

# Afterword

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We are deeply honored to be participating in this innovative collaboration—what amounts to a scholarly, multi-volume summit meeting on the state of reading instruction in America. These two volumes contain front-line news reports from across the nation written by teachers seeking innovative ways to make reading instruction more effective, more vital, and more transformative for students. It is rare in our discipline to see two books—companion volumes—developed collaboratively on the same subject, and this obviously speaks to a renewed interest in theorizing reading as foundational for any kind of understanding of academic learning and meaning-making. Both of these volumes theorize reading and writing as collaborative, generative, powerful forms of thinking and reflection—and when teachers do their work well, reading and writing become forms of deep thinking, exploration, and meaning-making. Increasingly in our discipline, reading ability is acknowledged as essential to the development of strong writers. Our book is entitled *Deep Reading: Teaching Reading in the Writing Classroom* (2017), and it was developed collaboratively with Alice, Deborah, and Cynthia. The full table of contents is provided below.

Although it may appear at first glance that these two volumes focus primarily on college-level concerns and practices, in a variety of significant ways they also focus considerable attention on the still largely unexplored intellectual and pedagogical spaces, gaps, and interstices between high school and college. There is a great deal of “news,” wisdom, and current research contained in these two volumes that English teachers at all levels of instruction can benefit from, especially grades 6–13. As we know, college readiness and issues related to articulation have been central concerns for our discipline for many years now. These two volumes address this issue directly by theorizing a new approach to reading, writing, and creative and critical thinking for the 21<sup>st</sup> century, one that deliberately counters the reductive, instrumentalist approach to reading embodied in standardized testing regimes like the Common Core. Furthermore, these two volumes theorize *the teaching of reading* as a pedagogical activity essential to teaching practices across all disciplines and all grade levels. The primary goal of these two volumes, following reading scholar and Global Teacher Prize recipient Nancie Atwell (2007), is very

ambitious, indeed: To help nurture skilled, passionate, habitual, critical, creative, and joyful readers across all grade levels and especially across institutional boundaries in America's high schools and colleges.

We began our work on this project with a great sense of urgency. Data suggest that America is currently experiencing what might be described as a reading crisis. Many students in America appear to be reluctant, unhappy, and unskilled readers. Kelly Gallagher (2009) has famously suggested that reading as it is now taught in school systems across the nation has produced a condition that he calls "readicide"—"the systematic killing of the love of reading, often exacerbated by the inane, mind-numbing practices found in schools" (p. 2). Much of this is the result of the central place that standardized testing now occupies in primary and secondary school systems, the reductive way that standardized tests theorize the act of reading, and the increasing unwillingness among legislators and powerful philanthropists to use disciplinary knowledge to inform teaching practices and goals. Our two books actively seek to address these problems.

Ominously, as Elizabeth Wardle (2012) has suggested, current reading instruction in school systems—driven by standardized testing—appears to promote superficial kinds of cognitive engagement. We find Wardle's distinction between "problem-exploring dispositions" and "answer-getting dispositions" particularly important in this regard. Problem-exploring dispositions, Wardle suggests, "incline a person toward curiosity, reflection, consideration of multiple possibilities, a willingness to engage in a recursive process of trial and error, and toward a recognition that more than one solution can 'work'" (Problem-Exploring vs. Answer-Getting Dispositions section, para. 1). Answer-getting dispositions "seek right answers quickly and are averse to open consideration of multiple possibilities" (Problem-Exploring vs. Answer-Getting Dispositions section, para. 1). These dispositions are created primarily through the approach to reading we privilege in our classrooms. Wardle concludes that

the steady movement toward standardized testing and tight control of educational activities by legislators is producing and reproducing answer-getting dispositions in educational systems and individuals and that this movement is more than a dislike for the messiness of deep learning; rather, it can be understood as an attempt to limit the kind of thinking that students and citizens have the tools to do. (The State of Current Educational Dispositions section, para. 5)

The work we have undertaken in these two volumes can thus be theorized as activist in nature, seeking to nurture skills and dispositions that will help further democratic ideals and the development of a reflective, thoughtful, independent citizenry. Like Wardle, we regard this work as a high stakes enterprise. As it turns out, and each

in their own way, the contributors in these two volumes all actively promote reading practices in the classroom that nurture creative and critical thinking, flexibility, curiosity, open-mindedness, metacognition, and problem-exploring dispositions.

