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ABSTRACT

A study reexamined data from an earlier study of the effect of teacher questioning techniques on students' understanding of and responses to literature. Data were reexamined for instructional correlates of difficulty of recall and difficulty of depth of understanding. Subjects, 1,041 students in 58 eight-grade English classes in 16 midwestern urban, suburban, and rural schools, took a test consisting of a set of increasingly more probing questions concerning five literature titles they had studied in class that year. Additional data included teacher and student questionnaires concerning instructional practices and student backgrounds, and class observations. Control measures included a brief personal essay and a multiple-choice test and a written response to two brief stories and one poem from the National Assessment of Educational Progress. The study was also controlled for race, ethnicity, sex, socioeconomic status, and grade level, since a few schools included seventh-grade students in eighth grade classes. Results indicated that: (1) curriculum and instruction significantly affected the difficulty or ease that students experienced with literature; (2) the absence of frequent, extensive writing was by far the most significant factor in handicapping students' recall and understanding; and (3) different instructional practices potentially complicate literature in different ways. (Three tables of data are included; 22 references are attached.) (RS)

Making It Hard: Curriculum and Instruction as Factors in Difficulty of Literature

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Making It Hard: Curriculum and Instruction as Factors in Difficulty of Literature

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Introduction

The difficulty of any work of literature, the authors in this series agree, cannot be adequately explained by text features alone. Purves (1990), following Stanley Fish (1980), argues that literature education is essentially a process of aesthetic socialization, or enculturation into the interpretive community of those who read, understand, and value accepted works of literature. This acquired ability superficially entails, as Hirsch (1987) argues concerning cultural literacy, a passing familiarity with those texts considered literary. More fundamentally, it entails particular values, tastes, and mannerisms empowering particular responses and motivating particular sorts of readings, viz. poetic, aesthetic readings (cf. Rosenblatt, 1977). The difficulty of any given work of literature, then, is not categorical, i.e., for all time and all readers; nor is it fully a matter of such text characteristics as syntax and lexis. Rather, the difficulty of any particular literary text ultimately depends on the standards which the literary community establishes in treating and interpreting it. As Purves concludes, "A text's difficulty depends upon the nature of the understanding expected" (Purves, 1990, p. 8).

Touponce, citing Barthes, Derrida, and Lacan, comes to a similar conclusion. He argues that it is the nature of interpretation in any given case that determines the difficulty of the text, for it is the nuance of individual readings that breathes life and meaning -- simple, complicated, or otherwise -- into the text. Hence, understanding the difficulty of any given text requires looking beyond the text itself to the actual readings of the text, just as understanding reading practices involves looking beyond individual reading skills to the institutions that educate the readers. "In other words," writes Touponce, "the theory of the text suggests that the idea of difficulty is less a property of texts themselves than of the ways in which institutions train us to read" (Touponce, 1990, p. 2).

For Elam, difficulty is endemic to textuality itself. Language is never transparent, and there is no definitive account of the meaning of any given text. Rather, the act of reading itself constitutes meaning, and it is the nature of reading to complicate the text, to introduce difficulty. "Any reading that ... contemplates not what it knows but how it can come to know anything at all, will take us rapidly from certainty to uncertainty, from sure answers to unanswerable questions, from stable centers to disappearing lines and dislocated boundaries" (Elam, 1990, p. 3). For Elam, difficulty is an aspect not of text but rather of thinking about text. Nor, she contends, is this difficulty undesirable, something ideally if not unfeasibly to be removed through assiduous study. But she acknowledges that the challenge for education is to make difficult texts accessible without oversimplifing them.

From a different perspective, Hazard Adams (1990) argues that a text is difficult when readers are not sufficiently well-educated to take up its demands. This is why, he contends, late twentieth-century students of literature often have a hard time with classical allusions and important facets of classical and even modern literature; they have no understanding of Latin and Greek or of literary traditions and a very superficial sense of history, literary or otherwise.

