the RPC's version of close reading may, we fear, devalue the background knowledge and cultural ways of making meaning that diverse students bring into the classroom and therefore limit what thoughtful textual interrogation can accomplish in adolescents' lives.

Against this backdrop we offer our own vision of adolescent close reading instruction, one that more fully accounts for interactions among the reader, text, activity, and sociocultural context during the reading process (Snow, 2002). To develop this vision, we have traced the history of close reading through key theories taken up by secondary educators in the past 75 years. We have also reviewed empirical work on close reading written from 2000–2015, focusing on studies of, examples of, or critical perspectives on close reading instruction in middle and high school classrooms. In keeping with the theme of this handbook, we have also sought out practice-based methods of adolescent close reading instruction that have been developed by educators over the past 15 years. Our vision of adolescent close reading instruction is also informed by our perspectives as scholars and former teachers and our belief that there is never just one monolithic best "reading." Instead, readers should engage in multiple reading practices and a range of culturally appropriate ways of understanding (Gee, 2007; Heath, 1983; Street, 2003; New London Group, 2000). We hold that prior knowledge and social experiences allow some readers to access and interpret texts within these multiple literacies more competently than others (Bransford & Johnson, 1973; Brown, Collins, & Duguid, 1989; Pearson, Hansen, & Gordon, 1979) and that some reading practices are more valued than others by society (Smagorinsky, 2001).

Keeping our perspectives on language and literacy in balance with the research literature, we propose five principles for adolescent close reading instruction:

1. *Background knowledge.* Learn about students' cultural backgrounds, areas of expertise, and existing literacy practices, and adjust close reading instruction to leverage and build students' content and discursive knowledge.
2. *Authentic reading and writing.* Present students with authentic opportunities to use close reading strategies that mirror the types of reading that happen in the real world, and to draw from these close readings to compose authentic texts.
3. *Metadiscursive awareness.* Promote students' metadiscursive awareness by helping them understand the purposes and structures of texts in different disciplines and genres, and which close reading strategies work for these purposes and structures.
4. *Critical literacy.* Involve students as critics of themselves, texts, and the world as they read closely.
5. *Dialogically organized discussion.* Guide students to ask and answer authentic questions while reading texts closely, and engage them in rich and rigorous conversations about their questions and interpretations.

In the coming pages, we contrast what we are calling a Common Core close reading paradigm with our vision of a 21st-century close reading paradigm for adolescent classrooms. Then, we turn to our five principles of adolescent close reading instruction. In our discussion of each principle, we offer a definition, explain its importance to adolescent literacy, summarize its research base, and describe examples of close reading instructional practices from the research literature that exemplify the principle. For each principle we attend to close reading within both new and digital literacies (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000; Gee, 2010; Knobel & Lankshear, 2014; Kress, 2003; Leu, Kinzer, Coiro, Castek, & Henry, 2013; Mills, 2010) and traditional and print-based literacies, as we argue that close reading instruction must adapt to the “pluralized, hybridized, intertextual, immediate, spontaneous, abbreviated, informal, collaborative, productive, interactive, hyperlinked, dialogic (between author and reader), and linguistically diverse” digital new literacies (Mills, 2010, p. 255), as well as traditional literacies that have been with us for millennia. Finally, given that we have found very few empirical tests of particular approaches to adolescent close reading instruction, we conclude with directions for future research.

A VERSION OF THE OLD, A VISION FOR THE NEW: COMPARING COMMON CORE CLOSE READING WITH A 21ST-CENTURY ADOLESCENT CLOSE READING PARADIGM

Searching for Common Ground: What All Close Reading Shares

Since the premise of this chapter assumes that Common Core “close reading” is different from 21st-century “close reading,” here we strive for a simple, ecumenical definition of close reading that can offer common ground for discussing alternative perspectives. In the introduction of Lentricchia and DuBois’s (2003) compilation of close reading analyses, DuBois crafts a “common sense” definition of close reading that will serve this purpose well: “Reading with special attention” to a text (p. 2). A reader conducting *any type* of close reading will scrutinize a text; this is the common element across close reading paradigms. Close reading paradigms, however, may differ along many other dimensions. For example, educators may differ in their goals for close reading, ideas about what constitutes a text worthy of close reading, and assumptions about where meaning resides. These beliefs may lead to differences in instructional practice, such as the types of texts chosen, types of questions posed to students, participation frameworks designed, and the overarching curriculum in which close reading is embedded. We argue that the 21st-century close reading paradigm we have imagined differs along these dimensions from the Common Core close reading paradigm in ways that more accurately reflect what we know about the construction of meaning from texts, the needs of a diverse adolescent population, and the demands of literacy in the 21st century.

