

Review for the Language Arts Journal of Michigan

Manuscript: Understanding Understanding: Interdisciplinary Articulation for Instruction and Assessment

This study illuminates the ambiguity of what it means *to understand* and *to demonstrate understanding* as intended by the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). Using “principles of ethnography,” the authors charted instances of how *understanding* is used in the CCSS documents. They found the term and its variations to function as both a noun and a gerund and therefore, maintains more than one definition: *Understanding* is contextual. To illustrate the complex and contextual nature of what it means *to understand*, the scholars provided a classroom example of an instance in which they, as instructors, did not understand a student’s understanding. The conclusion was *understanding* is situational and involves a process of negotiation.

This research is reminiscent of Scribner’s (1984) work on the elusiveness of *literacy* and what it means for one to be (*non*)*literate*. Importantly, both Scribner’s and the work in this manuscript implore us to ponder how educators can recognize, let alone explicitly teach, an ideal (i.e., literacy proficiency or understanding) that has not been clearly defined. Unlike Scribner’s work, the analyses of this manuscript do not thoroughly unpack the educational implications of the varying meanings of *understand*.

Further, the classroom example, while illustrative of the authors’ misunderstandings, seemed slightly out of place in the manuscript. (Perhaps these are two different studies?) Without specific information about the methods used to analyze the discursive interactions between Justin and his instructors, the conclusions tend to lack validity.

However, the phenomenon of interest, the definitions of *understand* and the pedagogical implications of those definitions, stands to be a timely topic of interest for practicing teachers and scholars. I think this work will advance conversations surrounding classroom practice, assessment, and contextual influence. Therefore, I recommend this manuscript be revised and resubmitted.

For revision, I recognize the following as strengths of this manuscript:

1. Relevant, important questions: What does it mean to *understand* a text and be able to demonstrate that understanding? According to whom? For whom? Under what conditions or contexts? For what purposes and for what desired outcomes?
2. A clear gap in the knowledge and the literature about the intended (or unintended) meanings of *understand* in the CCSS
3. The recognition that standardized assessments impose power by requiring a “correct” understanding of a text

For revision, I suggest attention to the following:

Significant Revisions

1. The discussion of the definitions of *understand* states that the word is used as “an action...” However, Tables 1 and 2 do not include examples of the infinitive or verb form of *understand*.
2. How do the varying functional uses of *understand* contribute to the analysis? How were the grammatical uses analyzed? Which methods of analysis were used?

3. Let the reader know if “Justin” is a pseudonym. Did the class, including Justin, agree to the audio recording or class meetings? How was consent given or denied?
4. In the section “Justin’s understanding of Graff’s text,” a statement is made about analysis: “Analysis of the transcript would prove....” How was the transcript analyzed? Did the authors use a method of discourse analysis?
5. What are the significances of the notes on Table 3? How did these notes contribute to the analysis?

Minor Revisions

1. The citation for the CCSS is National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers (2010). *Title of specific document*. Washington, DC: Authors
2. An in-text citation for Mitchell (1984) is not included in the references.
3. In the section “Justin’s understanding of Graff’s text,” a reference is made to Table 3, lines 352-370. The table begins with line 355.
4. Include a key for Table 3 for identifying transcription symbols and their associated meanings.
5. Check the APA manual for assistance with references.