



The Role of Reading in the Composition Classroom

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As a teacher, I have always found the selection of texts peculiarly painful. To choose what to include in a literature or composition course is inevitably to make decisions about what to exclude, and exclusion is nearly always painful. As a writing program administrator, I came to dread those hordes of publishers' reps hawking their wares, and even more so, that moment when, after careful deliberation, we presented our instructors (most of them graduate students) with lists of "approved" texts for various courses. Quite simply, text selection defines us: defines the courses we teach, our goals and ambitions, our theories and pedagogies.

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Questions about what to read in composition courses have shaped themselves into a fierce ideological debate, fueled not only by local tensions between those who teach literature and those who teach composition, but also by broader concerns about what constitutes literacy and about the nature and function of higher education. We need, as Jane Peterson has argued in *College English*, to "reframe" this debate: "to focus on reading instead of genres and to contextualize our conversations about Freshman English" (314). Much of the discussion about reading in writing courses has proceeded from an unintentionally narrow or even impoverished sense of what reading involves. Moreover, commentators have frequently asked the wrong starting questions. What if instead of asking, "what should we read in composition classes?" we asked "why do we read in composition classes?" By focusing more carefully on what happens when students read, we can make more astute choices about both course design and text selection.

In supervising novice teachers (specifically, graduate student instructors), I came to recognize how differently each teacher sees what Iser and others call "the act of reading" and its connection to what anyone who teaches composition knows as "the writing process." The students in my weekly teaching practicum were once complaining, as they often do, about the anthology of non-fiction essays selected by our departmental textbook committee. As I recall, the "reader" in question was an innocuous, inoffensive collection of expository essays, exactly the text that a committee of teachers with strong individual viewpoints might select in compromise. The graduate students, all second quarter teaching assistants responsible for their own sections of English 1 (a freshman-level expository writing course), bemoaned both the paucity of well-written essays and students' lack of intellectual engagement in the assigned reading. More specifically, they anguished over their own inability to find selections they "liked," the passivity of students, and their resistance to "discussion."

I then asked what seemed a foundational question: "Why do we assign readings to our students in writing courses?" One student, whose own writing for my class had been characterized by an eloquent, sophisticated prose style, responded: "I assign readings because I want students to appreciate good writing. Which is why I know I'll be a better teacher next year when I get to use literature in English 3 [a freshman-level literature-based composition

course, which students can take as an alternative to English 1]. My students will write better essays when they read good writing." Another student had a different answer: "That's not really what I care about at all. I just want the readings to provide them with ideas to write about. I assign readings that students will care about--readings they will be willing to discuss actively. Readings with real ideas." Finally, a third student, one whose contributions always revealed an abiding concern for the needs of the students, said, "The best readings are the ones that give students models that they can emulate. I like to give them examples of good student writing, like those in *Prized Writing* [an anthology of student papers submitted for an annual essay contest on our campus]. That's what students really want to read."¹

What was most significant for me in these responses—given my initial question, "*why* do we assign readings?"—was the emphasis on "text selection." These student-teachers seemed to hear my question not as *why do we read?* but as *what should we read?* I had asked for theories (at the very least, for motives) but had gotten instead textual preferences. True, each preference unconsciously revealed a partial theory of reading: that reading reveals mastery of written structures; that reading provides access to ideas; that reading makes us aware of how genres and patterns shape ideas. But when our choices precede our theories, and when we fail to discern theory from practice, theory becomes little more than a rationale offered for choices already made. Our teaching becomes, as Mariolina Salvatori says in her excellent essay on reading in the teaching of composition, a mere "repertoire of `tips for teaching'." Instead, we must, as Salvatori argues, make "visible our teaching strategies and expose their rationale" (452). This rationale can be derived in a variety of ways from theories of interpretation, textual production, and literacy. Significantly, these theories often help make connections between literary and rhetorical approaches to reading, as compositionists and literary theorists have moved in similar directions in their evolving understanding of the text. To understand what a text is and how any text might be used in the composition classroom, we might best begin by exploring why and how reading and writing have been described as interconnected processes.

Reading Skills and Writing Ability

Ironically, undergraduate students often have little understanding of the connections between reading and writing. We admonish students that "good readers" (whatever that might really mean) make "good writers," a claim that proves hard to sustain in the academic world, with its own unique system of rewards and punishments. I have heard students who failed a challenge exam for a required writing course argue unapologetically, that they never read about current events, and thus, any "writing" test that requires them to interpret a general interest reading is patently unfair. The test should measure, they claim, "writing" not "reading" skills (much less, reading "experience"), as if there were no relation between the two. And it is not just the weak or "underprepared" students who express such attitudes. Linda Brodkey has concluded that some of the cleverest students come to believe that reading and writing have little connection. In Michael Berbe's and Cary Nelson's *Higher Education Under Fire*, she recounts a story told by her own son, who avoided reading the texts on which writing assignments were based, "on the grounds that reading would unnecessarily complicate his understanding of the assignment and increase the difficulty of producing the kind of essay [characterized by verbal fluency] that his teachers wanted" (222). Paradoxically, he learned to write an acceptable "reading" of

the text, without actually "reading" the text himself. Even when students believe in some abstract way that reading is good for them and might make them better writers, they often wish that it were more pleasurable, less arduous. Many students have simply not developed the habits of mind and language that make what Victor Nell calls "ludic reading" possible. How, after all, can a student who finds thoroughly overwhelming the process of reading all but the most simple and straightforward texts become a better writer by reading? The act of reading itself will not improve this student's writing abilities unless the connections between reading and writing are made explicit.

