

Close reading and distance: between invariance and a rhetoric of embodiment

Paul Cobley and Johan Siebers

“The utmost distance alone would be proximity.”
(Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*)

Abstract

‘Close reading’ of texts has become a central activity of humanities pedagogy and is carried out across different levels of education and through a number of disciplines. The analysis of texts as part of educational practice is sometimes claimed to be a very recent phenomenon, attendant on the formulation of the idea of the text in the early 1960s (Lotman 1964, Barthes 1977 [1964]) and, slightly earlier, in the English tradition, with respect to exercises in ‘practical criticism’ (Richards 1929, Empson 1930). On the other hand, close reading is associated with a much older tradition dating back to the inception of scriptural exegesis. While educators attempt to inculcate practices of active interpretation, close reading’s adherents and advocates often recognize that procedures of close reading can become ossified into routine acts of identifying invariants of textual functioning at the expense of enabling students to intensify and articulate a more engaged relation with the text. In an age of Big Data, statistical analysis and instrumentalization of Higher Education, the intimacy of close reading as a practice is in question.

Through survey methods, the research presented here sought to ask what methods of analysis are used in respect of texts in different disciplines, what practices are identified as close reading, what procedures are followed and whether they are common across disciplines, what theoretical, methodological and historiographical frameworks sustain these practices and what educational ethos might be in play. This article will discuss some of the results, not least of which is the finding that the commitment to close reading as a central feature of humanities education does not seem to have waned in the last century, but neither has it reconceptualised reading as anything other than a cerebral exercise in apprehending ‘meaning’ or in developing a disembodied skill. The article briefly contrasts these findings, suggesting a rhetoric of embodiment, mediating the demands for both distance and proximity in reading, as an area for future inquiry.

Introduction

This article is concerned with a special kind of reading – close reading. It presents and discusses the results of a survey into contemporary close reading practices in Higher Education (HE). Yet one of the predicaments the survey evinces is that even – or especially – in an era of growing awareness of the embodied and distributed nature of cognition, and in the face of less ‘close’ means of analysis, it remains difficult for many of close reading’s users and/or adherents to define what their practice actually is. For a start, ‘close reading’ is generally taken to be a process; but it can also be a noun: i.e. a ‘close reading’ of a text. As ‘close’, it should also be different to general reading, adding extra nuance to the text or more analytic rigour in the reading of it. However, that immediately presents problems, because it demands that the boundary of general reading and close reading be identified and strict demarcation observed. Moreover, in close reading, the distinction with ‘surface reading’ may be taken to imply that more accurate decodings occur in the former, as though all texts are peppered with invariants which are not quite visible to the surface reading. As such, a text is ultimately understood not so much as being susceptible to numerous interpretations but, rather, to numerous interpretations *plus* the true or most accurate interpretation as offered by

a close reading. Usually, that close reading will arise from the interpreter's competence in understanding the text's *form*, its bearing as rhetoric in conveying both particular meanings and interpretable meanings to readers. Not surprisingly, there is some ambivalence towards the basis for competence in close reading. For some proponents, that competence can derive from a systematic approach to reading, where any tendency towards personal or divergent interpretations is kept in check by an overarching theory about the form, the reading process and the wider world. For others, close reading competence is a matter not of theory but of accumulated exposure to the form, along with attentiveness and individual discipline in the act of reading, a hermeneutical practice. Sometimes, a combination of these two views will inform close reading.

Most of these ambiguities in the definition of close reading derive from its history. The analysis of texts as part of educational practice is sometimes claimed to be a very recent phenomenon, attendant on the formulation of the idea of the text in the early 1960s (Lotman 1964, Barthes 1977 [1964]), although it is clearly associated with a much older tradition dating back to the inception of scriptural exegesis (Young 1997; Emanuel 2012). Although there are some suggestions that the teaching of classics in British universities in the early years of the twentieth century amounts to the institutionalization of close reading (Guillory 2010), the 'invention' of close reading is usually attributed to Richards (1929). His exercises in 'practical criticism' inaugurated particular kinds of discussions and advocacy of reading closely and were followed up by many, most notably, and probably first, by Empson (1930). The book, *Practical Criticism* (Richards 1929), reported a series of experiments on undergraduates in which students were asked to analyse a number of unattributed poems, focusing on questions of interpretation and aesthetic response. Notoriously, the students often dismissed the anonymously-presented work of celebrated poets while sometimes lavishing appraisal on lesser-regarded, amateur or supposedly less competent poets. Aside from this egregious outcome was the very serious aim of Richards, influenced by Coleridge before him, to investigate the capacity to understand "the psychology of the speech-situation" (1929: 338) and the vagaries of communication (1929: 137). Committed to foregrounding *form* as the key issue, evacuating traditional assumptions about an author's 'intention', Richards concentrated on poetry for its "subordination of reference to attitude" (1929: 216). For him, poetry "is the supreme form of emotive language"; therefore, his investigation of form is the mid-most target for a larger investigation of the broader phenomena of language and communication, because

there can be no doubt that originally all language was emotive; its scientific use is a later development, and most language is still emotive. Yet the late development has come to seem the natural and the normal use, largely because the only people who have reflected upon language were at the moment of reflection using it scientifically (216).

This excavation of the emotive bearing of language that has become buried by referential purposes and scientific use is important to note. In recent decades, literary scholars (Gang 2011; Armstrong 1995: 417) have made much of the behaviourist trajectory of Richards' practical criticism. Gang (2011: 6) suggests that Richards' original experiment turned the Cambridge classroom into an "ersatz laboratory" in which he tested the gleaning of meaning from overt language use rather than covert/imagined mental states. If so, this early practice of close reading, in its move away from author intention to form, already shows some affinity with the distributed perspective (Cowley 2011) and "closeness" signals as much a moving away from what traditionally might have seemed to be the natural focal point of

interpretation, as a new concentration on the medium rather than the message. Close reading was, from the start, a technique of externalisation.

For Gang (2011: 1), close reading and practical criticism went on to infect the influential writings of the New Criticism, even when those writings explicitly rejected the premises of Richards' work. Indeed, Gang (2011: 25 n. 38) suggests that Richards' model set back for years all those seeking to discuss problems of mind in relation to reading. Whether it was the model itself or the disposition of pedagogues and analysts of reading which were to blame for the inertial barrier to meeting the "promises of cognitive science" (Gang 2011: 3, 20) remains open to argument. Certainly, the results of the survey presented in the current article strongly indicate that the sample of contemporary adherents of close reading is untouched by current perspectives on cognition. Yet, the views of cognition that Richards' work supposedly blocked are more in the way of appraisals of 'mind', 'feeling' and 'empathy' in reading than the technicalities of embodiment and the distributed perspective (see, for example, Morgan 2012). As suggested, one could argue that there are, equally, traces in *Practical Criticism* – or in the discussions of orders of knowledge in *How to Read a Page* (Richards 1965 [1942]: 186-209) - of a striving for an approach to reading which comprises a broad sense of cognition. Richards' instruction of students was certainly geared to a negotiation of language's inclination to both emotive and literal sense co-ordinates but, in the focus on the latter, the importance given to the former should not be overlooked.

In the wake of Richards, close reading may have become a victim of its own success. Posing as 'practical' meant it was able to comprehensively insinuate itself into the classroom and to become naturalized as a pursuit seemingly without a history. "As an approach to thinking processes", writes Donald (2009: 44; cf. Rabinowitz 1992) in respect to the humanities in general, "commitment to close reading may be the nearest thing to a shared principle in contemporary criticism". Yet, the history of close reading beyond its embedding in the influential reach of New Criticism (Lentricchia 1980; North 2013) has been riven by criticism of its tendency towards principles of canonization and insularity (Gallop 2007, Wilkens 2012). Although Gallop (2007: 185; cf. North 2013: 155) indicates that the elitism inherent in the choices for analyses is more a product of the New Criticism than close reading itself, an avatar of close reading's relation to canonization can be found in the 'Great Books' project of Robert Hutchins and Mortimer Adler at the University of Chicago (Adler 1940).

Close reading has not just been blamed for the socially elitist dimension of canonization, however; it has also been cited in the dimensions of canonization associated with nation and culture. One plank of Moretti's (2000; 2013) celebrated project of 'distant reading' is concerned with the possibility of bringing entire literary traditions – including national ones - back in from the cold of exclusion. In contrast to the micro-criticism of close reading, with its putative inability to range across the vast expanse of literary production, across national borders and pre-existing canons, Moretti has employed and advocated, in his distant reading project, the use of long-range computational methods in order to provide a macro-criticism of the voluminous contents of digital libraries. Cast as the antithesis of 'close reading', Igarashi (2015) notes that such a diagnosis is somewhat undermined by the fact that Richards' work itself used statistical methods. Following E.L. Thorndyke's example of word lists and partly harnessing the approaches of his 'Basic English' project, Richards' early crafting of close reading as a kind of method centrally involved an attempt to instil statistical rigour in the face of the emotive disposition of initial readings of poetic language. Statistical analysis of texts, then, is neither new nor the ultimate alternative to close reading. Nor is it a guarantor of democracy in the field of textual analysis. Among the counter-criticisms of Moretti's

approach – one that is important for the research in the present article – is that ‘literature’ is already a loaded term. Moretti’s approach, then, rather than being an instrument of critique, risks becoming a voluntary, if unwitting, bolster for canonical notions of literature). In questions of form, close reading has not remained in the realm of poetry and the novel. Instead, it branched out a long time ago towards ‘practical criticism’ in film, media and cultural studies.

