Scaffolding effective reading practices in the middle years of schooling: A focus on responses to narrative

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1 Scaffolding in high challenge learning contexts

This paper takes up the issue of resourcing teachers so that they can adequately assist learners to negotiate the challenge of school English. According to Mariani (1997), effective learning is most likely to occur in contexts in which teachers provide both high challenge and high support for learners. Challenging learners in English depends on (at least) two kinds of knowledge: knowledge about language itself (its potential and its uses) and knowledge about the goals of language learning in the discipline. Both kinds of knowledge are important in developing an adequate framework for empowering teachers to intervene effectively in their students’ learning. Maybin, Mercer and Stierer suggest that a goal oriented view of such knowledge is essential to scaffolding:

To know whether or not some help counts as ‘scaffolding’, we would need to have at the very least some evidence of a teacher wishing to enable a child to develop a specific skill, grasp a particular concept or achieve a particular level of understanding.

[Maybin, Mercer & Stierer, 1992: 188]

With a goal-oriented perspective on classroom learning, teachers are able to imagine the possibilities of the classroom environment and to plan an appropriate learning program for their students.

But understanding the goals of learning in school English is only one element of the teaching-learning challenge. The other element in the scaffolding paradigm is that of support. As teachers move from a synoptic focus on planning, they need access to what Mercer calls ‘discourse strategies for intervening in children’s learning’ (Mercer, 1994: 101). The question for English teachers here becomes one of how to adequately assist learners to engage with the language of more demanding texts as they progress towards the senior years of English. Discourse strategies in English are concerned primarily with ‘talk about text’. The problem here, however, is that teachers themselves are often unfamiliar with the ways in which they can talk about texts with learners and, perhaps more importantly with the literacy development which different kinds of talk, different kinds of writing, can foster. The problem here is that the nature and value of different kinds of text awareness is seldom made explicit either in pre-service education or in syllabus documents themselves. This is especially true of those documents supposed to guide teaching practices during the middle years in English.¹

¹ This is nowhere more in evidence than in the still current syllabus informing teaching of English in Years 7-10 in New South Wales. English 7-10 (Board of Secondary Education, 1987) is an anachronistic document in many ways, most obviously in its eschewing of the value of explicit and systematic teaching of knowledge about language in English. It is also a testimony to the personal growth
However, the value of different ways of talking and writing about texts are implicit in the texts produced by students themselves and can be accessed within a semantically oriented metalanguage such as systemic functional linguistics. (Halliday, 1978, 1994). My strategy in articulating goals for learning in English has been to analyse the texts produced by students for examinations and the grades (and, if possible, the commentaries) these attract from teacher-examiners. The semantic features of these response texts present us with a window on learners’ awareness of the demands and possibilities of the discipline, at least as far as these are embodied in examination English. This kind of knowledge about students’ textual practices is vital if we are to develop discourse strategies for promoting successful reading in English. This is not to valorise only those strategies that make for examination success but to deal with the implicitness of expectations in the discipline and to make teachers themselves in both primary and secondary English aware of these expectations.

In this paper I focus on two different orientations to text, two reading strategies which are common in school English - the personalist and the literary reading strategy. The personalist reading is concerned with the student-reader’s personal experience of the text, whether literary, everyday or mass media text. The primary point of reference is to the feelings that (one part of) the text arouses in them as reader. The personalist reading is still highly valued in many English classrooms (Christie, et al, 1991, Sawyer and McFarlane, 2000). The literary reading, on the other hand, focuses on the high order meanings of the text such as its abstract theme(s) and ethical values. The primary point of reference for students in this latter reading strategy is the language of the text, its pattern of wordings and the ways in which one pattern relates to another. Whether the text is literary, everyday or mass media, the literary reading construes the text as a ‘construct’. Within this way of reading, the student adopts a global rather than a local orientation to the structure of the text. She or he is able to first process the text as it unfolds (dynamically) and then to overview it in a look-back strategy (synoptically). A global orientation to text meaning is very important if students want to succeed in English. Reading the text as a part-whole structure is the key to this global orientation. Accessing and naming the themes and the value positions made available in a literary text is only possible if students can first read the text, interpreting its inferential meanings, and then relate one part to others and to the whole in what I call a ‘relational reading’.

