An Exploration of the Impact of Epistemological Stances on Reading

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Abstract: This paper explores how reading is affected by the epistemological stance we take. It begins with a historical survey of how reading has been conceptualized. The survey shows that reading has been regarded as discrete linguistic decoding skills, an innate human capacity, a transaction between the reader and the text, a product of sociocultural practices, and being digitally literate. However, little research has been conducted on how the epistemological stance we take affects the reading or interpretation of a text. Therefore, three epistemological stances, i.e., objectivism, subjectivism, and constructionism, are discussed to illustrate how they affect the reading of a text. In addition, a fourth epistemological stance, intersubjectivism, is put forth to demonstrate how it complements objectivism, subjectivism, and constructionism in helping us better understand the reading process. Finally, the implications for reading instruction are presented.

Cet article explore comment la lecture est affectée par la position épistémologique que nous prenons. Il commence par une étude historique de la façon dont la lecture a été conceptualisée. L'enquête montre que la lecture a été considérée comme des compétences de décodage linguistique discrètes, une capacité humaine innée, une transaction entre le lecteur et le texte, un produit de pratiques socioculturelles et une culture numérique. Cependant, peu de recherches ont été menées sur la façon dont la position épistémologique que nous adoptons affecte la lecture ou l'interprétation d'un texte. Par conséquent, trois positions épistémologiques, c'est-à-dire l'objectivisme, le subjectivisme et le constructionniste, sont discutées pour illustrer comment elles affectent la lecture d'un texte. En outre, une quatrième position épistémologique, l'inter subjectivisme, est mise en avant pour démontrer comment elle complète l'objectivisme, le subjectivisme et le constructionniste en nous aidant à mieux comprendre le processus de lecture. Enfin, les implications pour l'enseignement de la lecture sont présentées.

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Introduction

The complexity of the reading process is largely hidden from our view and has taken on the aura of the magical and mysterious. It was not until much later in the 20th century that reading became a recognized field of study with systematic programs of research aimed at examining its fundamental nature and the processes of its acquisition (Alexander & Fox, 2004). One of the groundbreaking, but controversial publications of this period was *Why Johnny Can't Read – And What You Can Do About It* by Rudolf Flesch (1955). Flesch attacked the prevailing look-say method of reading instruction and referenced research that established the effectiveness of phonics-based techniques over those that relied on a look-say or whole-word approach. From this perspective, the processes and skills involved in reading could be defined and broken down into their constituent parts, which, in turn, could be practiced in a systematic fashion through classroom instruction. Problems in reading were looked on as deficiencies in need of remediation. Phonics instruction came to be seen as part of the logical groundwork for beginning to read because of its attribute of being trainable (Chall, 1995).

The conceptualization of reading as discrete, trainable skills, however, was challenged by reading scholars who argued that language, like other innate human capacities, was to be developed through meaningful use. This notion of reading as an innate or a "hard-wired" capacity was strongly influenced by Noam Chomsky (1998, 2002), who proposed that humans emerged from the womb with a preexisting template that guided language use. In this sense, learning to read was not so much a matter of being taught, but a matter of arriving at facility as a result of a predisposition to seek understanding within a language-rich environment (Alexander & Fox, 2004). In line with the view of reading as an innate capacity, Goodman (1965) and Goodman and Goodman (1980), for example, suggested that reading diagnosis should not focus on identifying and eradicating students' errors, but ascertaining how the unexpected errors readers produced were reflective of their attempts at meaning-making.

