What We Mean When We Talk about Reading: Rethinking the Purposes and Contexts of College Reading

Rachel Ihara and Ann Del Principe, Kingsborough Community College, CUNY

Abstract: This study illuminates faculty beliefs about reading by closely examining their attitudes toward assigned readings and faculty professional reading practice. Drawing upon interview data from instructors teaching in a range of disciplines at a two-year college, we suggest that conversations about reading would benefit from greater awareness of the various contexts and purposes for reading. Rather than talk about reading as something students either "do" or "don't do", or do well or poorly, we draw attention to the ways that different purposes for reading shape reading behaviors for students and faculty alike.

Studies of college reading often bemoan the sorry state of reading on college campuses: students are weak readers and resist assigned reading; instructors do not do enough to promote and monitor reading; more needs to be done to correct this situation. Certainly, there are reasons to be concerned about low levels of reading in higher education, and we share the view that both individual instructors and institutions can and should devote more attention to fostering a culture of reading. We worry that there is a disturbing tendency to focus on quantifiable areas like retention and graduation rates, while neglecting aspects of higher education that are more difficult to measure and that take more time to improve, such as intellectual rigor and quality of instruction. Yet, rather than reiterate this mantra of impoverished reading on college campuses, it may be useful to pause and look more closely at what faculty across the curriculum mean when they talk about reading.

Implicit in the notion that there is a college reading crisis is an unstated belief that reading is inherently good and that more reading is better. Obviously, this is a view with which we, as English teachers, are inclined to agree. But what does it mean to say that reading is good? Good for what exactly? In this article, we seek to unpack the often-unexamined idea that reading should be central to a college education by looking closely at what teachers at our institution say about how and why they assign reading. What we found in talking to a number of instructors at our institution about reading—their practices assigning reading, their beliefs about reading, and their behaviors as readers— is that discussions of college reading would benefit from greater precision. Too often we talk about reading as if it is a stable construct, as if only one type of reading "counts." In fact, in discussing reading in their professional lives and in their teaching practices, we came to appreciate reading as a highly variable and nuanced activity that can only be understood with reference to its purpose and context. To treat reading as a single act, something people either do or don't do, is to vastly oversimplify.

College Reading: A Review of the Literature

We do not mean to dismiss concerns that students in college today are not reading enough. There is ample evidence to suggest a trend of reduced reading on college campuses. Burchfield and Sappington's frequently-cited longitudinal study of reading compliance in psychology courses found a decline in students' completion of assigned textbook reading over a sixteen year period (Burchfield & Sappington, 2000), and many other studies suggest that a large number of students do not complete the assigned reading before class as instructed, leading Starcher & Proffitt to conclude that "Non-compliance with assigned reading is not limited to any particular discipline or subset of disciplines" (Starcher & Proffitt, 2011, p. 396). Our own investigation into reading at our home campus identified a disturbing pattern of non-reading in a significant number of college classes (Del Principe & Ihara, 2016).

For some, the problem of declining levels of reading lies in changing student attitudes toward reading, especially students' failure to fully commit to the demands of college work. Citing a survey of business students, Starcher and Proffitt note that about half named "lack of time" as the main reason they didn't read (p. 401). A study of students' reading in various undergraduate psychology classes found that only 27% of students read before class, suggesting to the researchers that students don't recognize that college should be treated "like a full-time job, meaning class preparation should take approximately 40 hours a week" (Clump, Bauer & Bradley, 2004, pg. 228). Indeed, according to a report by the Indiana University Center for Postsecondary Research and Planning, only 12 percent of college freshmen report spending 26 hours or more a week studying while most spend less than 15 hours a week (Clump, Bauer & Bradley, 2004, p. 228). Results of a student survey at our institution paint an even starker picture of student non-reading, with only 16% of students indicating that they spend 11 hours or more per week on "studying and academic activities" and the majority (49%) reporting that they only spend between 1-5 hours per week (Office of Institutional Research, CUNY).

Others fault faculty for creating classroom environments that render reading superfluous. Studies show a significant number of students say they don't complete the assigned reading because doing so isn't essential to doing well in the class (Bartolomeo-Maida, 2017; Del Principe & Ihara, 2016 & 2017; Nilson, 2015; Starcher & Proffitt, 2011). Indeed, research suggests that students often are able to get the necessary information from lecture and PowerPoint notes, making independent reading redundant (Brost & Bradley 2006; Erikson, Peters, & Strommer, 2006; Horning 2013; National Center on Education and the Economy 2013). As a student cited in one study observed, "It's hard to get students to read, because we know that the material will be summed up in class anyway" (Brost & Bradley, 2006, pg. 105).