The reading strategy adopted by a student is immanent in his or her written responses to narrative. We can study these to understand more about the kind of text awareness the student reader has developed to this point - at least the kind of awareness embodied in the written response. Although they were produced over 10 years ago now, the two response texts presented here are apt exemplars of reading strategies encouraged in contemporary English classrooms. They offer teachers in earlier years vital information about the ‘exit competences’ associated with different ways of reading in Year 10. If we position literacy education in the middle years on a continuum, then we enable primary and secondary school teachers to share knowledge about the demands and value of...
different reading strategies from Year 5 to Year 9. This dialogue will be facilitated if we they share a metadiscourse for reflecting on students' reading strategies as these are revealed in their response texts.

Why is this dialogue important in the middle years of school English? The answer has to do with creating continuities of expectations amongst teachers in both primary and secondary years of middle schooling. Teachers in these years need to know which interpretive frames can be applied to a reading of any text and the 'affordances' of these different frames of awareness. They also need access to the differential values these frames attract in examination situations. Finally, From the point of view of pedagogic support, teachers need to know more about how different ways of reading can be taught, how they can enable their students to produce a literary reading in examinations if this textual practice is what examiners value. My work on the response genres is part of a broader project of curriculum reform focussed on the goals of ‘explicit’ and ‘systematic’ teaching of knowledge about language in school literacy practices. The long-term aim of this project is to make the goals and the tasks of learning clear and accessible so that all students can share in both the meaning-making processes of classroom learning and succeed in the formal credentialling processes that affect their futures.

More than ever, in times of intense curriculum diversification and change, teachers need to talk to one another about what they value in different reading practices and they need shared interpretive metadiscursive frameworks for doing this. The systemic functional metalanguage associated with the work of linguists such as Michael Halliday offers us a valuable meta-framework for reflecting on the ways of meaning of different reading strategies. It enables us to explore differences in orientations to meaning as these are revealed in students' different responses to literary texts.

In the next section of the paper, I outline the semantic attributes of personalist and the literary reading strategies, drawing on a systemic functional analysis of two response texts. Following this, I present a developmental framework for moving students from a personalist to a literary reading of narrative and the kinds of strategies which teachers can use to promote engagement with the patterns of language in narrative texts and how students can produce literary readings of these, where necessary.

II Responding to narrative – two possible response strategies

The short story is the most common text facing examinees in the Reference Test and similar examinations. The one featured here is typical of the five narratives presented to New South Wales students between 1986 and 1995 (the year I stopped collecting and analysing Reference Test narratives). CLICK is reprinted in the Appendix for readers'
It is a short story about a young girl, Jenny, who endures unhappy domestic circumstances and largely absent parents by watching television. As the story makes clear from the outset, Jenny is compulsively attached to her television. She manages to avoid her lonely domestic reality through watching soapies such as *Secret Loves* and *Doctor's Diary*. Not even the injunctive warnings of her mother against watching too much television touch her. Then one day, Jenny leaves the television for a time when she hears an ambulance siren outside her flat. She walks outside and encounters a road accident victim outside her flat. She looks into the dead girl’s face and touches reality. At the evaluative high point of the narrative, we read:

The image froze into Jenny’s mind. The girl’s face was horrible and beautiful at the same time. It seemed more real than anything Jenny had ever seen. Looking at it, Jenny felt as though she was coming out of a long dream. It seemed to cut through the cloud in her mind like lightning.

Once the ambulance men take the victim away and onlookers drift back to their homes, Jenny returns to her room and to *Doctor’s Diary* but is no longer comfortable. The pain of her new awareness presses in as she realises:

“People never die on *Doctor’s Diary*.” At first they were just words that Jenny couldn’t stop saying in her head. “People never die on *Doctor’s Diary*.” The words made Jenny remember the dead girl’s face. “People never die on *Doctor’s Diary*.” Then the words started meaning something. CLICK. The television switch sounded through the room like a padlock snapping open.

The examination question following the story presents students with the following question:

"CLICK. The television switch sounded through the room like a padlock snapping open". Why do you think the story ends this way?