In his analysis of text readability, Chafe (1990) shows how even sources of difficulty ostensibly located in the text actually originate beyond the text. Key to the difference in readability between two texts he analyzes -- a comparatively easy passage from Edith Wharton and a more obscure passage from Henry James -- is the relative discrepancy between the world of the text and reader knowledge. James is a more difficult author for modern readers than Wharton partly because he makes more obscure references for these readers than does Wharton As I have noted elsewhere (Nystrand, 1986), shared knowledge and well-managed reciprocity between writer and reader are a hallmark of all readable texts. As a result, readability is not categorical and cannot be determined from examination of text features alone; readability potentially changes with every new group of readers, who, along with the author and text, configure the textual space, or semantic potential, of the communication between them.

If difficulty in literature involves more than the text itself, what are the implications of this conclusion for curriculum and instruction? Clearly, in choosing literary titles of appropriate difficulty, teachers must consider more than the texts themselves. It makes no sense to talk definitively of the inherent difficulty of The Grapes of Wrath or Animal Farm or any other text since any given work of literature will vary in difficulty for students depending on the students' abilities and predispositions, as well as what teachers and their students actually do with it. Animal Farm is a relatively easy book when read simply as an animal story; it is comparatively more difficult when treated in depth as an allegory. In short, curriculum and instruction -- what teachers ask students to do -- are themselves significant factors in the difficulty of any work of literature studied in school. In understanding the pedagogical difficulty of literature, it is consequently appropriate to inquire about just which sorts of practices complicate, and just which sorts of practices enhance, literature understanding and achievement.

In her paper, Hynds (1990) begins to examine research on curriculum and instruction from this point of view. For example, she notes that Gall (1984) found that 20% of teacher questions are procedural, 60% seek to elicit recall, and only 20% require analysis. She notes that Hoetker and Ahlbrand (1969) found that literature teachers typically ask a question every twelve seconds or less, a dizzying pace that would indeed seem to favor recall over higher order thinking. In a study of 58 eighth-grade literature classes of varied abilities and socioeconomic status, Nystrand and Gamoran (1989) found less than a minute per day devoted to discussion and small-group work. Only 11% of the teachers' questions in these classes involved **uptake**, in which teachers incorporated previous student answers into subsequent questions, and only 12% of their questions were **authentic**, meaning that for almost all their questions teachers were looking for particular answers. What effects do such practices as these have on students' understandings of and responses to literature? Do they facilitate or complicate learning? And just what sorts of learning to they promote?'

A Study of the Instructional Correlates of Literature Achievement

To examine these issues, I reexamined the data noted above (Nystrand and Gamoran, 1989) for instructional correlates of *difficulty of recall*, on the one hand, and *difficulty of depth of understanding*, on the other hand. In other words, I sought to distinguish instructional practices which complicate recall from those which make it difficult for students to understand literature in depth.

In our study, we distinguished two sorts of student engagement: "procedural," which concerns observance of classroom rules and regulations, and "substantive," which involves sustained commitment to the content and issues of academic study. We found empirical support for the hypothesis that substantive, but not procedural, engagement bears a strong relationship to literature achievement. In other words, merely doing homework, paying attention in class, and answering questions were not enough to assure that our subjects might do well on our measure of literature achievement. Significantly, literature achievement seems not to be well explained in terms of student behavior alone. Rather, substantive achievement seems best explained in terms of a comprehensive instructional context distinguished by extensive interaction between students and teacher, including:

(a) numerous authentic teacher questions, i.e., questions such as open-ended ones for which teachers do not prespecify answers;

(b) discussion of literature in terms of students' own experience;

(c) uptake, i.e., the incorporation of previous student answers into subsequent teacher questions;

(d) deliberate relation of individual works to other readings; and

(e) ample time for discussion.

