

Guest Editors' Introduction

Guest Editing as a Form of Disciplinary Probing

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1986. New Orleans. The Conference on College Composition and Communication. The two of us and Elaine O. Lees are presenting on a panel titled "Reader-Response Theory and the Teaching of Writing: The Teacher as Responding Reader." Our titles? Salvatori: "Some Implications of Iser's Theory of Reading for the Teaching of Writing." Donahue: "Barthes and the Obtuse Reader." Lees: "Is There an Error in This Text? What Stanley Fish's Theory of Reading Implies about the Teaching of English."

There was something special about the Conference on College Composition and Communication that year, especially for anyone concerned about reading. A few books had already been published: *Composition and Literature: Bridging the Gap*, edited by Winfred Bryan Horner (1983); *Writing and Reading Differently*, edited by G. Douglas Atkins and Michael Johnson (1985); *Only Connect*, edited by Thomas Newkirk (1986); and *Convergences: Transactions in Reading and Writing*, edited by Bruce T. Peterson (1986). More appeared to be on the way, for instance, *Reclaiming Pedagogy: The Rhetoric of the Classroom*, edited by Patricia Donahue and Ellen Quandahl (1989). *College English* and *College Composition and Communication* were brimming with provocative investigations. Interest in reading was, paradoxically, both burgeoning and at its apex, which we came to recognize only in retrospect. Over the next few years, while we and a few others (most notably David Bartholomae, Elizabeth Flynn, Joseph Harris, David Jolliffe, Kathleen McCormick, Susan Miller, Thomas Newkirk, and Donna Qualley)

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continued to think and speak about reading's interconnection with writing and the pedagogical advantages of teaching them as interconnected, the crowds thinned. At a convention a few years after the New Orleans one, we were scheduled for a small, out-of-the-way space, which we remember being named the Outback Room (whether or not it was is beside the point). Reading had had its moment. That moment was over.

While work on reading continued to be delivered and published, it was obvious that new topics had seized the professional imagination. As composition began to articulate its contours and separate itself further and further from literary studies, scholar-teachers seemed to find categories like cultural studies and literacy more provocative, or generative, or rewarding—more socially committed than the supposedly rarefied reader-response, hermeneutical, and reception theories. This is not to say that reading disappeared altogether, but it did seem to take a backseat to other kinds of disciplinary construction. Was it because capturing meandering reading processes was difficult, or risky, or suspect? Or perhaps, as we have argued elsewhere, the importance of reading to the teaching of writing was to many so obvious, so vivid, that it could be taken for granted? Reading? Check.

In many respects this special issue is, as has been much of our collaborative work over the past few years, an attempt to come to terms with, to understand in constructive and theoretical ways, why reading acquired such visibility only then to fall into relative neglect. Of course, over these years reading has always been “there,” whether “there” is the classroom or the book or the journal or the Internet. Recently, in one of the always lively discussions that take place on the Writing Program Administrators electronic mailing list, several have forcefully stated that, yes, of course reading has to be taught, of course reading cannot be taken for granted, of course students can only improve as writers when they improve as readers. But, we feel, the question of how the teaching of reading should change to achieve these results needs more sustained attention.

Fortunately, alongside these claims of the “always already” and the unquestionable imbrication of reading and writing is heard another chorus of voices, of those who feel the need to rethink and reconceptualize how teaching can mine that imbrication. To do so, several contributors draw upon the theoretical work on reading published in the 1980s and 1990s. A few are thinking, as others did before them, about reading as a function of interpretation or meaning making. Considerations about the interconnection of reading and writing that ignited the work in the 1980s are not ignored in their work. In fact, they yoke them, productively, with other matters of concern, the

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vagaries of transfer, for example, and of course the impact of the digital on literacy. In addition, some contributors expose and address the significant gaps or absences of reading in writing workshops and in writing centers and the erasure of reading within the rhetorical tradition of *imitatio*.