Given the open-ended nature of the task, there are (at least) two response strategies available. Students could interpret the task as a request for either a personal or a literary reading. They could key on the ‘what do you think?’ aspect or the ‘Why does the story end this way?’ aspect of the question. The question also leaves itself open to a focus on just the ending of the story CLICK or to a discussion of the relationship between the ending and the prior stages of the narrative. In short, the wording of the question leaves the response strategy open. The problem for many students, especially those from classrooms dominated by personal growth models of English is that it lends itself just as much to a personalist as to a literary reading. They may attempt to generate an explanation for the final sentence that is only weakly connected with the rest of the text. They may try to imagine what could have been in the author's mind when she wrote the story. Or they may explore the impact that the final sentence of the text has on their feelings. All these response tactics are common within a personalist reading. The literary reading is more specialised and less accessible to students on a cursory reading of the narrative. The literary reading has to be taught.
The two response texts which I discuss next are emblematic of the personalist and the literary readings produced by students to narratives over the years since 1986 until 1995 (see Macken-Horarik, 1996, for a full account of the Reference Test narratives and responses to some of these). The grades and commentary published with each response text in specimen papers (Board of Secondary Education, 1987) show something of how the examiners responded to each strategy. As can be seen, the literary and the personalist reading are valued very differently by examiners even when the student does not show evidence of a problem with basic literacy.

Following the presentation of each response text, I discuss the semantic qualities of each response using the notion of metafunctions common within Hallidayan linguistics (Halliday, 1994). Halliday uses the term ‘metafunctions’ to refer to the general types of meaning that underpin linguistic communication.

All languages are organized around two main kinds of meaning, the 'ideational' or reflective, and the 'interpersonal' or active. These components, called 'metafunctions' in the terminology of the present theory, are the manifestations in the linguistic system of the two very general purposes which underlie all uses of language: (i) to understand the environment (ideational), and (ii) to act on others in it (interpersonal). Combined with these is a third metafunctional component, the 'textual', which breathes relevance into the other two. [Halliday, 1994: xiii]

These three metafunctions provide us with semantic frames for exploring the general orientations to meaning displayed in students' response texts. Whether personalist or literary, the response will represent experience in some way (ideational), will adopt some kind of stance or attitude to the reader and to the propositional content she or he is exploring (interpersonal) and will organise or package this in a particular way (textual). Contrasts between texts across these three dimensions of meaning are very revealing of the ways of reading and then writing about texts adopted by learners. They tell us a lot about where our student readers 'are at' when it comes to reading. Understanding learners' starting points vis a vis a task is a necessary first step in scaffolding new interpretive frames and new reading practices.

III The personalist reading
Response Text 1 represents a personalist interpretation of the question following CLICK.

Response Text 1

The author has intentionally written the ending this way to create the effect that she wanted. I felt eerie and isolated after reading the ending – ‘like a padlock snapping open’ sounded so lonely and made me feel so afraid.

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3 The two response texts are reproduced preserving the spelling and punctuation of the original as published in the specimen samples Board of Secondary Education, 1987.
I also felt very empty after reading the passage. It has such a depressing ending that it made me feel afraid and scared. The way ‘CLICK’ is written by itself in a sentence and in capital letters added to the emptiness. I can really imagine the exact sound it makes, the way it ‘sounded through the room’. ‘Sounded through the room’ is another example of how the author creates a feeling of isolation so carefully displayed. It sounds hollow and dead and creates fear in your mind.

This is what makes the passage so effective - the way the mood of the characters is portrayed so clearly. I enjoyed this passage immensely the ending was very clear and well written.

**Grade E**

The personalist reading focusses on the reader’s subjective experience of the narrative. **Ideationally**, when it comes to interpreting what the story is about, the students respond to **concrete details of the story** such as the feelings of individual characters or particular images. In the E-range responses of my corpus, students tend to see the events of the story as enigmatic, something to ponder rather than something accessible to interpretation. This usually means that they generate an extended subjective response to one aspect of the narrative, as in Response Text 1: “I can really imagine the exact sound it makes, the way it sounded through the room”. The personalist reading views the literary text as mimetic - a window on, or a mirror of, experience rather than as a semiotic construct. This means that more difficult texts can seem inscrutable – beyond the reach of the experiential world of the reader. This is a predictable response to texts which demand inferential interpretation, as **CLICK** does.