A Version of the Old: A Common Core Close Reading Paradigm

From our vantage point, the Common Core close reading paradigm, as presented by the CCSS and RPC, resembles a New Critical close reading paradigm that has endured as the dominant mode of textual analysis in English classrooms for much of the 20th century.

The phrase *close reading* originated with the New Criticism, a literary school most active from the 1930s through the 1970s (Gallop, 2007). Though the New Critics did not share a common set of goals for close reading, assumptions about where meaning resides, or notions about what constitutes a text worthy of close reading, they were united in the belief that the text should serve as a touchstone for rigorous interpretive work (Ransom, 1937). Robert Penn Warren and Cleanth Brooks's New Critical close reading paradigm was most influential in secondary classrooms, as their book, *Understanding Poetry* (Brooks & Warren, 1938) was widely used for over 5 decades, with new editions released in 1950, 1960, 1976, and 1978 (Golding, 1995). Within Brooks and Warren's paradigm, close readings could best be accomplished by holding reader bias and consideration of the text's historical context at arm's length: Only then could one appreciate the meaning inherent in the text. As Brooks (1979) put it, "To use a metaphor drawn from the law courts, 'evidence outside the poem' is always secondhand (or even hearsay) evidence as compared with the evidence presented by the text itself" (p. 600).

While populist approaches to textual analysis, such as reader response or critical literacy paradigms, replaced New Critical formalist approaches in research journals by the 1980s, secondary classrooms maintained the status quo of Brooks and Warren-esque close reading (Applebee, 1993; Burroughs & Smagorinsky, 2009; Dressman & Faust, 2014), perhaps because this paradigm was ensconced in advanced placement (AP) English assessment, popular pedagogical resources such as Adler and Doren's (1972) *How to Read a Book*, and instructional methods such as the Junior Great Books program and Paideia Seminars. Since close reading in the New Critical tradition never really gave way to reader response or critical literacy approaches to textual interpretation, many teachers in U.S. classrooms will recognize the Common Core close reading paradigm as reinforcing practices that are all too familiar.

If anything, the Common Core close reading paradigm may be more text-centric than New Criticism. The Common Core close reading paradigm situates meaning entirely within the text, without acknowledging the role of the reader or sociocultural context in interpretation. The authors of the RPC assert that meaning "lies within the four corners of the text" (Coleman & Pimentel, 2012, p. 4), and can therefore be extracted through a process of answering "text-dependent" close reading questions that "do not require information or evidence from outside the text or texts" (p. 6). Such language reveals Coleman and Pimentel's (we believe, problematic) assumption that meaning lies in wait like an archeological artifact to be excavated and placed in a reader's mind, as long as he or she had the appropriate tools to dig it out. We like better Louise Rosenblatt's (1978) metaphor of meaning-as-*poem*, crafted anew each time a reader encounters a text in a specific social, cultural, and historical moment.

The Common Core close reading paradigm is also "old" in its approach to what constitutes a worthy text for close reading. Curriculum designers are asked to provide "short, challenging" texts, as well as "novels, play, and other extended full-length readings," which should all be "worth reading closely and exhibit exceptional craft and thought or provide useful information" (Coleman & Pimentel, 2012, pp. 3–4). We agree with Rabinowitz (1992) that such a limited vision of texts may exclude the analysis of culturally or historically important texts and "privilege figurative writing over the realistic portrayal of material social conditions, deep meaning over surface meaning, form over content, the elite over the popular, and indirect expression over direct" (p. 233). Furthermore, both the CCSS and the RPC demand the close reading of *print* text only (Chandler-Olcott,

2013; Drew, 2012). Multimodal and digital texts are excluded from the reading standards, and the RPC warns that nonprint multimedia such as videos should “[engage] students in absorbing or expressing details of the [print] text rather than becoming a distraction or replacement for engaging with the [print] text” (Coleman & Pimentel, 2012, p. 13).

Finally, the Common Core close reading paradigm is marked by limited goals for close reading: “The criteria make plain that developing students’ prowess at drawing knowledge from the text itself is the point of reading; reading well means gaining the maximum insight or knowledge possible from each source” (Coleman & Pimentel, 2012, p. 1). The RPC’s emphasis on gaining knowledge from text excludes a wide range of desirable goals for adolescent close reading, such as social action, identity construction, or even pure enjoyment.

