# Outsiders looking in? Challenging reading through creative practice

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## Abstract

Becoming well read, especially in academia, is key to being part of the university - and of society. Academic reading is 'tricky business' especially for those widening participation students not necessarily familiar with the forms and processes of Higher Education. To foster these students' academic literacies and practice, rather than the decontextualised teaching of 'skills', we create empowering social spaces for authentic collaborative reading. To facilitate this, we present text 'differently': text as scroll. A textscroll can be made by taping article or chapter pages together, side-by-side. Textscrolls open up the contested bookspace and make the written word accessible. They foster dialogic and multimodal interaction with texts and, if woven into a developmental embodied sequence of learning activities, help develop an understanding of academic reading as a wider social practice. Student and staff feedback show that scrolls are liberating. Scrolls, in embodied ways, make university reading meaningful and can authentically scaffold entry into epistemic communities. Scrolls help learners access the written word - and enjoy reading.

## Keywords

## Introduction: What's this paper about?

We live in a literate culture and arguably the ability to read and understand texts are key features of that culture. Reading helps people to construct meaning and make sense of themselves and the world. Thus, the teaching of reading, especially at university, should not be about developing technical 'skills' in a de-contextualised way but the fostering of literacies in a broader context (Lea & Street 1998; Lillis & Tuck 2016): reading is critical and analytical social practice. As we, the authors of this paper, are situated in academia, this made us wonder: *How can we encourage educators to approach reading differently so it becomes more inclusive and also more meaningful for their student readers, especially those academic-outsider students that are not familiar with academia and its workings?* In this paper, we describe what happened when we used scrolls and textmapping (Middlebrook 1994a; 1994b) with our widening participation undergraduate students (Abegglen, Burns, Middlebrook & Sinfield 2019a). We also outline how we have utilized scrolls and textmapping with staff learners in both Postgraduate Certificate and Masters courses and teachers in extra-curricular workshops (Abegglen, Burns, Middlebrook & Sinfield 2019b).

Textscrolls can be produced from articles and chapters by photocopying pages and taping them together, side-by-side. These scrolls, often several meters long, can be unrolled or unfurled across floors, walls and desktops. This enables text to be engaged with and worked on in a direct and embodied way. Text-as-scrolls can do a few things the bound codex book format cannot: making implicit content visible and comprehensible. This makes them useful even for the most resistant reader. Together with textmapping, a graphic organiser technique, they can bring text to life and through that, allow readers to experience the liberatory power of reading. In our paper, we argue that all educators could make use of scrolls - and collaborative, hands-on reading - so reading becomes accessible and pleasurable for all students, and thus helps them make sense of academia, of the world and of themselves.

Our creative approach to reading has also led us to approach writing differently. With our undergraduate students, we have used blogging, free writing (Abegglen, Burns & Sinfield 2016) and regenring (Burns, Sinfield & Abegglen 2018a; 2018b; 2018c; 2018d; 2018e). With our staff learners we have done the same - and reflected on reading (Abegglen, Burns & Sinfield 2019b) and the teaching of reading (Middlebrook 2007a). In our own practice, we have developed strategies of writing together, sharing our thoughts and findings on paper, facilitated by Skype, and synchronous and asynchronous writing in Google Docs. Appreciating the power of this collegiate practice, we present this article in an alternative mode: dialogically and conversationally. We showcase how we, as academics, work together. We also highlight (and italicise) what labour - what conversations - have gone into the production of this piece. As Roxå and Mårtensson (2009) have established, conversations about teaching and learning are important for academic development. Especially 'backstage' conversations influence academic teachers' everyday practices and conceptions of learning and teaching.

We begin the alternative journey with an outline of what is challenging about reading, in particular academic reading, and move on to outline our particular reading experiences and those of our

students and peers. The paper then dips into social theory to outline in more detail the potential of the scroll and alternative approaches to reading and the teaching of reading. Finally, the paper provides recommendations for others who would like to follow our approach and make reading more accessible and more relevant (and also more fun) for their students - and their own academic practice.