Our purpose in assembling these diverse approaches to reading and writing, and in using this introduction as an occasion for framing, is not to draw conclusions about what *reading* currently means, or what scholarship in reading should do, or which understanding of reading should be valued above others. The articles offered here represent a wide range of interests, motivations, and approaches. Different as they are, certain words reoccur throughout them, though they are made to work in contrasting ways (*transfer* is a case in point). Individually and collectively, these articles register the presence of various trends within disciplinary and pedagogical sites, trends that we hope the readers of this issue will find meaningful and generative, so that the discussion of reading can be widened further by asking such questions as, what do these trends urge us to consider about our disciplinary commitments within English studies (a category that can be understood to include composition studies, rhetoric, literary studies, literacy studies, media studies, digital studies, visual studies, and more)? Which investments need to be made to adequately educate an increasingly variegated population of students? Which specific theoretical assumptions and practices need to be reexamined so that we do not inadvertently penalize those who cannot yet know what they may need to know?

In our call for papers, we described this issue as a “re-turn to reading.” We all know that a “re-turn” is never an exact duplication but always a resurgence or duplication or reentry (a new turn) into the new of what seems familiar but is really not (and thus may pass unnoticed). Repetition, the saying goes, is always “with a difference.” In our call for papers, we put this “re-turn”—and cast our net—in the following way:

As exciting as we find this re-turn of interest, we can't help but ask why it has occurred, which needs it fulfills, what significance it might have for the discipline at large. In particular, we want to ask, how does the current turn to reading figure students—their interests, their needs, their strengths, their investments?

For this special issue of *Pedagogy*, we welcome submissions from both established and new scholars in any field who are interested in examining reading's “re-turn” by considering questions such as the following. What does this return of interest (repetition? renewal?) suggest and reveal about how reading has been taught, and how it might or should be taught? What, if anything, does it suggest about the

reciprocally reflexive relationship that might exist between reading and writing, and its potential advantage for teaching both reading and writing in college classrooms? What has made reading's "invisibility" newly noticeable? What possibilities for the study of reading might this revival point to and open up? How is reading constructed in different ways in different fields? Where should those interested in reading now turn in order to move the conversation forward? And what, in each case, is meant by the word *reading*?

The submissions we received, and those we accepted, are heterogeneous. The different genres and methods they deploy make visible and articulate the complex relationship between reading and writing in different ways and for different purposes. Each article tackles one aspect of the interconnection, brought into focus by a particular theoretical lens. As we read them, we see them not in competition with each other but, although none of the contributors might have expected this to happen, as building on one another to highlight the difficulty of pinpointing, of freezing the complexity of a relationship that resists being reduced to this or that. The articles, each in its own way, set up that difficulty as an argument for further and continuous exploration.

A few words about sequence. While we have not classified these articles in an explicit way, we do imagine them as falling within four loose groupings, each emphasizing a particular concept, with numerous crossovers among and between. We encourage our readers to perceive more links and conversations among the articles.

For the first group of articles, the dominant concept is *transfer*, a term that has acquired considerable currency and persuasive power in composition studies in recent years. The two articles in this group, by Ellen C. Carillo and by Tara Lockhart and Mary Soliday, construct *transfer* in different ways, in a rich demonstration of how theories are modified and constructed in light of practice or, to put the idea differently, as a demonstration of the degree to which one's understanding of practice shapes one's understanding and choice of theory: theory and practice in these articles exist in mutual reciprocity.