Measure of Literature Achievement

The literature test used as the dependent variable in our analysis consisted of a set of questions concerning five literature titles students had studied during eighth grade; the test was administered at the end of this grade in the spring. Four of these titles were chosen as a stratified sample that represent the kinds of literature each class had studied; if half of the titles studied were short stories, then two of the four were short stories, etc. The fifth selected title was the one work the class had spent the most time on; typically it was either a novel, such as To Kill a Mockingbird or A Tale of Two Cities, or a drama, such as Romeo and Juliet. Only short stories, novels, and dramas were selected.

The test involved a set of increasingly more probing questions, ranging from naming and/or describing as many characters from each story as students could remember and explaining the ending of each story, to outlining the themes and conflicts of each and relating theme, conflict, and ending. Students were asked to elaborate on these especially for the one title on which their class had spent the most time (i.e., the fifth selection). All students answered the same general questions though the details of each test varied depending on the titles studied and selected.

Scoring

These tests were read at least twice by trained graduate students from the Department of English at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Each test was scored for:

(a) extent of recall;

(b) depth of understanding;

(c) number of endings remembered;

(d) relation of ending to denouement;

(e) relation of conflict and/or ending to theme;

(f) understanding the internal motivations of characters;

(g) interpretive treatment of the major selection; and

(h) level of discourse used to discuss theme and conflict.

Readers read the entire test and then determined a single, holistic score for each of the items listed above. Each student's literature score derived from this test was the sum of each of the components listed above. The overall reliability of the assessment, computed as a correlation of the two readings, was $r=.90$.

Subjects

In all, 1041 students in 58 eighth-grade English classes in 16 Midwestern schools participated in this study. Three of these schools were rural and all white; four were suburban, mostly white, and mostly upper-middle class; and nine were urban composed of students representing mixed socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds.

Other Data Sources

Data sources included student tests, teacher and student questionnaires concerning instructional practices and student backgrounds, and class observations. Each class was observed four times, twice in the fall and twice in the spring. The main purpose of the observations was to flesh out the portrait of instructional practices provided by the questionnaires.

Control Measures

In the fall of data collection, students completed two tasks that were used as control measures in the study. One of these consisted of two brief stories and one poem from the National Assessment of Educational Progress; students were required to read the selections, answer multiple-choice test items, and write a page in response to one of the stories. This test served as a control of literature ability. The other control measure was a writing sample in which students wrote a brief personal essay.

In addition to these two measures, our study was controlled for race, ethnicity, sex,

socioeconomic status, and eighth grade, since a few of our schools placed some seventh graders in eighth-grade classes.

Some Hypotheses Concerning the Effects of Instructional Practices on (a) Difficulty of Recall and (b) Difficulty of Understanding in Depth

In the data we collected, recall and depth of understanding correlate rather substantially ($r=.707$). This is no surprise, of course, since recall is surely a prerequisite to understanding in depth, and depth of understanding surely enhances recall. But the two cognitive processes are not the same (indeed, the possibility of understanding in depth without comparable recall may well provide a charitable explanation for the phenomenon of professorly absentmindedness!). In our study, we measured extent of recall in terms of factual information and extensiveness of detail that students produced concerning the five titles listed on the test. By contrast, our measure of depth of understanding required gauging the extent to which students had integrated these same details and information into an interpretive framework.

We would expect procedural engagement to be an essential prerequisite for both extent of recall and depth of understanding, since doing one's work is the *sine qua non* of all school learning. Related to this, we would obviously expect outright disengagement, such as failing to do homework, to complicate both recall and understanding in depth since such failure must irrevocably increase the difficulty of both.

Many experimental studies in psychology show generally that the manipulation or elaboration of material being studied tends to improve recall and learning. Applebee (1984) and Langer and Applebee (1988) show how writing -- including notetaking, answering short-answer questions, summary writing, and essay writing -- specifically provides for such processing. Hence, we would expect recall and depth of understanding to be made difficult to the extent that writing is minimal and perfunctory. We should expect similar, negative results for minimal class discussion of readings. Conversely, we should expect comprehension and recall to improve when teachers help students to relate individual texts to their previous readings, previous class discussions, and topics they have written about. We should, furthermore, expect uptake to enhance comprehension and recall, for by following up on the responses of their students, teachers increase the extent to which students reflect on and process their thoughts.