The proposal of reading as an innate capacity moved away from the idea of reading as practicing discrete skills and focused on the reader's contribution to the reading process instead of analyzing linguistic components of a text. Louise Rosenblatt (1978, 2005) took a step further and argued that reading was a transaction between the reader and the text. Specifically, in her well-known reader-

response theory or transactional theory of reading, Rosenblatt (1978) stated:

> [Transactional theory] recognizes the text as a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for any literary work of art. Even within the confines of the text, the reader's role should not be underestimated. What the reader brings to the text will affect what he makes of the verbal cues. (p. 83)

In other words, the meaning of a text lies not only in the text itself, but also in the reader's transaction with it. In this sense, each transaction is a unique experience in which the reader and the text continuously act and are acted upon by each other. For example, the sentence "He dawdled about all day and couldn't write a word" does not have one single meaning. It can be interpreted differently by different readers. For a teacher working for years with struggling writers, the sentence may remind her of her students who are not able to, or do not want to, write. However, for a novelist, the sentence is a proper depiction of a moment when he is in desperate need of inspiration for his book project. Therefore, it is not only the text, but also the reader that plays an important role in the interpretation of the text. Instead of two fixed entities acting on each other, the reader and the text are two aspects of a total dynamic situation. According to Rosenblatt (2004), the "meaning" does not reside ready-made "in" the text or "in" the reader, but happens or comes into being during the transaction between them.

The next movement in the reading community shifted from the position of reading as an activity that happens in individual minds to the view that reading is not merely shaped or colored by social experiences and interactions, but actually exists in those interchanges (Sfard, 1998). The proponents (e.g., Collins & Blot, 2003; Finnegan, 1988; Gee, 1994, 2015; Heath, 1983; Street, 1984, 1993) of a sociocultural approach to reading or literacy in their language, conducted ethnographic studies of different communities and found that the meaning of literacy depends on the sociocultural context. Specifically, they discovered that different cultural groups have different ways of making meaning. There are terms/concepts unique in a culture that are difficult for people in another culture to grasp. For example, the term/concept "Wal-Mart" (an American corporation that runs a chain of large discount department stores and warehouse stores) is so familiar to people in the United States that it has become part of their lives. Implied in "Wal-Mart" is a

social practice, i.e., shopping for general merchandise and groceries in a large retail store. Yet in a country where there are no such large retail stores, it is a term/concept hard to understand, and there is no direct translation for it. Therefore, it is the sociocultural practice that keeps the literate terms, such as Wal-Mart, in place and makes them meaningful. To change the literate meaning, the corresponding sociocultural practice has to change as well.

Finally, with the advancement of technology, literacy means, more and more, knowing how to use the Internet, reading digital text, and making complex decisions about the veracity of information on various websites, blogs, and tweets (Dewitz, Graves, Graves, & Juel, 2020). These are called New Literacies (Leu, Zawilinski, Forzani, & Timbrell, 2014). The Internet is the textbook of today and the future. Therefore, the strategies that have been developed for printed textbooks and trade books are likely to give way to new strategies. Readers today need to learn to search for, verify, and synthesize information across a number of websites. Some suspect that the process of reading digital text is different from reading print on paper and presents new challenges for all readers. For example, Kaufman and Flanagan (2016) demonstrated that young adults reach higher levels of abstractions when reading on conventional paper than they do when reading on screens. Specifically, the ever-increasing demand of multi-tasking, divided attention, and information overload that readers encounter in their use of digital technologies may cause them to retreat to the less cognitively demanding lower end of the concrete-abstract continuum. As a result, they often resort to skimming and sacrifice deep reading understanding.

A brief review of the movements of reading research and practice above shows that reading has been regarded as discrete linguistic decoding skills, an innate human capacity, a transaction between the reader and the text, a product of sociocultural practices, and being literate in digital text. While each of these movements helps us understand the reading process, little research has been conducted on how the epistemological stance we take affects the reading or interpretation of a text. Specifically, many studies (e.g., Onwuegbuzie, 2002; Shadish, 1995; Smith & Heshusius, 1986) have shown that researchers' epistemological stance has a great impact on how they view the world, adopt a theoretical perspective, and choose a research methodology to study and understand the world. Yet, does our epistemological stance play a role in reading or interpreting a text? This is an important question to explore, but