**Interpersonally**, the personalist reading generates a **feeling response** to the story. Like other texts in the E-range, this student interprets the angle of the story in subjective terms, as in: “I felt eerie and isolated after reading the ending – ‘like a padlock snapping open’ sounded so lonely and made me feel so afraid”. The student assumes that the author has definite designs on the reader- has an angle in other words. But this is difficult to discern, as in “The author has intentionally written the ending this way to create the effect that she wanted”. The students cannot name the intended effect and does not explore the values-orientation of the narrative as a whole. **CLICK**, for example, lends itself to a discussion of the values underpinning the text. This narrative addresses ideal readers as ethical subjects who, like the protagonist, Jenny, can disengage from the fantasy world of television and face up to reality. Evaluation, where it is present in personalist readings, focusses on the narrative as ‘performance’, as in: “I enjoyed this passage immensely the ending was very clear and well written”.

**Textually**, the personalist reading displays a **local orientation** to the organisation of the narrative, keying on isolated details of its design, such as layout or imagery. The rhetorical strategy is to identify and respond affectively to one or more language features, as in: “‘Sounded through the room’ is another example of how the author creates a feeling of isolation, so carefully displayed.” Students adopting the personalist reading do not explore the significance of images such as the padlock for the narrative as a whole. There is very little attempt to relate one part of the text to others - to see the final click of the padlock, for example, as an inversion of the click of snapped fingers at the beginning. This student displays awareness only of isolated bits of the text and effectively splits off from the rest of the narrative. In sum, in the E-range personalist
reading, the student fails to engage with the language of the text, either to process its wordings or to read the patterns into which these wordings fall. Explaining the structure of the narrative is therefore and impossibility.

It is not my intention in this chapter to question the inherent value of the personalist reading. It is, after all, what most readers apply in their leisured informal reading of a novel, play or short story. It is certainly the regime of many adult book club meetings. It is also important to acknowledge that the personalist reading in non-school settings may well attend to features such as abstract themes and or salient values in these texts. But, in examination room settings the personalist reading embodied in student responses is profoundly disvalued by teacher-examiners. Response Text 1 is penalised because of its personalist orientation. The examiner's comment is very telling.

This response has attempted to give a personal reaction to the question asked. The student has concentrated on the literary style of the story but has failed to answer the question or show any understanding of the story.

[Board of Secondary Education, 1987:17]

The irony is that while they downgrade the personalist reading to an E, many of these same examiners continue to call for feeling responses to stories in their classrooms. As teachers, they are caught in the cross currents of competing loyalties - to the open-ended diversity of the curriculum and to their need to sort and grade students using literary interpretation as a covert benchmark in the examination. Students without access to knowledge about actual requirements of tests like this are the ones most likely to fall foul of the hidden curriculum in English. Their students are the ones who serve to gain from a careful scaffolding of the requirements of the literary reading.

IV  The literary reading

Response Text 2 represents a literary interpretation of the question.

Response Text 2

‘Click’ by Judith Stamper is a very didactic short story, the moral of which the ending of the story and its title conveys to the reader. Click is about a young girl who has run away from reality and its unhappiness and death that it confronted her with. She was unhappy with her family life; she was lonely because her parents and herself lived their lives apart. They had a very distant relationship. Jenny recognised this, but instead of facing it and making what she could out of it; or trying to rectify it, she chose to hide from it. Her hiding place was the fantasy, make-believe world of television.

Jenny only went outside to investigate the accident because there was a television commercial on. When she arrived, the girl was already dead and Jenny, when she look into the dead girl’s face, was shocked back into reality. “It seemed more real than anything...” “cut through the cloud in her mind.”
As it hit her, Jenny’s reaction was to “switch the channel,” to escape; to hide from reality. Jenny realised when she went back inside that the world of television no longer gave her protection from reality. Once she had been jolted back into consciousness the make believe world seemed too fake. This whole experience; the dead girl’s face; the shock of reality awake Jenny. The conclusion “Click, the television switch sounded through the room like a padlock snapping open” was symbolic. The padlock was Jenny’s mind and its snap was the awakening of reality in that mind; a realisation that it couldn’t run away.