In response to the problem of reduced reading compliance, scholars have offered a number of pedagogical strategies such as journals, learning logs, and regular quizzes (Bartolomeo-Maida, 2017; Carney, Fry, Gabriele, & Ballard, 2008; Lei, Bartlett, Gorney & Herschbach, 2010; Marchant, 2002; Sappington, Kinsey, & Munsayac, 2002). Linda Nilson (2015) suggests many ways faculty can hold students "accountable" for their reading, including written homework, daily quizzes, in-class discussions, and in-class writing. Implicit in the suggestion of particular strategies is the idea that faculty can and should do more to hold students accountable for independent reading. As Burchfield and Sappington (2000) point out, "Failure to monitor reading compliance sends a message to students that this aspect of learning is optional and of little concern to the instructor" (p. 59). However, simply adding a means of following up on student reading compliance might not be enough to generate the kinds of reading behaviors faculty are looking for. In her multi-year study of faculty in a WAC program, Odom (2017) found that faculty were ultimately disappointed by the results when they tried to add a WAC-inspired assignment that required students to read.

Moreover, making reading completion a factor in grading does not necessarily get at the question of why students don't feel motivated to read in the first place, absent some kind of check on reading compliance (and, often, even with one). After all, if students are able to do well enough on the major exams and other

assessment measures in a course, it seems fair to ask "why read at all?" What is the purpose of outside reading if the material can be taught in other ways? While many scholars have called for more, and deeper, student reading in order to support various types of student "success" (Horning 2007; Horning, Gollnitz, & Haller, 2017; Sullivan, Tinberg, & Blau, 2017), it is beyond the scope of this article to make claims regarding certain reading behaviors and the larger, more complex question of success. Instead we focus here on what faculty say about why they assign reading in their particular classes and on their own reading behaviors to tease out their beliefs about the purposes and functions of reading.

Method: Listening to Faculty Talk about Reading

Our interest in learning more about faculty attitudes and practices toward assigned reading grew out of our earlier investigation into student literacy conducted at our home institution, a public, urban community college with approximately 15,000 students. This study followed five student participants over four semesters, using interview data and collected artifacts related to the students' literacy learning to obtain a snapshot of students' reading and writing experiences over time in courses across the curriculum. One of our findings was that often students were assigned reading that they did not feel compelled to complete because doing so was not essential to their success in the course. This led us to question the role that faculty play in fostering reading (or non-reading) habits in their students. We wanted to know more about what faculty saw as the role of reading in their respective classes and what steps they took to encourage student reading.

To gain insight into faculty attitudes and practices with regard to reading, we gained IRB approval to recruit faculty from our home campus to take part in semi-structured interviews. We enlisted faculty for our study in a number of ways, with the goal being to interview instructors from a range of disciplines. Two instructors (from the Philosophy and Communications and Performing Arts departments) volunteered after hearing a presentation we gave on our earlier reading research at a faculty event. An email request to the faculty campus listserv yielded two faculty members from the English department and one from the department of Health, Physical Education and Recreation. The remaining fifteen were contacted directly; they were chosen to increase the number of departments covered, either because we knew them personally or because they were referred to us by a colleague. In all, we recorded interviews, of approximately 40 minutes each, for twenty faculty members, from the following disciplines: Art; Biology (two instructors); Business; Communications and Performing Arts; Early Childhood Education; English (five instructors); Health; History; Philosophy; Physical Education and Recreation; Nursing; Physical Science; Psychology (two instructors); and Sociology.

Our questions included basic demographic information about current title, number of years teaching at the current institution, previous teaching experience, and courses taught. Over the course of the interview we asked instructors to speak to the following: the type and amount of reading they assigned in the courses they taught and how they chose this reading; their goals in assigning reading; whether or not they assessed students' reading compliance; the relationship between the reading and the class activities; their sense of students reading compliance and comprehension; and their understanding of their roles in helping students read. We also asked them about the role of reading in their own lives. (See Appendix for a list of interview questions.) Since these were semi-structured interviews, our follow-up questions varied depending on instructors' responses, and faculty responses to the different questions varied in length and detail.

Upon completing and transcribing these interviews, we reviewed interview transcriptions to identify the salient themes, patterns, and contrasts among the 20 responses. Our initial coding corresponded to the interview questions; however, as we read, re-read, and cross-read the transcripts, we focused in on these four broad groupings. We used the coding software HyperRESEARCH to code and organize our analysis according to the following categories:

- **How reading is assigned** - This includes details about the texts assigned outside of class; if and when texts were read in class; how much reading homework was assigned per class; how independent reading is assessed; the relationship between reading and class, or what happens in class that relates to the reading; and any direct instruction in reading.
- **Instructor goals for assigning reading** - This includes comments about reading as a means of providing information; reading's role in citizenship; reading to improve reading skills for future career and educational demands; reading as an aid to cognitive development, and reading to generate writing.
- **Instructor reading practices** - This includes anything related to the instructor's own reading, whether for personal purposes or as part of their scholarly work. We also include reflections on early experiences of reading and attitudes toward reading.
- **Perceived student reading behaviors** - This category includes faculty observations about their students' behaviors: their enjoyment or lack of enjoyment of reading; their sense of students' reading compliance; their guesses as to why students might not read; and their assessments of students' reading abilities.