has not received adequate attention from the reading community in its past movements. Therefore, this paper will explore the impact of epistemological stances on reading. First of all, three epistemological stances, i.e., objectivism, subjectivism, and constructionism, will be discussed to illustrate how they affect the reading of a text. These three epistemological stances are singled out for discussion not because they are claimed to be an exhaustive list of all the stances, but because they are a result of an attempt to list a representative sampling of the epistemological stances adopted in the research community (Crotty, 2003). In addition, a fourth epistemological stance, intersubjectivism aligned with Jurgen Habermas's (1984, 1987) theory of communicative action, will be put forth to demonstrate how it complements objectivism, subjectivism, and constructionism in helping us better understand the reading process. Finally, the implications for reading instruction will be presented.

Objectivism, Subjectivism, and Constructionism in Relation to Reading

In this section, three epistemological stances will be compared and contrasted. The knowledge of their differences will help us understand how a text can be read differently from each epistemological stance.

Objectivism

> By 'objectivism,' I mean the basic conviction that there is or must be some permanent, ahistorical matrix or framework to which we can ultimately appeal in determining the nature of rationality, knowledge, truth, reality, goodness, or rightness. An objectivist claims that there is (or must be) such a matrix and that the primary task of the philosopher is to discover what it is and to support his or her claims to have discovered such a matrix with the strongest possible reasons. Objectivism is closely related to foundationalism and the search for an Archimedean point. The objectivist maintains that unless we ground philosophy, knowledge, or language in a rigorous manner we cannot avoid radical skepticism. (Bernstein, 1983, p. 8)

An objectivist believes that there exists a permanent, ahistorical matrix on which to ground rationality, knowledge, truth, reality, etc. The concept of such a matrix dates back to Descartes (1951), who meditated on an immoveable foundation or an Archimedean point that serves as a basis for all inquiries. The job of an inquirer is to discover the foundation. Objectivism holds that meaning, and, therefore, meaningful reality, exist as such apart from the operation of any consciousness. A tree in the forest is a tree regardless of whether anyone is aware of its existence or not. As an object of that kind, it carries the intrinsic meaning of "tree-ness." When human beings recognize it as a tree, they simply discover a meaning that has been lying there in wait for them all along.

For an objectivist, as an object has intrinsic meaning for the subject to discover, so does a text possess information for a reader to decode. In this sense, the reading of the same text even by different readers should result in the same interpretation as the information encoded in the text is the objective truth that does not vary from person to person. While it is true that a certain fact, for example, whether there is one tree or two trees mentioned in the text, can be objectively determined without a doubt, the objectivist reading ignores the fact that even the same object such as a tree mentioned in the text can generate different evocations in different readers. An arborist, for example, will perceive a tree differently than a tree drawing artist. Therefore, reading solely from the objectivist stance foregrounds the importance of the text, but relativizes the role the reader plays in interpreting the text.

Subjectivism

Unlike objectivism, subjectivism rejects the view that there is objective meaning waiting for us to discover it. In subjectivism, meaning is imposed on the object by the subject. The object itself makes no contribution to the generation of the meaning. However, even in subjectivism, humans are not so creative as to create meaning out of nothing.

> The meaning we ascribe to the object may come from our dreams, or from primordial archetypes we locate within our collective unconscious, or from the conjunction and aspects of the planets, or from religious beliefs, or from… That is to say, meaning comes from anything but an interaction between the subject and the object to which it is ascribed. (Crotty, 2003, p. 9)

> For example, the meaning of a tree, in subjectivism, does not come from the tree, but is imposed by the subject. The meaning of the tree can come from the subject's reading about it, hearing about it from other people, imagination, dream, etc. – anything but the subject's interaction with the tree.