We offer an alternative vision of adolescent close reading instruction for the 21st century, one that assumes and asserts that (1) meaning is constructed at the intersection of a unique reader, text, and activity within sociocultural contexts; (2) the term “text” entails print and digital, short and long, carefully crafted and hastily jotted, official and popular; and (3) close reading should build identity, equity, and action, as well as knowledge.

A Vision for Now: A 21st-Century Close Reading Paradigm for Adolescent Classrooms

Our vision of how meaning is made during adolescent close reading draws from the RAND Research Study Group (RRSG), whose members imagine reading as a simultaneous interaction among text, reader, activity, and the encompassing sociocultural context (Snow, 2002, p. 13; Figure 26.1).

As the heuristic suggests, meaning making during close reading is much more complicated than reader-meets-text, reader-extracts-meaning. Instead, textual interpretation is a bit different for every reader, depending on his or her knowledge and motivation to read, the features of the text he or she encounters, and the activity in which reading occurs. Furthermore, the macrocultures of society and the microculture of the classroom

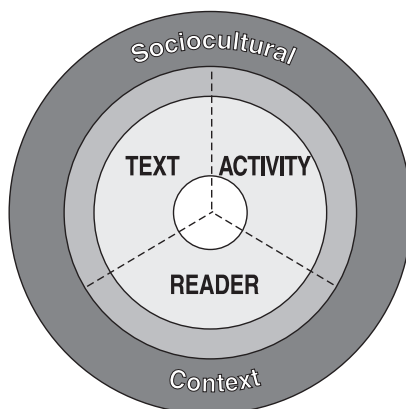


FIGURE 26.1. A heuristic for thinking about reading comprehension. From Snow (2002). Copyright 2002 by RAND. Reprinted by permission.

sanction what readings are acceptable, and the sociocultural backgrounds of the reader and text further shape interpretations (Smagorinsky, 2001). Thus, the power structures, discourses, and cultures in society surround and infuse all other components in the heuristic.

A 21st-century close reading paradigm must also expand the category of texts that are worthy of close reading. It is our belief that close reading instruction that does not incorporate networked digital technology and texts is not 21st-century close reading instruction, since digital literacies and a participatory ethos (Knobel & Lankshear, 2014) have influenced how adolescents read at home (Ito et al., 2010) and how they will someday have to read in college and in careers (Warschauer & Matuchniak, 2010). We also consider popular texts (Alvermann, 2008) and texts from adolescents' peer and home cultures (Lee, 2001) as fair game for close reading instruction.

Our goals for adolescent close reading instruction also move beyond the knowledge-building demanded by the Common Core close reading paradigm. We believe that teachers should aim to engage adolescents' interest in reading and composing (Alvermann, 2002; Guthrie, Klauda, & Ho, 2013), for without engagement, there is no reading, close, distant, or otherwise. We also believe that teachers should guide students to read and write a wide array of texts in different disciplines and genres (Adolescent Literacy Committees and the Adolescent Literacy Task Force of the International Reading Association, 2012), prepare them to be active citizens in a culturally diverse global world (Gutiérrez, 2008; New London Group, 2000), and to help them analyze, critique, and change the cultural ideologies reflected in texts (Freebody & Luke, 1990).

We now turn to our five principles for 21st-century adolescent close reading instruction as a way of illustrating this paradigm at a finer grain of detail for practitioners and researchers alike.

PRINCIPLES OF 21ST-CENTURY ADOLESCENT CLOSE READING INSTRUCTION

Background Knowledge

Learn about students' cultural backgrounds, areas of expertise, and existing literacy practices, and adjust close reading instruction to leverage and build students' content and discursive knowledge.

Researchers converge on the finding that an adolescent reader's content and discursive knowledge (what we refer to as *background knowledge*) has a significant effect on his or her reading practices and reading comprehension (Anderson & Pearson, 1984; Kintsch, 1998; Langer, 1984), particularly as texts increase in complexity (Fisher, Frey, & Lapp, 2012).

The mechanism underlying background knowledge's importance to readers is theorized by the construction–integration (CI) model of reading comprehension (Kintsch, 1988) that arose from the schema theory models of the 1970s and 1980s (Anderson & Pearson, 1984). This theory suggests that in order for readers to *learn* from a text, they must create what Kintsch (1988) terms a *situation model*, or a mental representation of the text that is linked to long-term memory. Prior knowledge is crucial in this phase of the process, since they must have a schema on which to “hang” the ideas they encounter.