In many important ways, our work on these two volumes devoted to reading is a continuation of our series of books focused on college-level writing: *What Is “College-Level” Writing?* (2006) and *What Is “College-Level” Writing? Volume 2: Assignments, Readings, and Student Writing Samples* (2010). As we note in the introduction to our book, we would like to suggest—after many years of reflection and research on the complex question that frames these two books: “What is ‘college-level’ writing?”—that reading must be theorized as foundationally linked to any understanding of writing. A great deal is at stake, therefore, as we seek to deepen our understanding of the vital role that reading plays in teaching and learning in the writing classroom.

We cheer the serious and thoughtful approach taken in this volume toward reading at the college-level, a subject that too often has been ignored by higher education scholars. The assumption by many college faculty today is that teaching reading is the responsibility of K–12 teachers. As advances in neuroscience have shed light on the development of the human brain over an individual’s life course—and the impact of reading on that development—more and more college faculty have recently begun to pay attention to reading in the college classroom. If, as Maryanne Wolfe (2007) and other researchers attest, reading changes a brain, then it is the responsibility of all educators, K through 16 and beyond, to actively nurture that transformative process. In that spirit, we deeply appreciate Brian Gogan’s focus in this volume on reading as more than a mechanical, skills-based exercise, but one that is instead deeply transformative, both of the reader and of the reader’s understanding of the world. We are reminded of Paulo Freire and Donaldo Macedo’s (1987) revelatory aphorism: reading the word equates to reading the world—effecting self-improvement while assisting in political and social change (p. 29).

In addition to the insightful approach to reading as a transformative subject, this collection does us all a great service by reminding us of a crucial fact: that reading instruction needs to take into account the institutional and disciplinary differences when readings are assigned and taught. Community college faculty, for example, will appreciate Jennifer Maloy, Beth Counihan, Joan Dupre, Susan Madera, and Ian Beckford’s contribution, which focuses on reading and reading pedagogy at a diverse, open-admission, urban community college. Ildikó Melis’s essay about teaching reading at a two-year tribal college—serving a geographically isolated, low-income, rural student population—offers another important perspective related to institutional and disciplinary diversity that has been largely ignored in our scholarship. As Melis notes, “In the less privileged institutions of higher education, the students’ reading experiences tend to be more limited.”

Moreover, we are grateful that the editors of this collection take as perhaps

their most fundamental understanding of reading pedagogy the fact that responsibility for reading instruction must be actively engaged across the curriculum by teachers from all disciplines. Teaching reading at the college level simply can no longer be theorized ever again as simply the responsibility of one department (English) or one course (first-year composition). This important work must be theorized and practiced much more broadly and inclusively across disciplines. Creating a college curriculum suffused with rich, vibrant reading assignments—augmented with instruction focused on how to read these different kinds of texts—must be the concern of all faculty, both in college and in high school. The essays included in this volume make the case for this kind of approach to reading across the curriculum—and reading instruction across the curriculum—with great eloquence and power. Mary Lou Odom’s essay, for example, reports on a research project that revealed three foundational principles essential for supporting a reading-instruction-across-the-disciplines approach to teaching reading:

First, faculty must recognize ways in which they impact student reading behavior—beyond assigning texts or writing related to texts. Second, faculty must articulate to students their goals for student reading. Third, faculty must be willing to provide guidance for students reading complex, discipline-specific texts that may look quite different from much of the reading that has occupied their textual lives until this point.

Laura J. Davies’s essay in this volume offers a fascinating case study approach for how this pedagogical practice might be accomplished in one specific discipline, the science classroom. Readers may be surprised to see how deliberately and carefully Davies instructs students to read different kinds of texts frequently encountered in the science classroom: 1. the popular science trade book and magazine article; 2. the science textbook; and 3. the empirical research article published in a peer-reviewed journal. As Davies notes, “Scholars who study the rhetoric of science have long argued that scientific writing and scientific research are neither “objective” nor “detached” (Kuhn, 1962; Gross, 1990; Bazerman, 1988). Rather, scientific knowledge is produced through persuasion and shifting social structures and relationships.” This is precisely the kind of patient, careful, discipline-specific reading instruction we’d like to see practiced across disciplines.

Creating a climate of support for reading across the curriculum poses significant challenges and requires concerted effort, as Pam Hollander, Maureen Shamgochian, Douglas Dawson, Margaret Pray Bouchard attest in their essay. Allies abound for this effort, including composition colleagues such as Chris Anson, whose essay here examines the fundamental relationship between writing and reading.

We celebrate this collaboration, and we are deeply thankful for the honor of being able to work closely with Alice, Deborah, and Cynthia on this project. As

Maryanne Wolf (2007) has noted, reading “changes who we are” and “what we imagine we can be” (p. 8). Our books are both dedicated to precisely this transformative process—and providing it systematically to students across all grade levels and across all institutional boundaries.

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