Why Read?: Reading for Information versus Reading to Respond

Our analysis of this data zeroes in on the first three categories, focusing less on instructors' speculations about student reading behaviors and more on what they said about the purpose of reading in their classrooms and in their own lives. Our aim in this project was not to determine what or how students read at our institution; this would have required input from a larger percentage of the faculty and other types of data. Instead, we wanted to know more about what instructors from various disciplines see as the purposes of reading in their classrooms, what they want reading to accomplish, and how they articulate these goals.

Expressed views on reading and the purpose of reading took two forms: general or abstract beliefs about reading and more immediate goals for reading within the context of a particular class. We focused on the latter. This is not to discount the values and beliefs underlying general statements we heard about the value of reading. Instructors spoke passionately about the pleasures of reading and the neurological benefits, as well as the need for strong reading skills to succeed in school and the workplace and to thrive as citizens. Yet in explaining why students needed to read for their classes, professors gave more precise reasons for reading that could be roughly grouped into two general categories: reading to master course content and reading to respond. These, we would argue, represent distinct modes of reading, driven by different purposes or goals. Without minimizing the subtle distinctions within these groupings, we would suggest that attending more closely to the discrete *uses* of reading across the disciplines, and the stance students are asked to take vis-à-vis reading, may help to illuminate what we mean when we talk about college reading.

For many of the instructors we interviewed, the main reason for students to read outside of class was to access information and ideas for exams. When asked about their goals for assigning reading, instructors teaching biology, astronomy, nursing, media studies, and business all discussed ways that assigned reading served to extend and reinforce material from lecture. Some noted that having a course text was particularly helpful in classes with challenging course material. As one of the biology professors put it, "reading is highly essential because the concept that is put into the classroom lecture always cannot be followed." "[The textbook] illuminates points," explained the nursing professor. "It goes into more detail than I can have the time to cover. It's a confirmation of sorts. If they hear something in class and they're not sure, they can go and read about it and get clarity." The astronomy professor observed that students in his class might be able to pass the class without reading but would need to do some reading to get a grade above a "C", since the textbook offered more thorough explanations.

This notion of texts as informational resources occasioned particular ideas about *how* students might best make use of reading. As the comments above suggest, professors imagined students reading selectively, focusing on particular sections as needed. One biology professor reported that she explicitly advised students *not* to read the text "straight through just because I've assigned that chapter. It's not the most effective, and you won't like it anyway." Instead she suggested that students first review the course learning objectives, then "Highlight what the key concepts are and then go to the book and read the surrounding text for those key concepts." The business professor made a similar point, noting that he typically covered a given topic *before* asking students to read about it because, "if the students read first they have more difficulty because they're muddling through the words."

Understanding texts as serving an informational function raises some questions about the primacy of the textbook over alternative sources of information. If the textbook is essentially a resource to be referenced when needed, why not consult the Internet instead? The astronomy professor who said he believed students needed to read to do well in his course also noted that students could, and did, rely on sources like Wikipedia in lieu of the assigned text. The biology professor who endorsed selective reading speculated that students probably used the Internet and her published PowerPoint slides as much as they used the book. The professor who taught media studies went a step further, encouraging students to use whatever sources of information they had at their disposal to answer the "70 or so standard questions" that would appear on the final exam, according to department policy.

While the instructors discussed above saw reading as a supplemental mode of information delivery, something to extend or reinforce lecture, in other classes reading was less about acquiring concrete knowledge for a test and more about reading for the sake of reading—an activity central to the aims of the class. This was true for instructors teaching education, history, sociology and writing. Typically these instructors did not assign textbooks but instead asked students to read academic articles, fiction, and memoirs. Here, texts were understood to be contributions to an intellectual conversation, objects to analyze, or both.

For instance, the education professor we talked to organized her class around discussions of articles, which served as the basis for the essay exams students wrote at the end of the semester. Toward the end of the semester, the instructor would let students know the essay exam questions, giving them an opportunity to review the various resources at their disposal, including assigned readings, as they prepared to write. Similarly, the history professor structured her classes around students' in-class discussions of academic articles, although in her class the final assessment wasn't a written assignment but rather participation in a formal discussion employing a "fish-bowl" format, with a smaller group discussing the reading at the center of the classroom while the larger group observed from the periphery. Thus, both classes created a very different relationship to reading from the model of reading for content, with the emphasis being on students' ability to engage with readings, make connections among readings, and respond to the ideas in readings. According to the history professor, this final discussion activity better matched her notion of the work of her discipline; as she saw it, the historian's goal is to look at different kinds of documents and "come to some new set of questions or conclusions." The goal for student reading was not to master a text in the "test-taking sense," as she put it, but to see texts as "things that people produced and made decisions about" and to "walk away with ideas about the stuff that we're reading."