## What's the issue with academic reading?

Moral panics about student reading - alongside concerns about their writing - have encouraged an academic culture focused on 'turn-it-in' and 'plagiarism detection', creating a lack of trust between staff and students where 'at best' many academics 'teach' reading as a set of decontextualized study skills rather than as an engaging set of meaningful academic practices (Lea & Street 1998; Lillis & Tuck 2016). But what is the problem with academic reading? We read all the time. Why is the reading of academic texts so different to the reading of newspapers, novels, crime stories and graphic novels? Theoretically, the practice is the same: de-coding what has been written, drawn, scratched or carved (*Icelandic rita: 'to cut, scratch, write', Swedish rita: 'to draw, design, delineate, model', German ritzen: 'to carve, scratch'* - see Molinari 2017). However, in contrast to popular media, academic texts are often aimed at a specialist audience and thus utilise a discipline- or subject-specific language. The writing itself is dense, with a formal tone and style. Those unfamiliar with this sort of writing - and with academia and academic processes - often find this reading 'dull' and 'complex'. The texts are difficult to engage with and difficult to comprehend because they are built around an epistemic argument, making use of a particular vocabulary and structure that is set in a particular history (Mann 2000). Where academic texts come in a digital format, students have to scroll through endless pages of words. Whilst one might argue that online access should help student readers, allowing them to flexibly move back and forth between pages, and zoom in and out of paragraphs, in practice, they can never see more of the text than what fits on the screen (Rose 2011). This is limiting and frustrating - the very opposite of easy random access. And, very similar to the bound book, reading on screen is one-dimensional and uni-sensory. As Dave (Middlebrook 2007b), one of the authors of this paper, highlights on his website this makes accessing written content difficult, not just for learners with additional or special needs, but for all learners.

> *Dave: It seems that I cannot wrap my mind around working with Google Docs. botched up the first paragraph. My apologies for that. I'm going to try writing my suggestions just underneath (new paragraph). We'll see how that works.*

### It hurts so bad
The struggle with academic reading means that many students resist reading and fail to feel part of their academic communities as a consequence. The question is: *How can we encourage these students to read - and even more importantly, how can we make academic texts accessible for them?* First, it would help if we understood why these students are not reading or rather, why they resist it. While there is a whole body of literature that looks at reading from a linguistic point of view, there

is very little available when it comes to the socio-cultural dimension of (student) reading. Recently, a colleague in Egypt, Maha Bali (2019), asked her (postgraduate staff-) students directly what encouraged them to read and also what discouraged them. She found that when they felt that they had a choice (or options) in terms of readings, where the texts were short, interesting and relevant, and when the students themselves had time, then they were motivated to read. Her participants also wanted to manage their own reading, to spread the reading over time and share it with others, their peers. This increased their motivation. This indicates that students resist reading when they are forced to read, the texts selected have little or no relevance for them, the writing is long and dense, and they feel they cannot manage the task. Interestingly, Bali's (2019) students were also discouraged to read when assessed or quizzed on content. In that instance, texts became something that 'you either understand or you don't'. Fear of misunderstanding, or rather mis-reading, stopped her students reading. As a consequence, Bali (2019) suggests that educators should ask: "Why aren't they reading, and how can I encourage them to read" rather than "How do I make them read".

This echoes our own personal experiences and our associated research. We did cover this several years ago with the (Online Literature Review) *Critical Reading Skills for Students; An Evolving Literature Review* (last edited 11 years ago, July 2008) (Hoskins 2008a). The point of this brief intervention was that a PhD student - Kate Hoskins - undertook a literature review on the topic of academic reading in a collaborative online wiki space - to attempt to model the processes of reading and writing in 'real time'; whilst reflecting on that process in an accompanying blog (Hoskins 2008b). The outcomes of this small research project were a focus on the power imbalance in reading *in Higher Education* (HE):

> So, what do the power relations and constraints, exclusions and or dispositions of the power of the text mean for the non-traditional student who is attempting to navigate their way through the academy?  For one thing, to be so silenced reinforces feelings of not being welcome and to be given such extensive reading tasks can encourage a sense of failure in less engaged students.  Rather than demonizing students further with this, students need understanding about the purpose of their reading and moreover, practical ways to engage with it, which can simultaneously serve to dismantle, or perhaps less ambitiously to problematise, the power relations embedded in the discourse.  To summarize then, it seems necessary to unpick the power of the text, particularly in terms of uncovering strategies that will allow students to critically engage with their reading (Hoskins 2008c).