The subjectivist reading, therefore, emphasizes the reader's interpretation at the cost of the information contained in the text. For example, a subjectivist reader, who is obsessed with monster books and films, may subjectively interpret a tree standing in the middle of bushes as a monster feeding on gullible villagers symbolized by the bushes. However, another subjectivist reader may see the tree differently as a friendly giant living harmoniously with people in a village. The problem with the subjectivist reading lies in the fact that the text is not referenced in the reading process. As a result, many interpretations, often times, contradictory interpretations, of the text will be made by different readers.

Constructionism

The third epistemological stance is constructionism. It subscribes neither to the objectivist view that the meaning of an object awaits us to discover nor to the subjectivist view that the subject imposes meaning on an object. Instead, constructionism proposes:

> Truth, or meaning, comes into existence in and out of our engagement with the realities in our world. There is no meaning without a mind. Meaning is not discovered, but constructed. In this understanding of knowledge, it is clear that different people may construct meaning in different ways, even in relation to the same phenomenon. (Crotty, 2003, pp. 8-9)

Therefore, it is the interaction between the object and the subject that distinguishes constructionism from objectivism and subjectivism in the meaning making process. Though constructionism argues that meaning is constructed, it does not deny the fact that the objective world exists whether the subject is aware of it or not. For example, a tree standing in the park is a tree whether we know of its existence or not. However, it is we, human beings, that have given it the name and attributed to it the associations with trees. In other words, it is human beings that have made a tree meaningful. Of course, the associations with trees may

differ from culture to culture and from person to person even within the same culture. Trees, for example, are likely to evoke different associations and meanings in workers in a lumber mill than residents in a treeless apartment complex.

Unlike objectivism and subjectivism, constructionism emphasizes the importance of both the text and the reader in the reading process. A constructionist reader does not only read the text carefully, but also links the text to his/her past experiences and extrinsic factors in interpreting the text. In this sense, the constructionist reading is aligned with Rosenblatt's (1978) transactional theory of reading:

> Thus the transactional view, freeing us from the old separation between the human creature and the world, reveals the individual consciousness as a continuing self-ordering, self-creating process, shaped by and shaping a network of interrelationships with its environing social and natural matrix. (p. 172)

Rosenblatt's transactional theory tries to steer away from focusing on either the text as the sole basis for interpretation or the reader as the whimsical conjurer of the meaning of the text. Instead, Rosenblatt emphasizes the transactional process between the text and the reader.

However, constructionism is not without criticism. The problem with the constructionist reading is that the text is read monologically – one reader tries to understand the text. In fact, this problem also occurs in the objectivist and subjectivist readings of the text. Reading from the stances of objectivism, subjectivism, and constructionism ignores the fact that the text can be discussed or contested dialogically between readers to help them better understand the text. This is where intersubjectivism comes into play. In what follows, I will show how a text can be read dialogically from the intersubjectivist stance based on Jurgen Habermas's (1984, 1987) theory of communicative action.

Intersubjectivism

Intersubjectivism discussed in this paper is a dialogical paradigm grounded in Jurgen Habermas's theory of communicative action (TCA). TCA steps beyond the scene of a lone, passive subject/observer and replaces it with that of two or more sentient beings communicating with each other:

> The concept of *communicative action* refers to the interaction of at least two subjects capable of speech and action who establish interpersonal relations (whether by verbal or by extra-verbal means). The actors seek to reach an understanding about the action situation and their plans of action in order to coordinate their actions by way of agreement. (Habermas, 1984, p. 86, italics in original)

TCA is an action-based dialogical paradigm built on mutual understanding. One of the most salient features of TCA is that there is more than one subject involved. The subject assumes a performative role in communicative action oriented toward understanding (Habermas, 1984). The subject in the dialogical paradigm is no longer a sovereign, authoritative figure, but an actor who communicates with other subjects and whose being as an actor requires other subjects and the internalization of other subject positions.