Grade A+

Whatever the examination question may lend itself to, the literary reading is the regime of the A-range in English examinations. In this regime, readers leave their own feelings about the text to one side. Ideationally, they explore the abstract significance of the story and identify what I call the problematic of the narrative. This is typically the deep theme underpinning the events of the story. In the case of the response to CLICK, the problematic is concerned with the main character Jenny’s struggle to escape from, and then face, the ‘world of death and unhappy endings’ – reality. Details such as Jenny’s farewell to her working mother, her viewing of television soapies and her discovery of a road accident victim outside her flat are only important for what they establish of the protagonist's psychological and moral disposition. CLICK is less about what happens to Jenny than about what Jenny makes of it – her struggle with and eventual victory over her escapist fantasies. Response Text 2 recognizes the opposition between fantasy and reality implicit in the story and packages this in abstract nominals in the introductory sentence: “CLICK is about a young girl who has run away from reality and its unhappiness and death that it confronted her with”. 

Interpersonally, literary readers read the angle of the text in primarily ethical terms. Reading text values takes students beyond a simple identification with the central character and his or her evaluation of events (although it does involve this). Of course, empathy is part of the interpersonal task of the literary reading. For example, Response Text 2 displays understanding of the feelings and motivations of the protagonist, Jenny: “She was unhappy with her family life. She was lonely because her parents and herself lived their lives apart”. But it also moves beyond empathy to a posture of discernment. The interpersonal dimension of this reading involves an understanding of the points of view opened up in the narrative. The student has to identify (usually) with the main character and then to discern the ethical rightness and wrongness of this character's behaviour. The response text should chime in with the final (usually implicit) value position made available in the narrative. This is the the role of the ideal reader in a mainstream reading. The student's final evaluation may or may not coincide with the value position adopted by the main character. Although ideal/A range readers may empathize with Jenny in her response to her unhappy domestic circumstances, they do not condone her escapist tendencies. Note the patina of moral uprightness in the verbs chosen to recapitulate the story in Response Text 1: “Jenny recognised this, but instead of facing it and making what she could out of it, she chose to hide from it”.

In sum, when it comes to the interpersonal frame, students making a literary reading need to display evidence of both empathy (standing with characters in fellow feeling) and discernment (standing over characters in judgement). Both aspects of evaluation need to be present if students want to interpret the angle of the author as this is
manifested in the narrative. Both are necessary to secure an A-range response from examiners.

Finally, textually, the literary reading demonstrates a **global** orientation to the organisation of the narrative text. In this response strategy, the student interprets images like the padlock in symbolic terms: "The conclusion “Click, the television switch sounded through the room like a padlock snapping open” was symbolic. The padlock was Jenny’s mind and its snap was the awakening of reality in that mind; a realisation that it couldn’t run away.” It is not enough to simply identify figures of speech and enumerate them. The personalist response does this much. The literary response reads implicit meanings in a figure to ground relation, discerning the abstract implication of the image (padlock snapping open = awakening of reality).

After first processing the meanings of the narrative dynamically, the student adopts a synoptic perspective on the text as semiotic construct. S/he views the literary text as a gestalt with each part intrinsically related to the whole. The starting point may be the events of the story but the end point will be its overarching significance. Response Text 2 begins: “CLICK, by Judith Stamper is a very didactic short story, the moral of which the ending of the story and its title conveys to the reader”. This sensitivity to high order meanings of the text such as the opposition between fantasy and reality is acknowledged by the examiner in his or her comments on the A+ text.

An outstanding response showing that the very best pieces of writing are exceptional. This is not really typical of an A+ but is one of the best responses encountered. Note the capacity to develop the idea of fantasy and reality.

