

Language Diversity and the Hidden Learner

A STUDY ON THE VALUE RUBRIC ON READING

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Motivating Questions

International Student Context

- How are international students, with worrisome TOEFL scores, going to survive and succeed? And what do we not know about them yet that we need to know?

Overall FY Student Context

- What's going on with the “evidence” assessment score, and is it a reading problem?

My WPA Context

- Given my choice as WPA to adopt a “translingual approach” (Horner et al.), how should I orient myself to the administrative tasks of assessment?

Context and Setting

- Drew University: small liberal arts college in northern New Jersey
- International students admitted with TOEFL scores around 50-60: could we offer what they need to succeed? Could they acquire more English quickly enough to succeed academically?
- Annual assessment of FY portfolios: low scores across all levels on “use of evidence”
- Given connection between reading and use of evidence, additional funding was acquired to assess same set of portfolios using VALUE rubric on reading.
 - What would be of value in the VALUE rubric?
 - What would we need to discard or revise in light of multilingual context? The translingual orientation?

Study Design

- FY student writing portfolios collected at end of each semester.
- Subset of 53 (of about 400) selected for reading study.
- Two graduate and adjunct writing instructors trained in use of VALUE rubric on reading; each paper scored by both readers.

Reading in TESOL/SLA

- From 1970s emphasis on linear decoding to current awareness of reading as interactive
- Is L2 Reading “a reading problem or a language problem” (Alderson 1984)
- Focus on comprehension, defined as “component skills” of decoding, vocabulary knowledge, syntactic processing, metacognition” (Jeon and Yamashita 2014, p. 161)
- Jeon and Yamashita meta-analysis, 2014
 - Vocabulary knowledge seems to be biggest factor, followed by morphosyntactic knowledge
 - Distance between L1 and L2 does not seem to matter
 - Seems to be a language problem –readers read
- Kong, 2006: Reading strategies of adult Chinese learners of English
 - Threshold level of proficiency needed to deploy known reading strategies
 - But increased vocabulary does not automatically lead to using more strategies. Influencing factors include the manner in which language was learned (high testing environments e.g.), amount of L2 reading, situation.
- More recent work ties reading to writing tasks, aligning with composition orientation

Reading-Specific Concerns for International ESL Students: True at Drew?

- Vocabulary: maybe 10,000 words in personal lexicon, compared to 40,000 for NS (Grabe and Zhang 2013, p. 111)
- Grammatical difficulties of English that are not rule bound: prepositions, phrasal verbs, articles, SV agreement...hard for NNS to grasp (Grabe and Zhang 2013, p. 111)
- Less experience with tasks that involve reading-writing interaction (Ferris, qtd in Grabe and Zhang)
- Less experience applying and deploying information from texts in writing

Reading in Rhetoric and Composition

- Tied to writing; needed for writing
- Reading in social context; move to “consumption AND production” model
- Critical reading: Reading to learn, reading to write, especially across the curriculum (as opposed to general reading) (Horning and Kraemer 2013, p. 9)
- “Getting meaning from print” first, followed by a range of processes including analysis, synthesis, evaluation, and making use of reading for the reader’s own purpose (Horning and Kraemer 2013, p. 10)
- Statements of connection of reading to writing and learning from NCTE, CCCC, WPA Council, and ACRL (information literacy threshold concepts)
- Research suggests troubled reading abilities of college students (Joliffe, Howard and Jamieson/Citation Project, Pew studies)



Reading in Comp and SLA: Common Grounds and Common Questions

- Concern about students' abilities to work with large amounts of print (Horning and Kraemer 22; Citation Project; ACRL Threshold Concepts)
- New work on how teachers can approach the teaching of reading, especially because it was not part of their training and professionalization? (Grabe and Zhang 2013, 108; Donahue; Carillo; Bunn)
- When reading and writing are seen as fundamentally interdependent tasks, L2 and L1 questions (of learning, pedagogy, assessment) become the same. Grabe and Zhang examined:
 - Summary writing
 - Synthesis writing
 - Research paper writing
 - Contrastive rhetoric (or intercultural rhetoric, Connor –discourse and genre diversity)
 - Plagiarism questions

"This association between L2 writing and a range of L2 language skills (including reading) indicates that expectations for academic writing success among L2 students must be tempered by L2 students' language abilities generally, and also more specifically by their reading comprehension abilities. In tasks that involve some integration of reading and writing skills, L2 students need to have adequate reading comprehension abilities if the task assigned requires them to be accountable for the content of the reading text" (Grabe and Zhang 2013, p. 128)

(One possible) hypothesis: Language proficiency matters fundamentally; therefore, less-than-ideal-proficiency-level ELL students' scores of reading in writing tasks should be significantly lower than NS scores.