TCA is the core of Habermas's social theory. It is a broad theory integrated through the concept of communicative action. Therefore, it is not my intention to review it in detail in this paper. To gain a thorough grounding, interested readers can refer to Habermas's (1984, 1987) two-volume work *The Theory of Communicative Action*. What will be presented below focuses primarily on certain communicative features of TCA that can be appropriated to address how a text can be read from the intersubjectivist stance.

Validity Claims and Criteria

Instead of "truth," Habermas uses "validity" to emphasize that truth should not be perceived monologically, but contested and validated communicatively. A claim made in communicative action is a claim to validity, and Habermas argues that every meaningful act carries validity claims. "A validity claim is equivalent to the assertion that the conditions for the validity of an utterance are fulfilled" (Habermas, 1984, p. 38). That is to say, a validity claim is an assertion made by an actor that his/her utterance is of "truth, truthfulness, and rightness" (Habermas, 1998, p. 24). However, the actor's assertion or validity claim can be received with a yes, no, or abstention, depending on the extent to which the other actor is convinced. In addition, in the case of each claim, support can be given only: validity cannot be established once and for all. It is

fallible.

The question is how the actors determine whether the validity claims are true, truthful (sincere), or right. That is, what are the criteria for evaluating the claims? Habermas would respond that the claims made in each meaningful act can be divided into three categories and that each category has its own criterion for validation. The three categories, or what Habermas calls three formal-pragmatic worlds, consist of objective, subjective, and normative claims:

> The objective world (as the totality of all entities about which true statements are possible); the social [normative] world (as the totality of all legitimately regulated interpersonal relations); [and] the subjective world (as the totality of the experiences of the speaker to which he has privileged access). (Habermas, 1984, p. 100)

To objective claims there is multiple access, whereas there is only privileged access to subjective claims. Therefore, the criteria for objective claims and subjective claims are multiple access and privileged access respectively. The criterion for normative claims is shared interest. Hence, each kind of claim is evaluated by its corresponding criterion.

The Ideal Speech Situation

In her editorial introduction to Habermas's *On the Pragmatics of Communication*, Cooke (1998) states that the ideal speech situation includes the conditions "that participants are motivated only by the force of the better argument, that all competent parties are entitled to participate on equal terms in discussion, that no relevant argument is suppressed or excluded, and so on" (p. 14). The ideal speech situation is ideal because it can never be reached empirically. However, as a necessarily presupposed standard, the ideal speech situation is approximated and referenced by every communicative act. Habermas recognizes that, in reality, not everyone desires to have the ideal speech situation. Yet this does not change the fact that it is necessarily presupposed, he argues, even though it is sometimes intentionally distorted. The ideal speech situation is not an empirical goal to attain, but serves as an idealizing guideline for regulating rational argumentation. For those who distort communicative action intentionally, their intention can be recognized as it violates the ideal speech situation. Therefore,

whether or not the ideal speech situation is wished for, it is a presupposed standard for argumentation in communicative action.

Intersubjectivist Reading of a Text

Intersubjectivism, based on Habermas's TCA discussed above, steps beyond a monological paradigm and features at least two subjects participating in communicative action orientated toward understanding. What is foregrounded in the intersubjectivist reading is the communicative action between readers in an attempt to understand the text. In what follows, I will demonstrate how a text can be read dialogically from the stance of intersubjectivism through a children's book, *Summer Wheels*, by Eve Bunting (1992).

Summer Wheels is a children's chapter book about a "Bicycle Man" who lets neighborhood kids sign out bikes for free each day as long as they bring their bikes back by 4:00 p.m. The kids are also responsible for fixing anything that breaks. Two boys, Lawrence and Brady, love riding the bikes and are careful to follow the rules. However, one day, Leon, a new kid, appears. Leon has problems being responsible for his actions. He signs the bike out as "Abraham Lincoln," a fake name, and fails to bring it back at the end of the day. When he is given a second chance, he breaks the bicycle deliberately. The kids are very angry at him, but the "Bicycle Man" never gets tired of giving more opportunities and craftily teaches the kids a lesson about responsibility and forgiveness.