Another instructor, a sociology professor, described a similar goal for student reading: practice in the intellectual activities of his particular discipline. To this end, he had stopped assigning textbooks, providing his own explanations for sociological concepts through lecture and requiring students to assemble a "textbook" made up of their notes. For reading, he assigned fiction and memoirs, which offered material for students to evaluate using concepts from sociology. As he explained, "I gave up on textbooks. First, because they weren't reading them, and second, I realized that just the whole structure of a textbook where you're reading about somebody else's conclusions is not what I want my students to be

doing. I want them to be thinking as opposed to recording." The books thus served as "data," with students ultimately tested on their ability to write about them using concepts from class.

Unsurprisingly, the five English instructors we interviewed also talked about reading serving primarily as the basis for student writing: readings provided students with opportunities to explore a given theme with the goal being to generate a thesis by making connections among texts. This purpose for reading occasioned particular approaches to texts, particular ways of reading. Whereas instructors in the "content" areas imagined students reviewing textbooks for clarification of difficult ideas, perhaps zeroing in on particularly challenging concepts, writing teachers expected students to alter their reading patterns based on their chosen essay topic, selecting areas to focus on based on interest and plans for writing. Several writing instructors noted the challenge of getting students away from writing summaries of what they read. Instead students were asked to "look for important things that kind of call out to them, look for the big idea of whatever they're reading and look for the things that they can use."

This notion of reading as an intellectual process vital to the work of the discipline is very different from a conception of reading as supporting knowledge acquisition. As one instructor put it, "[Composition] is a skills class. It's not a knowledge class." Instead of seeing the text as an authority, students were asked to question and challenge what they read. "I want them to look at it and kind of engage with the text so that they don't just assume that just because it's there it's true," another explained. "Sometimes [students will] read it and just [think], 'it's on the page, so it must be true,' instead of looking for places where you could question and interact with it, just being less passive and more interactive." Whereas instructors in "content" courses might ask students to look to a text to reinforce and clarify ideas, in writing classes instructors wanted students to reread to see anew and ask questions. "The more you read the more you see," one writing teacher affirmed; "I'd say that's main point I try to get across." Another instructor justified reading novels because they generated questions rather than a clear position. "I want the students to find ambiguity and no real right answers in their reading. Why does she do that? Why does his father do that?"

While there is a tendency, particularly among those in the humanities, to favor the latter approach to reading—reading to question, to interrogate, to respond—it is worth examining this bias. In the classes where faculty structured their classes around analysis or inquiry into texts, that activity corresponded to some activity in their discipline: integrating ideas about education; assessing historians' interpretation of events; analyzing memoir (in lieu of field notes or observations) from a sociological perspective; reading fiction in order to draw conclusions about character. But for the other classes, reading was not meant to support some discipline-based activity but rather served as a means of transmitting disciplinary content. Is this purpose for reading inherently inferior? Or is reading for information one legitimate function of reading, an approach to text used by academics and professionals for particular purposes in particular situations?

Faculty Reading Practices: Reading as Professionals

When asked about their own reading practices, faculty noted a range of purposes for reading, both personal and professional. However, we focus here on faculty members' professional reading practices, which revealed approaches to texts that roughly correspond to the two approaches outlined above, namely reading to access particular information and reading to analyze and respond. For some, professional reading served primarily as a mode of information acquisition. In much the same way that students were asked to read to gain content knowledge, instructors recalled reading to bolster their knowledge of a given topic relevant to a particular professional practice. For instance, the nursing professor talked about the importance of research and reading in her work as a nurse and midwife. "It's impossible to know everything you need to know to be a nurse," she explained, "one has to constantly be educating oneself by reading." The communications professor talked about the role of background reading in his work editing

shows at NBC. Challenging the perception of video editing as primarily technical, he insisted, "[…] if I didn't know what we were editing, if I didn't know about this project or something like that, I couldn't make any decisions. I really couldn't. Whatever the subject was. [If] I was sitting down doing something on Bach, I had better know Bach and my engineer better know Bach, too." And multiple teachers talked about the role of reading to stay current in rapidly changing fields, to make sure that the textbook coverage of topics like computer animation or recombinant DNA technology was still up to date. A key distinction between these reading situations and those of students, however, is the motivation behind the reading. Whereas students were expected to turn to textbooks and possibly internet sources to learn about course concepts for a future test, these instructors described instances where information was tied to a particular action: a health care practice, a video editing decision, or preparing for class.

