Metacognition and Close Reading
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Project Goals
• Theoretical
  Use research in metacognition to better understand how close reading works
• Practical
  Use this research to develop better close reading assignments in the literature/writing classroom

What is Close Reading?
• The most basic tool in the literature classroom
• Developed and popularized in the 1950s by the “New Critics” (I.A. Richards, Empson, Brooks) against older forms of criticism: philology (concentrating on word origin, meaning); historicism (biographical or historical facts of text); belle-lettrism (text is good or bad)
• In general: close readings pay attention to the form rather than the content of the text
• Not what the author says but how the author says it
• Close readings concentrate on things like figurative language, imagery, syntax

What is Metacognition?
• Knowledge of the way we learn/process information, and the ability to recognize and regulate that process
• For example: knowing how to monitor our own goals/progress for a task – being self-reflective and critical as we progress

What is Close Reading as Metacognition?
• Why link metacognition to close reading in the first place?
• Close reading compels students not just to read a text (the content; what it’s about) but to reflect on how they’re reading, i.e., what images or language they’re paying attention to as they read
• Studies on cognition and literacy (most importantly Flower and Hayes) confirm that the best writers reflect on their own thinking as they compose
• Close reading first developed in 1950s when literature professors became interested in psychology – particularly behaviorism (I.A. Richards)
• However, while psychology has advanced beyond behaviorist models, literature teachers still generally teach close reading as they did in the 1950s
• Attention to current research in cognition and education can improve close reading assignments in the literature/writing classroom

Why Teach Close Reading?
Reading
• For difficult texts – e.g., a Shakespeare sonnet – close reading is necessary for basic comprehension
• For non-literary texts – advertising, popular movies – close reading can reveal aspects of the text not evident at first glance
Writing
• Paying attention to the formal qualities of prose and poems will help students develop their own writing
Thinking
• Close reading models strong critical thinking; students recognize ambiguity, complexity, etc.

Data and Analysis
• Performed a qualitative analysis of post-class surveys and comments and reflections on student papers in a First-Year Writing Seminar with 17 students
• Prior to taking the class students were familiar with close reading (or textual analysis more generally) from previous coursework
• Students recognized value of close reading; particularly, they continually referenced how it develops their metacognitive skills—i.e., close reading helps them improve their thinking “process” makes “meaningful connections” in thought, and aids them in reasoning in a “step by step” manner
• When asked about close reading in the FWS, though, students describe it simply as an aid in gathering evidence for papers
• They used “pointing” language to describe how close reading works in the FWS: close reading “pin points” details; “gathers” evidence
• Metacognitive language of process, connecting, etc., not evident in how students view close reading in the FWS

Conclusions
• Students already recognized that close reading was helpful in improving their metacognition
• Likewise, research in cognition, composition, and literacy points to important parallels between metacognition and close reading
• However, my evidence suggests that the traditional way of teaching close reading does not aid in developing metacognition
• Drawing on current research in metacognition can improve close reading assignments
• Assignments should encourage students to think of close reading as a “process” that they can reflect upon and ultimately control
• Exposing students to “expert” and “novice” versions of close readings will help them perceive the process by which “expert” readings develop from “novice” ones
• Students should also be asked to externalize their own process of formulating close readings (in journals or discussion board posts) as they draft and revise their writing, since doing so will help them recognize and control their thinking habits

The intelligences, they the spherae.
(51–9)
Here we have a profound textual crux, but it is commonly agreed that Grierson was right when he rejected the reading of all editions in favour of the reading of all manuscripts; what he rejected was the plural spherae, which apart from not rhyming throws away the whole claim that this couple has achieved identity. It has been pointed out, in favour of the reading ‘spherae’, that Donne seems habitually...