The power imbalance between student and text - and student and university - has been further complicated by the introduction of the 'consumer model' of HE (Giroux 2011). As a student-consumer one might suppose that the (end) product of the reading and writing undertaken for a course or module is a certificate, validating a set of skills learned. The consumer model implies more choice for the student and a 'value for money' ethos in HE overall. However, this happens in a context of cutbacks on creative subjects and creative pedagogies as well as reductions in the services and staff that support those learners that do not immediately thrive in academia. Thus, what

we witness is not a more equitable sharing of limited resources, but rather the introduction of a more rigid model that only recognizes and rewards those that have already been groomed from birth to succeed in middle-class academia.

## So… What can be done?

> *Sandra S: On an early Access course for adult learners, I saw the teacher waving a book in the air and shouting at the students: "What is wrong with you - even my GCSE students can read this?!"*

In academia, the teaching of reading is often outsourced to specialist services: the Learning or Academic Development Units. If reading is discussed in university classrooms, it often includes frightening students with tales of failed reading, abstract discussions of professionalism, horror stories around plagiarism detection software, and the students' own implicit lack of academic integrity. This is supplemented by the introduction of performative reading activities and tests aimed to check 'comprehension' or to detect and punish 'non-readers'. These approaches to reading serve to mask the true value of reading itself from those very students who most need a bridge or guide in order to meaningfully join their disciplinary or epistemic communities: the non-traditional students who may not have yet learned to read at university level or those students who struggle with academic reading (for whatever reason). We, the authors of this paper treat reading differently with our students - and with our staff learners and peers. We approach reading more consciously and also more slowly (Berg & Seeber 2016; Bosanquet, n.d.). There needs to be time and space for meaningful engagement with texts and content of texts - and also for the discussion of reading. Reading should be something that is enjoyable - and helps everyone succeed and progress. It is not an isolated skill to be mastered nor is it an activity that is intrinsically meaningful for itself (reading for reading's sake). Rather, it needs to be embedded in the curriculum and in the activities undertaken in class. We need new approaches to reading - and the teaching of reading: approaches that are creative and diverse as is our student body and staff.

### *Textscrolls*

> *Dave: Textmapping starts with a scroll. Scrolls are an ancient technology, but they offer clear advantages over books - advantages that are particularly useful in the context of classroom instruction.*

We found that textscrolls (Middlebrook 2007c) do an excellent job in making reading accessible for students, including those who struggle with reading or academic work generally. Scrolls can be made by photocopying or printing off short, relevant articles or chapters (on to one-side of the paper) and then sticking the pages side-by-side to produce the scroll itself. Enlarging the print to A3 size seems to make the texts even more user-friendly - it definitely makes them more accessible. When

we have used scrolls with students with specific learning needs, such as dyslexia, they reported back that whilst they initially felt some trepidation at this reading in public, the supportive nature of the scroll and of the activity overcame their doubts. Scrolls can be taped to walls or simply spread across floors - which makes them 'open' for groups of readers as they manipulate them as physical and intellectual objects. We have used scrolls with groups of up to fifty students, splitting them in smaller groups with each of them having their own scroll to work on. With these groups the main concern is the need for the physical space (and the time) to engage with their unrolled text - and possibly some guidance on how to work as a team. For colleagues who worry about the environmental cost of printing off such large text formats, we can only suggest that this sort of one-off investment in facilitating the reading of students may be worth it in the long term.

Scrolls do quite a few things for teaching and learning that arguably the infolded structure of the bound book does not: they change the geography of the book space - opening it up. They allow readers to access text multimodally. They make text structure and content visible. They allow students to 'see' the shape, structure and format of the writing: 'intro' (introduction) and 'outro' (conclusion); headings and paragraphs; images, charts and diagrams; footnotes and bibliography; author and date; and especially the way the text appears on the page itself. Scrolls also open up content. They allow readers to enter from various viewpoints: by moving back and forth, texts can be looked over from afar and close up (see the ancient Northern European words *farstand*, *firststand*, *forestand* and *understand* - Onions 1994; Whitney 1895). A scroll encourages readers to move about, to walk along its length, stepping close for details and stepping back for the big picture. Scrolls can be shared, discussed, taken apart and put together again, which is very different from the bound book that only ever has room for one reader at a time. In that sense, they could also be said to outweigh reading on screen, especially as first steps to academic reading. Although online text may be shared or projected it is not promoting an active and embodied engagement; and unless students are reading together in 'hypothes.is' (collaborative online reading space), it does not allow for people to come together. Scrolls on the other hand facilitate 'active' reading - and discussion.