The study of reading and writing connections occurs in several disciplinary sites, from literary theory to composition studies to educational research. Not only reader response theorists but those interested in deconstruction, semiotics, and phenomenology claim that reading and writing are interrelated. Robert Scholes describes the connections between reading and writing as a "textual economy, in which pleasure and power are exchanged between producers and consumers of texts." As he says, "writers must consume in order to produce and readers . . . must produce in order to consume" (*Protocols* 90). J. Hillis Miller has said, "Writing is a reflection and testimony to the habits of reading in the writer . . . reading is itself a kind of writing, or writing is a trope for the act of reading" (Olson 325). In their explorations of human language both Heidegger and Gadamer identify parallels between reading and writing. Theorists interested in the status of literature as cultural discourse, and especially those, like Mark Turner, who are interested in the connections between literary studies and cognitive science, have argued that we must see both reading and writing, regardless of specific products or contexts, as related acts of the human mind. What all these theories insist upon is the interdependency and similarity of reading and writing.

Given how pervasive such theoretical assertions are among humanists (literary scholars in particular), it is perhaps surprising to discover that when reading is studied in other disciplinary contexts (in schools of education, for instance) and by more empirical methods, the connections between reading and writing cannot be asserted so unequivocally. The ERIC database includes numerous references to studies that fail to show a clear correlation between reading "skills" and writing "ability."² Even ethnographic approaches, which as humanists we usually find more sympathetic than empirical ones, fail to prove that writers must also be readers. Deborah Brandt's work with autobiographies of literacy suggests that while people often have positive experiences with reading, their experiences with learning to write are decidedly more ambiguous. Brandt also found that few people "regarded reading as the principal means by which they learned to write" (475). From her studies, she concluded that considering oneself part of a "writer's community" was often a much more formative experience for writers than was simply reading widely. What memoirs of literacy also show, according to Lorri Neilson's work with school teachers, is that early reading experiences are often associated with maternity, nurturing, and sensuality, and yet learning to read in the academic environment requires linear thinking coupled with a knowledge of rituals, rules, and conventions. As Neilson explains, "in order to survive in school, readers must . . . participate in the larger institutional narrative, or school text" (101), and what was once pleasurable becomes duty.

Do Student Writers Really Need to Read?

Such research into reading-writing connections should help us to understand better our students' sometimes conflicted relationship to both the consumption and production of texts. While "English teachers" (those who teach reading and writing, regardless of their departmental location) do sometimes instill in their students a love of the written word, the practices in required writing courses can sometimes dull a student's desire to read or to write. To quote Linda Brodkey: "composition instruction appears to have succeeded best at establishing a life-long aversion to writing in most people, who have learned to associate a desire to write with a set of punishing exercises called writing in school" (220). In the face of this aversion to writing, different pedagogical approaches have emerged. It seems that many teachers have concluded that they can make students into better writers by helping them find their own voices and by teaching them critical thinking strategies. Or they can make students into better readers, by developing their patterns of comprehension and helping them to identify a text's central concerns and strategies for developing those concerns. But can they do both at once in the same course? To focus too much on reading may be to sacrifice student writing; to focus too much on student writing may be to short-change the process aimed at making students more adept at critical reading of complex texts. This dilemma becomes most difficult for those of us who teach both literature and composition in the same course. In a typical literature survey or theme course, our selection of texts primarily reflects what we want students to *know* about at the end of the course. In a composition course choices are influenced more by what we want students to be able to *do* as the course unfolds. And if the course has been designed so that teaching literature and teaching composition must be integrated, this tension between knowing and doing becomes palpable.

Compositionists themselves have not been without ambivalence toward the importance of reading in improving student writing. We are perhaps most likely to find the writing process privileged to the act of reading in advanced composition and professional writing courses, where students are encouraged to move beyond the conventions of academic writing and where "models" for developing such flexibility may be few. But even in the freshman course in "academic writing," reading may not play as important a role as practicing invention strategies, improving flawed paragraphs, or revising sample sentences. Occasionally, in this context, the question is phrased not as "What shall we read?" but as "Shall we read?" One 1983 text, clearly geared for the "introduction to teaching composition" course, devotes only a page to the problem of assigning what is called "collateral reading."³ The book advises teachers to select an anthology of readings *only* after consciously deciding that students really do need to read in a writing course. Strangely, teachers are offered two, apparently equally acceptable opinions to help them make this decision: Ann Berthoff's that "composing is best nurtured by interpreting texts," and Peter Elbow's that the students' own writing is the only writing they can take seriously. While more recent texts on composition practice, for example Thomas Newkirk's *Nuts and Bolts* and Chris Anson's *Scenarios for Teaching Writing*, give more attention to the selection and use of readings, reading is hardly seen as central to composition courses. Similarly, concern with reading shifts fairly quickly in many recent articles from the motives and goals of reading to a specific concern with teaching students how to synthesize multiple sources or to write research papers: in other words, from why we

should teach reading to how we can teach students to use readings.