‘Practical’, as a term, seems all too ideological in its implicit binary with ‘theoretical’, particularly as the formalist aspect of close reading seemed to excise ideology from the equation, as if close reading could be free from the political formations in which it was employed. ‘Practical criticism’ carries the connotation of a workable process with applications rather than just a theoretical one which is only sufficient for musing. This is despite the fact that areas such as needlework, where the addition of ‘practical’ would be descriptive, may not have a particularly active theoretical wing. It implies the gaining and use of a skill, without the need for theorising. This, of course, does not mean that close reading has been divorced from or uninformed by theory. Indeed, it has been the stock-in-trade of suspicious analysts, those guilty of ‘theory’ in their approach to reading texts, whose readings are often a sifting of textuality to reveal ideological predispositions (Brown 2017). As Eagleton (2007: 2) points out, the major literary theorists of the last hundred years have themselves been scrupulously close readers. Yet, the practical, a-theoretical reputation of close reading persists. Effectively, as this basic opposition exemplifies, close reading became embroiled in what was to be entitled the “theory wars” of the 1980s and early 1990s (see Williams 1995).

As recently as 2007, Eagleton still lamented the effects of the theory wars. “Wasn’t it literary theory”, he asks ironically, “with its soulless abstractions and vacuous generalities, that destroyed the habit of close reading in the first place?” (2007: 1). In a characteristically coruscating discussion, he then goes on to outline the place of close reading in theoretical perspective, presenting formulations that, it must be said, are very much of a piece with Richards’ work. For Eagleton (2007: 2), what is at issue is not the closeness of a close reading or the tenacious way you might cling to a text but “what you search for when you do so”. Paramount in such searching is an attention to ‘form’ or ‘discourse’ as opposed to straight ‘language’. As Eagleton (2007: 9) points out, critics like Richards, in their focus on form, were by no means unresponsive to social history; however, they felt obligated to come to terms “with the forces which helped shape the sentences, forces which include a good deal more than the author”. Like other close reading advocates, committed to the explication and exposure of form, including Richards and Kenneth Burke, Eagleton (2007: 8ff.; cf. 1983) proposes the general study of rhetoric, a discourse theory in which sensitivity to the workings of power is so pervasive that it can be discerned in punctuation and phrasing. In this formulation, poetic language is a paradigm case; in what seems an echo, with added clarity, of Richard’s position on the emotive and rational dimensions of language, Eagleton (2007: 21-2) writes

The modern age has been continually divided between a sober but rather bloodless rationalism on the one hand, and a number of enticing but dangerous forms of irrationalism on the other. Poetry, however, promises to bridge this gap. More than almost any other discourse, it deals in the finer nuances of meaning, and thus pays its dues to the value of reasoning and vigilant awareness. At its best, it is a supremely refined product of human consciousness. But it pursues this devotion to meaning in the context of the less rational or articulable dimensions of our existence, allowing the

rhythms, images and impulses of our subterranean life to speak through its crisp exactitudes. This is why it is the most complete sort of human language that one could imagine – though what constitutes language, ironically, is exactly its incompleteness. Language is what there is always more of.

Although this statement offers a very concise definition of poetic language, it also illustrates one of the key issues in close reading practice: the desire to reach a feasible or workable understanding of what the text does in the face of the text's inherent open-endedness. Again, the dialectical interdependence of distance and closeness as a principle of close reading can be discerned.

Inevitably, close reading would be central to questions about the role of the reader and the status of the text in the latter part of the twentieth century. The question runs through the work of Roland Barthes and, through the discussion of the invariant in the work of Lotman. It also frequently experienced particular outbreaks, such as the early 1980s growth of 'reader-response' criticism (Tompkins 1980), the arguments between Wolfgang Iser and Stanley Fish regarding the order of ideation and interpretation (see Fish 1996 and Iser 1996), the pitting of Peircean semiosis against deconstructive 'drift' (Eco 1990) and even the "pointless populism" of reception theory in the study of media texts (Seaman 1994; Copley 1994). Usually in dispute was the extent to which any given text harbours inherent meanings which are to be released by a reader, whether those meanings are invariant, whether they are malleable, or whether a reader is almost wholly responsible for imputing meaning to a text. There seems to be in the very conception of close reading some sense that it brings to light immanent features of a text which would not be evident to some readers because they are not paying due attention to phrasing (Dubois 2003: 2). While educators might attempt to promote practices of active interpretation, close reading's adherents and advocates often recognize that procedures of close reading can become ossified into routine acts of identifying invariants. Yet, again, Richards points out that the salient matter is emotional; beyond literary texts, he refers (1929: 5-6) to the "vast corpus of problems, assumptions, adumbrations, fictions, prejudices, tenets; the sphere of random beliefs and hopeful guesses; the whole world, in brief, of abstract opinion and disputation about matters of feeling". If there is any ambiguity in language, then for Richards this arises from language's relationship to its emotive and rational comportment. If, as Richards asserts at the beginning of *Principles of Literary Criticism* (1926: vii) that "a book is a machine to think with" – a view which seems to coincide with Eco's (1994) statement that every text is "a lazy machine" – then the work that is done by the reader to effect a text would not be a purely rational, logical operation. Even while Richards might have been keen to inculcate such operations in readers, theories of the text/reader relationship gradually came to realize what he had professed earlier: that feeling is integral to both superficial and close readings of texts. Close reading can thus be seen as a more intensified dialogue between reader and text than some other forms of engagement with a text, but it is in the dialogue that meaning arises or is made.

Amidst these ongoing discussions, more recent theories of close reading have only very tentatively begun to theorize the body's role in feeling's centrality to reading. Morgan (2012: 51) notes that "some literary critics have turned to the body of the reader in order to move beyond the disembodied text of New Criticism and poststructuralism". Bearing this out, the trickle of studies of 'embodied reading' before 2012 when Morgan was writing, many of them concerned especially with pedagogy and literacy (Bogdan et al 2000; Sumara 2003; Taylor 2007), has become a veritable flood in the period since 2012, particularly with the advent of the discussion of the different affordances of e-readers and books () or those studies

which centre on the idea that the bodily sensations of characters are ‘felt’ by readers (Kuijpers and Miall 2011; White 2015; Schugar et al 2011; MacWilliam 2013), followed by more specific studies of haptics, related embodied processes and distributed cognition in digital and print reading practices (Mangen 2008, 2016). Yet, in the extant literature on embodied reading there does not seem to have developed any arguments, or even interest in, the tradition of close reading. There is research which is concerned with enhancing reading skills, to be sure; however, the practice of close reading seems to have been resistant to general 4E approaches in research. Some of the possible reasons and remedies for this lack of cross-pollination between the study of embodied cognition and close reading will be revisited in the conclusions on the survey which informs the present article.

Research question

The research question was relatively simple, as befits a survey. It was:

How prevalent is the practice of close reading in UK Higher Education nearly ninety years after Richards’ *Practical Criticism* and how is that practice conceived?

However, it was underpinned by some hypotheses formulated following a number of years of formal and informal discussion among the authors, particularly in the reading group on ‘close reading’ and in related pedagogical initiatives at Middlesex University.

Hypothesis

Our hypothesis was that there would have been significant change in the conception of close reading in the nearly ninety years since the publication of *Practical Criticism*. Of course, we were aware that the survey would attract a majority of academics who self-identified as advocates of ‘close reading’ and might possibly exclude others. One of the shortcomings of this research, then, is that the title and the questions were too explicit, less neutral than might have been desired and, possibly, self-fulfilling. Nevertheless, we considered that was a flaw that we could tolerate whilst gaining data for a pilot study which might not otherwise have invited such a focused response and such strong engagement.

Nevertheless, we assumed that there would be a number of changes in perspectives on close reading which would have seemed very necessary. Richards himself (1929: 338-9) states that the understanding of language, particularly as inflected in its literary form, is wholly dependent upon the size of the communities in which it arises. In 1929, he observed the growth in size of communities and the declines in commonality which entailed that reading could no longer remain a unitary phenomenon. Diversifying of communities in the last ninety years, coupled with globalization and general mobility, must surely have wrought changes in the way that close reading is to be understood. Richards also observed that communications in general were crucial factors in the possibility of enacting close readings. His main example (1929: 340) was the wireless – i.e. radio. In the present period, when ‘wireless’ refers to the ability to electronically access an unfathomably large amount of communication ‘on demand’, close reading must surely be a different proposition from what it was at the time of its inception.

