

November 2

Sean MacFarland's Reading Video

Notes from discussion group

Discussion participants: Rose Aceves (Carnegie), Dennis Chowenhill (English), Marcia Corcoran (English), Katie Hern (English), Ingrid Hufgard (English), Carmen Johnston (English), Michael Langdon (English), Barbara Worthington (English)

*What did you hear?* [Initial prompt. Follow-up prompts, not noted here, were also used, addressing specific responses as they were made.]

The students were upset, panicky, distrustful. Many of their observations were about emotions.

Reading was described as so much baggage. Many seem not confident that they know what "reading" means.

Written language is like a second language to many of our students.

Students are overwhelmed because there are so many things in a text.

Students often discussed reading as a ritual. You buy the book (or not), you do things familiar in the classroom. But after you buy the book, what then?

Students expressed a dysfunctional desire for lecture. Lecture has clearly become for many instructors a way of compensating for students not reading. Students depend on this and have learned that the reading is often not necessary if one can understand the lectures well.

Students expressed much frustration with teachers. They want to be taught how to read.

There were many contradictions. Who is responsible for the difficulties that the students described? The relationships between students, teachers, and texts is complicated.

Teachers' authority is apparently a barrier to many students.

Respect is an issue. Students feel put down by failure and by teachers when they are unwilling to take time to assist the students to understand reading assignments.

The students' many references to building bonds with teachers is striking. We often do not think about this.

The comments about teachers talking at "their level" are impressive, and alarming. We are generally unaware when we talk at a level that makes the students uncomfortable. We make too many assumptions about what students know and what they have experienced. It is very difficult to know what assumptions can be made.

Our body language also is an issue. Not only our words, which we at least attempt to monitor, but the ways that we carry ourselves are affecting students.

It is astonishing how we must articulate many things that are second nature to us.

We often are shocked at what our students don't know, and we attempt to hide this shock and act calm and supportive. But the students can read our shock in our gestures, facial expressions, body language.

The fear of being stupid is apparently a large issue. This appears to be a significant obstacle to reading: reading can make students feel stupid.

Several students spoke of going to school to get a job. As instructors we want them to learn.

[One instructor's comment]: I open up by sharing with my students how I also do background work to look things up that we are reading about.

[Another instructor]: When I drive home, I ask myself the question, "Did my students learn anything today?"

This video makes me ask the question, "What is the purpose of higher education?" Why *not* give students the handout of a lecture?

The students actually want to learn. They want to get it. Their drive is impressive, as well as their frustration, is impressive.