How much we make students read has also become a bone of contention among writing teachers. Could too much reading even be counterproductive in the composition classroom? In his essay in *Redrawing the Boundaries: The Transformation of English and American Literary Studies*, Richard Marius argues that we should "agree to teach students how to explain texts, especially texts about ideas" (475), but he also argues that we should "limit the texts that students read and write about in a writing course" to about a hundred pages—which is probably far less reading than most text-oriented composition courses currently require. "Give students too many sources," he claims, and they will produce "falsely authoritative papers about subjects that quickly become too much for them" (476). However well-intentioned, such discussions always leave a lingering suspicion that compositionists are afraid that teachers might spend too much time discussing the readings and too little time having students freewrite or share drafts—the real work of the composition classroom.

Such fears are certainly less about the reading selections themselves than about how both students and teachers use readings in writing courses. And from what most commentators suggest, the problem lies more with the teachers and how they define reading, than with the students themselves. Mariolina Salvatori describes her own evolving response to William Coles's 1974 argument against reading in composition courses: "rather than judging Coles's statement as a blanket and arbitrary indictment of the presence of 'reading' in the composition classroom . . . I began to see that what Coles was indicting was a particularly enervated, atrophied kind of reading," which characterized not just the teaching of composition but the teaching of literature (442). Most composition textbooks have presented students with a definition of reading that emphasizes the reader's mastery and control over the text. Kurt Spellmeyer contends that even though most widely-used composition textbooks encourage active reading, "they still define it as linear, acontextual, monological" (56). As composition studies has emerged as a distinct discipline, some scholars have tried to define reading in more complex and useful ways. For example, David Bartholomae and Anthony Petrosky, in *Facts and Counterfacts: Theory and Method for a Reading and Writing Course* (1986), offer a description of reading as a transformative and constructive process. Rather than asking students to find a "controlling idea" in a text, ask them to "assign significance" to it: "When a student moves to account for the significance of what she has noticed, the competing demands of convention and idiosyncrasy are perhaps most dramatically and illustratively felt" (21). Apparently, when students respond to texts in this way, they can be asked to read more than they can where reading is defined as mastery of the text. In contrast to the 100-page "limit" to which Marius would hold his Harvard freshmen, in the basic writing course that Bartholomae and Petrosky describe, students read six required books and four others they choose on their own. They also read significant amounts of student writing. Not only the amount of reading but the careful integration of student and "professional" forms of writing distinguish this course from the kind of course where texts are assigned so that teachers can "teach for students' understanding of texts and for their ability to convey their understanding to readers" (Marius 476). When we compare the course that Bartholomae and Petrosky describe with the composition course that Marius describes we see two quite different theories of reading emerge. For Bartholomae and Petrosky, reading is part of a complex process of finding ways to respond to ideas and to construct ideas. In contrast, the theory of reading that informs a

course like the one Marius describes seems highly functional: We read to understand, and we write to reflect that understanding. Thus, by asking students to read less, we insure that students will understand more of what they read. This claim seems doubtful, unless students come to understand reading as transactional and understanding as a carefully negotiated process between reader and text.

Literacy and Literature

Decisions about whether to read, how much to read, and what to read are undoubtedly influenced by institutional concerns and insecurities. One writer worries that an insistence on the connections between reading and writing will weaken independent writing programs (Olson 324), while another fears that by removing literature from the writing classroom, English composition courses will become little more than service courses for other disciplines (Tate, "A Place" 320). While many writing programs are located in English departments, where literature is the predominant professional concern, some institutions have moved to freestanding writing programs with administrative and (less often) curricular autonomy. At other institutions, writing courses have sprung up in a variety of departments in the humanities and even the social sciences. Clearly, writing instruction is no longer strictly the province of English departments where literature is privileged over other kinds of writing, including student writing. Yet despite what seems to be a tendency to situate writing courses outside of English departments, many humanists assert not just the interdependence of reading and writing, but the dependence of literature and composition on one another. In *Literacy and the Survival of the Humanities*, Richard Lanham argues that "Literature can never absent itself from the 'real' world, nor composition do without literature and literary criticism"—an idealistic argument frequently belied by institutional structures and attitudes that relegate literature and composition to separate and often unequal realms (111).

As we consider the various arguments about where writing should be taught in the academy and by whom—arguments that often arise in the same context as those about what we should be reading in writing courses—we should probably remember that writing courses, especially those required of all students early in their undergraduate careers, have always had a socializing element, if not explicit goal, in their design. As Susan Miller has shown, the goal of composition instruction in American higher education has historically been to show that good writing is "a matter of politeness and good breeding" (55), and the purpose of the "freshman course" was to "assimilate unentitled, newly admitted students in the late nineteenth century 'new university'" (55,79). Even today, across the nation, the freshman writing course, along with its prerequisite for "underprepared" students, the "basic writing" course, serves as a site where new undergraduates are not only provided with the verbal skills needed for academic success but also made cognizant of the culture and organization of the college or university to which they have been admitted. When, several years ago, the University of California took steps to eliminate on its various campuses the courses that fulfilled the century-old "Subject A" requirement (courses whose "remedial" nature was debated endlessly), one of the main opposing arguments focused on the socializing influence of these courses for "at-risk" students—those first-generation college students who would presumably have no other source for learning how the academic system works. If we consider the freshman course as a tool for leveling the playing field for students whose race, class, or

ethnicity has deprived them in some way, how does this affect our reading selections? Katha Pollitt suggests that for those on either the left or right of the canon debates, "The chief end of reading is to produce a desirable kind of society. A respectful, high-minded citizen of a unified society for the conservatives, an up-to-date and flexible sort for the liberals, a subgroup-identified, robustly confident one for the radicals" (24). If this assertion is even partially true, is it surprising, then, that some composition instructors, who define as their goal a desire to empower each student's written voice (in other words, to "liberate" rather than "produce" students), see reading as beside the point in their classrooms?