In addition to Richards’ perturbations, it was also hypothesized that the conception of close reading in the present could not be untouched by two related intellectual concerns. The first

of these was the superseding of the synchronic perspective of which Richards' work was originally such an integral part in the first part of the twentieth century, the conceiving of communication, language and reading in terms of the transmission of coded messages or invariant meanings. The structuralist idea that language comprehension is a matter of decoding discrete invariants has been so extensively put to the sword in recent decades by the likes of Eco (1990) and Harris (1981), that it seemed certain that an atavistic version of close reading would no longer obtain. The second concern revolves around what are known as 4E perspectives, broadly conceived. In addition to the burgeoning work of the last thirty years on the embodiment of skills and practices (see Ihde and Malafouris 2019) and the distributed nature of cognition (see Dror and Harnad 2008), the considerable and steadily growing literature on 'embodied reading' (see above), would tend to suggest that close reading, as an idea even if not as a practice, would not be untouched by the possibility of understanding it as involving readers' bodies rather than a purely cerebral message transfer.

Finally, and in correspondence with the above, it was hypothesized that close reading in the second decade of the twenty-first century would have largely expunged the notion of the author's 'intention' in whatever form that might take. That form could be the straightforward reference to authors as people whose intentions it was possible to glean, in the classic way, through engagement with a text. Such an approach was certainly demonstrated to be alive and well in UK schools as was demonstrated by the 'Close reading, codes and interpretation' symposium that was held in June 2017 at Middlesex University as a prelude to the current research. Secondary school teachers reported practice with students in which the latter were routinely expected to give their account of what an author's intention might be. The survey research reported here, though, was focused exclusively on teachers in Higher Education. It seemed unlikely that speculating on authorial intention would be cited as a feature of close reading practice or even, in a variant of the same, that close reading was construed as the revelation of the specific meanings of portents.

Method

The research was conducted by way of a survey configured through the Qualtrix software and website and distributed to potential respondents in the Summer of 2017. The survey was aimed at teachers in UK HE and these were targeted by requesting participation through messages sent on various scholarly email lists, including MeCCSA, Linguist List, ECREA, Philos-L. As these lists are not all exclusively UK-based, there was a small number of overseas respondents to the survey.

When clicking the link, respondents would be met with a landing page statement which was designed to indicate that 'close reading' was not only to be understood as applicable to verbal text, but also to a range of nonverbal or mixed forms:

Thank you for clicking through to this survey on practices of close reading in Higher Education.

In what follows, you will find a series of multiple-choice questions about close reading, along with some open questions. On most pages, the multiple-choice questions are supplemented by an opportunity to add alternative answers or further comments.

with 1 on the scale being ‘Not important at all’ and 7 being ‘of utmost importance’. Straightforward multiple-choice questions offered appropriate unequivocal options, thus:

- Q16 In your teaching, how often do you use the practice of reading aloud?
- Never (1)
 - Sometimes (2)
 - Often (3)
 - Always (4)

Questions offering follow-on options, operated as in the below example, with follow-on questions depending on the first answer:

- Q4 Do you use close reading in your educational practice?
- Yes (1)
 - No (2)

Display This Question:

If Do you use close reading in your educational practice? Yes Is Selected

Q5 What do you see as the potential and function of close reading?

Display This Question:

If Do you use close reading in your educational practice? No Is Selected

Q6 Why not?

An example of an open-ended question was

- Q7 How do you teach your students the practice of close reading?

The very last question in the twenty offered respondents the opportunity to add any comment or observations on the topic that they wished to make.

The range of questions asked in the survey are presented in the histograms which take up the narrative in the Results, below.

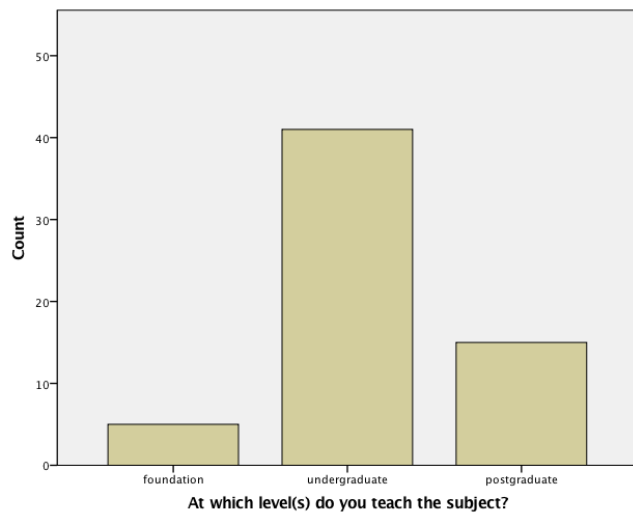
Results

In total, 165 teachers in Higher Education agreed to participate in the online survey via Qualtrix. However, most of the respondents did not complete the survey entirely (i.e., only about 60 filled in all the answers). On average, participants took 116 minutes to complete the questionnaire ($SD = 726.31$), which includes pauses and returns to the survey. Of the complete questionnaires, 25 respondents declared they were male, whereas 36 declared themselves as females. On average, teachers reported 16.73 years of professional experience ($SD = 10.49$; Question 18). The majority taught at the undergraduate level ($N = 41$), followed by postgraduate level ($N = 15$; Question 10).

Regarding the perceived importance of different educational goals (Question 2), the HE teachers reported the “*ability to find relevant information*” as the most important teaching objective ($M = 6.66$, $SD = 0.69$), followed by the “*capability to express oneself clearly*” ($M = 6.64$, $SD = 0.76$), and the “*ability to carefully and thoughtfully read and interpret texts*” ($M = 6.59$, $SD = 0.95$). When asked to rank their perceived contribution to achieving these

educational goals (Question 3), a similar pattern emerged. Indeed, respondents claimed close reading to be highly effective in facilitating their students to develop the possibility to “carefully and thoughtfully read and interpret texts” ($M = 6.53, SD = 0.82$), followed by the “ability to find relevant information” ($M = 6.33, SD = 0.94$), and the “capability to express oneself clearly” ($M = 6.23, SD = 1.03$). The results are clearer still in the series of histograms that follow, generated by the Qualtrix software.

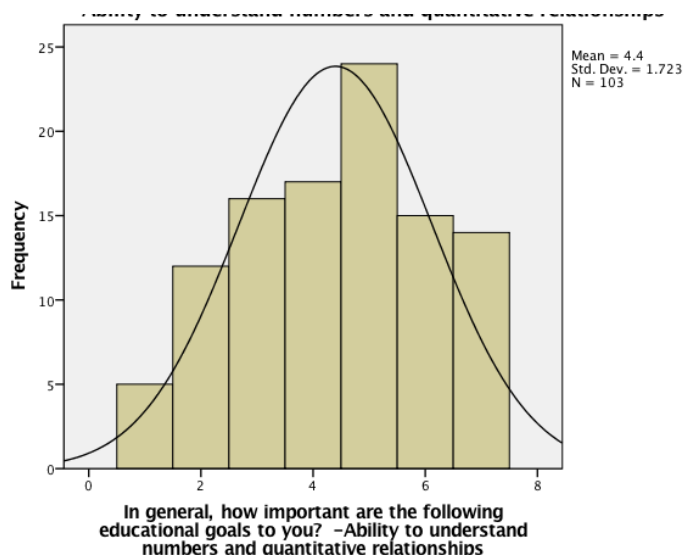
Overall, it was clear that the survey had largely managed to reach the key constituency for the research - those teaching undergraduates:



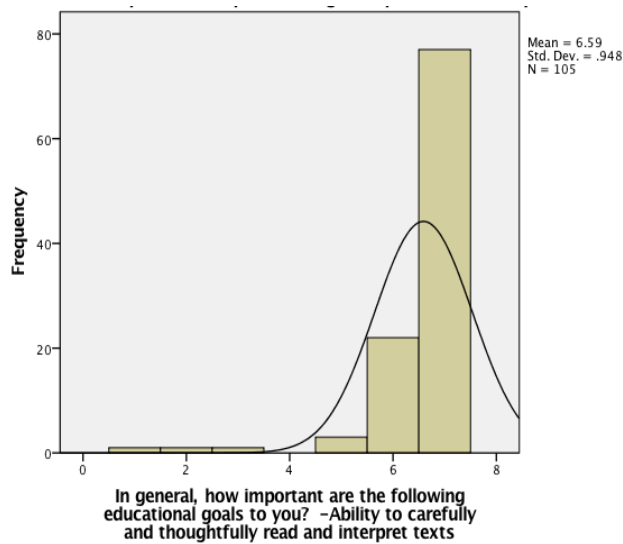
The 41 teaching at postgraduate level were complemented by 15 at postgraduate level. The survey also picked up 5 teachers at ‘foundation’ level in Higher Education.