More often, faculty described reading situations where the ultimate goal of reading was to respond through writing. Yet, if this goal for reading was broadly the same as for students when they were asked to read and respond in class, faculty descriptions of their reading practices were more closely tied to particular disciplinary practices, with the discipline determining the types of texts selected and how those texts were handled. These practices varied considerably across disciplines and sub-disciplines, but a common thread was the distinction between reading of secondary sources (or relevant scholarly literature) and analysis of primary sources (or data). Thus professors talked about "grounding [their] work in the literature" as distinct from "analyzing data:" recognizing something as a "big topic" in business ethics and then turning to "primary sources to see how it was being taught" for an article on pedagogy; reading scholarship to find out what had been said about a given work of literature, while reading and rereading the work itself to figure out an "angle" and identify sections relevant to the argument being made.

Instructors expressed different attitudes toward reading secondary materials. For instance, an education professor spoke of her enjoyment of the phase of "looking at the literature, and situating what I'm going to do in a body of literature, and often discovering authors and research that I kind of didn't even know, like how that little pocket of research was defining itself, and who was in that conversation. I just love that part, I find it so enormously exhilarating." The astronomy professor was less enthusiastic about this part of the process, describing reading only portions of the articles that related to his research area, since the goal was to get the basic idea, and noting that he sometimes cited sources that he had read about but not read himself. However, in both cases, this kind of reading was understood to be reading to situate oneself within a conversation, to establish a larger context for one's contribution to an area of scholarship. It was not necessarily deep or close reading.

This approach to reading of secondary material contrasted with the philosophy's professor's discussion of the way he read a primary text that was the focus of an article he was in the process of writing for publication. In our interview, he recalled rereading and mulling over a short section from Plato's *Euthyphro*, noting, "I've read these three pages, now, I wouldn't be surprised if it was several thousand times!" This description of reading aligns more closely with the writing instructors' expressed desires for student reading cited above. Like them, he described reading, at least in this particular context, as a process of active engagement involving questioning and rereading. His interaction with text, as he describes it, models behaviors advocated by the writing teachers we spoke to who wanted student to be "less passive and more interactive," to "[look] for places where you could question and interact with [the text]," to realize that "the more you read the more you see."

Obviously, faculty members are not the same as students. Our objectives and motivations for reading are different, based on different choices, histories, identities and commitments. However, it is worth noting some common threads: in both the classroom and the "real world," texts were sometimes read to acquire information for a particular action (a test or a professional decision) and sometimes provided an opportunity to respond, either by engaging the views expressed or by offering an interpretation of the text itself. It is important, we think, that in all of these situations, the reader is positioned actively, as a person

who is reading with a particular interest in mind. The reader wants something from the text that he or she will use to accomplish another task.

Discussion: Varieties of Reading

One thing these conversations about reading reveal is that reading takes many different forms and serves different purposes. Faculty who participated in our study wanted their students to read differently and had different goals in mind, and how they read varied in their own lives depending on the context. This may seem like an obvious point, but it is one that often gets neglected in studies that focus on reading compliance and in blanket calls to "improve" reading in college. In the field of writing studies, scholars have pushed back against the notion of "good writing," arguing that writing should be understood as socially situated and in flux. For instance, New Literacy Studies offers a model for understanding the complexity of "academic writing," one that recognizes that writing "well" in a particular context not only requires "acculturation into disciplinary and subject-based discourses and genres" but also involves "both epistemological issues and social processes, including power relations among people, institutions, and social identities" (Lea & Street, 2006, p. 369). We see reading as a similarly complicated activity and would argue that what it means to read, and to read well, varies across the curriculum given the different ways that subjects and disciplines construct knowledge.

We are not the first to suggest that reading is as worthy of careful consideration as writing. A decade ago Linda Adler-Kassner and Heidi Estrem (2007) urged compositionists to "devote the same attention to identifying components and conventions of reading and reading processes as we did with writing" (p. 35-36), while David Jolliffe (2007) noted that there are many contexts that do not call for the kind of "strong reading" privileged by the humanities (p. 479). However, scholarly focus on reading continues to emphasize "critical" or "deep" reading rather than reading for information. For instance, most contributors to the edited volume *What is College Reading?* (Horning, Gollnitz, & Haller, 2017) define "college reading" as an activity that necessarily involves features like: creativity and engagement (Anson, 2017), transformation (Gogan, 2017), and a focus on intertextuality (Hollander, Shamgochian, Dawson, & Bouchard, 2017). Another volume acknowledges that "there are many different ways to read—many ways appropriate for different purposes, all of them remarkable" but ultimately suggests that faculty maximize activities (like discussions) that push toward critical engagement with the text and ideas as a way to encourage more "transactional" relationships with the text. (Manarin, Carey, Rathburn & Ryland, 2015, p. 2, p. 88). Similarly, Robert DiYanni (2017) offers a definition of critical reading in which the first step, "understanding," is followed by attention to "a text's language and selection of detail, its genre, imagery, and form" and involves "recognizing a writer's purpose, understanding his or her idea, identifying tone, evaluating evidence and reasoning, and recognizing a writer's perspective, position, and bias" (p. 4). These are certainly worthwhile objectives for reading, but focusing on this type of reading ignores a large swathe of student reading in which the primary aim is not analysis or critique but, rather, the acquisition and mastery of concrete information.