Perhaps nowhere is the ideological debate about reading in composition classroom as polarized as in what has come to be known as the "Tate-Lindemann Debate" on the question of whether literature has any role in the freshman English course.⁴ Just as my graduate student instructors defined the freshman course by their textual preferences, so too does this debate about literature in the composition classroom raise questions about the goals and purpose of composition courses.

Lindemann begins by arguing that the focus of the freshman course should be academic discourse, and that literary texts serve no function in providing students with this introduction to, in her words, "the process whereby writers and readers enter the conversation of the academy and begin to contribute to the making of knowledge" ("No Place" 313). And not only is literature irrelevant to the goals of freshman English, it focuses students on the consumption rather than production of texts and silences students' voices. Literary language, with its limited usefulness, is taught not as language to emulate, but as language to appreciate. And finally, she says, a literature-based course neglects the interdisciplinary nature of interpretation. Textuality is more important in the humanities than in other disciplines, and students need to understand what constitutes evidence in other disciplines. Anticipating the humanist's arguments about the value of literature, Lindemann concludes with an exhortation: "Instead of asking our students to write *about* what it means to be educated, let us assist them to join the conversations an education enables" ("No Place" 316).

The tone of Tate's response to Lindemann is elegiac, and his vocabulary—however tongue-in-cheek it is intended to be—evokes images of warfare, bloodshed, and submission. He begins by expressing regret that having surrendered in the 1960s to the "Rhetoric Police" (whom at one point he likens to the KGB), "we have lost most of the texts that body forth that imagination and that style whose passing I mourn" (318). And the loss is not just for teachers, he claims: "We have denied students who are seeking to improve their writing the benefits of reading an entire body of excellent writing" (317). Tate questions the ability of the freshman course—more specifically, perhaps, the ability of those who teach these courses—to provide the interdisciplinary awareness that Lindemann seeks to foster. Why not teach what English teachers know best, he asks? It is not writing across the curriculum that should be our project, he says, but writing beyond the disciplines. In the end he challenges not just Lindemann's assumptions about the goals of freshman English, but her definition of education. "I am convinced," he says, "that true education, as opposed to training, is concerned with much more than we find in the various academic disciplines"—but which we are certain to find in "literature" (321).

I have summarized these arguments in some detail, because they reveal such different views of reading and writing, not only in what they say specifically about reading and writing in the college curriculum, but in the ways they each read and write their own and each other's arguments. As one of my graduate students said after reading these essays, "I knew that I should somehow be persuaded by Lindemann's arguments, but my sympathies remained with Tate." Given the radically different rhetorical strategies of the two essays—for example, the dependence on logic and evidence in the first and the appeal to ethics and emotion in the second—I find it difficult to resolve the differences. Many who have responded to these pieces have been right to see that ideology informs both arguments. The desire to "return" literature to its "rightful place" in the composition classroom is viewed by some as a kind of romantic nostalgia, deeply-entrenched elitism, or both, while to others, the emphasis on "academic discourse" betrays a misguided attempt to "professionalize" the undergraduate curriculum. What seems clear from this debate is that our choices about what texts to read reverberate far beyond the walls of our own classrooms.

While this debate reveals much about the politics of reading, especially the politics of reading literature, it reveals little about the individual experience of the reader who confronts a text. If we accept, as both sides in this debate agree, that a student will experience the literary text differently than, say, the text of another student, why does this happen? What are these differences and how do we account for these differences to ourselves and to our students? The answer to this question moves us beyond the virtues of particular kinds of texts to the nature of all texts in shaping the writer's development. Furthermore, in an age where technology is radically altering our culture, we can hardly afford to see reading as merely the process of decoding of words on a printed page. In fact, we cannot afford to see a "text" as merely the printed word. The "texts" that our students read and write can all be described, in Robert Schole's words, as "places where power and weakness become visible and discussible, where learning and ignorance manifest themselves, where structures that enable and constrain our thoughts and actions become palpable" (*Textual Power* xi). This broader definition of "text" opens us not just to the possibilities for literature in the classroom, but to a wider range of text material than we might have considered before.

Arguing about whether to restore literature to the composition classroom or banish it for good distracts us from perhaps the most important issue about reading we will face in the next century. Even now, students need to learn how to "read" a wider variety of "texts" than ever before. For example, Carolyn Ericksen Hill uses her students' own observations—what she calls their "readings about their worlds"—as an analogy of sorts for the reading process: "Encouraging students to think of their observations as readings to be tested against those of others will help them learn to revise their initial readings" (203, 204). We must recognize that texts are no longer necessarily linear—as "reading" hypertext fiction or surfing the World Wide Web clearly demonstrates. In contrast to the process of review, editing, and marketing that characterizes traditional publishing, publishing on the Web requires little more than technological skills (in other words, the ability to construct an effective web page). Authors can find an audience without having any particular knowledge of the subject or any mastery of the strategies of persuasion. Thus, uncritical reading becomes more dangerous here than anywhere. Issues of power and empowerment, of deception and manipulation, must increasingly become part of the connections between reading and writing in the composition

classroom. Wherever texts are being constructed, issues of voice and authority are always evident. By teaching students how to produce their own readings of a variety of different kinds of texts, we empower them as participants in an ever changing and ever widening conversation. In recognizing the power structures inherent in texts, readers can begin, in Freire's phrase, to "read the world."

