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“How Should I Read This?”: Exploring the Role of Culture in Academic Reading

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Abstract

Unlike linguistic differences, cultural differences and how they might impact reading often go unnoticed. Educators and students may not easily recognize or articulate when reading issues occur and identify intercultural dynamics at play. To address these gaps, this multiple case study rooted in an intercultural rhetoric framework (Connor, 2011) explored the academic reading practices and perspectives of four international graduate students from diverse linguistic backgrounds studying in an Education program in the U.S. Reading surveys, artifacts, stimulated recall, letters of advice, and semi-structured interviews were collected, and data were analyzed using grounded theory and emotive coding (Kleres, 2011). Findings indicated that these advanced readers entered U.S. graduate programs with assumptions and approaches informed by the literacy practices of their home cultural contexts. Findings revealed complex intercultural differences beyond the texts as the participants negotiated different cultural norms for engaging with them, such as expectations for critical reading and talking about texts. Pedagogical implications for educators and students are drawn from the participants’ agentive and innovative ways of situating themselves as authoritative readers.

Keywords: academic reading; intercultural rhetoric; international graduate students; multiple case study