Sociocultural researchers tie this background knowledge explicitly to culture; recently, for example, Juzwik (2014) has argued that students raised in Biblical evangelical religious traditions may be better positioned than many of their peers to undertake the type of close reading outlined in the CCSS and RPC. Thus, culture and embodied experience are as much a part of background knowledge as is semantic knowledge.

Implications for Close Reading Instruction

Because of the importance of background knowledge to meaning construction, teachers should learn what content and discourses students already know, and look for opportunities to add to this knowledge as students read with special attention to text. Cultural modeling approaches to close reading instruction (Lee, 2001; Orellana & Reynolds, 2008) are one way to address the gaps between students' existing linguistic and literacy practices and those expected in school settings. Carol Lee (2001), for example, drew on her African American high school English students' knowledge of language play in African American English to build close reading strategies for poetry. Teachers following Lee's approach might learn all they can about their students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds, use discourses from these backgrounds as a launching point for close reading strategy building, and think carefully about how to organize texts such that students are gradually improving their knowledge over the course of the year.

Teachers might also draw on digital technology to scaffold adolescents' background knowledge in the form of multimedia vocabulary hyperlinks, graphics illustrating word meanings, and supplemental multimedia supports such as maps, timelines, and videos (Dalton & Proctor, 2007). Over the course of a curricular unit, teachers might plan which digital technology will build knowledge, practice close textual analysis of digital texts, and gradually release responsibility to students for finding and analyzing new knowledge sources (Boche & Henning, 2015). Teachers may also learn about students' existing digital literacies, and leverage them to teach close reading skills and content, for example, "using Minecraft to design the town of Maycomb may promote [a student's] close reading of *To Kill a Mockingbird*" (Curwood & Fink, 2013, p. 426).

Authentic Reading and Writing

Present students with authentic opportunities to use close reading strategies that mirror the types of reading that happens in the real world, and to draw from these close readings to compose authentic texts.

Too often, when we ask high school students to conduct close readings in English classrooms, we are leading them to craft what Burroughs and Smagorinsky (2009) term *codified discourses*, or those that are valued only in school settings. For adolescent close reading instruction to be authentic, it would have to take into account the "text uses" (Luke & Freebody, 1999) that students will encounter in college, careers, and life, while providing them the instructional support they need along the way.

We borrow Purcell-Gates, Duke, and Martineau's (2007) definition of *authentic literacies*: "(a) reading and writing of textual types, or genres, that occur *outside* of a learning-to-read-and-write context and purpose, and (b) reading and writing those texts for the purposes for which they are read or written outside of a learning-to-read-and-write

context and purpose” (p. 14). Theories of situated cognition (Brown et al., 1989), the sociocultural learning of higher mental functions (Vygotsky, 1978), and legitimate peripheral participation (Lave & Wenger, 1991) all suggest that in order to learn in a given domain, learners need to be immersed in the authentic experience of that domain’s discourses and culture while guided by more expert others. The theoretical basis for authentic literacy instruction is strong, and the few studies that test the effects of authentic texts and tasks on student outcomes show promise for authentic close reading instruction (see Purcell-Gates, Degener, Jacobson, & Soler, 2002; Purcell-Gates et al., 2007).

Implications for Close Reading Instruction

Andrew Turchon, a middle school social studies teacher, exemplifies an authentic approach to close reading instruction in his unit on map literacy (Dakin, Eatough, & Turchon, 2011). Turchon asked his “student geographers” to read maps closely to discover their purpose: inform, persuade, explain, or compare and contrast. Students drew on their knowledge of maps to provide text-based evidence for their answers—phrases, symbols, or images from the map. Teachers following Turchon’s example might think about the reading practices used by experts in the field of study, choose authentic texts that would be read in that community, and lead students through close reading activities designed to make them more aware of the texts’ features and purpose.

Digital literacies may offer multiple pathways for students to engage in authentic reading of texts of their own choosing, thus increasing engagement (Alvermann, 2008; Neugebauer, 2013). We can imagine a close reading lesson at the high school level, in which teachers ask students to choose a digital game they play outside of school or a social media platform they frequent, then guide them to develop close reading strategies that would foster new interpretations of these media.

Teachers can also learn much from the authentic close reading that occurs in digital forums, which are heavily intertwined with writing, composing, and creativity. In fan forums, for example, fans share and debate their close readings of television, movies, and books with other fans (Jenkins, 2013). Instruction modeled after online participatory culture might use close reading as an entrée into creative, transformative writing. For instance, teachers testing a Teachers’ Strategy Guide for New Media Literacies led students to perform close readings of *Moby Dick* across multiple platforms (e.g., film, song, book), then craft comic strips, plays, music videos, and fanfiction in response (Kelley, Jenkins, Clinton, & McWilliams, 2013).