VALUE Rubric Statement on Reading

Definition

Reading is "the process of simultaneously extracting and constructing meaning through interaction and involvement with written language" (Snow et al., 2002). (From www.rand.org/pubs/research_briefs/RB98024/index.html)

Framing Language

To paraphrase Phaedrus, tests do not explain, nor answer questions about, themselves. They must be located, approached, decoded, comprehended, analyzed, interpreted, and discussed, especially complex academic tests used in college and university classrooms for purposes of learning. Historically, college professors have not considered the teaching of reading necessary other than as a "basic skill" in which students may require "remediation." They have assumed that students come with the ability to read and have placed responsibility for its absence on teachers in elementary and secondary schools.

This absence of reading instruction in higher education must, can, and will change, and this rubric marks a direction for this change. Why the change? Even the strongest, most experienced readers making the transition from high school to college have not learned what they need to know and do to make sense of tests in the context of professional and academic scholarship—to say nothing about readers who are either not as strong or as experienced. Also, readers mature and develop their repertoire of reading performances naturally during the undergraduate years and beyond as a consequence of meeting textual challenges. This rubric provides some initial steps toward finding ways to measure undergraduate students' progress along the continuum. Our intention in creating this rubric is to support and promote the teaching of undergraduates as readers to take on increasingly higher levels of concerns with tests and to read as one of "those who comprehend."

Readers, as they move beyond their undergraduate experiences, should be motivated to approach tests and respond to them with a reflective level of curiosity and the ability to apply aspects of the tests they approach to a variety of aspects in their lives. This rubric provides the framework for evaluating both students' developing relationship to tests and their relative success with the range of tests their coursework introduces them to. It is likely that users of this rubric will detect that the cell boundaries are permeable, and the criteria of the rubric are, to a degree, interrelated.

Glossary

VALUE Reading Rubric

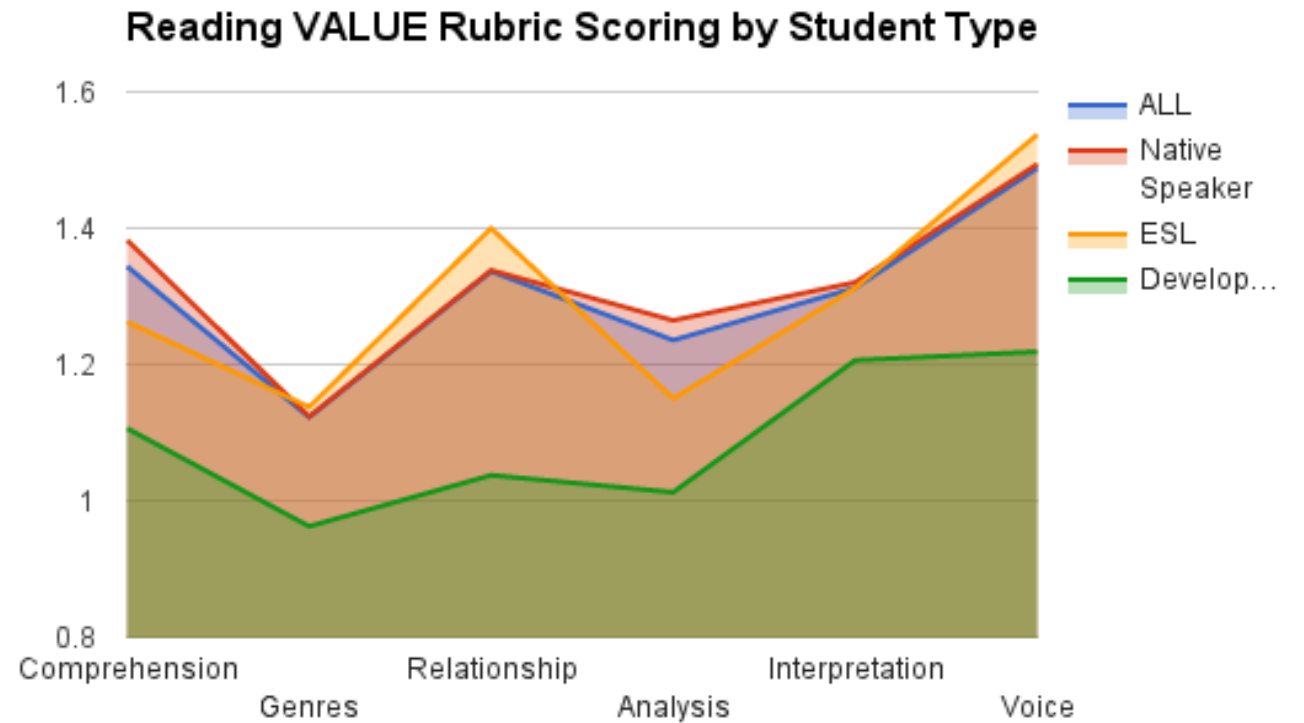
	Capstone 4	Milestone 3	Milestone 2	Benchmark 1
Comprehension				
Genres				
Relationship to Text				
Analysis				
Interpretation				
Reader's Voice				

VALUE Reading Rubric Categories

	Milestone 2	Benchmark 1
Comprehension	Evaluates how textual features (e.g., sentence and paragraph structure or tone) contribute to the author's message; draws basic inferences about context and purpose of text.	Apprehends vocabulary appropriately to paraphrase or summarize the information the text communicates.
Reader's Voice	Discusses text in structured conversations (such as in a classroom) in ways that contribute to a basic, shared understanding of the text.	Comments about texts in ways that preserve the author's meanings and link them to the assignment.

