

RESPONSE TO TEXT - A FORMATIVE PROCESS

PDIG 2020-21 Final Report

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Project Description:

Our project aimed to support teachers with a deeper understanding of what authentic response to text involves and open a dialogue about forms of response other than the traditional written form most students and teachers are familiar with. We also wished to support teachers in following a formative process during instruction related to response and encourage a lesser focus on the summative written form. By providing a bank of other forms of response, resources, teaching strategies, and formative assessment practices we wished to support teachers in their understanding of response through a new lens.

Though we originally wished to begin the project by reviewing data related to student success in summative response tasks, the pandemic, school closures and cancellation of exams in the previous year limited the amount of data we had to work with. Without this data, we relied on the team's collective experience and anecdotal observations to come to some conclusions on where there were gaps in student learning in regards to response. To help guide some of our decisions when creating resources, we collected some data by designing and using both a student survey (attitude towards response, types of tasks preferred, self-reflection) and a teacher survey (current teaching methods, response texts used, best practices, understandings). The results of the student survey indicated that there is a general lack of understanding on the part of students as to what response to text actually is, and students seem anchored in the idea of a written response as the only way to show their learning. The majority of work done in their classes up to this point around response has typically centred around them examining a short story and then writing a response to that story.

This validated our assumptions and moved us to consider tools and resources to help teachers, and consequently students, in moving forward in their views on what authentic response to text is and how to approach it formatively in class.

One of the primary aims of the project was to increase the amount of feedback and support teachers were able to give to students and we knew that this would require resources that supported teachers in considering ways for students to show their learning other than the summative, written style response to text most of them were using frequently with students. From some previous work done and through current research, the team settled on creating single-point rubrics that clearly

identified success for students and removed the element of a grade. Single point rubrics focus on providing students with actionable feedback and so these were viewed as a good tool for teachers to use during a formative assessment process. Working from the QEP, the Progression of Learning, the Reader Response Learning Continuum and the MEQ Secondary 5 exam rubric, the team created a profile for each of the four main skills we hope for students to develop, worded in student-friendly learning targets. The rubric has a space on either side for a teacher to indicate strengths and provide specific feedback to help move a student forward in their learning. The rubrics designed are meant to be used flexibly and can be used independently of, or as companions to, each other. The team also decided to include a section of the exam rubric at the bottom of each single point rubric to support teachers who might like to provide students with feedback but also record a mark for documentation purposes. Understanding that, once a mark is given, many students consider the learning done, the section with grades is recommended for teacher recording only and typically that section would be omitted from the rubric when the feedback is given back to students.

The following is an example of the “Big Ideas” single point rubric developed by the team:

Single Point version to be used to provide students with feedback:

Formative Response: Big Ideas

Name: _____ Group: _____ Date: _____

The Reader Draws Clear Meaning from the Text		
Strengths	I Can Statements	Areas for Improvement
	<p>I identified one or more big idea/s in the text.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I can identify one or more big ideas that run throughout the story.</p>	
	<p>I produced a theme statement that could apply to different situations and avoided cliches.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I can figure out a clear theme statement, lesson learned, or message in the text.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I can avoid cliches and flat morals as theme statements.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> My theme statement can apply to many different situations</p>	
	<p>I have references that show my understanding of the text.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I have references that help support my theme statement.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I explain how my references support my theme statement (clear, detailed, appropriate).</p>	

Adaptation of exam rubric for teacher use:

Formative Response: Big Ideas

Name: _____ Group: _____ Date: _____

LEVEL 5 ADVANCED			LEVEL 4 THOROUGH			LEVEL 3 ACCEPTABLE			LEVEL 2 PARTIAL		LEVEL 1 MINIMAL
The reader draws comprehensive meaning from the text.			The reader draws clear meaning from the text.			The reader draws general meaning from the text.			The reader draws literal meaning from the text.		The reader suggests rudimentary understanding from the text.
The reader demonstrates an extensive understanding of the text through insightful interpretations, discerning inferences and compelling explanations of ideas, with well-defined references to the text. The reader draws in-depth meaning from the text through perceptive interpretations that go beyond the text and illuminate other familiar life circumstances or contexts.			The reader demonstrates a solid understanding of the text through thorough interpretations, relevant inferences and comprehensive explanations of ideas, with pertinent references to the text. The reader draws detailed meaning from the text through thoughtful interpretations based on ideas developed in the text.			The reader demonstrates an adequate understanding of the text through straightforward interpretations, commonplace inferences and acceptable explanations of ideas, with general references to the text. The reader draws general meaning from the text through basic interpretations linked to ideas within the text.			The reader demonstrates a limited understanding of the text through unsubstantiated interpretations and little explanation of ideas, with vague references to the text. The reader's understanding of the meaning of the text is undeveloped and his/her interpretations consist mainly in retelling or summarizing the text.		The reader demonstrates an inadequate understanding of the text based on irrelevant interpretations that are not supported with references to the text. The reader's interpretation of the text is inaccurate and unfocused.
5+ 100%	5 95%	4+ 90%	4+ 85%	4 80%	4- 75%	3+ 70%	3 65%	3- 60%	2+ 55%	2 50%	1 35%

Teachers from our team successfully experimented with these rubrics to provide feedback to students throughout the year and each time we met we discussed their usefulness. We determined that they supported students in identifying areas of strengths and weaknesses and teachers in providing actionable feedback to students.

Once clear success criteria and a common understanding of what teachers could look for when a student is responding to a text was established, we turned our attention to curating a list of texts that teachers might use when teaching response that was both relevant to students and varied in type, including short stories but also other forms of text (poetry, song, short and feature-length film). Many of the texts listed are inclusive and diverse and expose students to a wide variety of “windows and doors” instead of just “mirrors”. We wanted to encourage the use of a variety of contemporary texts that engage students and give them more authentic opportunities for response. From our survey, we realized that teachers rely heavily on short story when teaching response, a form not all students find easy to access. When creating more space for students to respond quickly and authentically to text on a frequent basis, we considered that the texts themselves that students are responding to had to be short, appealing (encouraging more than one reading/viewing), and more diverse in type to meet the needs of all learners. These types of texts allow for authentic response in a variety of forms and integrate responding to text into classroom instruction in diverse ways and not just as a summative assessment. We did not identify as many alternatives to short story as we might have liked but we also consider this list to be a working document to be added to in an ongoing way.

Along with a bank of texts to respond to, our team wanted to provide teachers with examples of varied ways students might show their understanding. Our survey and our experience revealed that teachers are most comfortable with the written form of response because that is the evidence they are most familiar with assessing. We knew that if teachers were going to consider alternative ways of students showing their learning, a series of examples that showed concretely that response to text could take a variety of forms was necessary. The team worked to collect a bank of models where the focus was to show how teachers can find evidence of learning related to response in oral responses, small and whole group discussions, short writing tasks, as well as production pieces. Models were drawn from both online sources as well as from student samples of tasks the team explored in their own classrooms. In our accompanying notations for the models, we attempted to connect them to assessment and feedback to make them realistic options for teachers to explore as ways to check for understanding

formatively and provide students with feedback before they attempted a larger summative task. When considering a collection of potential examples, the team discarded many models that reflected just on analysis or comprehension and focused on those models that reflected a students' thinking about big ideas in the text, their own connections to the text, their thoughts on the author's use of craft and ideas and opinions stemming from their reading/viewing of the text. We were careful to choose models that reflected Universal Design for Learning, something the written task does not currently take into account. Consideration was given to tasks and formats designed to be engaging and accessible for all, but in particular, boys, as that population has been identified as especially struggling with Response.

While finding highly engaging texts and interesting tasks where students are able to demonstrate their response in a variety of forms was a challenge, we were ultimately successful in creating resources that will allow for teachers to integrate authentic response into their lessons on a more regular basis, allowing for them to assess students more effectively, determine gaps, provide feedback, and remove some of the stress many students associate with response to text, hopefully addressing negative attitudes towards response along the way.