Educational goals

In terms of educational goals, the scales of response demonstrate a tendency towards slightly larger numbers at the lower end (less important), but still a strong showing among some, in respect of the issue of numbers and quantitative relationships:

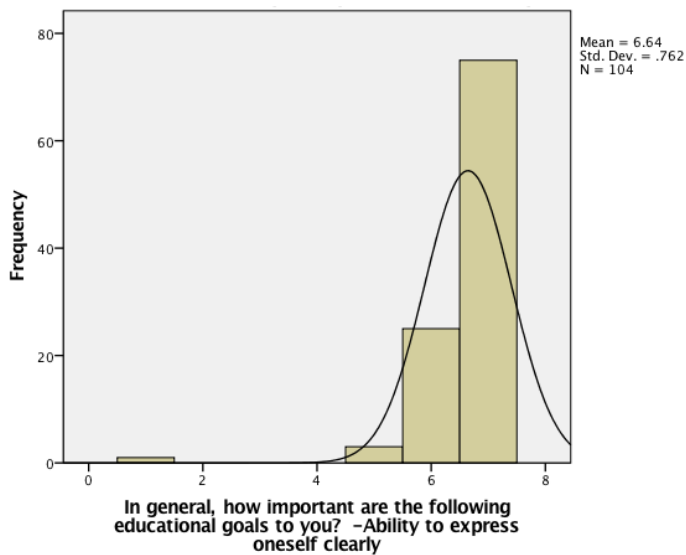


The degree of importance given to quantitative relationships is by no means negligible, yet it is in considerable contrast to the task of reading and interpretation, as shown to the right of the following histogram:

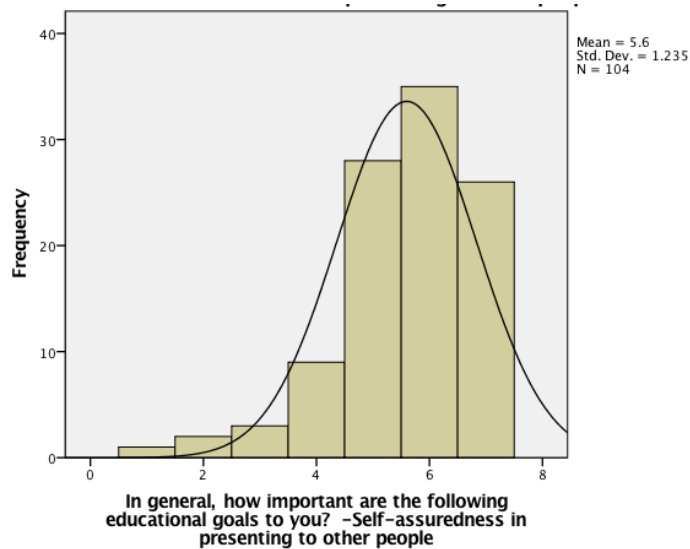


This confirms the character of the group targeted for the survey, although the previous histogram about quantitative relationships suggests that the group are not orientated towards interpretation exclusively.

It may be assumed, too, that interpretation, as an educational goal, is quite closely related in the responses to the goal of enhancing the ability of students to express themselves clearly, for the preceding histogram and the one below are almost congruent:

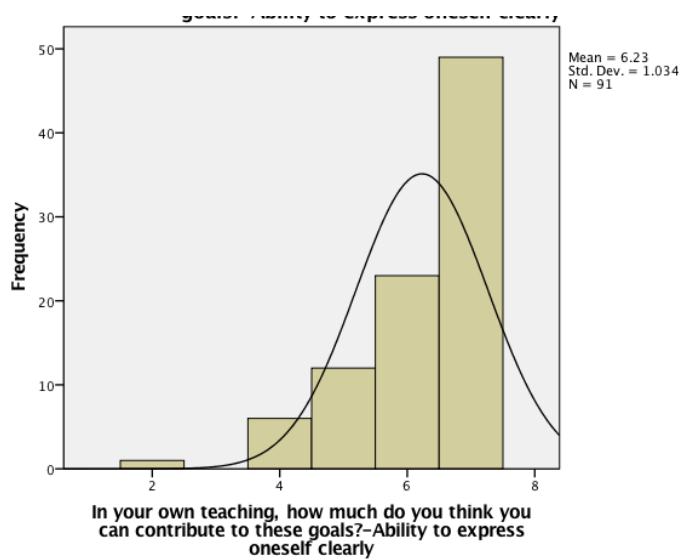


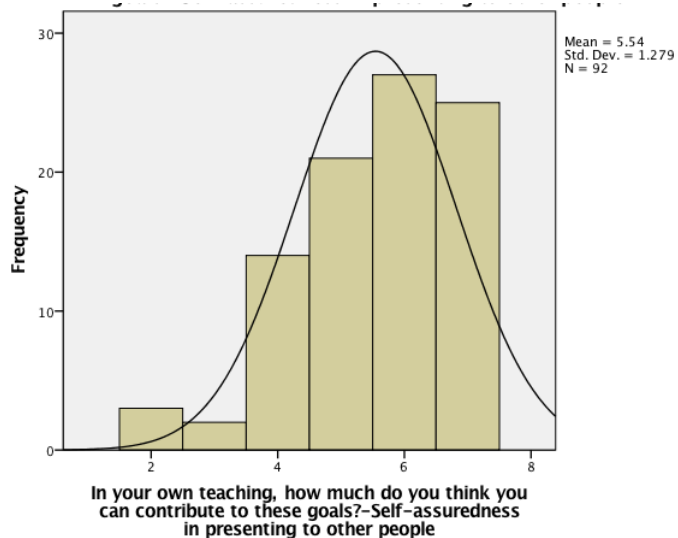
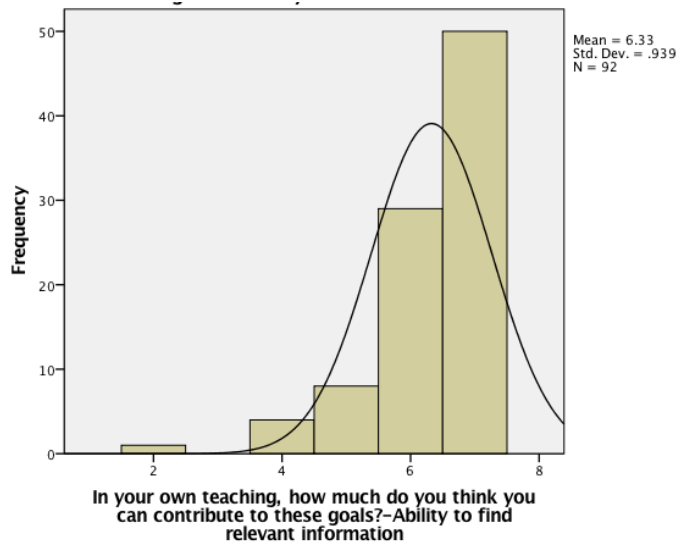
The further reaches of expression into self-assuredness evinces a slightly lower mean but the histogram is nevertheless notable for the number who seem to have considered this to be closely related to the previous two educational goals:



Teacher's contribution

If close reading is a method, rather than unspecified curriculum content, then there must be some agentic dimension to Higher Education teachers' conceptualization of their practice. Thus, the survey asked about the contribution of teachers to educational goals and found that a significant number expressed the belief that they were able to contribute as agents to the goals of enabling students to "*carefully and thoughtfully read and interpret texts*", "*find relevant information*" and "*express oneself clearly*":





Perhaps unsurprisingly, the results in respect of instilling self-assuredness are somewhat more tentative given the personal nature of the attribute. Yet, all three histograms demonstrate HE teachers' confidence in their agency.

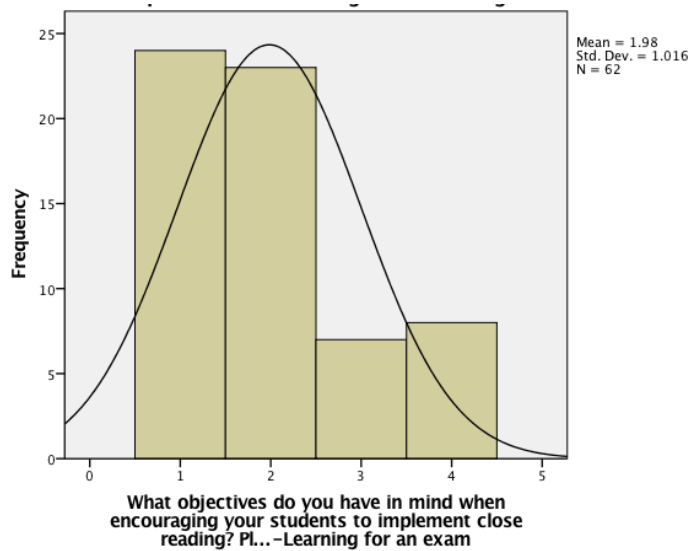
Purposes

Overall, 92.4% of the respondents stated that they used close reading strategies in their educational practice (N = 85; Question 4). When applying and requesting students to implement the strategy of close reading (Question 11), the most important learning objective expressed by the HE teachers was to allow students to “obtain nuance and depth in understanding texts” (M = 3.73, SD = 0.52), followed by understanding “how to engage in acceptable interpretations and to articulate them” (M = 3.47, SD = 0.65), “other sorts of learning objectives” (M = 3.33, SD = 1.02), and to teach close reading “as a support to develop a personal response to a text” (M = 3.29, SD = 0.80).