Metadiscursive Awareness

Promote students’ metadiscursive awareness by helping them understand the purposes and structures of texts in different disciplines and genres, and which close reading strategies work for these purposes and structures.

We define *metadiscursive awareness* as knowledge about texts and reading practices (Schoenbach, Greenleaf, & Murphy, 2012). More specifically, the purpose of metadiscursive awareness “should be to identify and explain differences between texts and relate these to the contexts of culture and situation in which they seem to work” (New London Group, 2000, p. 14). In everyday terms, metadiscursive awareness might be construed as

how, when, where, and why a learner adapts reading and writing practices to a particular context, such as a discipline (biology vs. literature), a kind of text frame (description vs. argument), or a task (summary vs. critique). As adolescents gain this metadiscursive awareness, it should inform the lenses, purposes, and strategies they choose when closely reading texts in different genres and disciplines. Due to shifts in the CCSS and research that has revealed disciplinary differences in expert reading approaches (Shanahan, Shanahan, & Misischia, 2011), many researchers have asserted that adolescents should be taught to read closely using discipline-specific lenses (e.g., Lee, 2014; Moje, 2008; Shanahan, 2012). In addition to performing these discipline-specific close readings, we want students to be able to approach multimodal and hybrid text genres with a metadiscursive toolkit at their disposal.

One empirical body of work that focuses on developing metadiscursive awareness during adolescent close reading instruction comes from a systemic functional linguistics approach (Halliday, 1978). Working in this tradition, Schleppegrell, Greer, and Taylor (2008) have created and tested close reading instruction that helps students develop a metalanguage for examining the language patterns in history texts. Teachers lead students through a series of questions that help them recognize and interpret what the authors term “reference devices”: pronouns, demonstratives, synonyms, verbs, nouns, conjunctions and other features of language. Drawing from these reference devices, students and teachers discuss common processes captured by historical texts (e.g., cause–effect), historical participants and their agendas, and the circumstances in which historical events occur. Above all, students develop a metalanguage for closely reading, discussing, and learning from historical texts. Students whose teachers participated in a summer institute to learn this close reading instructional strategy significantly outperformed comparison group students in all facets of a historical essay aligned with the California State Standards.

Implications for Close Reading Instruction

Functional language analysis presents one instructional model for close reading instruction; multiliteracies pedagogy (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000; New London Group, 2000) provides another. Whereas functional language analysis zeroes in on the implication of grammatical features of text for interpretation, multiliteracies pedagogy seeks to foster a metalanguage about different modes (e.g., visual, linguistic, audio, spatial, gestural). This metalanguage includes understandings of features of genre, such as common patterns of textual organization, as well as understandings of how the verbal, visual, and aural contribute meaning to texts. Cope and Kalantzis (2000) detail how a teacher at William Ross High School organized metadiscursive close reading instruction within a multiliteracies pedagogy using a music video. The teacher first asked students to analyze the song’s written lyrics, then she asked what the music, colors, imagery, and editing add to the meaning of the music video. As this example illustrates, multiliteracies pedagogy can develop students’ metadiscursive awareness around multimodal text genres, as well as traditional print literacies.

Digital texts are not often bounded and linear; rather, they are interwoven, changeable, and multilinear (Looy & Baetens, 2003). A student may begin to read a webpage about graffiti laws in his or her city and navigate by the end of the session to the Instagram

#*graffiti* hashtag. Close reading digital texts, then, takes metadiscursive knowledge about how genre features, intertextuality, and multimodality work together to make meaning. Internet reciprocal teaching, in which students teach their classmates about digital text features and reading strategies, may also hold promise as a 21st-century close reading approach (Leu et al., 2013).

Critical Literacy

Involve students as critics of themselves, texts, and the world as they read closely.

Allan Luke (2012) defines *critical literacy* as “use of the technologies of print and other media of communication to analyze, critique and transform the norms, rule systems and practices governing the social fields of everyday life” (p. 5). Teachers designing close reading instruction through a critical literacy lens would demonstrate to their students that texts represent particular points of view and silence others, and that texts can be used as jumping off points for social action (Luke & Freebody, 1999). We believe, with Franzak (2006), that “critical pedagogy that incorporates effective literacy instruction seems to hold the most potential for both improving reading achievement and working toward equitable social arrangements” (p. 221).