Objective Claim and Multiple Access

Suppose that you and I taught in an elementary school. You were a first-year teacher. I was a veteran teacher asked by the principal to mentor you. I had used *Summer Wheels* in my reading block with third graders for years. I gave you a copy of the book and asked you to read it.

Seeing you in the staff lounge, I greeted you and said, "Have you read the book?" Looking confused, "What book?" you asked. "Remember the book I gave you last week," I responded. "Oh, the book about bikes? Yes, I have read it," you said. In this conversation, you made an objective claim that the book was about bikes. It was an objective claim because the claim could be validated through the criterion of multiple access. For example, I could look at the book again to make sure that bikes were mentioned in the book. Someone else could also read the book to see if it was related to bikes. In other words, your objective claim that the book was about bikes could be observed and verified repeatedly and objectively by more than one

reader.

Subjective Claim and Privileged Access

"Did you like the book?" I asked to continue our conversation. "Yes, I enjoyed it a lot," you responded right away. "I like how patient and kind the old man, I mean, the 'Bicycle Man' is," you commented. "I think he must like kids a lot." In your response to my inquiry about whether you liked the book, a subjective claim was thematized. Specifically, you claimed that the "Bicycle Man" liked kids. Unlike an objective claim, this subjective claim could not be verified through multiple access, but was subject to privileged access. For example, you could argue that the "Bicycle Man" liked kids because he generously let kids in the neighborhood use his bikes for free. Furthermore, you could back up your argument by citing one episode in the book where the "Bicycle Man" was willing to give a kid a second chance even though he failed to bring back the bike before the deadline. Yet regardless of how much evidence you provided, you could never know for sure whether the "Bicycle Man" liked kids or not. Only the "Bicycle Man" had privileged access to his own personal preference or feeling and knew whether he truly liked kids or not. We could observe his outward behavior manifested in the book, but never knew for sure whether he liked kids or not.

Normative Claim and Shared Interest

Hearing your positive comment about the book, I said, "You should let your students read the book." In my suggestion, I foregrounded a normative claim that your students should also read the book. A normative claim is an assertion that something is right or wrong, good or bad, appropriate or inappropriate, should or should not be, etc. The criterion to evaluate a normative claim is shared interest. Therefore, whether your students should read the book depended on whether reading the book met their interest. I assumed that if you learned something from the book, your students should also benefit from reading the book. Therefore, reading the book would meet not only your interest, but also your students' interest.

The Ideal Speech Situation

The ideal speech situation serves as a contextual standard for readers to discuss the text dialogically. Specifically, it ensures that the readers in communication toward understanding the text are motivated by the force of the better argument and free from coercive

power. To see the ideal speech situation in action, suppose that, upon hearing my suggestion of asking your students to read *Summer Wheels*, you disagreed and said, "But the book is too difficult for my first graders to read." Feeling disrespected by your response, I rebutted, "I have taught here for decades and know what's best for your students." Before allowing you to talk, I added, "I am pretty sure the principal will agree with me." Instead of discussing the issue rationally with you, I suggested that the principal would be on my side if you disagreed with me. In this case, reason no longer served as the medium to reach an understanding. Instead, I used my power as a mentor to force you to agree with me, or, otherwise, I would report to the principal your "unprofessional" conduct as a mentee. Therefore, the ideal speech situation was violated. The "consensus" thus reached was not due to mutual understanding, but coercion. However, even if you were coerced to agree with me due to the unequal power relations between us, both you and I knew that the ideal speech situation was violated.

Implications for Reading Instruction

Four epistemological stances (objectivism, subjectivism, constructionism, and intersubjectivism) have been discussed in relation to reading. It has been shown that the epistemological stance we take has an impact on how a text is read. While different epistemological stances focus on different aspects of reading and have their own merits, they also have limitations. The purpose of the implications for reading instruction presented below is to tap into the merits of the four epistemological stances to show how they can complement one another to help us better understand the reading process and meet various needs in reading.