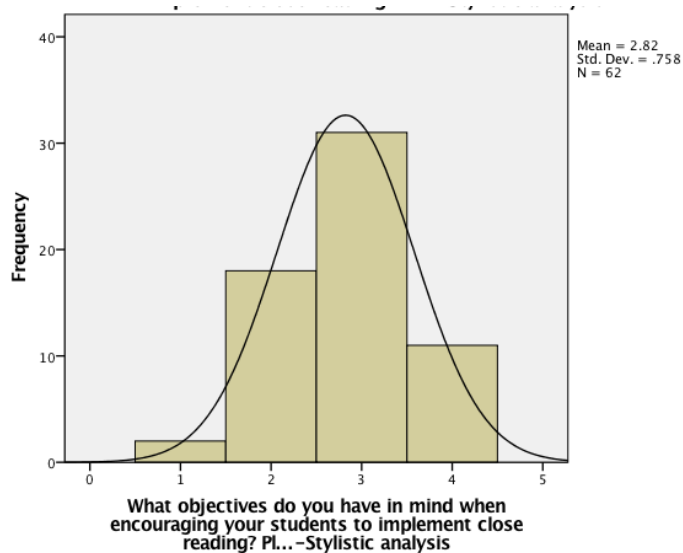
The scale used in the following histograms is a smaller one comprising

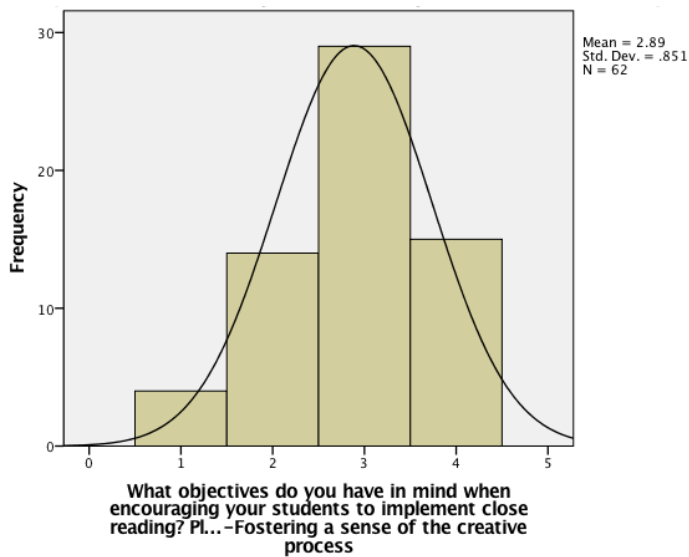
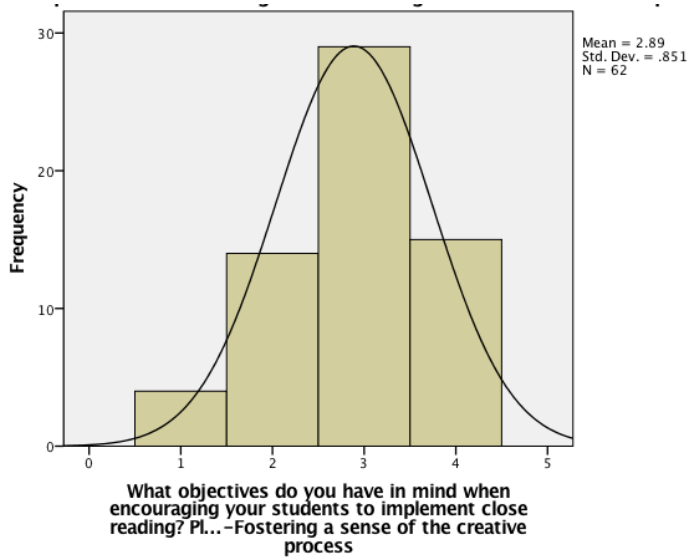
1 = never 2 = sometimes 3 = often 4 = always

The first question, about implementing close reading as learning for an exam, elicited high responses for “never” and “sometimes”:

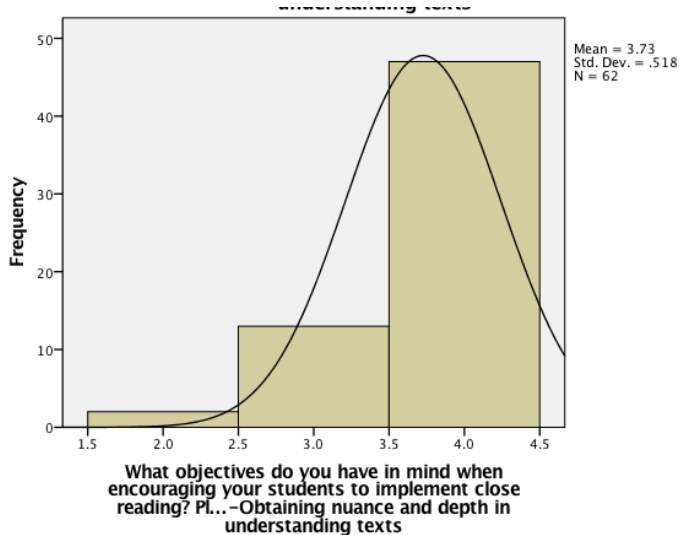


This contrasts with the responses in respect of stylistic analysis and fostering a sense of the creative process which both elicited high responses of “often”:





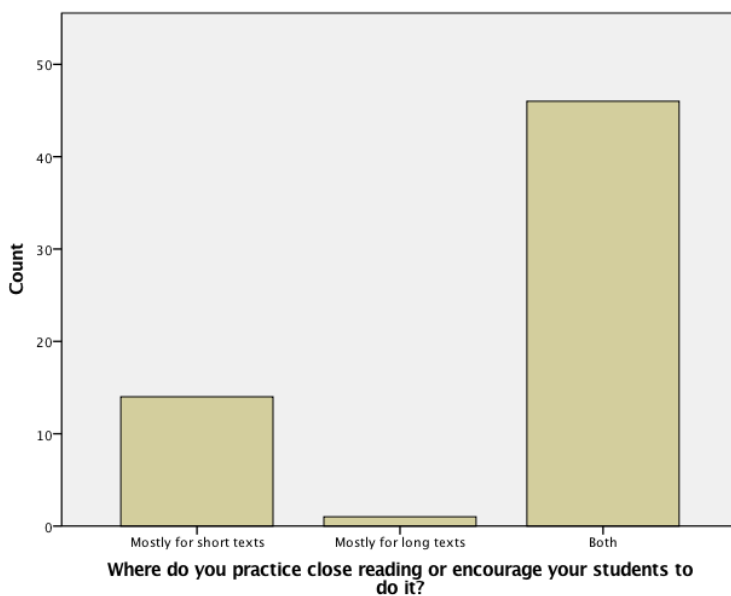
If these questions held any ambiguity for respondents, as might be suggested by the low mean score, then the final question on nuance and depth in understanding texts seems to have been equivocal in the responses it elicited:

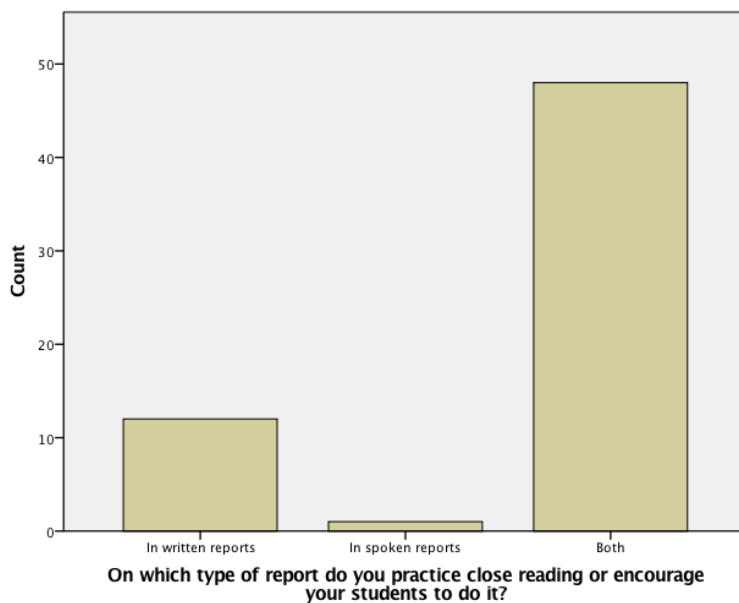
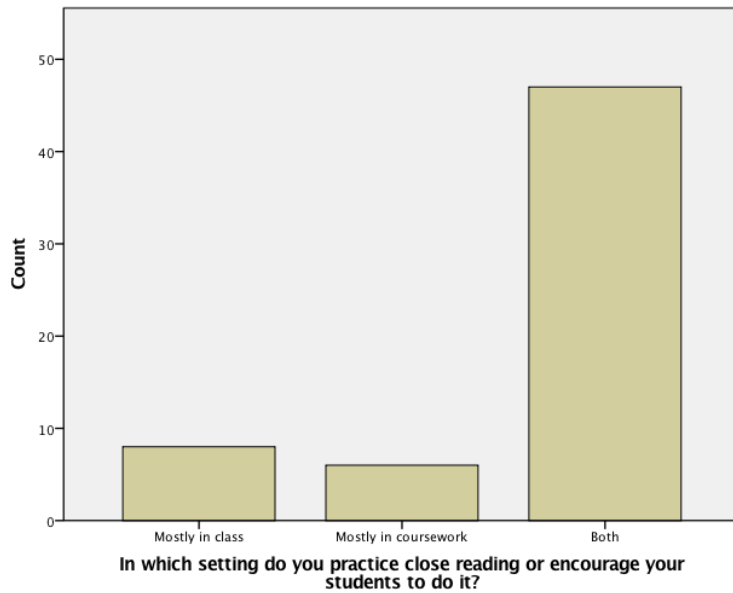


The near unanimity of response here is continued in respect of the questions about situations for close reading.