[Board of Secondary Education, 1987:1]

We can use the metafunctional perspectives to give us a purchase on the reading strategies adopted in the two texts and to highlight the different focus of awareness they embody. We have, in effect, three 'lenses' on the strategies adopted by each student: an ideational lens, picking up on what the student appears to assume the narrative is about; an interpersonal lens, highlighting the angle or point of view adopted by the student in relation to the narrative; and a textual lens, telling us about the orientation to text structure s/he appears to take up.

Table 1 contrasts the different patterns of focus adopted in the two readings.
1. What is the text about? (Ideational)  
Focus on concrete details of the story.  
Example  
“I can really imagine the exact sound it makes, the way it ‘sounded through the room’.”.  
Recognition of abstract themes in the narrative  
Example  
"CLICK is about a young girl who has run away from reality and its unhappiness and death that it confronts her with".

2. What is the angle adopted? (interpersonal)  
Focus on feelings of reader/self in reaction to the text.  
Example  
“I felt eerie and isolated after reading the ending - "like a padlock snapping open" sounded so lonely and made me feel so afraid”.  
Focus on values played out in the text.  
Example  
“Jenny recognised this, but instead of facing it and making what she could out of it; or trying to rectify it, she chose to hide from it”.

3. How is the text structured? (textual)  
A local orientation to text structure.  
Example  
“I enjoyed this passage immensely the ending was very clear and well written”.  
A global orientation to text structure.  
Example  
“‘Click’ by Judith Stamper is a very didactic short story, the moral of which the ending of the story and its title conveys to the reader”.

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<th>Table 1: Different semantic orientations in two readings</th>
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How do teachers use this three-part metadiscursive framework for developing and scaffolding effective reading practices in the middle years of English? The final section of the paper takes up some of the issues surrounding the element of support in scaffolding and the kinds of discourse strategies teachers can use to move students from a personalist to a literary reading and ways in which they can make their different demands explicit for learners.

V Implications for scaffolding literacy practices

The semantic dimensions of each strategy outlined in the previous two sections, indicate the semantic features of personalist and the literary reading strategies in junior secondary English. In my opinion, the literary is the more demanding of the two and the one less likely to be produced without assistance. Some of the implications for teaching the literary reading as embodied in Response Text 2 can be spelled out briefly.

First, students need to be able to process the stimulus text before being asked to interpret its significance. Many learners find the demands of inferential comprehension,
especially of more sophisticated narratives, very difficult to achieve. Even this relatively simple and banal narrative does not spell out that the character Jenny has turned off the television. It is implied in the final segment of the narrative and students need to learn to read between the lines in order to get the significance of the final click. This kind of reading has to be taught. It is essential to current approaches to reading currently adopted by teachers working with the scaffolding pedagogy developed by Brian Gray, Wendy Cowey and others and centred at the Schools and Community Centre at the University of Canberra (see Gray and Cowey, 2000).

Second, students need to learn to see texts as structured entities. The literary reading construes texts as semiotic rather than mimetic. The text is a literary construct and ‘what is there’ in crafted texts is less like a window than a movie camera, which selects and shapes material to particular rhetorical ends. Teachers can ask students to think about the relation between one language choice and another, of one image and another, of one evaluation and another. They can unpack the structure of the text through various means, one of which is to identify its pattern of stages – the step-by-step phases of the text. This is one of the strategies underlying the various materials produced by the genre movement within literacy (see, for example the very useful books on exploring how texts work by Derewianka (1990) for primary school English and on the structure of the response genres by Rothery (1994) for secondary school English. The pedagogic power of the genre-based curriculum lay in the handle it gave teachers and students on the part-whole structure of different text types. It should not be underestimated.

Third, the language choices made in a text are related to the overarching interests and goals of the author. Hence, students need to view texts as motivated structures. Teachers can ask them to consider why the author has made the language choices s/he has and to expect that there will be a connection between these and the meaning of the text as a whole. This means that both teacher and students need to pay attention to the wordings used in any text studied in class and to talk about these choices.

Fourth, students need to learn to read the higher order meanings embodied in texts. Narratives, for example, create orders of abstraction and values through the play of event sequences and character development. In the terms explored in this chapter, students need to learn how to identify the text’s problematic and its overarching value systems. In order to do this, of course, they first need to be able to process the narrative – to read it paragraph by paragraph. This is no mean feat for many students, especially those facing the more demanding texts of high school English. One strategy for enabling them to do this ideational work is to talk about ‘what is going on’ in a text as the students read it. This enables them to synopsize the events of the text and to share understandings, even confusions, with their teacher and with one another.