Project Goals:

The main goal of our project could be described as wanting to encourage teachers to think about response in a more differentiated way, so that they might better meet the needs of their students. Primarily we wished to:

- Demonstrate how students might show their learning in more than one way.
- Provide teachers with resources to make response to text more engaging for students.
- Shift response from what was primarily a summative task done once a term or so, to an ongoing and frequent series of shorter checks on student learning.
- Guide and support teachers in giving students more frequent and targeted feedback related to response to move them forward in their learning.

We were successful in reaching those goals in that we created:

- A survey for teachers and students to better understand attitudes and thinking surrounding response to text.
- A bank of anchors/exemplars demonstrating response to text in various forms including
 - small and whole group discussions
 - individual audio/video recordings
 - short written tasks like mindmaps, double-entry journals and sticky note annotations
 - production tasks like one-pagers and written responses.

This bank includes annotations and rationale where the models are explained in regards to what evidence they provide in relation to student learning in response.

- A bank of texts/songs/poems/short films for students to respond to that are engaging, contemporary, and relevant for students. An effort was made to identify which of these texts were inclusive and representative of diversity.
- Clearly defined success criteria based on the QEP, the Progression of Learning, the Reader Response Learning Continuum and the MEQ Sec 5 rubric in the form of four Single Point Rubrics (Big Idea, Connections, Author's Craft and Thinking Critically). The design of these rubrics is to specifically highlight feedback, process and progress. The rubric asks students (when self-reflecting and assessing) and teachers (when evaluating student work) to identify strengths and areas to improve in relation to the skills identified. There are no grades indicated in this kind of rubric-drawing attention to the feedback and next steps instead of the mark.

A final goal was to build a bank of mini-lessons/strategies to help in the teaching of specific skills students access when producing a response. We did not have enough time to reach this goal specifically but gains were made towards it through in-depth discussion of models, the role of talk, the ways the single point rubrics can be used in class and the possibilities around using rich and diverse texts. Strategies and instructional practices were naturally highlighted during these discussions.

Project Outcomes:

Gains in teachers' expertise related not only to their understanding of response to text but also in formative assessment were made by the team. Working collaboratively to create strategies and resources that consider response in a broader and more authentic way deepened teachers' overall understanding of what Response to Text represents in our program. The sharing of best practices amongst the team and the coming to a common understanding of expectations through the building of rubrics and the bank of models led to rich discussion and connections between the three regional high schools. Quebec's Education Program is unique regarding the idea of Response and, therefore, creating specific resources, strategies, and models directly related to our program had a direct impact on student success and teacher professional learning. The team has agreed to re-administer the student survey developed at the beginning and end of next year in an attempt to gain insight into the impact of this work on student success. This year proved challenging in regards to how much evidence could be collected so the team decided to look at the resources next year and continue the work done during the project. They hope to record changes in student learning and improvements in student attitudes toward response over the course of an uninterrupted year using the rubrics, and a more formative approach to response with more differentiated ways to collect evidence.

Reinvestment

As described in the section- Project Goals, the project resulted in three key resources:

- An annotated bank of anchors/exemplars demonstrating response to text in various forms.
- A bank of engaging texts/songs/poems/short films for students in Cycle 1 Secondary students to respond to.
- Four Single Point Rubrics (Big Idea, Connections, Author's Craft and Thinking Critically).

These resources will be shared in the three ETSB regional high schools by the teachers involved in the project. These same resources will also be shared with Cycle I and II Secondary and Cycle III Elementary teachers in the School Board with a view to broadening the understanding of the Response process at all levels- this will be done both through a website where the resources can be accessed and through PD and discussions opportunities offered by the Board's ELA consultant.

As one of the members of the team is the ELA consultant for the School Board, the resources developed will be shared with her colleagues across the province by presenting them at a DEEN subcommittee meeting of the Language Arts Network. We hope that the results of the project, resources, strategies and best practices developed, would be shared with the ELA community broadly by the consultants on the subcommittee.