

# Assessing Intertextuality: The Development of a Rubric for Academic Literacy Practices in Developmental Reading Courses

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## BACKGROUND AND LITERATURE BASE

One important aspect of academic literacy development is schema activation, or the process of linking unfamiliar texts or ideas with prior knowledge (e.g., Lenski, 1998). The curricular model explored in this study involves a scaffolded, schema-building approach to teaching college reading that involves explicitly teaching students how to make connections across multiple texts. With an intertextuality-based curricular model, students are taught this process of linking texts as a comprehension strategy that can result in their increased engagement and reflects the literacy practices students will encounter in their college courses (Armstrong & Newman, 2011).

Such a multiple-text approach has a rich history in the cognitive and educational psychology literature (e.g., Rouet, Britt, Mason, & Perfetti, 1996; Wiley, & Voss, 1999), and has been further examined in the context of the disciplinary literacies movement (e.g., Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008). Additionally, the Common Core State Standards Initiative (CCSSI) has acknowledged the need for focused instruction on multiple-text approaches in providing state-level national standards for college and workforce readiness (CCSS, 2010). The CCSS will be assessed via one of two assessment groupings: PARCC or Smarter Balanced. Illinois, the context for the present project, is a partner in the PARCC assessment group. The English-Language Arts (ELA) prototypes for the PARCC have recently been released, and these sample items provide students with multiple texts en route to an intertextual analysis in the form of an essay that includes evidence from several texts (PARCC, 2013). In short, once the CCSS are fully implemented, and an assessment protocol is in place, college/career ELA readiness will be defined through a student's ability to read and comprehend multiple texts, incorporate these texts into an analysis-based essay, and provide text evidence from these multiple texts to support a claim of cross-text connections.

## RUBRIC-DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

The overall aim of this project is to extend the focus beyond high school exit, and examine the efficacy of an intertextuality-based curricular approach for postsecondary literacy contexts. The first step in this larger study was to develop a common rubric that provided information on students' understandings of the concept of intertextuality, including specific aspects of their applications in authentic course writings.

A rubric was developed that intentionally looked beyond specific instructional requirements and instead attempted to assess the extent to which students' course writings demonstrated their understanding of intertextuality after having been exposed to an intertextuality-based curricular model in their developmental reading courses. Three specific constructs were assessed through this rubric: understanding of the concept of intertextuality, effective application of intertextuality in their writings, and effective use of sourcing in line with an intertextual (multiple-text) approach. The process of rubric-development was a multi-stage effort that included different levels of norming and checks of inter-rater reliability. Norming occurred on multiple levels. First, rubrics were completed independently for each student essay. Then, raters provided written and verbal rationales for their scores, which led to in-depth examinations and discussions to reduce any disparities where differences between the raters were noted.



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## INSTRUCTIONAL CONTEXTS

Two instructional contexts served as the basis for rubric-development: intertextuality-based developmental reading courses at a community college and a university. Although both settings adopted an intertextuality-based curriculum, there were differences in approach.

*Community College Context.* The first intertextuality-based instructional context was a developmental reading course at a large Midwestern community college. The focus of the curriculum/instruction was discipline-specific reading/writing (see Armstrong & Newman, 2011 for an explanation of the curricular approach). In addition to teaching and encouraging the growth of basic reading strategies, a goal of this course was to teach students to read, think, and learn like an expert (Hynd-Shanahan, Holschuh, & Hubbard, 2004; Shanahan & Shanahan, 2012; Wineburg, 1991) in five different disciplines. Students were taught to use the intertextuality strategy as one way to facilitate discipline-specific learning. Thirty-one sets of student essays from the unit on education (learning in the social sciences) were collected and analyzed during this phase of the study as the rubric was developed.

*University Context.* The second intertextuality-based instructional context was a decentralized alternative-admissions developmental program (Johnson & Carpenter, 2000) housed within a Midwestern public university. The first course in a two-course developmental reading sequence was based on an intertextuality model and was the focus of this analysis (see Armstrong & Newman, 2011 for an explanation of the curricular approach). The writings analyzed for this project were in-class queries, eight in all, taken over the course of the 16-week semester. These timed, open-book queries prompted students to create an argument about the intertextual connections between a core text and one supplemental text. For purposes of this analysis, 31 student data sets were scored, with each data set consisting of at least six queries.

## PRELIMINARY INSIGHTS

The purposes of scoring these writings were to test the finalized rubric and assess inter-rater reliability for future scoring; however, some additional insights emerged beyond the scope of these immediate purposes. First, although a majority of students were able to engage in intertextuality as indicated through their scores on the three constructs evaluated on the rubric, results of this analysis suggest a wide range of student understandings of intertextuality, including the specific applications appropriate to college-level reading. The primary conclusion drawn from this analysis is that the rubric is an effective diagnostic tool for assessing students' holistic understandings of intertextuality.

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