One widely cited theoretical framework in the research literature is Hillary Janks’s (2000) four dimensions of critical literacy in education: domination, access, diversity, and design. Close reading pedagogy from a domination perspective might focus on how symbolic forms of representation (written language, visuals, sound) reproduce existing power structures. Close reading pedagogy from an access perspective might focus on critiquing and learning dominant genres. Close reading pedagogy from a diversity perspective may call for a wide range of texts to be read and for student’s cultural reading practices to be valued. And close reading pedagogy from a design perspective may emphasize that close reading should be but one step on the path to crafting new narratives that effect social change.

In a review of critical literacy interventions at the secondary level, Behrman (2006) claims that while there are many different pedagogical approaches represented in the literature, there are common threads running through studies. Students in critical literacy interventions might read multiple texts, with the goal of highlighting key differences in author perspectives; read from a resistant perspective, with the goal of unmasking power structures represented by texts; produce countertexts, with the goal of lending legitimacy to marginalized voices; conduct student-choice research projects, with the goal of learning about social forces; and take social action, with the goal of engaging literacy for change.

Implications for Close Reading Instruction

We think that instructional frameworks such as Borsheim-Black, Macaluso, and Petrone’s (2014) critical literature pedagogy (CLP) hold promise for promoting close reading from a critical literacy standpoint. Teachers using the CLP would lead students through close readings *with* and *against* the text. Close reading *with* a text “includes familiar approaches of comprehending storylines, analyzing literary devices, making personal connections, understanding historical contexts, and developing thematic interpretations”

while close reading *against* a text “examine[s] how it is embedded and shaped by ideologies” (Borsheim-Black et al., 2014, p. 124). The authors of the CLP suggest that teachers lead students through interrogating a wide variety of texts, canonical and popular, along five dimensions: canonicity, contexts, literary elements, reader, and assessments. Behrman (2006) argues that close reading for critical literacy is also possible in the content areas. Content-area teachers seeking to promote critical literacy might ask questions such as “How do[es] specific text content, [modes of inquiry, and text genre] gain acceptance and prominence? What counts as ‘true’ within the discipline, and who makes that determination? Why?” (p. 496).

The proliferation of texts, digital platforms, and tools on the Internet increases the need for critical literacy in close reading instruction (Leu et al., 2013). In 2010, Google CEO Eric Schmidt observed that every 2 days, Internet users create more data than humans created from the dawn of man through 2003 (Siegler, 2010). Partially because the sheer quantity of information on the Internet is staggering, it is necessary to ensure that students develop the tools to recognize that Internet texts and platforms, as literacy objects, are created by authors with agendas (Brandt & Clinton, 2002). Facebook, for example, allows certain types of interaction (e.g., the “like” button), while discouraging others (e.g., making one’s profile invisible to advertisers is arduous). This commercial side of the Internet, coupled with the reality that anyone can publish anything, raises the stakes for solid critical reading pedagogy in modern classrooms. Judging the credibility of sources, the validity of arguments, and the subtexts encoded in surface texts are necessary in any close reading context, but especially so in this new digital world of texts.

Though the Digital Age has increased the need for critical literacy in close reading instruction, it has also increased the opportunities for students to engage in close reading. Students can, for example, now analyze multiple versions of texts online (Webb, 2007), remix texts to create alternative narratives (Gainer & Lapp, 2010), and distribute these counternarratives to authentic audiences to promote social change (Avila & Moore, 2012).

Dialogically Organized Discussion

Guide students to ask and answer authentic questions while reading texts closely, and engage them in rich and rigorous conversations about their questions and interpretations.

Dialogue is a medium through which classroom communities can reach collective interpretations of a text (Wells, 2002), students can articulate their thoughts and then reach for those thoughts as new interpretive tools (Smagorinsky, 2001), or students can confront alternative perspectives, therefore moving toward new patterns of reading activity (Engeström, 2015) or belief systems (Bakhtin, 1986). When students are asked to sustain “special attention to a text,” often over repeated readings, we think dialogue between teachers and students can drive richer and more nuanced interpretations.