The second group is loosely organized around ideas of erasure. These articles identify different sites where, for various reasons, attention to reading has seemed to disappear. For Elizabeth Kalbfleisch, this site is the rhetorical tradition of *imitatio*. In its earlier incarnations, *imitatio* was a practice both of writing and of reading, but over the years its relationship to reading was lost, leading to considerable impoverishment of our understanding of *imitatio* and of the reading-writing interaction as the "unified field theory" that many

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compositionists have long been searching for. Michael Bunn also addresses a meaningful absence, a result not as much of loss as of misrecognition: the failure, within writing workshops, to recognize the critical relationship of reading to writing. Bunn's article not only makes a persuasive case for the implicit inclusion of reading in workshops but also offers a twist on the conventional workshop practice by suggesting how the work of published writers can provide an opportunity for the kind of insightful reading that leads to insightful revision. Finally, G. Travis Adams examines the erasure of reading within writing centers, the increasing number of students who are asking for assistance in reading, and what this means for how writing centers represent their work to themselves and others: does the inclusion of reading suggest that a center is more about learning than about writing? For the writing centers that are successfully integrating reading and writing, why have their successes not entered the scholarly conversation? What kind of reading (in terms of both the process itself and the object of that process, the reading or text) needs to be attended to? What does it mean—what is at stake and what are the consequences—to teach reading in relation to writing in the writing center? These are some of the questions that Adams considers.

The next group consists of a pair of articles, by Stephen Sutherland and by Stephanie Moody, that share an interest in the kind of readers reading theories presuppose and promote. Sutherland's article, for example, exposes the erasure of readers and their material practices occasioned by the constructions of reading proposed in a series of recently published how-to-read books. It argues that most how-to books promote what he calls "reading without reading," a method of reading that circumvents readers' work of reading by providing them with what are in effect the authors' ways of reading. Moody's article points to the presence and influence of hegemonic theories of reading that occult, and thus conveniently ignore, the complex reading practices of groups of readers who do not conform to their hegemonic assumptions: women reading popular romance and beginning student readers in composition and literature classes.

Finally, we conclude with three articles that focus on digital reading, a topic of considerable interest these days, by Janine Morris, by Mike Edwards, and by Richard E. Miller. Although these articles cannot provide an exhaustive rationale for the impact of the digital on reading, or vice versa, together they can serve as an exemplum, albeit limited, of a significant trend: they show that the question of reading, whether in (its) relationship to writing or to digital media or as a means to transfer knowledge or strategically adapt practiced ways of making meaning to different contexts, or genres, is

being asked with renewed vigor and passion. That is all we will say about this group for now, to preserve what J. Hillis Miller calls the “expected surprises” (1990: 33).

What we have learned from reading and assembling these articles is the degree to which guest editing can be an act of disciplinary probing, by which we mean disciplinary self-reflection, the act of taking notice of divisions that began in arbitrary ways, to mark arbitrary differences, and have developed into systems of difference and stratification: reading = literary studies, writing = composition studies, pedagogy = schools of education. By *disciplinary probing* we mean also to suggest an act of questioning how and why these divisions were established, in whose interests, to whose advantage, and with what consequences.

We complete this introductory gesture with a list of “unruly” questions, questions that include and also push beyond the why, why not, and how so that triggered our contributors’ investigations and our own work. Such questions are not unruly because they are new or unfamiliar. They are unruly because of their potential for disruption—of how we teach, of how we understand our disciplinary responsibilities and enactments. To engage such questions seriously, in terms of genuine pedagogical commitment and potential for transformation rather than convention or trope or slogan (think of the stultification of what was once an exciting formulation: “to read is to write is to read, right?”), is to be an unruly teacher, an unruly theorist, an unruly practitioner. It is to see crossovers where others see division, to see meaningful ambiguity where others see confusion. It is to read subversively (in its etymological sense), and thus generatively.