What is Reading?

Despite the kinds of rifts and rivalries that exist between "literature" and "composition," both disciplines have shared over the last half century a similarly evolving view of textuality. As Martin Nystrand, Stuart Greene, and Jeffrey Wiemelt show in their "intellectual history" of Composition Studies, parallel concerns about the problem of meaning in discourse have characterized the development of linguistics, literary theory, and composition during the last half century. All three fields have evolved through four distinct phases: from formalist conceptions of the text as autonomous; to constructivism's understanding of the text as a translation of the author's thoughts; to the social constructionist's view that the text is a set of discourse conventions; and finally, to a dialogic view of the text as representative of a semiotic meditation between writer and reader. Along with these changing notions of the text have come changing definitions of reader and writer and even of language itself (302). Thus, it is not just compositionists but literary critics as well who see meaning not as residing in the text, but as generated in a dynamic that involves the text with both readers and a social context. As a result, the focus in both literature and composition studies has "shifted away from elite text forms to far more blurred genres increasingly associated with popular culture and the everyday social world" (305). Rethinking the nature and value of texts has made both compositionists and literary critics rethink the act of reading.

Most of us will agree that not all readings are the same, even of the same text. Whether we accept that each text will produce a diversity of interpretations, or insist that some readings are more "correct" than others, we must also recognize the inevitability of misreadings, which occur within the same dynamic process that more "correct" or "convincing" readings do. So what are the differences in these different ways of reading? Kathleen McCormick, in *The Culture of Reading and the Teaching of English*, offers three broad models of reading that help us to understand the ways in which readers approach the act of reading. Each model recognizes the roles of reader, text, and social context in the reading process, but the dynamic relationship among these roles differs from model to model. The "cognitive model" of reading, which has, according to McCormick, long dominated our thinking about reading, assumes that reading comprehension "occurs as a result of a reader's purely 'mental' capabilities" (17). The cognitive model describes reading as a hierarchy of abstract skills developed in readers in order to help them produce a correct reading of a text. In contrast, the "expressivist model" of reading privileges the reader's experience in the reading process. The goal of expressivist reading is not, then, to offer a correct reading of a text, but to "give students the authority to create their own texts" by integrating the perspectives of the text with their own experiences (38). The cognitive and expressivist models of reading clearly stand in dialectical opposition to one another.

McCormick's third model, the "social-cultural model" of reading, moves beyond the printed

text and sees reading as a process that occurs all the time and in all kinds of contexts. This model of reading describes the reader as "balanced between autonomy [of the sort claimed by the expressivist model] and social determination [a result of reading according to the cognitive model]" (52). The goal of reading is thus to produce a "negotiated version" of the text. As teachers, we hope to cultivate students who can "develop more historicized self-reflective and resistant readings of texts, and thus become more active producers of texts" (52). In McCormick's analysis, the social-cultural model of reading seems the model most likely to produce what she calls "critical literacy": "the ability to perceive the interconnectedness of social conditions and practices, and to possess the critical and political awareness to take action within and against them" (49). And yet, oddly, McCormick stops short of advocacy: "I am not arguing for the wholesale takeover of the other models by this model, but rather for the active development of genuine dialogue among all approaches" (14). What McCormick seems to be suggesting in this disclaimer is that even a social-cultural model of reading can hardly avoid the essential issue of reading comprehension—an issue privileged in the cognitive model and minimized in the expressivist model. It might even be useful to see the categories that McCormick defines as progressively more sophisticated ways of reading that we can encourage students to develop over time.

These categories clearly have important implications for course design. In describing the historical development of three different models of writing in composition courses, Erika Lindemann uses categories that are strikingly similar to those McCormick devises to describe reading. These models of writing help Lindemann to answer broader questions about course design: who is the teacher? who is the student? what should students read? what should they write? and how should their writing be evaluated? By understanding how teachers with different theoretical perspectives understand the writing process, we can begin, Lindemann suggests, to understand something about the goals of different kinds of freshman composition courses.

Each theory of "writing" evokes a similar theory of "reading," and in turn, dictates specific choices about what to read in composition courses. In a "writing as product" course, the focus is on texts, both "professional" texts (preferably literary texts) and student texts. In this environment, the professional texts exist as a source of ideas and as stylistic models for the student texts, which in turn are created to demonstrate the student's proficiency in "forms, formulas, terminology, and rules" ("Three Views" 293). Lindemann's second model, "writing as process," focuses on student experience and student interests. This view of writing focuses not on the forms and conventions of a final product but on invention, practice, revision, and the community of writers such a classroom creates. While occasionally published texts help students to understand subjects or processes, student texts take center stage in a classroom based on this theory of writing. In Lindemann's third model (which, like McCormick's third model of reading, seems to transcend the weaknesses of the other two models), "writing as system," the process of writing is contextualized: "a way of living in social groups, of interacting with others and having them interact with us" (296). Working collaboratively, students read texts from a variety of disciplinary perspectives and practice creating texts of their own, designed to inform or persuade members of different discourse communities. According to Lindemann, teachers who create courses based on this definition of writing "have helped us direct writing back into the world, reminding us of the social context of all

rhetorical activity" (299).