All classroom dialogue is not equal in its effects on student learning, however. In a large-scale study, Nystrand (1997) found that dialogue in the vast majority of studied classrooms was monologically organized, in which the teacher held the discussion floor (and the topic of discussion) far more than did students and adhered to IRE (initiation–response–evaluation) discourse patterns (Cazden, 2001). But in the classrooms in which

teachers posed more authentic questions and elaborated on student ideas, students improved their analytic skills to a point where they performed significantly better on standardized writing measures. Nystrand (1997) terms the latter approach “dialogically organized” instruction, drawing on Bakhtin (1986). Dialogically organized instruction typically elicits more student voices and encourages students to build on each other’s ideas, incorporates authentic questions to which there is no “right” answer predetermined by the teacher, and scaffolds student offerings with the goal of creating access to more complex ways of reading (Gutiérrez, 1993).

Large-scale empirical studies (Applebee, Langer, Nystrand, & Gamoran, 2003; Murphy, Wilkinson, Soter, Hennessey, & Alexander, 2009) have demonstrated that dialogically organized classroom discussion correlates with positive reading outcomes in adolescent classrooms, with some caveats. Applebee et al. (2003) showed that dialogic instruction, envisionment building, and extended curricular conversation effected better student reading and writing outcomes, but that this type of instruction was rarely present in low-tracked classrooms. In their analysis of the effects of nine dialogically organized discussion approaches for literacy, Murphy et al. (2009) found that increases in levels of student talk did not always correlate with improvements in comprehension, and conclude that talk should be a *means* to an end, and not an end in itself. These studies suggest that teachers of close reading should create opportunities for all of their students to engage in high-quality, rigorous, and authentic discussion about texts. This is especially true for teachers of low-income or low-tracked classes, who are too often pressured to steep students in basic skills instruction at the expense of rich classroom discourse.

Implications for Close Reading Instruction

Smith et al. (2014) offer an alternative to the version of close reading championed in the RPC that allows for dialogically organized discussion. Specifically, they provide a counterlesson responding to Coleman’s close reading of Martin Luther King’s “Letter from Birmingham Jail” (Engage NY, 2012). Unlike in Coleman’s lesson, students in Smith et al.’s imagined classroom would talk about issues in the text before reading, reflecting, for example, about times when they felt weak, strong, or persuasive. As they closely read King’s “Letter” and supplementary texts, students would participate in discussion guided by authentic questions, such as “What giants oppose equality and the achievement of civil rights in Dr. King’s time and our own?” The authors also provide ideas for participation strategies (e.g., a whole-class brainstorm, jigsaw activity, think-pair shares, role play) to organize the close reading discussion, so that students take up each other’s ideas and elaborate on their own. This reimagined lesson better capitalizes on the experiences of all readers in the classroom and frames close reading as a collaborative process that takes place in an interpretive community.

New digital literacies offer more opportunities for dialogically organized close reading pedagogy than ever before. Social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Snapchat, discussion forums such as Reddit or Stack Exchange, blogs and media platforms such as YouTube, or crowd-sourced informational resources such as Wikipedia all offer pathways for collaboration or discussion on the Web. Chandler-Olcott (2013) envisions an approach to dialogically organized close reading in which students read an online article and its accompanying comments, critically analyze the arguments made,

discuss the role of comments in our culture, collaboratively craft class guidelines for comment writing, and author their own comments. Teachers might also introduce digital tools into their classrooms to increase collaboration and discussion as students closely read texts. In a classroom observed by Castek and Beach (2013), seventh-grade students used the annotation app Diigo to highlight key information in a Web text about wind energy, type questions, and respond to their classmates' annotations. While the use of such apps has promise for promoting dialogically organized discussion, teachers should still generate authentic questions, choose motivating topics for discussion, make sure that students have adequate time and knowledge of technology to communicate online, and organize classroom participation frameworks in a way that supports online interactions (Castek & Beach, 2013; Leu et al., 2013).

CONCLUSION

Taking Stock

So now that we have traced the journey of close reading across many decades and offered our personal reading of its virtues and vices, what are we to make of close reading? Does it deserve the close reading we have given it? Is it worthy of our collective and individual attention in classrooms and schools around the world? Will it set comprehension activity, classroom instruction, and conversations about text on a more productive pathway than we have been traversing over the past 40+ years?

Our qualified answer is “Yes . . . maybe . . . under certain conditions.” At the risk of being regarded as equivocal on close reading, our statement is as positive an assessment as we can muster in the uncertain state of its implementation in today's schools. Whether close reading represents an advance in our teaching and learning about text *does* depend on which principles and practices get privileged as it is rolled out.