### *What we did: With our undergraduate students*
In our UK post-1992 institution, we aim to make reading accessible and enjoyable. We do not 'teach' our students to read nor do we offer 'remedial' sessions to brush up their reading skills. Rather we construct an authentic academic context in which reading can take place. We source relevant and accessible texts, and we encourage students to read for meaning. We ask them to explore the texts (in a variety of ways), make sense of them (both in terms of their content and structure) and utilise them for their study (in a real research project). Specifically, in our first-year undergraduate module, we asked each student to use the collaborative reading seeded by the textscrolls that we distributed to produce an individual literature review for their own qualitative research project.

In practice, each group of students was given their own scrolled text to keep - and use. We selected articles closely linked to the assessment task they had been given: the planning and carrying out of small qualitative research projects on some aspect of student learning, studying or assessment. This made the texts meaningful for students, something they could interrogate against their own experiences - and jump off from to undertake their own further explorations and research. By the

end of several weeks with scrolls - in class and out - everybody in that module had interacted very powerfully with a 'real' academic text - and made sense of it in a variety of ways: including via participant observation of what facilitated or impeded learning around the University; by re-genring, that is, representing the findings of their observations in a multimodal exhibition - as animation, video, 3D artefact, poetry, comic book; through collaborative reading over time; and by presenting their own texts back to the class as a whole. Students were now 'ready' for deciding with which of these texts to engage even more deeply to produce the literature review for their own individual research project.

> *Dave: What exactly were the texts in the scrolls that you gave out? Did each group get the same texts or different texts?*
> *Sandra S: Student groups each received a different textscroll - but all the scrolls were related to study and academic practice. Experience told us that student research was usually on topics like group work, academic reading, notemaking, academic writing, learning spaces - so we found texts on those topics (the Journal of Learning Development in Higher Education is a good source to use for this). The idea was that a literature review on practically any research project the students wanted to undertake individually would be able to be built from the texts given out in class.*

Reflecting on this as tutors, we felt that we had, perhaps for the first time, made clear to our students the *point* of academic reading. Academic reading was not some performative 'jumping through hoops' implemented to torment them. Reading was designed to help their thinking - their research - their writing. This is learning by doing (experiencing) and reflecting (Dewey 1938; Gibbs 1988; Kolb 1984; Schön 1983): a 'hands-on' relationship with the text rather than an abstract and theoretical discussion of words. Most importantly, this different approach to reading allowed a more welcoming, accessible, collaborative and dialogic encounter with content. Reading became an empowering socio-political activity rather than a disempowering linguistic or semantic one.

> *Dave: Sandra S and Tom, when you used scrolls with your students, what did this look like? And how did it seem to work? – i.e., were they engaged in the article(s), and did they appear to be comprehending more deeply and thinking more deeply?*
> *Sandra S and Tom: Yes! So, the student groups were each given their own scroll - and allowed sufficient class time with it. We gave out coloured felt tips and highlighters - and asked them to actively engage with their scroll. Some groups unrolled across the floor, some pulled tables together and unrolled - one group found some blu-tack and stuck their scroll on the walls. Then they annotated, coloured and scrawled. They made those texts their own.*
> *Tom: When we have previously run sessions on reading where individuals struggled alone, we have seen mature, capable adult learners crying silently - unable to get the reading*

*done - and overwhelmed by their feelings. Arguably, if these students had attempted that reading at home on their own, they would not have returned to the University.*

A major part of the process was to slow down the reading and thus to make transparent the stages of academic research itself: think-read-observe-talk-present; read again-observe again-talk again-present again. Engaging in this cycle in class together in real time modeled the sort of reading process that is authentic - and that actually works, allowing students to perceive and feel the value and purpose of academic reading. Each student group was expected to "be with" (Nancy 2000) their scroll and engage with its form and content. This meaningful and in-depth reading was followed up with writing. That is, students also had to blog about their learning, reflecting on the work they were doing, individually and together with others. This quasi-academic writing (see working- and learning-out-loud - Jarche 2014) in their own voices helped students to form a writing habit as they took ownership of their own learning (Abegglen, Burns & Sinfield 2015). To help them move from more personal to more formal academic writing we built in a class *Writing Week* scheduled before an assignment hand-in date - in the case study being discussed here that was the handing-in of the qualitative research project proposal. Students were expected to turn up with drafts of the proposals for peer review and development. In practice, those that turned up without writing had to join a 'Shut Up and Write Group' - those that brought draft work joined a 'Peer Review Group'. This meant, the reading 'naturally' led to writing, with students outlining their project ideas and later reporting on their findings - while also thinking about their learning process.