Situations for close reading

Most of the participants (75.4%, N = 46) declared that they sought to encourage their students to use close reading equally in long and short types of texts (Question 12). In the same way, the HE teachers stated that they would encourage close reading within both written and spoken types of reports (78.7%, N = 48; Question 14), and equally in class or during coursework (77%, N = 47; Question 13). In this sense, the length, the type of a text, and the setting are not discriminating factors for the application of close reading strategies. Concerning the specific teaching strategy of “reading aloud” (Question 16), 33 said they used it sometimes (53.2%), 16 often (25.8%), 9 never (14.5%), and only 4 reported use of it always (6.5%):





These results were also supplemented by 51 responses in 'Other', where respondents suggested alternative or augmented settings for close reading and some asserted that they did not quite understand the questions. Many offered specific classroom or educational environments as the setting for close reading. Among the alternatives were "All texts/speech that you might want to learn something from", "Any environment, really", "Home university library trains journeys air flights" (lack of punctuation in the original).

What the histograms and the comments demonstrate, above all, is that close reading is quite a prevalent activity, in a number of pedagogical contexts, for this group of respondents. This is notwithstanding the fact that 'close reading' may be defined differently and more or less

loosely among respondents, perhaps exemplifying Guillory’s (2010) that there are practices of close reading and practices of reading closely.

Discussion

Corresponding with the aims of this research, the survey reached a diversity of subject areas in the humanities:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Academic Writing/English Composition/Technical Writing/Study Skills (3) • Art History and Literary Studies • Media Production • Contextual Studies: Design, Architecture, Cultural Anthropology, Visual Culture, Media Archaeology, Philosophy of Media 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • English (3) • English Literature (5) • ESL (2) • Film (17) • French Language • Game studies. • German • PGCE • Linguistics (4) • Film (2) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maths for Humanities • Media/Communications/Cultural Studies/Journalism (9) • Philosophy of science • Political theory, cultural theory • Public speaking • Spanish • Politics, Philosophy and Economics • Translation Studies • Drama and Media • Misc.
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Table 1: subject areas reached by the survey

Among these were traditional text-based subjects (e.g. English Literature), but also a number of subjects where one would have expected that perspectives on embodiment would be quite prevalent (e.g. Cultural Anthropology, Visual Culture). If nothing else, there is a demonstration here, once more, of the continued prevalence of close reading as a practice and a component of the broad range of Humanities pedagogy in HE.

As has been seen, the educational goals of the HE teachers were heavily geared to the finding of relevant information, interpretation, achieving clarity of expression and, to a slightly lesser extent, self-assuredness in presenting to other people. However, in the box for ‘Other’, where respondents could add their own content, there was a plethora of different educational goals, including instilling the ability to:

- act appropriately in a range of contexts
- critically question norms
- discover hidden meanings
- formulate an argument
- frame thoughtful research questions
- think critically and act upon those thoughts in daily life

and many other cognate formulations. Although it may be too obvious to note, all of these suggest that education is conceived as transformative in some way. Claims for close reading, particularly in the few textbooks devoted to the practice (e.g. Brummett 2018), are repeatedly made with reference to the same kind of transformative bearing.

This is amplified in the statements about how HE teaching can contribute to educational goals. Among the extra content that was added to address these questions on teaching’s contribution, respondents cited enabling students to

- learn about contemporary debates and develop confidence in exploring or/and expressing them
- value perseverance and hard work
- engage in debate
- learn independently
- carry out inter-textual exegesis
- understand qualitative relationships and analysis
- write well

Predictably, this continues the transformative theme initiated in response to the general questions on educational goals. However, when the theme is brought into focus with the practice of close reading, it is telling that the “other” section features single words or short phrases indicating definite educational ‘take-aways’. In answer to the question “Do you use close reading in your educational practice? If yes . . . other”, the following words were repeatedly offered by respondents in order to represent what close reading implants in students:

- analysis
- systematic
- critical thinking, rigour
- persuasion
- engagement
- production
- feelings, desires, passion
- context

Again, this list is not particularly surprising, for its items will look familiar to anyone who habitually discusses close reading. That observation includes the term “context” which, in traditional or standard approaches to close reading, is usually bracketed out of discussion in favour of focus on form. Yet, if one considers the following statement, yielded in response to the open-ended question 7, “How do you teach your students the practice of close reading?”, a sense of what haunts close reading in pedagogy is apparent:

I want my students to learn how to identify an author's position, distinguish that from the evidence the author uses and the other positions the author refutes. I want students to acquire the ability to discuss how an argument is waged or how it proceeds. In the end, these skills should help them to evaluate the merit and validity of an argument for a particular position. These skills are applicable across disciplines and outside of the academy. Higher literacy is probably the most important enabler for personal economic stability in addition to the intrinsic pleasures it supports relative to a rich cultural life.

Along with the aspiration of a richer cultural life for students plus an ability to argue, both common features of close reading pedagogy, there is also the common sense, secondary school reference to the role of an author (i.e. a concept that close reading is generally taken to have abolished). Yet, the most salient feature of this statement is its contention that close reading is “a skill”. That is, with the best intentions, close reading is a gift or a package to be taken away. The skills in question were not of the kind that enactivist scholars and the distributed perspective attempt to analyse. Rather, they were of the kind which demonstrates

that close reading has been co-opted to the reifying and decontextualizing discourse of ‘transferable skills’ in Higher Education, the neo-liberal demand of the last thirty years that universities should be graduating fully enterprise-orientated, industry-ready students (Drummond et al 1998; Kemp and Seagraves 1995; Smith and Paton 2014; Hill et al 2020). Of the 158 responses to open-ended questions 8-10 in the survey, there were 17 explicit responses invoking the idea of skills as a package and numerous implicit allusions to the same.

As might be expected, the open-ended questions also threw up assessments of close reading practice which brought the question of skills into relation with the learning of theory (or not), cognition and personal qualities. Question 8 asked “Does your understanding of close reading have a specific theoretical underpinning? If so, how would you characterize this theoretical underpinning?” Five of the fifty-six answers were a straight “No”, with no further comments. A further thirteen said no with a small amount of equivocation, a number mentioning the influence of semiotics, some mentioning a very general theoretical bearing but “no specific theoretical underpinning”, a few citing ‘common sense’, some referring to eclecticism and varied or general perspectives, along with others who alluded to an “inbuilt base of accumulated knowledge” or said that they knew theory but did not use it, plus a handful of respondents who simply wrote “Not really”. One response contained the assertion that “most forms of theorising cannot afford to take place in the absence of close reading”; another saw it as “a central methodology or practice”. On the side of theory, there was no unanimous alignment on underpinnings, although seven cited structuralism/poststructuralism and deconstruction; these were supplemented by the recurring proper names of Derrida, Barthes, Saussure. (Richards was mentioned once). Two explicitly referred to hermeneutics, two cited stylistics, two indicated feminist theory and one mentioned rhetoric. “Classical liberal arts and mysticism” was also invoked as a theoretical underpinning, along with Dweck’s “growth mind set”. Bizzocchi and Tanenbaum (who wrote a 2011 article on close reading of game play) were cited by one respondent as if they were canonical authors. Perhaps the most interesting and recurrent reported negotiation, beyond the critical bent of poststructuralism and the hermeneutics of suspicion, involved close reading plus, as one respondent put it, “the foundational assumption within cultural studies that everything is a text to be read - and the assumption that meaning is radically contingent and socially constructed, and shouldn't be taken ahistorically”. A number cited “context” generally or, more specifically: “The close reading needs to be contextualised in some way (i.e. socially, historically, politically, etc.) for it to have significance”. In this vein, slightly more strident is the following statement:

I wholeheartedly reject the notion that texts have any fixed meaning. Close reading is certainly a very useful skill for teaching critical thinking, and I think it can be combined with other methods to produce really outstanding work, but not on its own.

It combines nicely the approximately 20% of views advocating a combined approach in contrast to the theoretical (c. 40%) and the a-theoretical (c. 40%). Yet it also refers explicitly, once more, to the concept of ‘skill’. Although it is not definitive or conclusive, the results indicated that close reading underpinned by theory tended to be less inflected as a skill in comparison with the conceptualisation of close reading as a common sense practice informed by eclectic or general learning.

A further open-ended question sought to gain views on whether there was a personal commitment to close reading and whether this corresponded with the lack of/theoretical underpinning: Question 9 – “Is your understanding of close reading informed by a personal

ethos in respect of education? If yes, how would you characterize this ethos?” Again, as with Question 8, there were a number of straight, unembroidered answers of “No”: three out of fifty-two, with two answers of “Not really”, one of “Don’t think so” and one rejection of *ethos* in favour of *logos*. There were also a couple of answers which were subject-specific but not hugely elaborated: “No. You need to read the film text closely to do any work at all in Film Studies” and one observing the need “to understand how the elements of film form operate to create meaning” but also adding “in order to progress to wider and broader socio-political aspects of films and filmmaking”. One response suggested the need “to avoid imposing our own ethos (values/aspirations/interpretations) without making them subject to criticism and questioning”. Another, quite rightly noted “This is a bit of a leading question, isn't it?”