Clearly, there is a tradeoff between depth of treatment and coverage of material (cf. Newmann, 1988), and in this respect, we might expect instruction that focuses exclusively on recall to be at odds with understanding in depth. For example, one characteristic of recitation devoted to recall of previously learned material is a relatively quick pace, which is consistent, on the one hand, with the 5.2 question per minute pace that Hoetker and Ahlbrand (1969) report for literature instruction, and the 3:1 ratio of recall to higher order questions that Gall (1984) reports, on the other. (The classes we observed were characterized by a slower pace: 3.23 questions per minute on average with a minimum of 1.51 and a maximum of 9.33.)

If depth of understanding, unlike recall, requires an agile, proficient interpretive framework, then effective instruction must clearly foster the development of such a framework; specifically it must promote reflection and thoughtfulness. Langer and Applebee (1988), for example, distinguish essays and extended writing from short-answer exercises in just this way, the former fostering depth of understanding and the latter enhancing recall.

One reason that notes, short-answer questions, and summary writing promote recall but not depth of understanding is that they deal not with the student's but rather with someone else's ideas and information. Unlike recall, depth of understanding requires the individual learner's elaboration of an interpretive framework. It is an important purpose of authentic discourse to promote just such development. When teachers ask authentic questions -- eliciting responses and opinions and encouraging individual interpretations -- they open the floor to student ideas for examination, elaboration, reconsideration, and revision. When teachers help students read literature on their own terms and values, reading also becomes authentic and serves a similar cognitive function. In Rosenblatt's (1938) terms, there is an interaction between the world of the reader and the world of the text. In Smith's (1971) terms, comprehension is enhanced when, working from a store of personal knowledge, the reader is able more easily to predict the information of the text.

In our research, we code questions as *authentic* if they are genuinely open-ended or if they have no prespecified answers. Authentic questions allow students considerable input into discussion. By contrast, test questions (inauthentic questions for which the teacher is looking for particular answers) allow students no input into the course of the discussion since the agenda for questions and answers is set by the teacher before the class even begins. Hence, "What is the conflict in Act I?" is a test question if the teacher has a particular answer in mind. By contrast, "What do you think the author is trying to do here?" is authentic if the teacher is receptive to the student's opinion and does not insist on any one particular answer.

Why should authentic discourse promote depth of understanding? First, the character and tone of classroom discourse set important expectations for learning. When teachers ask genuine questions about what students are thinking (and not just to see if they have done their homework), they promote fundamental expectations for learning by treating students seriously as thinkers, i.e., by indicating that what students think is interesting and indeed worth examining. In effect, they treat each student as a *primary source of information*, thereby giving them all an opportunity to deal with things in their own frames of reference. Authentic questions prominently underscore the character of instruction where students are "major players" in the forum of the classroom, where communication is not a one-way affair, and consequently where the terms of reciprocity between teachers and their students are upheld not merely in procedures but in substance as well.

Results

We can best consider these hypotheses by examining the instructional variables noted above in terms of difficulty of recall, on the one hand, and difficulty of depth of understanding, on the other.

Before doing this, however, it is useful to examine the types and extent of writing that characterized classes in our study, as well as extent of discussion, uptake, and authentic questions. This information is provided in Table 1.

About 85% of the students in our sample completed both their writing and reading tasks. On average they spent just less than an hour a week on homework. In class, more than 34% actively participated in question-and-answer, and students rarely failed to answer questions.

Table 1. Means and standard deviations of variables included in regression analyses. (N=924 students.)