*Sandra A: If others would like to devise a similar programme, what would you advise them to do? What are the steps to take?*
*Sandra S and Tom: We would advise others to set the students a challenging task (we chose a qualitative research project - on the topic of student learning). Choose a range of interesting, relevant and 'pithy' academic articles to seed a real academic engagement with the task. Turn the articles into scrolls and give one each per student group. Start textmapping the scroll in class – with plenty of coloured pens and highlighters - encourage dialogue and discussion. Follow this up with a 'practical' activity related to the task (we sent the students out to check out the university's learning and teaching spaces - and required them to feedback on their observations in multimodal ways to help them 'see' differently). Return to working on the scrolls - seeded by all this other related activity and thought. Students then 'present' their scrolls - possibly saying how they might draw on the contents in their own projects. Students are now ready to use their own scroll in their own projects – and to choose which other reading to do, based on what the other students have presented.*

### What We Did: With Staff

> *Dave: Is it just students - or do you find this feeling about academic reading seeps into all of our feelings?*
>
> *Sandra A: Staff, too, find reading difficult. For example, one event that particularly highlighted their issues with reading was our "small acts of academic enquiry" activity conducted at our Learning and Teaching Conference. We provided a range of creative resources and asked our staff attendees to make an artefact that reflected their attitudes to, or thoughts about, academic reading. The overall representation of reading by staff was of confusion, despair and pain - with the most dramatic construction being that of a bloodstained, blackened paper cup peppered with pointed tacks breaking out of the cup ready to pierce the hand. One hole torn in the cup revealed the words: "A black hole. Painful. Bloody. Don't know where you are". If staff, too, are experiencing reading as disempowering and painful, it is no surprise that they are not finding easy or smooth ways to introduce their students to powerful practice.*

Subsequently, the intense reading-work that we undertook with students led us to also address academic reading - and writing - with staff. We fundamentally changed what did with the staff-as-students on our Postgraduate Certificate in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education (PGCert) module: Facilitating Student Learning (FSL). We were interested in their reading experiences, but we also wanted to take our staff on a textscroll journey, so that they too experienced in embodied ways how to read powerfully and thus how to develop reading powerfully. In our interactive workshops, we gave our staff participants textscrolls to also work through, mirroring the activities that we undertook with our undergraduate students. Even with staff, it appeared that through the conscious and active engagement with text, reading became something to be embraced - and even enjoyed - rather than a duty. We noticed that the majority of the staff that experienced these sessions then scaffold the reading for their students via the use of textscrolls. As one of the FSL participants (cited in Abegglen, Burns, Middlebrook & Sinfield - with Lewis 2019, p. 13) said:

> I think it was useful for the students, there was a good energy in the room. The exercise was a fun and enjoyable way to break down a long-ish text and at least one student who started the session feeling unsure and nervous about working with a text (on William Blake - an inspiring but potentially intimidating subject) went away more confident. I will certainly use the technique again.

Similarly, Dave has experienced resistant readers - and teachers of reading - embrace reading through the use of scrolls. As the many voices of teachers who have attended his workshops show, by experiencing reading differently, they got to enjoy text - and thus approach reading differently in their classrooms. They - and their students - learn to navigate through challenging content. They

get to understand arguments. As a college-level tutor cited on Dave's (Middlebrook, 2007b) website said: "This method puts the focus on the process, which helps focus my attention on what is important". Scrolls open up new pathways of thinking and doing. Because of that, Dave has recently begun to take scrolls into other educational settings, including prisons. Dave hopes that scrolls open up the gate to the garden of knowledge, for all readers.

## Evaluation

When we ran the textmapping session with a recent PGCert cohort, we undertook an immediate in-class evaluation - results below (note: this excludes analysis of the follow-up blog entries that typically follow such a session). We had twenty-seven staff participants, twenty-five attended that workshop. Of these the majority considered themselves relatively confident or experienced lecturers, with many attending the course as a condition of their probationary year with the University. In this context, we selected five texts that had relevance to our module and the work that we had been doing together - and mainly explored the texscroll/textmapping activity as a 'pre-reading' one, encouraging the staff-participants to think of ways that they might adapt this reading strategy to their own contexts. Each scroll group was given their own reading and had to deliver a short presentation on their text. After the class we asked the participants to reflect on the textscroll session in answer to the following questions in written form on post-it notes:

- In the textscroll session, what was your 'Ah ha' moment?
- What, if anything, did you find challenging?
- What will you take with you into your own practice - and why?