Each Epistemological Stance Plays a Role in Reading

Each epistemological stance plays a role in reading, depending on the purpose we have. For example, if we have accidentally swallowed a poisonous liquid, we will adopt an objectivist stance in quickly reading the label on the bottle to learn the antidote. Finding objective or factual information from the label is the main purpose of the reading. This kind of reading is similar to what Rosenblatt refers to as efferent reading where "attention is centered predominantly on what is to be extracted and retained after the reading event" (Rosenblatt, 2004, p. 1372). In contrast, when we

read a poem, we may adopt a subjectivist stance and pay attention to the qualities of the feelings, ideas, situations, emotions, etc. that are called forth in our reading. Such qualities are drawn on our subjective or personal repertories and vary from person to person even though the same text is read. Reading from a subjectivist stance resembles what Rosenblatt (2004) calls "aesthetic reading" that focuses on the experiential, affective, private, and associational. In subjectivist reading, meaning is imposed on the text instead of being read from the text.

When a constructionist stance is adopted, we transact with the text to construct meaning. Both we as readers and the text have an impact on how the text is interpreted. For example, suppose you and I are students in an education class. We are reading a chapter on struggling readers in preparation for a group assignment due next week. I am a pretty good reader, but entered the education program straight from high school without any teaching experience. When I read the chapter, I can memorize such factual information as how to identify struggling readers and what strategies can be used to help them. However, I have a hard time understanding why reading can be so difficult for some students. In contrast, you struggled with reading for a few years until you met your third-grade teacher who helped you overcome the reading problem. In high school, you volunteered in various capacities to help struggling readers and decided that you wanted to be a teacher to help more students. When you become an education student in college, you also work as a teaching assistant in a local elementary school, helping students with their reading. While reading the chapter on struggling readers, you do not simply glean the factual information from the chapter, but also are able to relate to the struggle the students experience in reading. You can even share some examples of how to help struggling readers in relation to the strategies discussed in the chapter. In this example, you and I are reading the same chapter, but the meanings we have constructed out of the chapter are very different. This is because in constructionist reading, both the reader and the text contribute to the meaning-making process.

Now suppose you and I work together on the group assignment after we read the chapter on struggling readers. We meet to discuss what we have learned from the chapter and try to come to a consensus on what our assignment should look like. In this case, we are adopting an intersubjectivist stance in reading the chapter. You and I do not only read the chapter on our own, but engage in a discussion to understand each other's viewpoint. Therefore, the

intersubjectivist reading helps us expand the scope of reading from a monological to a dialogical process where you and I are involved in communicative action oriented toward understanding.

In sum, each epistemological stance has an impact on how we read a text and is important to learn in order to meet different needs in reading a text. In this sense, no epistemological stance is better than others as the purpose of reading is different and should be taken into consideration. In fact, we usually employ more than one epistemological stance in reading a text. For example, it is not uncommon for us to indulge ourselves in subjective feelings about a poem, extract objective or factual information from the poem, and discuss the poem with other people intersubjectively. Therefore, in reading instruction, students should be introduced to different epistemological stances and understand their impact on reading. The students should also know that each epistemological stance is important, depending on the purpose of reading a text.

Habermasian Criteria Are Useful for Coordinating the Discussion of a Text

Reading instruction in the classroom is not limited to decoding a text, but provides opportunities for students to participate in a discussion of the text. The discussion will help the students view the text from different perspectives and result in a better understanding of the text.