The other challenge is that the higher order meanings of many literary texts are usually left implicit. They can, however, be discerned through attention to metaphorical language. With respect to lexical metaphors such as the padlock in CLICK, for example, students need to probe their literal as well as their symbolic meaning. Teachers can ask questions like: ‘What is the significance of the higher case CLICK here?’ or ‘How does the click of the padlock snapping open relate to the click of the television in the beginning of the story?’ or ‘Why does the author write that Jenny wanted to turn off its realness? What does this do to our understanding of the text?’ and so on. The literary reading and literary readers need to account for meanings which are latent or left
implicit in literary texts. This requires lots of classroom talk about text in which these figurative meanings are unpacked by students in collaboration with teachers who know where to take the classroom conversation.

Fifth, students need to learn to identify and weigh the different points of view presented in the text. This focuses attention on the interpersonal aspects of the text such as the way in which narrative often positions the reader to adopt postures of both empathy and discernment. With respect to understanding and feeling with particular characters in a narrative (empathy), teachers can ask questions such as ‘Which character do we see with at this point?’ With respect to evaluating the views of different characters (discernment), they can ask questions like ‘Whose evaluation is voiced in this part of the narrative? Which characters voice particular attitudes? What are these attitudes? Do you agree with these? Why? Why not? How do these attitudes relate to those expressed by the central character? Does he or she change attitudes in the course of the narrative?’ And so on. Becoming aware of the ways in which a text structures readers’ attitudes is an important part of both the literary and the critical reading. Both enable distance from texts and from one’s own ideological positioning by texts.

Finally, gaining control of the semantic hierarchies embodied in the literary reading, requires development of a global orientation to literary structure. Of course, interpreting a text holistically can only occur if students have firstly been able to read each paragraph of the text. Although the global orientation is privileged, it does not emerge fully formed out of students’ heads. Nor can it be taken for granted. A local orientation to text structure is often an indication that students are not able to process the text in the first place. This is especially true of more demanding texts. Pedagogic routines need to ensure that students can first read the text dynamically before being asked to interpret it synoptically.

Table 2 presents the kind of development teachers can expect to find as they adopt some of the discourse strategies outlined above in their interactions with students. The middle column suggests some of the points of connection with the text which students need to make in interaction with peers and teachers as they talk about the text.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Discourse probes</th>
<th>Personalist focus</th>
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<th>Literary focus</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What is the text about?</td>
<td>Concrete details of the story</td>
<td>Via exploration of metaphor</td>
<td>The abstract themes of the narrative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is the angle?</td>
<td>Feelings of the reader about the text</td>
<td>Via exploration of point of view</td>
<td>Values explored by the narrative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How is the text structured?</td>
<td>Local design features and linguistic choices</td>
<td>Via relational reading of the text (part-whole)</td>
<td>Global pattern of choices in the text</td>
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Table 2: Moving from the personalist to the literary reading: some pointers

Teachers can learn much about how students are mobilising knowledge about language by listening to and reading their responses to other texts. The developmental paths alluded to above present some initial strategies for supporting students in tackling more challenging narratives. It is when the learning context provides both high challenge and high support that most learning takes place. At such times, students can be pushed beyond current capabilities. They can begin to tackle the demands of the literary...
reading strategy with the support of a more capable other. Of course, teachers themselves need awareness of both the challenge of the different reading strategies and of students’ current abilities to negotiate this if they are to intervene constructively in their learners’ development, if they are to provide the kind of help entailed in scaffolding.
References


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APPENDIX

CLICK

CLICK. The television dial sounded through the room like snapped fingers. First there was soft static. Then loud voices swelled up.

“The sheriff will get you for this kid.” BANG! BANG!
“You won’t be around to find out Slade.” BANG! BANG!
CLICK, CLICK, CLICK. Jenny turned the dial to channel 4.