### The 'Ah ha' moment
Staff participants 'liked' the different text format. They particularly liked the physicality of the scroll which made text more accessible for them:

- I enjoyed getting physical with the article. I also read/approached it with a bigger font than usual which made it easier to read.
- How the physicality of the scroll made the article more accessible.
- Ah ha - great! Visual way of building relationship with text. An abstract idea *being there large format!* Thank you.
- I did this before but not with a scroll. Like this, it seemed easier to grasp. It is also useful to see the way the argument is constructed in terms of method.

### What if anything did you find challenging?
Although the scrolls helped staff learners access texts they still found reading a challenging skill to master. They mainly pointed out the 'mechanics' of reading as 'difficult'. Another challenge for them - as it will also be for their students - was to convey personal thoughts and ideas - and to bring differing views and approaches together: the challenge of 'teaching' reading meaningfully:

- It was challenging to skim and not read the whole thing!

- Reading is a personal skill. We all read and understand text in different ways. Speed of reading and English as an additional language could also be a challenge. Reading in a group therefore could be challenging.
- Getting out of my own head and away from the expectation of delivering a presentation that makes sense both to others & myself on a subject that I don't have time to read/to master.
- Difficult to consolidate contrasting POVs from different students at the end of activity (quickly).
- Working with others to clarify ideas… under the time constraints.

### *What will you take with you into your own practice - and why?*

Overall, the textscroll session seemed to have encouraged staff participants to think about - and in the future to approach - reading more consciously, for themselves and also for their students. In particular, the importance of trying to see the whole text and then to tackle particular aspects in more depth seemed to have resonated with them. They definitely liked the idea of sharing the 'labour' of reading and discussing content:

- Anatomic dissection of a text.
- Techniques for approaching my own task with finding a piece for critical review.
- (I will read the creativity article for sure.) How to help students to read more effectively and more confidently. I would like to try this with Montessori articles.
- Using anatomy of a text to quickly go through a series of texts in order to choose which to go more into.
- Effective techniques to manage large text-based resources and take relevant info in a timely manner.
- To divide and conquer! I like the way one of the groups divided the scroll between them.
- Tips for critical analysis. Inspiration for (blended) sessions w. students.
- Thought this was a great technique, particularly for the first-year students I teach, to introduce them to academic reading (& writing).

Overall, the staff feedback confirmed the potential of scrolls. However, in this particular case, we feel that spending more time with the texts might have revealed the power of the scroll even more. Reading needs time. There also needs to be enough time to think about reading and to challenge existing pre-conceptions about reading. The idea that reading is a 'skill' to master, rather than (messy) social practice, is hard to overcome. In addition, in this particular session, there were twenty-five participants and three tutors in one rather small fishbowl-like room which made unrolling texts rather difficult. It also made it difficult for participants to *farstand* and see the larger picture. So, for next time, we will definitely try to book a bigger and more learner-friendly room that allows readers to fully engage with their scrolls - and with each other.

## Different contexts, similar experiences

> *I may have told you that I created the material as a set of webpages, in something of a hurry, after taking one particular second year class when at LondonMet. I'd picked up teaching for that module (Organisational Analysis & Design I think, with Miriam Green) and had 3 seminar groups on the same day, when students were supposed to have read the article in advance. When I asked if they \*\*had\*\* read it, I was intrigued not that many had not (what's new?), BUT that many said things like* "I've read part of it ...", "I got about halfway ...", *etc. On the hoof, I then went through the way that they should approach reading academic articles, in my view, working through the article with them. I then did the same for following groups. I probably got more attention from those classes that day than any other period of undergraduate teaching! Of course, some students hadn't attended, so for them and for others generally, I created the material in quick'n'dirty HTML format: http://www.lenmholmes.org.uk/students/how2read/how2read_a.htm (Email, Len Holmes, October 2019).*

Professor Sally G. Hoskins' (2019) article also caught our attention, for it echoes our experiences and our effort to approach teaching and the teaching of reading differently. In the article, Hoskins describes the poor academic reading skills of her upper-level undergraduate students, and how she addressed the problem. Her solution was to slow down, engage, and focus on the process of reading, with an emphasis on deeper thinking: "I started to go for depth over breadth. I spent multiple class sessions deconstructing a single paper with my students…" (Hoskins 2019). She also used constructivist teaching methods, such as having her students work together in small groups, allowing them to develop a deeper, richer understanding through discussion and cooperative effort. It paid off. Her students were engaged, they changed their 'tunes'. They started developing their own ideas, tapping into their imaginations. But most importantly, as Hoskins (2019) points out, "...what they learned about their own creativity is the knowledge that lasts".