Thus, what we ask students to read in our courses reflects both our theories of reading and our theories of writing. How we want students to see themselves as writers will influence our choices about the tasks we give them as writers. Significantly, both McCormick and Lindeman insist that these categories are not mutually exclusive, rather that different ways of reading or of describing writing may be appropriate in different contexts and for different purposes. The question, then, is how we can help students to recognize their own patterns and preferences as readers, their own needs and concerns as writers.

Theories of Reading for the Writing Classroom

For the students, an understanding of different models of reading must be developed deliberately and consciously. Students can be told how readers read, but until they really understand reading from the inside out, such advice will have little impact on how they structure and develop their own texts. In *Thinking Through Theory*, James Thomas Zebroski has proposed that one goal of any writing course should be for the students themselves "to compose and revise a theory of writing" (29). If we want our students to recognize that reading and writing are interconnected processes, it seems only logical that the goal of a composition course should also be to help students compose a theory of reading—or perhaps more specifically to compose *theories* of reading that will help them to understand their relationship to the act of reading in different contexts.

First, our students need to understand that as readers they are always actively constituting meaning, not just receiving information. Reader-response theories of the text offer the advantage of allowing us to ignore the increasingly artificial distinction between literary and non-literary texts and focus instead on how a text is read. We begin to see that each text inscribes the roles of reader and audience and provides clues to ways in which the social context of reading and writing can be used to construct meaning. Louise Rosenblatt's widely-disseminated distinction between efferent reading, where the reader's primary concern in the act of reading is what he will carry away from the reading, and aesthetic reading, where the reader's attention is centered directly on what he is living through during his relationship with the text, helps us to see how both literary and non-literary texts might be read in the same way. Furthermore, by making our student readers more aware of their own experience of reading, we can make them better aware of the ways in which their own texts communicate.

Second, our students should recognize that their expectations of a text often shape their responses to it. Audience-oriented explanations of the reading process remind us that what readers know and believe and what they have been told about texts determine in large part how they respond to a text. In our classrooms, we often "frame" readings in this way. If a reader has been told that a text is "serious art" or "great literature," he or she will either look for affirmation of that in the text, or challenge that claim in the process of reading. English majors in my upper-level literature courses have often confirmed this reaction, questioning why a particular work belongs (or does not belong) to the "canon" that my course defines. To read not by the measure of what "should" be read, but to ask how and why readers interpret texts often allows us to give new value to texts that have been overlooked and to find a new

intertextual basis for relationships between texts. Michael Kearns has suggested that if our goal in using literature in our courses is to teach students to be critical readers, texts that have been seen as having slight literary value (in other words, that have been only minor texts in the canon) may well have great value in the critical reading skills they cultivate. When we focus on *how to read* rather than on *what to read*, we begin to judge the texts we select by a different standard. Historically overlooked texts can be brought into the curriculum not because they provide some requisite diversity of perspectives, but because they help students understand why diversity is an issue in the first place.

Third, as teachers we must decide why we want students to read a particular text, and we must communicate that purpose explicitly. That our motives may be various—and that different texts offer students a different piece of the puzzle that is reading and writing—is without doubt, and we should make those differences clear in the way we present texts to students. We must do more than merely provide students with clues that help them contextualize a text. We must help students understand for themselves what we may not always fully understand ourselves: how specific kinds reading and writing relate, how they are alike and how they are different.

At the same time, we can hardly define reading as an act vested solely in the reader and expect our student writers to find that useful to them in producing texts. The problem with reader-oriented theories in the composition classroom is that of indeterminacy of meaning. Theories that explain how texts are received by readers do not always sufficiently explain how texts are produced (Brodkey 227). Doug Brent tackles this problem in *Reading as Rhetorical Invention*. By adding to audience-oriented definitions of reading an awareness of the rhetorical context in which reading takes place, we can see that, in Brent's words, "the reading process is a delicate balance between the sources of constructive freedom and forces that seek to constrain meaning" (44). According to Brent, the writer must manipulate a text "according to his best estimate of the reader's repertoire and situation" (45). Writing, in this description, follows from a desire for communication that reader and writer share. By learning to recognize and analyze this "delicate balance," our students will gain a more profound insight into the production of texts and the control of meaning—insight that cannot help but make them more effective writers. Reading and writing become recursive, reciprocal, and mutually dependent acts.

Reading and writing are, quite simply, different, albeit complementary, ways of knowing the world. By reading, we enter into a social conversation that enables us to shape our own thoughts and give voice to our own readings of the world through writing. Critical reading involves more than just understanding a text, though clearly basic comprehension must precede critical reading. As we read we must be able to assess bias, to articulate opposing viewpoints, to evaluate strengths and weaknesses, and to make judgments about texts. We want to recognize when conventions are followed and when they are subverted. We also want to be open to the play of connotation and the persuasive power of words in a text.