As our interviews with faculty demonstrate, reading for information remains pervasive, particularly in certain disciplines, a finding that is in line with other research. In a comprehensive look at teaching in community colleges, W. Norton Grubb (1999) found that most classes consisted of lectures offering fact-intensive summaries or outlines of assigned textbooks (p. 77). Another study, which surveyed faculty about their objectives in assigning reading, found that science faculty saw the main purpose of reading as helping students "acquire knowledge of specific facts, terms, concepts, procedures and recall them later," while faculty in mathematics and the social sciences said the most important purpose for reading was to "familiarize students with a topic so they can follow class lecture and discussion better" (Wambach, 1998, p. 2). In striking contrast, faculty in the humanities said that the most important purpose of reading was to teach students to "exercise critical thinking, analytical thinking, [and] develop healthy skepticism,"

while the next most important purpose was to "teach students to critique existing products in their field" (Wambach, 1998, p. 3).

One way to understand these various disciplinary ways of reading is as behaviors resulting from, or perhaps enacting, the different epistemologies inherent in academic disciplines and the role(s) of texts in those epistemologies. At a basic level, we could utilize John L. Holland's oft-cited taxonomy of the 6 academic environment types found within the academy to understand these differences. The function of texts in Holland's "investigative" disciplines (such as Biology, Finance, Physical Sciences, Mathematics, Economics, and Sociology) might be to report on findings and conclusions drawn from the analysis of empirical data drawn from the outside world, while the function of texts in Holland's "artistic" disciplines (such as Arts, English, Language/Literature, Music, and Theatre/Drama) might be to act as the object of expression and analysis itself (Pike, Smart & Ethington, 2012). For example, in Geology, texts act as the repository for disciplinary knowledge drawn from experimental and analytical analyses of physical data. Geologists produce texts to document and share findings from their work in laboratories and in the field. In contrast, in Literary studies, texts act as both the objects of analysis *and* the expression of the results of this analysis. At base, these differences result from the epistemological distinction between "defining knowledge as 'discovered in the world'…vs. 'created in the mind'…" (Gimenez, 2012, p. 404) and the differing roles texts play in those positions.

In addition, we see another, perhaps broader, pattern in both faculty's intended purposes for assigning student reading and in faculty's own reported reading practices: reading to write or reading as a writer. In her recent book, *The Rise of Writing*, literacy scholar Deborah Brandt (2015) identifies an orientation she finds in many of her subjects that she comes to call "writing over reading." Brandt's "writing over reading" describes the stance of reading as a writer, as one who is going to (possibly) use information, ideas, conclusions from the text in their own writing—as content (in the instance of quoted or cited material), as a participant in a conversation in which you will engage, or even as a text you might emulate rhetorically or stylistically. When readers read as writers, they engage with texts differently than those who are reading with no intention of producing texts as a result of their reading, and, in Brandt's study, she finds that "writing over reading" has become a prevalent, interesting, and, possibly, revolutionary stance for younger readers.

As academics, we can appreciate how we ourselves enact "writing over reading" in our work as scholars. Because we are deeply embedded in our fields, and because we generally find ourselves reading other scholarship when we are preparing to write our own scholarship, we read with these needs at the forefront of our minds. We see this in Bazerman's (1985) study of the reading practices of seven research physicists. He found that the physicists he interviewed and observed read strategically and selectively according to their research needs. They did not read articles from beginning to end but often scanned introductions, conclusions, and figures, to see what was worth paying attention to given their particular research projects and what they hoped to get from the reading. Bazerman's physicists read just like most of the faculty we interviewed for this study—with the ultimate goal of *writing* in mind. Although the astronomy and philosophy professors we cite earlier may appear to have quite different reading practices, they both approach texts as writers and read with this practical and discipline-specific purpose in mind.