Results

ELL and NS students scored largely the same; the only significant difference was in the developmental student (NS) sections.

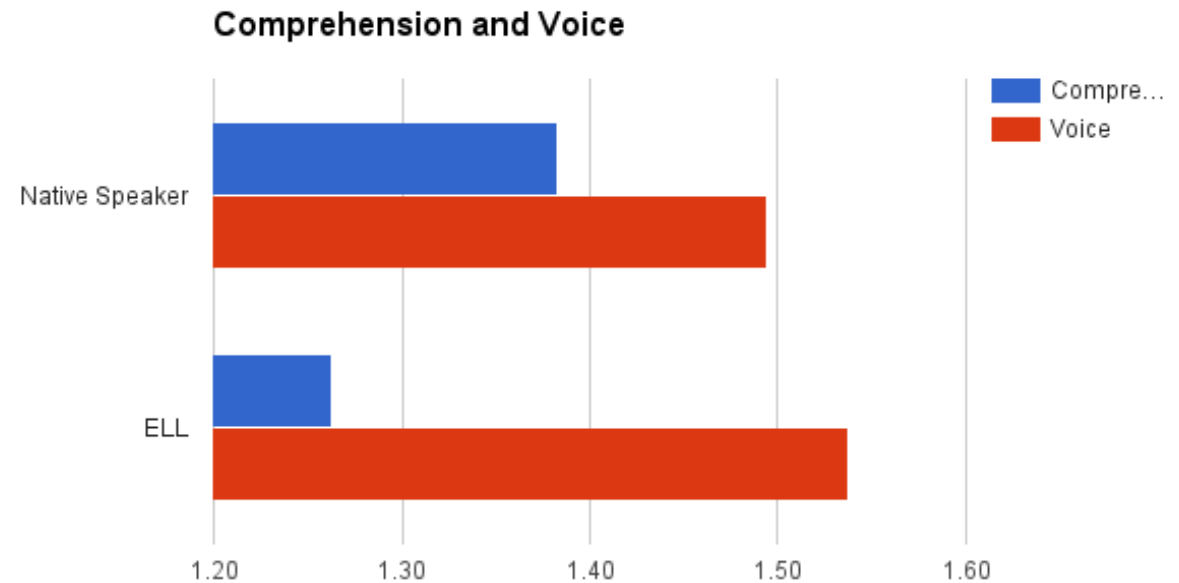


Results

However, NS and ELL student writing differed in two categories: reading comprehension, and voice.

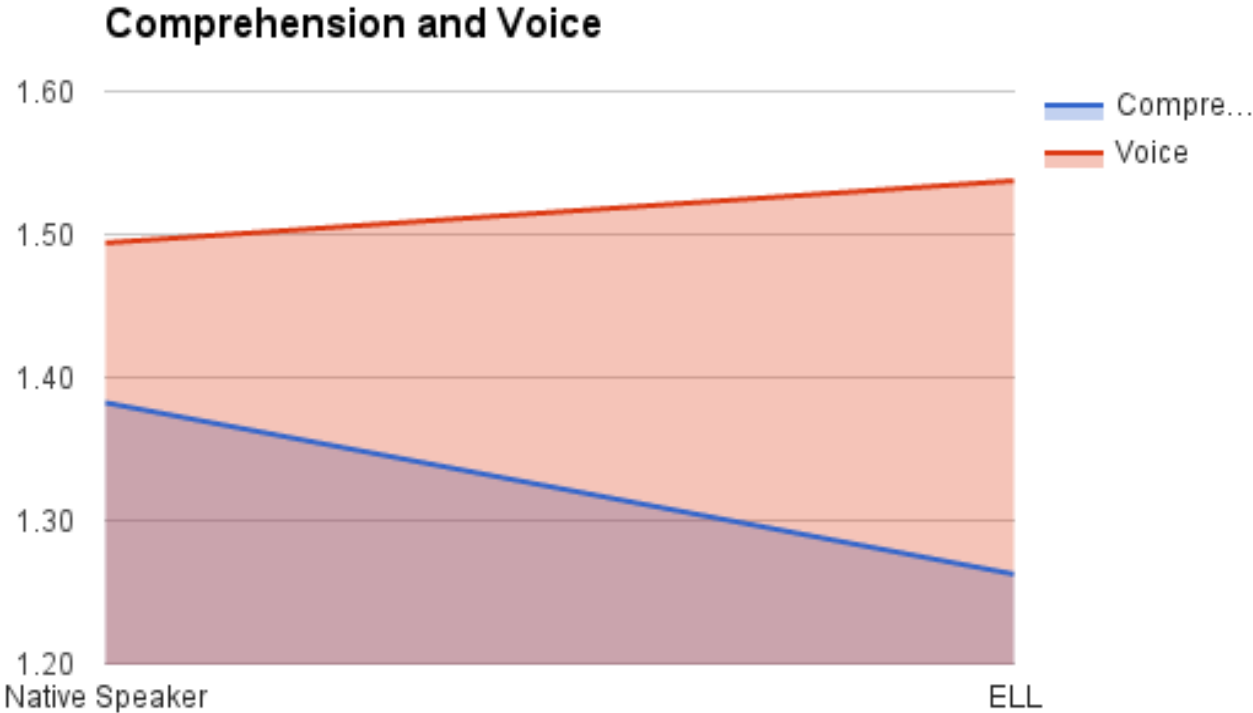
NS students scored higher on reading comprehension.