We must explore precisely *how* we ask students to respond to texts. Many teachers of writing have inherited from their origins as students of literature an approach to "discussion" that rarely moves beyond putting students in a circle and asking them what they thought or felt

about what they read. In my own classroom and in observing the classrooms of others, I have rarely seen this approach work well, especially when there are more than about fifteen students in a class (which is almost always the case), and when the students are racially and ethnically diverse. Student resistance is too easy to overlook; too many voices remain silent. Open-ended and narrow questions alike often lead to passivity or puzzlement. In short, we need to be as creative in cultivating reading skills as we are in developing writing ability. Indeed, oral and written responses to texts feed one another, and students who respond first in writing, either in class or outside of class, usually respond better orally. In the questions we ask and the "classroom activities" we suggest, we must remember that we are not just soliciting information, thoughts, or answers but modeling for our students the questions that experienced critical readers ask when they engage texts. Prompts for written responses need to be flexible enough that a student can find something to say, and yet precise enough that students are guided toward a useful response to the text. Asking students to articulate not only their initial responses but their reflections on those responses guides them toward "recursive and self-monitoring readings" (Salvatori 449). Small groups generate effective responses to texts, if a task has been defined clearly, and if groups share their responses with the rest of the class. Technology—specifically, real-time conferencing tools like *Aspects* or *Daedalus Interchange*—provides us with new ways to hear and respond to student voices and to engage them in dialogue with each other.

What are some of the ways we would like students to read, and how can texts—and responses to texts—help us to cultivate these ways of reading?

Reading to build an intellectual repertoire

Reading is above all else a way of knowing the world. An intellectual repertoire is, quite simply, all the knowledge of the world that we bring to any encounter with a text. Reading widely helps students to build their own repertoires of intellectual resources that will enable them to respond more fully to subsequent texts. One reason for the growing popularity of "thematic" writing courses, writing courses paired with courses in other disciplines, and writing courses situated in cultural studies programs is that such approaches allow us easily and rapidly to create an intellectual repertoire that students share. Text selection is simplified by organizing all the reading and writing around a theme. But even in the absence of such a unifying theme, we can encourage students to read widely and collect ideas that interest them, and to keep a writer's journal or "clipping file." We want students to sharpen their engagement with the world around them, so that they can in turn confront the texts they read with substantial resources, and we can do so by making them partly responsible for identifying relevant "texts." In short, we want to use reading and responses to reading to make students active participants in a larger conversation. And conversation, as Charles Bazerman explains, "requires absorption of what prior speakers have said, consideration of how earlier comments relate to the responder's thoughts, and a response framed to the situation and the responder's purposes" (48-49). To seize such "conversational opportunities" poses greater challenges but offers more profound rewards than does merely mastering a certain number of texts (53).

Reading for ambiguity

Ann Berthoff has argued that the first priority of writers is learning "to tolerate chaos," while the first priority of readers is "learning to tolerate ambiguity" (110). By negotiating chaos and ambiguity—and by recognizing the differences between intentional and unintentional ambiguity—both readers and writers construct meaning; and in recognizing the chaotic and ambiguous nature of communication, students gain greater flexibility in constructing meaning as readers and writers. Reading drafts in carefully constructed peer response settings may provide students with the best understanding of how coherent, forceful texts emerge from chaos and ambiguity. Reading and responding to drafts as readers constructing meaning, not as editors spotting errors, is a process that forces students to see chaos in a text not as merely a "problem" to be corrected, but as possibilities to be opened up. Similarly, when they confront professional texts of one sort or another they need to see difficulty not as something to which they must surrender if they cannot master it, but as a way that a text engages a reader's participation or opens itself to greater significance.

Reading for the unexpected

I may choose a particular text because it can teach my student readers the skills of what Donald Murray calls "reading for surprise" or "reading for the unexpected." Some texts help readers to see the ways that writers manipulate a reader's expectations. Murray describes the process of reading as "constantly passing between the particular and the general." In reading, he explains, "I match the vision of the whole to the implication of the particular" (13). For the most part student readers are not especially open to "follow[ing] an unexpected, significant meaning," because they have little experience in identifying their expectations, except in a vague and inexplicit way (16). Students must be shown how to articulate with some precision what they expect to find in a text, and how to distinguish between what Murray calls the general and the specific. By showing students texts that identify and respond to reader's expectations in various ways—including texts that deliberately subvert readers' expectations—we can open them to new possibilities about how to read and write.

Reading for the play of language

Students need to recognize how connotation, metaphor, tone, and diction influence our responses to a text. Imaginative literature or literary non-fiction may be the obvious choices to illustrate the play of language, but they are by no means the only or even the best choices to help students read for the linguistic or stylistic features of texts. In some courses I have had much success in using court cases to show how writers develop analogies or define words to constrict or expand meaning. We can also use more mundane cultural texts—advertising rhetoric, political speech, popular culture—to help students discern the power of language to shape perceptions, to evoke feelings, and to persuade. Transcriptions of interviews, court testimony, or oral histories, as well as dialogue in fiction, can help students negotiate the differences between written and oral uses of language. Using texts representing different genres and styles may help us to illustrate differences in diction and word choice that characterize different authors' approaches to similar problems.

