Title: Helping high school students read like experts: affective evaluation, salience, and literary interpretation
Author: Levine, S., & Horton, W.
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Strand of Work: Design and Design-Based Research on interventions

Question Investigated

This expert-novice study builds on previous work on the use of an interpretive tool we call "affective evaluation." In previous work, we reported the results of an instructional intervention in which novice readers – high school students who had average or below-average standardized reading scores and who performed poorly on previous literary interpretation assignments – learned to strategically engage in a process of *affective evaluation* (Levine, 2014; Levine & Horton, 2013). During this intervention, students learned to: 1) identify language in a text that they felt was especially emotionally evocative or affect-laden, 2) make subjective evaluations of valence in that language, and 3) explain their evaluations. In analyzing pre- and post-intervention written interpretations and think-alouds, we showed that novice readers taught affective evaluation moved from mostly literal to mostly interpretive readings of texts, in comparison with a class engaged in more traditional instruction in literary interpretation.

In the present study, we expand upon this finding, asking whether strategic use of affective evaluation might help novices "read like experts"; that is, whether affective evaluation guides novice readers' attention specifically to the kinds of textual details that expert readers find salient. Those details tend to include figurative language, repeated imagery, or shifts in mood, structure, or style (Rabinowitz, 1987). We compared the think-aloud protocols of novice and expert readers as they read a short story, examining the details that experts and novices found salient, the types of interpretations made by each group, and the relationship between the details a reader found salient and his or her thematic inferences about the story. In comparing expert and novice readings, we did not seek to reify a specific set of "better" responses to a literary text. Instead, we used the think-aloud responses of the expert readers as an *in vivo* instantiation of the more general models of literary reading and noticing (Graves, 1996; Van Rees, 1989).

Methodology

At a large urban high school, a class of high school 12th graders, most of whom were identified as struggling readers (as measured by standardized reading test scores and

teacher evaluation), participated in an instructional intervention in which they were taught to use the affect-based reading heuristic described above.

From that class of 12th graders, five students were selected to participate in pre- and post-study think-aloud protocols in response to a short story. Additionally, five urban and suburban high school teachers with advanced degrees in English literature or education participated in think-alouds in response to the same story.

We divided the story into separate "propositions," typically independent clauses, To arrive at an operational definition of interpretive salience, we identified those propositions that the majority of experts found important or interesting enough to comment on, as well as those propositions that the majority of experts did *not* comment upon. As a reflection of expert consensus, we coded propositions that received comments from 4 or 5 experts as "high salience," propositions that received comments from none or only 1 expert as "low salience." With this operational definition of salience, we then examined the degree to which students followed similar patterns of responding to high salience and low salience material, both before and after the affective evaluation intervention. We also established categories of types of responses based on a system of constant comparison, as well as an *a priori* code for affective evaluation. We looked for connections between their explanations and the language they used in their thematic interpretations. We also examined whether and how readers' overarching thematic responses incorporated ideas expressed in their think-aloud protocols.

General statement of findings
Both quantitative and qualitative results show that after the intervention, novice readers attended more frequently to story details that expert readers found salient to interpretation, and also made interpretive moves similar to those made by experts, such as inferences about character goals, interpretation of potential symbols, and, to some degree, attention to patterns and juxtapositions in the text. Further, this focus on interpretively salient details influenced the nature of students' thematic inferences.

Implications
In terms of research, this study suggests that "rules of notice" could be a useful model for examining reading practices. In terms of teaching, this study adds to the evidence that affective evaluation supports novices' attention to salient literary details, which in turn support their development of relevant and meaningful thematic inferences. These findings suggest that the recruitment of everyday, affect-based practices can help novice readers develop more "expert-like" literary practices and construct more meaningful interpretations of a literary text.