If close reading promotes a “special attention to a text” that requires, as does the RPC, that it stay within the “four corners of the text” (Coleman & Pimentel, 2012), then the answer is “No.” Such a stance will promote, at best, reading for *gist* (getting the author's key idea(s) and supporting details) and for *craft* (examining how the author uses language and image to persuade, position, or amuse readers). That's a start, but it falls far short of providing students with a full kit of comprehension tools or a full range of discussion experiences. Likely to be ignored is the all important practice of critical literacy—examining the assumptions and consequences of the text—what we like to call “what is said by silence.” And at its worst, such a stance will promote a dogged adherence to literal comprehension practices—in Nystrand's (1997) language, known-answer questions. That would be a setback for both reading comprehension and classroom conversations, because it would deny learners access to the cornerstone of democratic discourse—a skeptical and critical disposition.

But if close reading promotes “special attention to a text” (Lentricchia & DuBois, 2003, p. 2) that acknowledges all reading involves the three other elements in the RAND model (reader, activity, and sociocultural context), then the answer can be “Yes.” Just such a model of close reading is what various scholars—including Rosenblatt (1978), Fish (1980), Luke and Freebody (1999), Hinchman and Moore (2013), and Smith et al. (2014) have in mind. This approach begins with the recognition that even the simplest

act of close reading—a sentence, a phrase, or even a word—cannot be enacted without acknowledging, either directly or indirectly, the resources and constraints of prior knowledge, activity, and context. For starters, how can a reader monitor his or her reading to determine whether it makes sense without invoking background knowledge? It's impossible! To say that the text makes sense is tantamount to saying that it is consistent with (1) the model of the text base that we, as readers, have constructed to that point in the reading, and (2) the wellspring of knowledge and experience we bring to the act of reading (see Pearson [2013] or Pearson & Cervetti [2015] for a more elaborate version of this argument). So, too, with task: A close reading to determine the gist of the author's position is not the same as a close reading to pinpoint strategic deployment of figurative language designed to shape readers' attitudes toward a character, or a close reading to evaluate the validity of the argument made. And so, too, with context: A close reading of the validity of an argument in anticipation of a test is not the same as a close reading of an argument when researching material for an essay. In taking this position, we also side with one of the most revered proponents of close reading, Mortimer Adler (1941), who, in a classic essay entitled "How to Mark a Book," provided this account of the relationship between a reader and the author of a text:

And that is exactly what reading a book should be: a conversation between you and the author. Presumably he knows more about the subject than you do; naturally, you'll have the proper humility as you approach him. But don't let anybody tell you that a reader is supposed to be solely on the receiving end. Understanding is a two-way operation. (p. 12)

Adler's account is remarkably similar to the definition of reading in the RAND report as

the process of simultaneously extracting and constructing meaning through interaction and involvement with written language. We use the words extracting and constructing to emphasize both the importance and the insufficiency of the text as a determinant of reading comprehension. (p. 11)

We rest our case. Close reading is all the closer, all the more accurate, all the more critical, all the more helpful when the text gets a little help from the resources brought to bear from the reader, the activity, and the context.

Research about Close Reading

We would be remiss if we did not close with a plea for more research on the construct of close reading. In part because it was born and bred in the interpretive research traditions of literacy criticism rather than the experimental lens of psycholinguistic studies or the ethnographic lens of critical literacy, there is not much empirical evidence to guide our decisions about what versions of close reading to endorse; we just don't know enough about the consequences of different models. Granted, we have learned a great deal from the work, cited earlier, of Nystrand (1997) and his colleagues and Murphy and her colleagues (2009). But even though we know something about the impact of steady diets of known-answer questions or an emphasis on critique, the findings lack the sort of specificity needed to make precise pedagogical recommendations. So here is our wish list of research issues we'd like to promote in our scholarly community:

- *Text length.* Most of the recommendations for close reading involve short texts—poems, letters, speeches, or excerpts. What does close reading look like when extended over a book or a course of study?
- *Disciplinary literacy.* Is close reading the same phenomenon in science, history, mathematics, and literature? We doubt that it is, but documentation of similarities and differences seems crucial to the future of close reading.
- *Authenticity.* If we can only manage close reading when texts are selected intentionally for the typical sorts of analyses we do in close reading, what does that say about its generalizability? And what about digital texts? Can any text be read closely? Or just some?
- *Relationships to writing.* Most close reading approaches assume that students will be able to draw evidence from their readings that they will then use in their writing. In short, how do ideas from close reading lessons or independent close reading make their way into student compositions?

Close reading will be a better resource for teachers and students when it receives full benefit from the research of the past and the research we can collectively undertake in the future.

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