### It's seeing reading - differently
Our joint experience is that academic reading should not be approached as the development of a de-contextualised set of skills or strategies, but by engaging with real texts with real meaning for a course or programme. In the process of scaffolding real reading, we also wanted to do something subtle: to distantiate and make conscious what reading *is* in the academic context - for the students and also for us as staff working with staff - and for the staff themselves when working with their own students. We felt that we had achieved that when the staff highlighted that the texts they had read related to different aspects of our module. Similarly, our undergraduate students in their Learning Spaces Exhibition and then in their presentations started to make connections between the texts they were reading and the concepts they wanted to explore in their research projects.

*Dave: This looks like an important point. Can you fill this in with some details? What happened here? What was it like for you to observe this happening? At what point did you realize what was happening? What did you observe?*

*Sandra S: I suppose the easiest example is the group that had been reading Thornburg's (2004) Campfires in Cyberspace. Thornburg discusses the primordial myths and values of the campfire, the watering hole and the cave - the different thinking/learning spaces that they facilitate. So, the group reporting back on that article could bring to life the ideas in the paper by reference to what they had observed in practice happening around the University. For example, they pointed out that a class-based discussion is like the campfire with elements of democracy but with the teacher there as the dominant storyteller - whereas the watering hole could be the social learning spaces in the library or just people talking in the canteen. These are the democratic spaces - no tutors, just self-directed learning. The cave they thought was like their reflective learning logs - a chance to think deeply and make sense of things on their own… It was so exciting for us as tutors to see our 'non-traditional' students in the first few weeks of their undergraduate programmes reading and making use of the reading in this way.*

*Tom: And when our staff readers engaged with the same text, they emphasised how difficult it was, coming from both a philosophical and a futurist perspective. None of the students said that the text was too hard.*

We felt that this was a powerful, embodied demonstration of the authentic point and purpose of reading. The students and staff did think deeply; they made connections. They could see and feel the 'dialogue' between what they had observed - what they thought - what they had made - and what some of the literature said. As Paolo Freire (1985, p. 19) says: "Reading is not walking on the words; it's grasping the soul of them". It also revealed back to us how we, in embodied ways, could make university reading meaningful - through the social reading - and by anchoring it in tasks that authentically scaffold the entry into epistemic communities (see social constructivism: Vygotsky 1930/1994; 1934/2012, and emancipatory pedagogy: Freire 1970; Shor 1996).

The challenge here is that for our students the authentic reflection they receive back of their worth is the mark or grade they are awarded - and for our staff how many students 'pass' their modules with good grades. It is the (end) 'product' that has value. For many students the transition to HE means the meeting of 'harder' tasks with more difficult assessment criteria. For staff, it means picking readings that are 'difficult' and judging their students only on particular skills. Even more confident readers and writers can fail this set up. It is risky or even dangerous - for both students and staff - to truly engage in the dialogic contesting of knowledge claims and the constructing of new knowledge especially when one is chasing 'good grades' and 'better degrees'. These are "crunch" points (Evans 2019) where students can make leaps and bounds in their learning and staff can provide meaningful teaching - or where they both become disengaged, both from the tasks and with each other. Evans argues here that we need to build student-efficacy and resilience and a better understanding of pedagogical principles and practice. For let us not forget that epistemology is not

neutral - it is hierarchical (see the work by Jürgen Habermas on epistemology - and also social theory) and arguably marginalises many forms of knowledge and through that marginalises certain student- and also teacher-groups. This is why the ontological turn is so important: through the textmapping which is inclusive, collegiate, dialogic and - equally important - appropriate, learners can experience and carry over learning in all its forms from the university classroom into lived lives - to address issues in lived real lives.