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation
TEST SCORES		
Recall on spring literature test	1.917	.876
Depth of understanding	1.212	.120
Fall reading	21.620	.311
Fall writing	6.412	1.388
BACKGROUND		
Sex (1=female)	.508	.500
Race (1=black)	.090	.286
Ethnicity (1=Hispanic)	.102	.303
SES	.016	.825
Grade (1=eighth)	.879	.327
PROCEDURAL VARIABLES		
% Reading not completed	15.722	22.913
% Writing not completed	13.205	12.217
% Nonresponse to questions	2.526	3.297
% Active in class	34.441	21.884
Time on homework[1]	.957	1.069
INSTRUCTIONAL VARIABLES		
Quantity of writing [weighted score]	1.527	.284
Freq. short-answer questions[2]	7.834	4.442
Freq. write at least a paragraph[2]	5.633	5.201

Table 1. Cont'd.

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation
INSTRUCTIONAL VARIABLES (cont'd.)		
Freq. write essays: 2 paragraphs or more[2]	2.066	3.173
Freq. write at least 1 page[2]	1.751	2.975
% teacher questions authentic	23.487	13.265
% reading tasks judged authentic by students	20.235	12.219
% questions exhibiting uptake	11.030	7.348
Contiguity of reading[2]	10.658	2.752
Discussion time[3]	.770	1.716

[1] hrs/week

[2] times per month

[3] minutes/day

Yet only about 12% of teacher questions were authentic, and just 11% of all teacher questions involved uptake. Less than a minute a day was, on average, devoted to class discussion. As Nystrand and Gamoran (1989, p. 19) note, "the overall picture appears highly consistent with earlier descriptions of secondary school classrooms as orderly but lifeless (Sizer, 1984; Goodlad, 1984; Powell, Farrar, and Cohen, 1986)." Specifically looking at writing, we find that the most frequent type of writing was short-answer; such extensive types as paragraph-length and more were clearly less frequent. According to teacher report, students in our study, on average, wrote more than a page less than twice a month. By contrast, they completed short-answer exercises nearly eight times a month. These results are consistent with those in Applebee's (1981) study of writing in American high schools.

To explore these hypotheses, *difficulty of recall* was computed as the opposite of recall (i.e., -1 x RECALL), and *difficulty of depth of understanding* was computed as the opposite of depth of understanding (i.e., -1 x DEPTH). Table 2 presents two regression analyses in which difficulty of recall and difficulty of depth of understanding served as the dependent variables, to be explained by variation in background and instruction. In both analyses, instructional variables are controlled for background and prior writing and reading abilities.

I have suggested that recall and depth are irrevocably complicated by students' failure to do their work. This prediction is partly supported by the analysis in Table 2, showing that failing to complete writing tasks significantly increased the difficulty of both recall and depth of understanding. In addition, failure to answer teacher questions increased difficulty of depth of understanding.

Beyond this, I suggested that recall and depth of understanding should significantly depend on extent of manipulation and elaboration of information. Table 2 provides ample support for this hypothesis. Both recall and depth of understanding were made difficult in classes where students did little writing. Both recall and depth of understanding were enhanced by uptake and complicated by its absence. Recall specifically improved to the extent that classes related individual texts to other things they had read. Depth of understanding, moreover, significantly depended on amount of discussion.

Table 3 examines in some detail the effects of different sorts of writing on difficulty of both recall and depth of understanding. As predicted, frequency of extensive writing enhanced both recall and depth of understanding. Specifically, frequent paragraph-length writing improved both recall and depth. Page-length writing was even more effective; comparing the coefficients for recall and depth shows that frequently writing one page or more is about 2.7 times more beneficial than frequently writing at least a paragraph; for depth the ratio is about 3.3. By contrast, frequently completing short-answer exercises in fact degraded recall and depth of understanding. Applebee (1984) offers one explanation for this surprising result. He notes that. because writing best assists learning of the topics it is focused on, such narrow-banded activities as short-answer exercises are likely to interfere with total recall. In addition, we might also speculate on the possibility of students' completing these exercises, albeit poorly, without having actually read the material involved.

Table 2. Effects of frequency of, quantity of, authenticity of, participation in, and contiguity of writing, reading, and classroom talk on difficulty of recall and difficulty of understanding literature in depth. Metric regression coefficients, with standard errors in parentheses. (N = 762 students, missing values deleted listwise.)