During the discussion of the text, disagreement is bound to occur. We can use the criteria proposed by Habermas to assess the validity claims made in the discussion. Specifically, objective claims are evaluated by multiple access, subjective claims by privileged access, and normative claims by shared interest. A claim made in the objective domain, e.g., "*Summer Wheels* is about bikes," can be evaluated by different students (i.e., through multiple access) to see if the statement is true. However, a subjective claim, such as "I like this book," varies from person to person and does not have a "correct" answer as it is evaluated based on privileged access. A normative claim, grounded in the principle of shared interest, can be contested by finding a consensus between students in dispute and then arguing from it toward the norm or value position in disagreement. For example, student A claims that the 'Bicycle Man' should not let Leon check out a bike again. Yet student B disagrees. A possible consensus between student A and student B can be that any kid that violates the rules is not allowed to check out a bike again. Based on this consensus, student A can then move on to argue that Leon has

not returned the bike by the end of the day and thus has violated the rules, so the 'Bicycle Man' should not let him check out a bike again. Therefore, the principle of shared interest is in play in guiding the discussion of the text.

A Safe Reading Environment Is Critical

Teachers should provide a safe reading environment that resembles the ideal speech situation where students are free from coercive power and allowed to share their views in their reading adventure. The ideal speech situation should be observed not only by students, but also by teachers. This is because the power relations between teachers and students are usually not equalized, but tilted in favor of the former. For example, students tend to please their teachers in order to receive good grades. The discussion of texts conducted in this way shapes students into knowledge recipients and rule conformers instead of communicative actors and risk takers. Teachers should not be knowledge transmitters or experts, but equal peers with students in the reading process.

In a reading environment where power relations are equalized, what is read should be decided by both teachers and students. Teachers should not prescribe what students read, but give students choice and provide guidance to help them achieve their reading goal. When students can choose what they are interested in, reading instruction becomes meaningful. The purpose is to help students become independent readers who are given a say in, and responsible for, their own reading. Boushey and Moser (2006) shared how they helped students become independent readers:

> Once children understand what is expected of them, have practiced strategies, and have built their stamina, it is time for us to put into place our next belief principle – which is to stay out of the way and let them read. This may sound counterintuitive, but we want students to make decisions on their own and to monitor themselves regarding their progress. How can they possibly do that if never given the chance to try it on their own in a safe, caring environment such as our classroom? (p. 25)

Thus, reading instruction, when regarded as a validity claim, becomes contestable between teachers and students. It is no longer prescribed by teachers, but decided communicatively between teachers and students. To empower students this way entails a

paradigm shift where teachers need to reconsider the role they play. Instead of focusing on what to teach, teachers should make the reading environment safe for students to participate in the decision making process of their own reading.

When power relations are as equalized as possible in the classroom, it is not just students, but also teachers that will benefit from this safe reading environment. This is aligned with Freire's (1984) insight that "the situation of oppression is a dehumanized and dehumanizing totality affecting both the oppressors and those whom they oppress" (p. 32). In other words, unequal power relations affect or dehumanize not only the oppressed, but also the oppressors. By sharing power with their students, teachers not only empower their students, but also free themselves from the bondage of oppressive power and thus become more humanized.

Conclusion

Reading is a complex process that involves at least the text, the reader, the transaction between them, and the dialogue between readers. In addition, how a text is read is affected by the epistemological stance the reader adopts. This paper shows the impact of objectivist, subjectivist, constructionist, and intersubjectivist stances on reading. It argues that each epistemological stance plays a role in helping us interpret the text. Instead of considering one epistemological stance superior to another, we should understand their pros and cons and how they can complement one another in helping us better understand the text. This is especially true when there are different purposes of reading a text. Specifically, a text can be read objectively, subjectively, constructively, intersubjectively, or in more than one way, depending on the purpose of reading the text. When a text is read intersubjectively, Habermas's criteria can be employed in evaluating the validity claims made by the readers to coordinate the discussion of the text. In addition, reading instruction should be set in a safe environment resembling the ideal speech situation where both students and teachers are free from coercive power in their investigation of the text. It is hoped that through the exploration of different epistemological stances in relation to reading presented in this paper, the process of reading and reading instruction will be better understood and practiced in the classroom.

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