Nowacek and James (2017) suggest that students read exactly the same way, and that we all read with "mental maps" of the field in which we are engaged. These mental maps allow us to know what we should pay attention to as we read because we are always reading selectively. They argue that, rather than framing students as "novice" readers and professors as "experts," we should understand that students and professors are reading with different "mental maps" that help them know what to pay attention to, where they might respond to or use the reading, and where to, as Horning (2011) describes it, "put the manicules." As the student-writers whose work has been analyzed in the Citation Project demonstrate, simply having to write a "research paper" on a subject does not necessitate deep reading and extensive

knowledge of a topic (Jamieson, 2013). We all, professional and student readers, aim to read selectively, strategically, efficiently, and with mental maps when we read as writers.

The Takeaway

The main lesson we draw from our interviews with faculty about their reading pedagogies and practices is that assigned reading, like reading in general, must be understood in the context of how it is used and the purpose it serves. This has implications for scholarship and pedagogy, but also points to a need for broader institutional reform.

First, we call for scholars of reading to consider Smart and Umbach's (2007) suggestion that, rather than consider faculty as a cohesive common group, we recognize them "as a diverse collective with varying professional interests, attitudes, and values based primarily on their disciplinary affiliations" (p. 191). Thus, we should expect and accept that faculty from different disciplines will construct "reading" differently in their courses and will have different goals for student reading. One area for further research, then, is a better understanding of these differences. For instance, we might conduct cross-institutional analyses of faculty goals and practices of assigning reading in certain disciplines, or we might track the shifts in reading expectations and behaviors as students move from general education courses to more advanced courses in their majors. We also call for scholars of college reading to embrace the constant shifting nature of all literacy practices and examine the new ways that our digital native students interact with the texts we offer them in college.

At the same time, as instructors we can be more precise about our aims and how best to achieve them. If students are reading primarily to acquire information, we need to think carefully about the best ways for them to do this: before lecture or after? straight through or selectively? Rather than assume that students will develop appropriate reading strategies when reading for content knowledge, instructors might do more to guide and direct students, possibly by discussing their own reading practices. If students are reading to "respond," or reading as writers, then we need to be as precise as possible about what this means. Are they considering a number of texts to see how they fit together and talk to one another and responding to those ideas? Or are they looking closely at a historical document or work of literature, according to particular disciplinary tools and perspectives? These purposes for reading require different approaches and strategies, and instructors can be more transparent about the best way to proceed. Rather than continuing to talk about reading "well" or "poorly," we need to think more critically about what kind of reading is occasioned by particular tasks or activities. As teachers, we must help our students recognize that different reading situations involve different purposes and that the purpose for our reading should and does shape how we focus our attention and energy on a specific text (Carillo, 2017). We strongly echo Mary Lou Odom's (2017) three levels of advice to faculty based on her multi-year study of faculty in a WAC program:

> 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. (p. 255)

Helping our students become stronger academic readers means both becoming more aware of our own expectations and goals for their reading as well as learning to be more explicit with our students about the purposes of reading in our classes and in specific projects.

Becoming more aware of one's purposes for assigning reading may lead to rethinking the role of textbooks. We may be betraying our own disciplinary bias here, but it does seem that conceiving of

classroom reading entirely as a mechanism for information transferral raises some potential problems for instructors. Most notably, assigning a textbook that includes the same material covered in lecture can result in redundancy, undermining students' motivation to read outside of class. For several instructors, the solution was to see the text as a reference, something to read selectively to gain a better understanding of particular concepts as needed. But, if this is the case, students need be aware of, and able to enact, this alternative, non-linear approach to reading, as noted above. Moreover, conceiving of a textbook as a reference resource raises questions about the relative value of an expensive, bulky book over the convenience, ease, and abundance of text obtained through a Google search. And, it may be worth considering the different ways that we read for information, inside and outside of school. The instructors who talked about reading for information in professional contexts (as medical professionals, editors, and teachers) used that reading to perform an activity better, which may be qualitatively different than reading to assimilate information to retrieve for a test.

While individual instructors can do much to be more precise and intentional about their purposes in assigning reading, ultimately institutions also have a role to play in supporting the efforts of faculty across the disciplines. Horning (2007) and Odom (2013), among others, have called upon institutions to support faculty through Writing Across the Curriculum programs focused on the reading-writing relationship or through stand-alone Reading Across the Curriculum programs that highlight the important role faculty can play in shaping students' reading behaviors. One thing we would caution, however, given our research into faculty attitudes and practices regarding reading, is that such institutional efforts recognize the different understandings of reading and the purposes for reading among faculty across the disciplines. Rather than imposing a humanistic understanding of reading upon faculty whose experiences and pedagogies around reading differ, programs seeking to foster reading across the curriculum need to be aware of, and respectful of, these differences. It may be that such a program will not result in more or deeper reading across disciplines, but rather more intentional and self-aware reading pedagogies by faculty more attuned to the many ways we read.