	Difficulty of Recall	Difficulty of Understanding in Depth
BACKGROUND VARIABLES		
Grade (1=eighth)	.054	-.183
	(.090)	(.118)
Race (1=black)	.246****	.068
	(.091)	(.120)
Ethnicity (1=Hispanic)	.122	.165
	(.089)	(.117)
SES	-.107****	-.138***
	(.036)	(.048)
Sex (1=female)	-.120**	-.174*
	(.052)	(.069)
Fall writing	-.073****	-.105****
	(.021)	(.027)
Fall reading	-.034****	-.036****
	(.005)	(.007)
PROCEDURAL VARIABLES		
Time on homework	-.065***	-.058*
	(.024)	(.031)
Reading not completed	.0004	.0004
	(.002)	(.003)
Writing not completed	.005**	.002**
	(.002)	(.003)
Participation in class	-.001	-.001
	(.002)	(.002)
No response to teacher questions	.008	.026*
	(.010)	(.013)
INSTRUCTIONAL VARIABLES		
Amount of writing	-.256**	-.289**
	(.104)	(.137)
Discussion time	-.022	-.038*
	(.016)	(.022)
Authenticity of teacher questions	-.0005	-.006**
	(.002)	(.003)

Table 2. Cont'd.

	Difficulty of Recall	Difficulty of Understanding in Depth
INSTRUCTIONAL VARIABLES (cont'd.)		
Authenticity of readings	-.003	-.018***
	(.005)	(.006)
Uptake	-.015****	-.020****
	(.005)	(.006)
Relating discussions to other discussions and student compositions	.005	.001
	(.004)	(.005)
Relating readings to other readings	-.046**	-.018
	(.019)	(.025)
R-SQUARE	.353	.339

* p<.10
** p<.05
*** p<.01
**** p<.001

Table 3. Effects of selected modes of writing on difficulty of recall and difficulty of understanding literature in depth. Metric regression coefficients, with standard errors in parentheses. (N = 1031 students, missing values deleted listwise.)

	Difficulty of Recall	Difficulty of Understanding in Depth
BACKGROUND VARIABLES		
Grade (1=eighth)	-.100	-.299***
	(.075)	(.101)
Race (1=black)	.437****	.242**
	(.081)	(.108)
Ethnicity (1=Hispanic)	.232***	.233**
	(.083)	(.110)
SES	-.166****	-.199***
	(.031)	(.042)
Sex (1=female)	-.055	-.098*
	(.048)	(.064)
Fall writing	-.106****	-.151****
	(.019)	(.025)
Fall reading	-.047****	-.048****
	(.005)	(.006)
TYPE OF WRITING		
Freq. of short-answer exercises	.015**	.024***
	(.007)	(.009)
Freq. of writing at least a paragraph	-.014**	-.019**
	(.006)	(008)
Freq. of writing 1 page or more	-.038****	-.058****
	(.010)	(.013)

* p<.10
** p<.05
*** p<.01
**** p<.001

Finally, I argued that depth of understanding, unlike recall, benefits from authentic instructional discourse. In its absence, we should expect students to have difficulty in this regard. Table 2 provides support for this distinction as well. Unlike recall, depth of understanding was significantly enhanced by both authenticity of teacher questions and authenticity of readings; both of these declined to the extent that either or both are absent.

Discussion

This study demonstrates, first, that curriculum and instruction significantly affect the difficulty or ease that students experience with literature. Specifically we find empirical support for the contention of all the authors in this volume that literature difficulty is more than a matter of which texts are taught; it is also a matter of how they are taught, i.e., instruction.

Generally, literature will be difficult for students for obvious reasons such as their failure to complete tasks and answer teacher questions. Uptake is important to both recall and depth of understanding. Of all the instructional variables examined in this study, however, the most notable is writing. The absence of frequent, extensive writing was by far the most significant factor in handicapping recall and understanding. By comparing coefficients in Table 2, we can see that quantity of writing positively affects both recall and depth of understanding much more than the amount of time spent on homework. Specifically, increasing writing assignments by merely one paragraph (i.e., asking students to write two paragraphs instead of one or three paragraphs instead of two) increases recall by .256 points. Compared to this, increasing homework by one hour a week results in a mere .065 point increase in recall. Of course, if students write regularly and extensively, they no doubt do lots of homework. Hence, the import of this finding is to underscore the importance of regularly assigning written homework.