## What we take from all this - and what we recommend

> *Sandra A: So, reading is complex. What's special about academic reading? Why is it particularly challenging?*
> *Sandra S: The reading process is more complex than we typically allow. A quick online search on Academic Reading looks at skimming and scanning - it talks about four types of reading, and seven strategies for reading... It emphasises that you are definitely NOT reading for pleasure. But academic reading is so much more than that.*
> *Students engage with a text written for one purpose (in that academic papers and chapters are not written to answer the essay question that the students have been set) - and have to use information from that source and many others to construct something else - usually an essay - with another purpose altogether.*
> *They have to process the issue or question - and place themselves in relation to that.*
> *They have to find relevant texts and place themselves in relation to them also. For when we read, we place our human selves - our ontology - the who we are - in relation to what we are reading. We always do - but this is more complex when the text implicitly says: You are not welcome here!*
> *Our students have to bring together this foment of epistemology and ontology - and make something new - something that answers the question - but is also something that they can believe in - or stand by. Something that is authentically 'me'.*
> *The writing becomes a metonym for some part of who we are. That is why it is so important to enable powerful reading by empowered students. Not allowing "the academy" to objectify and dehumanise our students; but creating space for our students to become not just unafraid of who they are in an academic context - but proud and powerful actors and agents in their own learning.*

We live in a literate culture and arguably the ability to read and understand texts is a key feature of that culture. In a very real sense, the success of students rests on whether or not they can master academic reading. The success of our widening participation students in particular - both during their years at university and after, in the working world – involves being able to accomodate reading as a critical and analytical social practice. Thus, in the most fundamental sense, reading education

cannot be about developing skills in a de-contextualised way: context is the entire game. Reading helps people to construct meaning and make sense of the world (Vygotsky 1930/1994; 1934/2012; Freire 1970; Shor 1996) - and also to join discussions and take action, on a global and local scale. The issue then is with power and the power of the text (Hoskins 2008a). What we ask of students who have not engaged or 'spoken' in such formal public space as a university is hard. Not that our students have not engaged in complex semantic discourse - it is just context - this academic context - in which they do not feel powerful.

We argue therefore that it is important to celebrate our students and to 'celebrate' reading, see it and do it as something that can and should be enjoyed, something that is more than the mastering of a skill. We engaged with this in the way that we began our undergraduate course - for the academic reading begins at the beginning, with the student and who they already are. This built on multiple ways that we encouraged students to bond and belong - to believe in themselves and to speak - to use their voices in our classrooms. Being positive towards our students and actively building self-efficacy is fundamental to all our practices - and the scaffolded introduction of meaningful reading is part of this. Scrolls and textmapping allow us to slow things down (see slow academia) - giving students and staff time and space to engage with the written word and content. This provides a different sort of academic inquiry, one where there is no right answer, one where there is exploration.

The particular way that we used the scrolls to scaffold meaningful and manageable reading with our students allowed them to harness their existing skills and understanding to read meaningfully - it provided a 'safe' space in which to tackle not only the tricky business of academic reading - but the even trickier business of academic writing. When reading and writing are not introduced early, when they are not scaffolded and developed well, students remain under-prepared and insecure, even when lecturers themselves (see Bali 2019). When they are enacted in powerful, human and emancipatory ways, students are enabled to become academics more on their own terms, resisting cultural or academic "colonisation" (Freire 1970). Our students experienced what was possible - and what they were capable of - and actually enjoyed inclusive and empowering reading. They were definitely not silenced by or abject before the 'power of the text': it is possible to create powerful learning spaces in and out of the text. We therefore thematised reading with our staff learners and introduced them to textscrolls. They, too, started to enjoy reading. This joy then led them to utilise scrolls and textmapping in their classrooms. This is important as this sort of learning can only happen if it is supported and fostered. We therefore recommend readers to take this article as a starting point to also reframe their reading practice with students and unroll their books and articles, reimagining what is possible and engaging with texts positively: love (the work) of reading.

It is our proposition that the development of advanced academic reading strategies is best done through discourse, and it should be done in a meaningful relationship to the context - in the case of students, in a meaningful relationship to their course and coursework. We say this because we have seen in our practice that reading together works much better than leaving students to read alone, and we have seen how focusing on real tasks such as a small-scale research project – rather than on perfectly fine texts that are not relevant at the moment – gives students a sense of purpose and, perhaps more importantly, motivates them to think independently, critically, and analytically.

Textscrolls facilitate this sort of dialogue and thinking: they are open for discussion - they unwrap content. We would therefore like to see more text unrolled - or unfurled.

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