Reading for strategies of persuasion

We can also use readings to help students to recognize the relationship between argument and evidence and to appreciate more fully the ways in which knowledge is made in different communities. Providing students with texts that demonstrate different viewpoints on the same issue or topic will be most valuable in this regard. To focus on the play of opposing viewpoints allows us, once again, to choose texts from a variety of genres and styles. If we use literature in the writing classroom, we should help students understand how their own interpretations are part of a larger conversation about the texts we offer them. One argument against using literature in the writing classroom points to the persistence of New Critical approaches that presume a literary text provides all the clues to its own interpretation. As Gerald Graff has so eloquently argued, we ought to introduce students to critical debates earlier rather than later in their reading of literature. As he explains, "Choosing a topic that interests you or making an effective argument depends on what *other people* are saying, of what the state of the discussion is." He shows how, as a student, exposure to what critics had said helped him to articulate his ideas and to "enjoy" literature more: "Relation to a community made the intimacy of literary experience possible" (43). Rather than confounding or intimidating novice readers of literature, exposure to critical debates helps students to find their own voices. In general, when we use issue-oriented or thematic texts of one sort or another we can help students see how reading helps them to define and shape controversies.

Reading for genre conventions

While genre, especially in literary studies, has typically meant a concern with the formal characteristics and consequent categorization of texts, more recent explorations of the concept of genre, especially in rhetoric and linguistics, have addressed what might be called the "textual dynamics" of discourse communities (see Berkenkotter and Huckin). Knowledge of genre conventions as well as the ability to discern conventions from observable patterns of texts in discourse communities give readers access to varied conversations. In our advanced composition and professional writing courses, we might choose texts that demonstrate the conventions of one particular discipline, or for that matter of a range of disciplines. By emphasizing genre conventions, we can teach students how to identify characteristics of discourse in distinct communities. In freshman-level courses questions as simple as the differences between newspaper articles and scholarly essays can introduce students to the concept and uses of genre conventions.

"Reading" experience

The engaged, critical relationship that we want students to cultivate with written texts might be encouraged through the use of other kinds of texts: photographs, films, music, oral history. The goal here is to help students understand response as a transactional and dialectical relationship between "text" and other. Observing and reflecting on experiences may even provide useful models or metaphors for critical reading. Asking students to observe and take notes about a place or event and then respond to that text, or asking them to freewrite about some personal experience and respond to that text helps them to move from summary to analysis and to negotiate the varying roles that readers and writers must adopt in different situations. Reading and writing thus become reciprocal processes.

While no one course could possibly explore all these ways of reading, identifying our own emphases and goals in particular kinds of writing courses will help us to explain the reading experience and to choose texts that illustrate that experience. Students in our courses will be formulating their own theories of reading, accounting for the demands and challenges as well as the rewards of negotiating meaning and developing critical literacy. As a teacher, whatever theories of reading inform a particular course, and whatever my own motives for assigning a particular text, my overarching goal is to demonstrate the variety of ways in which readers and writers negotiate meaning. Critical readers—the kind of readers we would like our students to become—are those who know how to engage a text, any text, in conversation: to ask appropriate questions. This is ultimately a task that involves knowing not just what questions to ask, but why these questions are appropriate and productive. A writer who has learned to be a critical reader is aware of the ways in which texts anticipate a reader's expectations. By communicating theories of reading to our students and by helping them to formulate their own theories of reading, we will cultivate critical readers in our composition classrooms—critical readers who transport this ability into the world beyond our classrooms.

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Notes

¹ I confess to having taken some dramatic license in recreating the student responses recounted here. At the same time, I wish to acknowledge the many ways in which the graduate student instructors help me to shape my own thinking about what happens in the composition classroom. I served as a program administrator at the University of California, Davis from 1990-1995. These graduate students, all M.A. or Ph.D. students in creative writing or literature, begin their teaching careers at U.C. Davis by teaching a freshman course in expository writing. In this department, the debate about literature in the composition classroom was resolved decades ago by creating two separate but equal freshman composition courses. In English 1, Expository Writing, literary texts are strictly forbidden by course guidelines, although more subversive instructors and administrators have found ways to sneak it in. In English 3, Introduction to Literature, "literature" is defined as poetry, drama, and fiction, and non-fiction is banned. Undergraduates may take either course to fulfill their lower-division writing requirement.

² See, for example, Mary Vroman Battle (freshman do not appear to absorb reading skills as a function of learning to write); Sherrie L. Nist and Ruth C. Sabol, (notes contrasts in reading and writing skills); Peter Smagorinsky (simply reading models is insufficient to teach young readers how to produce compositions).

³ David Foster, *A Primer for Writing Teachers: Theories, Theorists, Issues, Problems*: "An anthology of readings should be chosen only after the teacher has asked a fundamental question: do students need to read as well as write in a writing course?" (133-134). The author also notes that readings serve two main purposes: offering rhetorical and stylistic strategies to "imitate," and stimulating students' exploration of the "subject matter." I do not mean to be more critical than necessary of this particular text. But it does seem shocking to me that given

the amount of time, energy, and money devoted to the textbook industry in this country, so little attention is paid in books targeted for novice teachers to guidelines for evaluating and selecting textbooks.

⁴ This "debate" began at a session of the 1992 Conference on College Communication and Composition in Cincinnati and was subsequently published in *College English* 55 (1993): 311-321. *College English* has since published not only a number of responses to Tate's and Lindemann's original essays (55 [1994]: 585-590; 55 [1994]: 666-679), but also a "symposium" on literature in the composition classroom (57 [1995]: 266-318). After this last flurry of essays on the subject, Erwin R. Steinberg of Carnegie Mellon proposed editing a book on the question of literature in the classroom. According to a letter he sent me in August 1995, his call for papers had produced few papers and no real debate emerged, since most of the papers argued for including literature.

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