ELL students scored higher on voice.



Results

Here's another way to look at the relationship between comprehension and voice.



ELL Student Portfolio Essay: Voice

More interesting, the writing class in Chinese high school encourages students practice writing more, therefore, sometimes I was even becoming hardened to write because I did not really know what to write. In contrast, I prefer the way American writing class has. Learning from the writing class, I not only can improve my writing skill and communicate skill, but also express my idea clearer by the presentation. Every assignment is based on the reading. Books are an incredible source of inspiration, the source of knowledge. For me, each article just likes a piece in the jigsaw puzzle. And I need to complete the puzzle by linking them. In this semester, I read a dozen articles in writing class, some of which are about Thomas Edison, and some of which are about privacy issues in the Cloud storage. I also read a lot of articles and books in Dante class, they are the Divine Comedy, Vita nuova, Chronicle of Florence, Cambridge Companion and so on. It's a good start for me to read medieval literature and know more about Florence history in the medieval age. I believe my paper are generated by my feeling when I read these books. The class in American, formed with content, flexible form and practical method, has offered the relaxed and joyful atmosphere of accepting to the student.

ELL Student Argument Paper: Comprehension

In addition, the risk of privacy in cloud storage can be reduced by adjusting personal understandings and decisions, though some scholars insist that globalization in large part to promote the issue of leakage of privacy and security (King 12). Wu also argues that international regulation would be the best method to reduce the privacy issues. Even if there are no deny that globalization expands the scope of the invasion of net-privacy, people should acknowledge the power of themselves and use that to reduce the privacy problem. People should be aware of the advanced technology made security and privacy issues critical. When scientists concentrate on improving technology to protect personal information, the newer technology may present the menaces following to security and privacy issues. In a related matter, Emily Ngo announces that “if this is considered deeply, then it is possible to discover that technology makes personal information easier to be revealed while they can be most easily gather up” (Ngo 4). So to deal with privacy issues, people should not only focus on government's laws and globalization, but also be aware of the powerful technology which is changing the world over time.



Analysis

Given the overall similarities of scores, this study suggests that language proficiency, especially in reading comprehension –at least of the level of L2 writers in this cohort –is not as important as research in L2 writing suggests.

Reading comprehension seems to exist on an *equal* plane with higher-order cognitive skills like analysis, interpretation, and most significantly, voice: creating a personal relationship with the text, as orienting the text in one's own experience (which cannot be measured on a generic assessment test).

These results seem to affirm a translingual approach, which posits that speakers always draw on a full communicative repertoire (Canagarajah; Horner et al.; Otheguy, García, and Reid).

Questions

- What about proficiency and the reading tasks required of courses beyond FYW, where disciplinary content comprises a greater part of the performance expectations?



Implications

How can we as leaders:

- 1) Create ways for ELL students to continue developing proficiency in English, especially as reading comprehension will require more specialized disciplinary discourse as they move through their degrees?
- 2) Create ways for faculty across the university to better theorize the relationship between language and learning?



Conclusion

The results of this study call up the profoundly meaning-making work of learning. “Reading” or “writing” or “learning” are not one thing for language learners, another thing for native speakers. They are all forms of dialogue, between self and other, text and language, writer and reader.

As we as WPAs work out our language for assessment, curriculum, and faculty development, we can call up this notion of languaging as meaning making, and play down the rhetoric of comprehension and proficiency. We can intervene in the discourses of SLA reading research, SLO assessment, and the expectations of our own administrations.

What about your local
contexts?

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