

SUPPORTING CONTEMPLATIVE READING PRACTICE ONLINE

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CONTEXT

Contemplative reading is an approach to reading that emphasizes reflection and re-reading for deeper insights. The MyDante platform was developed by Professors Frank Ambrosio and Edward Maloney, along with Georgetown University's Center for New Designs in Learning and Scholarship, to facilitate contemplative reading in a digital environment, and became the primary platform for a 3-part MOOC in 2014. In MyDante, students learn about three "levels of reading," which represent increasingly deep layers of personal engagement with a text (see figure on right). Guided Mode, a particular reading view that wraps the poem in instructor-crafted commentary, models how students can apply the levels of reading to their own reading experiences. Then, through journal entries, annotations, and discussions, students produce their own commentary on the text, thinking intentionally about their use of the levels of reading.

MyDante By the Numbers (since October 2014)

8,331
students

83,393
annotations

12,515
journal entries



RESEARCH

Contemplative reading involves thoughtful, multi-layered reading and re-reading. As we watched students in the Dante MOOC embrace contemplative reading practice, we decided to look at their depth of engagement with the practice in a sample selection of journal entries to determine how their engagement manifested in their use of the different levels of reading.

WORKING ASSUMPTION

We began with the working assumption that the greater the number of passages that demonstrated engagement at any of the 3 levels, with increasing weight given the interpretive and reflective levels, the greater the engagement with the text.

1

We began by creating a corpus of entries for research by selecting journal entries that included the word "contemplative" or its derivatives. This, we hypothesized, would ensure that our corpus reflected writings from students who were actively grappling with this reading practice. Some students had multiple entries represented in our corpus.

2

We reviewed and coded these entries according to the level(s) of reading that they showcased. Entries often had multiple passages (paragraphs). In these cases, each paragraph was coded independently.

3

We identified two primary coders (research associate Jaime Gonzalez-Capitel and lead instructor Frank Ambrosio) and ran inter-coder reliability tests. These tests resulted in a reliability rating of .78.

4

We calculated engagement scores for each learner whose writings were reflected in our corpus using the following formula:

Aggregate points per user

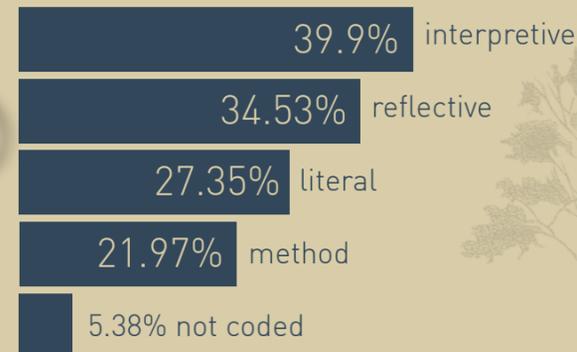
Number of coded entries per user

This came to 223 entries from 106 students

RESULTS

Overall, we observed that students were understanding and applying even the most complex level, the reflective level. The most frequently observed level was the interpretive level, which we might attribute to its similarity to traditional observations made during literary analysis, a method with which many of our students may be familiar. However, when an entry demonstrated only one level, that one level was most often the reflective level.

Overall elements coded as:



66.8% of coded entries showcased only a single level

For those that represented **2 or more levels:**

Interpretive and Reflective..... **11.66% of entries**
Interpretive and Literal..... **4.04% of entries**
Literal and Reflective..... **3.59% of entries**
More than two **2.69% of entries**

NEXT STEPS

Motivation

One of MyDante's primary objectives as a platform is to support learners in developing practices that will lead them toward a lifetime of deep, meaningful engagement with literary texts. Supporting students in further developing their contemplative reading skills is one area that we believe would enhance our progress toward this goal. If we begin with the foundational skills needed for contemplative reading, we then need to develop students' skills in recognizing the type ("level") of reading/writing that they are doing, as well as the quality of that reading/writing. From there, they can begin to deploy these skills for themselves.

Concept

To that end, we have begun a new stage of this research by developing a coding app. Learners will be invited to participate in a tutorial that asks them to code anonymized learners' entries according to the 3 levels of reading. In the tutorial, a correct answer will have been identified by research staff. Once learners have successfully mastered the coding challenge in the tutorial, they will move on to the next stage of the project, in which they code further entries. At the end of their coding experience, they will take a survey that inquires whether the exercise was useful in helping reinforce their familiarity with the levels of reading and contemplative reading practice.

Expectations

We hope that this next stage of research, which we expect to deploy in October 2016, will provide us with feedback that we can use to continue to hone the tools that we offer as core to the MyDante platform. Should the coding app prove useful to students' ability to recognize and apply levels of reading, which we hold as foundational to contemplative reading practice, we will incorporate it into the MyDante platform and continue to build on it as a tool for supporting students' acquisition of contemplative reading skills.

To learn more about the platform, please visit dante.georgetown.edu

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