Heather Smith Activity 2 – Assignment

**Context:**

Last year I taught a course at a 3rd year level at Dalhousie. The students were used to large lecture classes and so the active learning turn in my class was faced with a lot of a resistance. Some, of course, loved it…while other actively … and I mean actively….disengaged and thought it was ‘unscholarly’. I’m teaching it again in the winter semester and want to try to sort of ‘start where the students are at’ and I was inspired by the discussion in the Cummingham (2018) piece about how you can take a horse to water but you can’t make them drink…but you can salt the oats. I’ve been wondering about how to ‘salt the oats’ for these students.

One of the areas in which their skills were quite varied and which many assumed they have strong skills was the ability to read an academic article for its thesis statement and key arguments but it was clear that many didn’t have the skills they thought they had. Many also struggled with the ability to extrapolate arguments or envision consequences of the arguments beyond the text itself.

With that in mind, I thought I’d use some class time to explicitly work through this skill with them and to have them work individually and collaboratively on the skill. I suspect it will take a couple of classes to do this and I will need to figure out how to include that smoothly into the class (so any suggestions on that front are welcome…I tend to do mini-lectures and activities on one day of the class and dedicate the second day of the class in a given week to hands-on).

So here’s the rough idea….

**Title:** Unpacking the process of reading an academic article

**Objectives:** by the end of these series of lessons students will have collaboratively created a template that can guide their effective and efficient reading of academic articles.

**Why do this:** As you move through your academic careers, and beyond, the ability to effectively and often efficiently read an academic article for its thesis statement and key arguments is an essential skill. It’s also great to take the time to reflect on the ‘so what and who cares’ of the article … why does it matter, to whom does it matter, in what context?

Timeline of the assignment:

Tuesday January 15 (I’ve made up these dates for the purpose here…):

* We will begin the class with doing a collaborative brain storming session on the strategies you use to read academic articles for their thesis statements, key arguments, and the ‘so what and how cares’ questions. (20 minutes)
* We will then collect the ideas and start to create our template.
* The instructor will then share her step by step process for reading an academic article using a reading from that week. (20 minutes)
* Together we will revise the template and a plan to give it a test run in the next class.

Thursday January 17 – testing our template

* Working in groups, the students will fill out the template for the effective and efficient reading of an academic article based on one of the assigned readings for that class (20 minutes)
* We will then mix up the groups and have the students provide feedback to each other on the responses they’ve provided. (20 minutes)
* We will collaboratively review the templates and reflect on whether or not there is anything missing from our templates, whether or not the template needs revision and why and how the process can benefit us as we move through the course (and other courses) (20 minutes)
* Close with a one-minute essay on what the students learned about their own approaches to reading academic articles. (5 minutes)