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**Title:** Making interpretation visible with an affect-based strategy

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**Strand of Work:** Design of and Design-Based Research on intervention

## **Abstract**

### **Question Investigated**

This study builds on earlier READI research (Levine and Horton, 2013) on the efficacy of an affect-based interpretive heuristic that allows students to evaluate their affective responses to texts and then justify those responses, a process which helps novice readers move from summary to the construction of connotations and thematic inferences.

Previous research examined the results of an instructional intervention in which high school students used this heuristic to develop thematic statements after reading poetry. The study described here examined students' responses to prose fiction – a short story – during concurrent think-aloud protocols, in order to assess the efficacy of the intervention in this genre and to more closely examine the effects of the heuristic on interpretive sense-making *during* reading. The prediction was that students would comment more often and construct more abstract connotations and interpretations as they read.

### **Methodology**

This study took place at a large, diverse urban public high school. Two teachers volunteered to be part of their study, and one class taught by each teacher participated in the study. Both the intervention ( $n = 19$ ) and comparison students ( $n = 18$ ) were 12th graders in untracked classes. The classes were matched in terms of standardized test scores, distribution of grades, and truancy levels. Five students from each group also participated in structured reading protocols of a short story. All of those students had earned either Bs or Cs during the previous quarter of the school year.

During the four-week intervention period, both intervention and comparison classes engaged with artwork, songs, and short stories and focused on literary interpretation, with special attention to symbolism. Students in the intervention group practiced the affective evaluation heuristic. While students in the comparison group did discuss emotional responses to texts, they did not use the affective evaluation heuristic.

Think-aloud interviews were conducted before and after the month-long intervention period. All interviews were conducted by the researcher and lasted from 30 – 35 minutes. At both pre- and post-study, the participating students were told that they would be

reading a story aloud, and as they read, they should “use any strategies or ways you know to make sense of the story and make interpretations of deeper meanings, symbolism, or other meanings beyond the literal.”

### **General statement of findings**

Student responses were submitted to ANCOVA. Analysis of a pre- and post-study interpretive writing task and clinical think-aloud protocols from both groups showed that at post-test, students receiving the intervention commented more frequently than did comparison students, and made more interpretive responses. In addition, their interpretive statements reflected recognition of more of the conflicting themes in the text than did the comparison group. The results suggest that explicit instruction in affect-driven interpretive heuristics can support novice readers in constructing interpretive readings of literary texts.

### **Implications**

This study supports the results of previous work that suggests that affective response may be an untapped resource for teachers who want to help their students develop interpretations of texts that are still responsible to those texts. The gains in frequency of response, as well as interpretive level of response, indicate that this kind of affect-based strategy may help students become more independent and thoughtful readers.

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