We also find that different instructional practices potentially complicate literature in different ways. Recall is sensitive to the extent to which teachers help students relate their readings to other readings and also to previous things students have written. If we were to derive a hypothetical high school literature class from the data of this study devoted exclusively to recall, it might be as follows: The teacher would assign homework regularly that would be completed by all the students. This homework would involve frequent paragraph- and page-length writing. Little if any of this writing would involve short-answer exercises. In class, the teacher would lead discussions that regularly alluded to this writing, and also to previously studied literature selections. The teacher would regularly follow up on students' responses by asking them further questions.

If, on the other hand, we were to derive a hypothetical high school literature class devoted exclusively to depth of understanding, it might be as follows: The teacher would assign homework regularly that would be completed by all the students. This homework would involve frequent paragraph- and page-length writing. Little if any of this writing would involve short-answer exercises. Classtime would be characterized by lots of uptake and authentic questions probing student responses and understandings of their readings. Discussion, wherein students regularly comment on each other's responses without prompting by the teacher, would be common. The teacher would take care to help students see relations between the narrative worlds of the works they read and their own individual experiences. We should point out that

this latter classroom designed to promote depth of understanding also promotes recall: for the most part, our profile of the instructional correlates of depth of understanding includes those for recall.

Clearly, how teachers treat literature -- the assignments they make, the kinds of writing tasks they design, the types of discussions they conduct -- does indeed affect the difficulty their students' experience with literature. It is essential to note that just as surely as all of the characteristics noted in the above profiles contribute to enhanced learning, their absence will just as surely degrade it. This conclusion is sobering given Applebee's (1981) findings that the dominant uses of writing in American high school English classes are note-taking and short-answer responses, and that paragraph-length writing is "reported as a frequent activity for only 27% of the classes at grade nine, and 36% at grade eleven." In his study, 50% of all English teachers reported assigning short-answer exercises "frequently," whereas they assigned homework involving writing of at least a paragraph length only 10% of the time. In the study reported here, teachers, on average, reported asking students to write a brief essay of more than two paragraphs only about twice a month, and one page or more 1.75 times a month. (These means, and others for the variables analyzed in this study, are reported in Table 1.) As a result, it seems totally justified, in evaluating instruction in literature, to do more than ask what teachers are doing. In addition, it is important to consider and hold teachers accountable for what they are *not* doing: are they or are they not assigning frequent, extensive writing; are they or are they not engaging their students in genuine discussion that regularly transcends recitation; are they or are they not frequently asking authentic questions; and so forth.

Many of the practices that promote depth of understanding potentially increase risk for teachers. When they ask authentic questions, for example, teachers cannot by definition fully anticipate the kinds of responses that students will make. As a result, they must be prepared to deal with a great range of possibilities, certainly greater than when they ask preplanned questions with preconceived answers. Similarly, when they encourage student discussion, teachers can never be sure exactly where it will lead. These pedagogical practices that promote depth of understanding would, therefore, seem to require depth of preparation on the part of the teacher; they should feel secure with -- indeed, even relish -- discussing unanticipated topics, themes, and aspects of the works they teach. But at the same time that these practices introduce an element of risk for teachers, they also enliven instructional routines that for both students and teachers can easily become humdrum and boring. Teaching the same lesson with the same preplanned questions to three, four, or even five different classes a day can quickly dull even the most dedicated high school teacher. By contrast, managing slightly different conversations with the same classes involving the unique contributions of the different groups of students may well prove stimulating and engaging for both teachers and students, especially when the students learn that their teacher listens, takes their contributions seriously, and often follows up on them.

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