Generally, there was a broad range of factors cited as informing personal ethos in respect of close reading. These included honesty – “in the sense of being true to the text/data rather than imposing interpretation”; rhetoric – “it enables one to recognise when and how someone else is trying to persuade you of something”; accuracy – “I think evaluative approaches are redundant and avoid them”; locality – “Examples from local cultural context help the students to understand the complex issues easily”; raising the level of literacy – “that's what's higher about higher education!”; holistic thinking – “i.e. linking various things together”; and detail – “in knowing/understanding how something is made and what that does to our experience of it”. However, there were numerous responses which indicated a personal ethos which lay somewhere between liberal and critical motivations for close reading. “Respect” recurred as a theme:

“. . . close reading as respect, considered as an 'ethos' that might mediate the relation between teacher and student (in the sense in which both are 'equal before the text' in Jacques Rancière's pedagogical work)”

“. . . working out how texts and readers construct meanings and being open to a plurality of interpretations is in itself respectful of the different parties involved (readers, students, writers, tutors)”

“I would say that the reading ethos I encourage my students to develop is an ethos of respectful, generous listening *and* of vigilant scepticism”

“Respect and attentiveness to the voice of the other, slowness, critique”.

In all these statements, the implicitly dialogical character of close reading finds expression. In addition, the exposing of power relationships was an important converging factor of close reading and personal educational ethos for some. ‘Social justice’ and ‘rigour’ were frequently aligned – “Question everything”, exhorted one respondent. Certainly, critical or independent thinking was reported as the basis of a healthy fallibilism in citizenship: “Success would be the radical acceptance of doubt and recognition of contradiction rather than dogmatic certainty”. Occasionally, a personal ethos bled into a theoretical one: “I find it hard to separate my ‘theoretical background’ from ‘personal ethos’”, wrote one respondent. Another simply stated in response to the question: “I was trained by critical theorists at the Graduate Faculty, NSSR, Hannah Arendt, Hans Jonas, Stanley Diamond, Benjamin Nelson and Reiner Schurmann”. Possibly the clearest representation of how the personal, the political and theory merge, informing close reading in education, is offered by the number of responses which indicated an underpinning of feminist theory and a feminist personal ethos.

Again, however, the idea of ‘skill’ was raised, revealing itself as a, problematic contested terrain. In discussion of their personal ethos with regard to education, numerous respondents linked attention to detail with skills. “I would see [close reading] as a key skill within the discipline, and one which is increasingly important in the digital age. Attention to detail and the examination of how artefacts make meaning are central to university work”, wrote one. For another, close reading “equips individuals with the ability to perceive ways in which they may be being influenced or manipulated, and this is also a very powerful skill to possess”. It was said to be crucial to developing

the kind of attentiveness, analytic rigour, and critical thinking that I believe an academic education should provide . . . close reading also represents an extension and deepening of the sorts of skills we all require in daily life - from consuming media, to successful communication and expression in general.

Educational goals were stated to coalesce around “helping students develop skills and understanding”. Criticality, attention to detail, the capacity to interpret and citizenship attributes were all found to combine in the ‘skill’ of close reading:

I believe everyone needs to develop critical thinking skills to participate as informed and sensible citizens in contemporary society. Being able to interpret texts is a crucial element of this. Close reading is necessary for the skilful interpretation of texts.

Yet there were also respondents who questioned what seemed to be the common wisdom regarding the relationship of close reading, criticality and skill. One respondent asserted that “any skills taught must be underpinned by a rich and challenging curriculum”. Another observed that “learning is a slow process and should not be rushed over” in relation to the idea of close reading as a skill package that can be quickly taught. More pointedly, one respondent draws a distinction between crafting and personal development:

I think education is about making a person not about learning a skill or a craft. One important aspect in this is political thought and engagement and the ability to read between the lines and discern intent, hidden biases in the presentation of thought /ideology, and whether the proposed action corroborates the professed ideology. Close reading hones this skill.

This tallies with another respondent’s statement “That education is about developing subjectivities, not to be measured in terms of efficiencies of production”. However, the insuperable nature of the demand to develop transferable skills in the 21st century Higher Education classroom forces a contradiction in the former quotation, where political thought, engagement, discernment and exposure of ideology is collapsed once more into a “skill”. It seems that the discourse of close reading as a skill or knack that can be taught, passed on and put to use, favours the transactional, instrumental, information-based approach to texts, knowledge and to education. The notion of skill is so dominant today in Higher Education that the view of close reading as a praxis that heightens sensitivity to the complexity, tentativeness, openness, interdependence and polyvocality of meaning and that is thus much more closely linked to the formative and transformative dimension of education, often appears to get subsumed under the skill label. A paucity of language, in itself the very absence of skill, in its etymological root meaning of “significant distinction” and “discernment”, manifests itself here. As will be suggested in the conclusion, the

understanding of close reading that makes more explicit use of a 4E approach to cognition might provide an underpinning for the development of a parallel discourse of close reading as praxis, rather than merely skill.

Amidst the direction of close reading to serious and worthy ends of a theoretical or political nature, it seems that other facets of an educational ethos may also have been lost. Out of all the responses to this question, only one referred to gratification for the student. Referring to the process whereby readers may “draw on our own experience in making sense of the text, but also that the text then has the potential to shape our future understandings”, this respondent adds, “I think there can be real emotional and aesthetic pleasure in this engagement, but somehow current developments in audit-driven education seem to mitigate against this by making many educational encounters purely instrumental”. This reference to emotional and aesthetic pleasure is probably the closest that any of the respondents gets to the issues that are now beginning to be raised in the literature on embodied reading.

The student’s experience might have been expected to be discussed in Question 10: “What kind of capacities must a person possess and/or develop in order to be able to practice close reading?” The fifty-five answers received ranged across a very large number of attributes, with “attention to detail” particularly prevalent. Seventeen of the respondents made explicit reference to this capacity, twelve made reference to patience, eight cited the ability to focus and seven noted the importance of an open mind. Extending the argument that close reading is not simply a matter of exclusive engagement with textuality were the five statements stressing “context” which might also be synonymous with the four which mentioned the ability to relate the detail to a “bigger picture”. The large number of other attributes testifies to the diversity of discipline and practice captured in the survey:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • attention to detail (17) • patience (12) • ability to focus (8) • an open mind (7) • critical thinking (6) • curiosity (6) • ability to take into account the context (5) • ability to relate the detail to a 'bigger picture' (4) • tenacity/persistence/perseverance (4) • language awareness (4) • self-reflexivity (3) • ability to analyse (3) • abductive reasoning skills (2) • a good memory (2) • imagination (2) • willingness to do research (2) • concentration (2) • respect (2) • confidence (2) • ability to follow a logical argument and train of thought (2) • ability to see below the surface of the text (2) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • abstract thought • a desire and capacity for precise self-expression. • responsiveness • sensitivity • ability to make notes • a fluent reader • a love of reading • an understanding of the relationships between texts • an understanding of how knowledge is made and understood. • an enquiring mind • a willingness to read at a granular level • a capacity to recognise ambiguity, irony, nuance, etc. • ability to read • ability to build arguments • ability to question as one reads • ability to consider other views and interpretations • a willingness to play Devil's advocate with oneself 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ability to spin a continuous thread of attention. • ability to be systematic • appreciation and experience in qualitative analysis • very good comprehension of target language (if not L1). • ability to structure thought • lack of distractibility • the ability to tolerate ambiguity and uncertainty • a capacity to be mindful of that text and that text alone at the moment of reading • a capacity to draw on other resources (such as dictionaries) in order to make sense of the text • meticulousness • creativity • resilience • ability to be kind to yourself • hard work • good thinking abilities
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a willingness to interrogate and explore one's own emotional responses and intellectual processes (2) • ability in rhetoric (2) • an awareness of the range of possible readings available (2) • ability to make connections and express relationships • ability to synthesize information • playfulness • knowledge about semiotics and structuralism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • clear and persuasive communication • a flair for writing/speaking • ability to make connections/see patterns • a lack of self-seriousness • an interdisciplinary background • observational skills • ability to re-view/re-read as much as necessary to retrieve information accurately 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • willingness to try, to experiment, to fail, to learn • clarity in expression • perception • precision in applying terminology • willingness to debate • organisation • familiarity with cognitive biases
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Table 2: cited capacities a person must possess and/or develop in order to be able to practice close reading

Yet, despite all these attributes, close reading as an act of discipline should *not*, according to its definition and tradition, require the services of specific capacities that are already in place. The listed attributes in a transformative close reading pedagogy would be more ideally *fostered* or *awakened* rather than enhanced or developed. Some of the respondents were explicit in making observations on this:

“I believe anyone can be taught to do close reading. The only fundamental capacities required are to be patient and methodical. Being able to express the close reading using appropriate medium-specific terminology will obviously help, but is not itself a requirement”.

“I think anyone can practice close reading, and in my experience it is often notable how students can surprise themselves if given time to do so in the classroom. I might consider qualities like 'patience', 'attentiveness' or 'openness' to be relevant here but I also think there could be a danger in personalizing these terms too much. I'm also curious (since I've used close reading in the context of teaching philosophical aesthetics) about the extent to which a grounding in theoretical or philosophical texts is useful or necessary to practice close reading”.