1. What is meant by the term *reading*? The answer to that question is largely a function of where and how we position ourselves as teachers, disciplinary representatives, academic citizens. Are we “in” composition and rhetoric, or composition studies, or writing studies, or rhetoric? “In” literary studies, or cultural studies, or visual studies? To what degree does this self-placement determine how we construct the reading and writing binary, a binary that seems to move in only one direction, back and forth, between literary studies and writing studies, no crossovers, no expansions?
2. What if all teachers who work with texts (however defined) were to identify themselves as teachers of *both* writing and reading—in addition to literature, or history, or religious studies? What effect might such disciplinary redefinitions have on our understanding of scholarly preparation and expertise, of scholarly production, of pedagogical engagement? In composition studies, would

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reading(s) continue to be assigned mainly as a model or provocation? In literary studies, would reading(s) continue to be subdivided into genres, or historical exempla, or sites for theoretical excavation?

3. How would classroom practice change if the claim that reading and writing are interconnected processes (a claim that keeps getting made, in the abstract) was thoroughly unpacked and sincerely enacted? When teachers serve as respondent readers of their students' writing, willing to understand students' writing as an effect of student reading (in the sense that the way they read is responsible for the way they write), then writing assignments have to be radically reconceived. What kind of writing assignments best guide students to reflect on what they do as they read, and the kind of understanding their doing allows for and leaves out? What kind of reading assignments and writing assignments best support critical self-reflexivity across the disciplines?
4. If, contrary to narratives of loss and decay, there is indeed a return to reading in higher education and beyond (reading remains a familiar topic in the popular press), what does this say about the reach and the effects of established practices of reading? How are they described, transmitted, normalized? What occurs when they encounter creative patterns of resistance? What can be said about a system of education that systematically stalls self-reflection? How can the academic say this—and be heard?

We are delighted that a flagship journal such as *Pedagogy* has given visibility to our inquiry, one that for us has always been and still is a labor of love, fueled by a passionate intellectual commitment to teaching and the relentless theoretical exploration of the ways of thinking and learning it demands. What do we hope this collection will offer that has not already been addressed in this journal? It can be argued, and we would agree, that every article published in *Pedagogy* addresses reading in one way or another: insofar as every article in some way provides a reading, each article also *implies* a theory of reading—indeed. But we want to push beyond implied reading.

This issue of *Pedagogy* is a call to engage a point that Robert Scholes in the pages of this very journal has so powerfully made: that in English studies, a discipline based on reading, “we see some writing about reading, to be sure, but we do not see reading” (2002: 166). In this piece Scholes makes visible the questions and inquiry that triggered this realization.¹ He received an e-mail from a colleague at Brown University, in response to his request that she share his thoughts about the preparation of freshmen in their first college literature class. “Her observations,” he explains, “confirm my own sense that we have a reading problem of massive dimensions—a problem that goes well beyond any purely literary concerns” (165). He continues:

This, in turn, drew my attention to the asymmetry in our topics for this panel, which mirrors the asymmetry in our professional arrangements. Setting aside the institutional differences, which affect everyone, the other two topics were divided into writing and literature. The natural reciprocal of writing—which, of course, is reading—had somehow disappeared, apparently subsumed under the topic of literature. (I have taken the liberty of compensating for this asymmetry in my own title for this piece by replacing the word *literature* with the word *reading*.) But this division of the English project is not just an aberration in the thought of this session’s organizer. *It is the way that most English departments at college and secondary levels think of their enterprise. This, as I have argued for some time, is an unfortunate error that we need to correct.* (165–66, emphasis added)

We couldn’t agree more. Our particular interest, as represented in this issue (and much of our work over the years), is scholarship that in a nondidactic way also makes explicit (rather than only implies), also makes somewhat visible the process of reading, or parts of it, that triggered it. The attempts at making visible the mental moves that produce and are produced by an encounter with a text also make it possible to reflect on what has shaped that process, on what that process does or does not require, on the understanding and knowledge that the process affords the reader who produces the scholarship and the readers who are reading it.

These are the reasons we embarked on this project. These are the reasons we believe our contributors did as well.

Note

Scholes’s article is a revised version of a talk delivered during a session at the National Council of Teachers of English Conference in Baltimore in November 2001.

Works Cited

- Miller, J. Hillis. 1990. *Versions of Pygmalion*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
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