“Mr and Mrs Williams, if you answer this question correctly, the water bed will be yours!”
CLICK, CLICK.
“I’m Popeye the Sailor Man.”
“Jenny, what are you doing tonight?” Her mother’s words floated into Jenny’s mind. But she didn’t answer.
“Jenny!” 18. This time her mother’s voice demanded an answer.
“Uh, I’m not sure, Mum.” 20. Jenny leaned forward to turn the dial to Channel 8.
CLICK, CLICK. The last part of Secret Loves was on.

“Jenny, don’t watch television again all night. I hate to leave you alone when your father is gone too. But find something else to do. Promise?”
“Sure Mum.” Jenny stared at the television, trying to hear what the mother on Secret Loves would say when she heard that her daughter was pregnant.

In the back of her mind Jenny thought she heard her mother say something. Then she heard the hallway door close.
“See you later Mum.” Jenny didn’t say it very loudly. Her mother wouldn’t have heard it anyway.

On the screen the mother was holding her daughter in her arms and crying, ”What will the family think? What will the family think?”

Jenny thought about her family. There wasn’t much to it. Her father was on the road a lot, driving his truck. Her mother worked at night as a waitress. Jenny didn’t have any brothers or sisters. It wasn’t a real family. They never did much together.

Secret Loves ended and a commercial came on. It was for the sex appeal toothpaste. A beautiful girl with white teeth was sitting with her boyfriend in a sportscar. She smiled at the guy and ran her hand through his hair. The guy reminded Jenny of somebody in her class. Jenny daydreamed about being in a sportscar with him and looking like the girl in the commercial. She thought about it everytime she brushed her teeth. She wouldn’t brush with anything but that toothpaste.

The wail of a police siren came into the room. Jenny started to go to the window. But she didn’t get up. Doctor Harding had started the girl’s heart again. The
beautiful nurse wiped his forehead. Someone told the girl’s family that the operation had been a success. Doctor Harding took off his surgical mask and the camera zoomed in on his face.

A commercial came on. Jenny heard the sound of an ambulance coming down the street. She heard her neighbours’ voices in the hallway. They were talking about the accident.

Jenny decided to check out the accident during the commercial. She would probably get back in time before the show started again. She went out into the hallway and walked down the stairs until she got to the top of the stairs outside the block of flats. From there she saw the girl.

The white body and red blood were like fresh paint splotches against the black footpath. The image froze into Jenny’s mind. The girl’s face was horrible and beautiful at the same time. It seemed more real than anything Jenny had ever seen. Looking at it, Jenny felt as though she was coming out of a long dream. It seemed to cut through the cloud in her mind like lightning.

Suddenly Jenny was aware of everything around her. Police cars were pulling up. Ambulance lights were flashing around. People sobbed and covered their faces. Jenny walked down the stairs to the street where the girl lay. She was already dead. No handsome young doctor had come and saved her. No commercial interrupted the stillness of her death.

For a second, Jenny wanted to switch the channel to escape the girl’s face. She wanted to turn off its realness. But the girl wasn’t part of her television world. She was part of the real world of death and unhappy endings.

Two ambulance men came from the ambulance and gently put the dead girl on a stretcher. The crowd of people broke into small groups and whispered to each other as they drifted away. Jenny stayed until the ambulance drove away. She watched its flashing lights and listened to its wailing siren fade into the night air.

Finally, Jenny walked back upstairs to the flat. As she opened the door, she heard the sound of the television. The last part of Doctor’s Diary was still on.

Jenny eased down into her chair in front of the television. It was the chair she always watched television in. But now she felt uncomfortable. The television seemed too close.

Jenny tried to get back into the show. But all the characters’ lines sounded phony. And Doctor Harding’s face wasn’t the same. His smile seemed fake and he looked too handsome, like a plastic doll.

Then the words started running through Jenny’s mind. “People never die on Doctor’s Diary.” At first they were just words that Jenny couldn’t stop saying in her head. “People never die on Doctor’s Diary.” The words made Jenny remember the dead girl’s face. “People never die on Doctor’s Diary.” Then the words started meaning something.
CLICK. The television switch sounded through the room like a padlock snapping open.

by Judith Stamper