Another respondent suggested “Basically anybody should be able to do that” but then somewhat undermined the non-discriminatory justness of this statement by adding “Of course, IQ helps”. The difficulty inherent in the question, despite the question being crucial to the discussion, is that it harbours the possibility of answers citing very specific attributes such as “knowledge about semiotics and structuralism”. One respondent summed up the matter by asserting, first, that attention to detail and a broad knowledge of culture are desirable bases for developing close reading. They then observed that “These aren't skills and sets of knowledge that everyone possesses, but everyone can work together with these things, because no one possesses ultimate mastery in either area”.

Conclusion

The key finding from this survey is, to some extent, a seemingly obvious one. That is, close reading is very prevalent as a practice according to our sample of UK Humanities scholars. The commitment to close reading as a central feature of humanities education does not seem to have waned in the last century. Another obvious point is that the distribution of close

reading across disciplines is wide and close reading encapsulates a concomitant diversity of practice. Clearly, close reading practitioners and advocates see it as much more than a mere classroom exercise. As one respondent contends, “It provides access to knowledge in every discipline. It provides access to ‘deep’ knowledge that surface reading might not reveal”. Another asserts that “I absolutely believe that all of society would benefit if they took the time to be critical of ‘meaning’ and where it comes from, rather than making snap judgements based on nothing more than instinct and blind prejudice”. As has been seen, respondents are confident that close reading provides something very different from ‘surface’ reading, promising results that will distinguish analysis of a text from mere consumption of a text. That assertions about this quality of close reading can, perhaps, be overstated – e.g. one respondent: “Close reading is a mode of divination in a literal sense” – does not detract from the general strength of feeling with regard to close reading’s efficacy.

The main hypothesis which stimulated this survey was that there must have been a significant change in the conception of close reading in the nearly ninety years since the publication of Richards’ *Practical Criticism*. This was definitely borne out. As has been mentioned, only one of the survey respondents mentioned Richards’ name. Yet, the change was not always quite as we had hypothesized it. Certainly, the diversifying of communities in the last ninety years and the unfathomably large amount of communication available ‘on demand’ meant that close reading was practiced in relation to numerous objects besides poetry. There was also evidence to suggest that close reading now negotiates the understanding that language and reading are not constituted by invariant meanings. Indeed, the old contests, revolving round the degrees of indeterminacy in texts and the role of the reader, continue in the numerous statements about plurality of readings, contexts and texts-to-be-read. They remain unresolved and they are very seldom extended to discussion of the affective dimension of reading and first-person experience.

So, while the survey bore out some of the initial hypotheses, there were instances where hypotheses were confounded. Given the huge literature that now exists in respect of debate on the so-called 4Es, both in its own right and in relation to arts practices, it was surprising to find that references to embodied and extended cognition in particular were wholly absent from respondents’ comments. The sizeable representation of respondents in the media subject area might have raised the expectation of some comment on the idea of ‘extension’ as posited by McLuhan. A student of I. A. Richards, particularly evident in his emphasis on pattern recognition (1964: 53), McLuhan’s conception of media, in its relation to extended cognition, has been the subject of some interest in recent years (Logan 2013; Trybulec 2013; Cortese 2014; Cocchiarella 2019). Yet, there was no trace of any arguments in this direction. This might suggest that Morgan’s 2012 comments, cited earlier, in respect of ‘blocking’ investigations of reading which foreground the body, might be correct. Certainly, the putative purposes for close reading seem to be geared towards objectives considered rational rather than affective. Richards’ own pronouncements in *Practical Criticism* advocate the treatment of poetic, emotive language to render it referential. So, it seems that close reading’s adherence to questions of meaning, reason, attention, “deep” knowledge, analysis and even “divination”, along with the qualities of patience, focus and curiosity required to sustain it, renders close reading unsuited to an embodied or distributed approach. Close reading would seem to be nothing other than a cerebral exercise in apprehending ‘meaning’ or in developing a disembodied skill. Yet, that cannot be the end of the discussion because the future of close reading would have to rest on the assumption that rationality and affect are discrete and unconnected, an assumption that has become untenable in the last thirty years (Damasio 1994). Moreover, Richards’ original formulation sought to see through the emotive

dimension of language but certainly did not seek to abolish it in the manner suggested by Wimsatt and Beardsley in their banishing of first-person experience in ‘The affective fallacy’ (1949). In terms of typical cognitive literary criticism, there may not be much mileage in conducting a close reading of *Hamlet* to show how the text might foster empathy or Theory of Mind. However, a future close reading practice underpinned by embodiment is not at all out of the question. If the text of *Hamlet* in a preliminary close reading, for example, amounts to ‘inability to act’ as rendered by iambic pentameter, a more 4E-informed assessment would envisage that theme embedded in a range of sensory and affective co-ordinates. In this scenario, the reading would be subject to cognitive distribution across the whole of the reader’s modelling.

Clearly, the survey attracted respondents with established classroom practices. The average career length reported was 16.73 years, with many reporting much longer periods in HE teaching. This does not explain the failure to embrace a distributed perspective in relation to the act of reading, but it may play a part. After all, it was hypothesized that the concept of the author’s intention would not rear its head in HE Humanities teaching, especially in considerations of close reading, during the second decade of the twenty-first century. Yet it was repeatedly mentioned in response. Classroom practice may not be renewed as regularly as research is. Indeed, that may be a factor in what seems to be the continuation of the theory wars such that it was possible to discern a faction that considered close reading as unconnected with theory and a faction that considered it as part and parcel of theory and, particularly, critique. Even where there was emphasis on practice and practical criticism, as opposed to the reductive abstractions of “theory”, a vision of a more dialectical relation between practice and theory than that of mere “application” seemed to be at work respondents’ statements.

One issue that did seem to have been dissolved amidst the pitting of the Practical vs. the Theoretical was the vindication of canons through close reading. The dissolution of the canon cannot be confirmed definitively but, certainly, the range of academics in different disciplines who responded, coupled with the fact that the concept of canon only arose once – in a remark from someone teaching the “Western male” canon and stating themselves to be interested in how “close reading might be a way to problematize assumptions that students can make about such a canon” – seems to safely confirm that close reading’s complicity in upholding canons can no longer be taken for granted and that the critical potential of close reading is foregrounded in the understanding and teaching practice of many educators.

Among the criticisms and predictions of close reading’s demise, it seems that the statistical approach of ‘distant reading’ (Moretti 2013), with its promise to extract bias, posed a significant threat. However, ‘distant reading’ was not mentioned by any of the respondents, a fact which, of course, might equally be because the survey attracted mainly (but not exclusively) adherents of close reading, as it might be because distant reading is not an issue. Perhaps the respondents did not know Moretti’s somewhat facile binary opposition between closeness and distance or perhaps they did not see the distinction as an issue. It was already overcome, albeit implicitly and latently, in the much more dialectical awareness of their relation by Richards. It is along this line that a salvaging of close reading for distributed perspectives in cognition is perhaps most useful. That salvaging might allow the closeness in distance and the distance in closeness to become visible; it might enable reading practices in education to retain a genuine critical focus in terms of cultural politics and to resist both the reification, as well as the all-too-easy abandonment, of the ontological anchorage of notions such as *author*, *reader*, *text*, *reading* and even *teaching* itself.

Certainly, distant reading would seem to threaten close reading's claims to engender a 'skill', This could be important because the survey showed that the idea of close reading as a skills package recurred. Yet, it should be remembered that there was also opposition to the idea that close reading could be offered as a quick takeaway gift. In this resistance to the neo-liberal overtones in HE, there could be significant indications for close reading's future. Running through discussions of close reading's contribution to critique, including in this survey, is the parallel with rhetoric and its democratic leanings in being open to all who wish to learn (see Eagleton 2007: 10-11; 1983: 179-89). The handy package of close reading skill should, theoretically, be open to all; however, as has been seen, many consider certain prior capacities to be essential to beginning close reading. Perhaps this is of a piece with the familiar reductive (mis)understanding of rhetoric as a knack of persuasion, a staple of pedagogic literature since Plato and mirrored in the unsteady and inadequate use of the concept of skill in talking about close reading .Furthermore, conceived as a rhetorical skill, and notwithstanding the diversity of disciplines in this survey, close reading retains its metaphorical name and some of its basis in verbality. The "attention to detail" it requires tends to suggest a cerebral over a bodily or distributed engagement. At present, close reading most resembles the "deep attention" that Hayles (2007) presents in conjunction with "hyper attention", the former being associated with focus on one task and the latter involving multi-tasking with a low boredom threshold. The obvious alignments of the two are with academic work in the case of the former and negotiation of the contemporary digital world of information and sociality on the other. However, it may be that close reading may need to become neurodiverse, accommodating cross-overs from each attention mode in the kind of mixed economy that Hayles identifies, rather than just diverse in terms of the disciplines where it features. An obvious indication for further research arising from this survey is an extension of its reach to other areas of the globe. However, another fruitful possibility lies in exploring a 'rhetoric of embodiment' as a new horizon for close reading – a pedagogy of affect in which a neutral terrain might be found in the bodily engagement with textuality between the hyper and deep modes of attention, between distant and close reading.

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