

Are We Having Students Focus Too Much on Finding Evidence in Texts?

In this article in *Education Week*, Mia Hood (Teachers College Columbia and Relay Graduate School of Education) worries that when students are asked to search for *evidence* in a text, they may be missing out on a broader understanding and enjoyment of what they read. “What does the evidence say?” asked one student in a group of eighth-graders reading Jerry Spinelli’s novel, *Stargirl*, and students dutifully thumbed through looking for a relevant quote. This is in line with Common Core’s injunction to “cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.”

“I don’t dispute the letter or the spirit of this,” says Hood, “but it seems like our focus on evidence has altered the way we see text. We’ve come to see text as evidence, and only evidence... Imagine reading along in a novel, already anticipating the question you’ll be required to answer, the thesis statement you’ll eventually develop, or the comment you’ll make in discussion and be required to ‘back up’ with evidence. This is reading the way squirrels put away nuts for the long winter ahead. This is reading to stock evidence, to prepare for the question, the assignment, the discussion.” What’s missing, Hood believes, is a broader approach to reading that “elicits thinking and draws out new ideas, curiosities, frustrations, causes, and sometimes even pursuits.”

Hood’s concern is that if students are taught to constantly search for text evidence, they may miss out on emotional responses triggered by what they read and a broader sense of why a text matters. “If we want to prepare students for college and career,” she concludes, “let’s teach them the full range of reading required of us in college and career. Let’s teach them to read for real and relevant purposes and also to return to the text to search for evidence when they must. Let’s teach them not only to use text as evidence to support claims, but also to let the text move, teach, frustrate, confuse, and compel them.”

“Isn’t Reading About More Than ‘Evidence’?” by Mia Hood in *Education Week*, October 1, 2014 (Vol. 34, #6, p. 24-25), www.edweek.org