Appendix

Interview Questions:

1. How long have you been teaching at this institution?
2. What is your current title?
3. Did you teach anywhere else prior to teaching here?
4. What courses do you usually teach?
5. Can you tell us a little about the reading you assign in each of those courses? (Do you assign a textbook or other types of reading? About how many pages of reading do you assign for each class session/week? Is this reading mandated by your department?)
6. What are your goals in assigning reading for students to complete outside of class?
7. Do you assess students' reading compliance? If so, how?
8. Do you typically cover all of the reading material in class lecture/discussion? Is there information that students can only get from the reading and not from class?
9. About how many students would you say complete all of the reading? How many complete some of the reading?
10. Why do you think some students choose not to read for class?
11. With regard to those who do read, what do you think is their level of comprehension?
12. What do you see as the main challenges for students in reading on their own? What are some problems students seem to have with independent reading?
13. Do you see reading instruction or helping students with reading as part of your job? Why or why not?

14. Can you tell us a little about the role of reading in your professional and educational experience? What reading do you typically do now as part of your career? What do you remember about reading in college and/or graduate school?

References

Adler-Kassner, Linda, & Estrem, Heidi. (2007). Reading practices in the writing classroom. *Writing Program Administration*, *31*(1-2), 35-47.

Anson, Chris M. (2017). Writing to read, revisited. In Alice S. Horning, Deborah-Lee Gollnitz, & Cynthia R. Haller (Eds.), *What is college reading?* (pp. 21-39). Fort Collins, CO: WAC Clearinghouse.

Bartolomeo-Maida, Maria. (2017). The use of learning journals to foster textbook reading in the community college psychology class. *College Student Journal 50*(3), 440-453.

Bazerman, Charles. (1985). Physicists reading physics: Schema-laden purposes and purpose-laden schema. *Written Communication, 2*(1), 3-23.

Brandt, Deborah. (2015). *The rise of writing: Redefining mass literacy*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP.

Brost, Brian D., & Bradley, Karen A. (2006). Student compliance with assigned reading: A case study. *Journal of Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, 6*(2), 101-111. Retrieved from https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ854930

Burchfield, Colin M., & Sappington, John. (2000). Compliance with required reading assignments. *Teaching of Psychology, 27*(1), 58-60. Retrieved from https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ854930.

Carillo, Ellen. (2017). *A writer's guide to mindful reading.* Fort Collins, CO: WAC Clearinghouse.

Carney, Amy G., Fry, Sarah Winstead, Gabriele, Rosaria V., & Ballard, Michelle. (2008). Reeling in the big fish: Changing pedagogy to encourage the completion of reading assignments. *College Teaching, 56*(4), 195-200.

Clump, Michael A., Bauer, Heather, & Bradley, Catherine. (2004). The extent to which psychology students read textbooks: A multiple class analysis of reading across the psychology curriculum. *Journal of Instructional Psychology, 31*(3), 227-232.

Del Principe, Ann, & Ihara, Rachel. (2016). "I bought the book and I didn't need it": What reading looks like at an urban community college. *Teaching English in the Two-Year College, 43*(3), 229-244.

Del Principe, Ann, & Ihara, Rachel. (2017). A long look at reading in the community college: A longitudinal analysis of student reading experiences. *Teaching English in the Two-Year College 45*(2), 183-206.

DiYanni, Robert. (2017). Reading responsively; reading responsibly: An approach to critical reading. In Robert DiYanni, & Anton Borst (Eds.), *Critical reading across the curriculum, vol. 1, the humanities* (pp. 3-23). Hoboken, NJ: Wiley Blackwell.

Erikson, Bette LaSere, Peters, Calvin B., & Strommer, Diane Weltner. (2006). *Teaching first year students*: [Revised and Expanded Edition of *Teaching college freshman*.] San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Gimenez, Julio. (2012). Disciplinary epistemologies, generic attributes and undergraduate academic writing in nursing and midwifery. *Higher Education, 63*(4), 401-419.

Gogan, Brian. (2017) Reading as transformation. In Alice S. Horning, Deborah-Lee Gollnitz, & Cynthia R. Haller (Eds.), *What is college reading?* (pp. 41-56). Fort Collins, CO: WAC Clearinghouse.

Grubb, W. Norton, & associates. (1999). *Honored but invisible: An inside look at teaching in community colleges*. New York: Routledge.

Hollander, Pam, Shamgochian, Maureen, Dawson, Douglas & Bouchard, Margaret Pray. (2017). Creating a reading-across-the curriculum climate on campus. In Alice S. Horning, Alice S., Deborah-Lee Gollnitz & Cynthia R. Haller. (Eds.), *What is college reading?* (pp. 57-66). Fort Collins, CO: WAC Clearinghouse.

Horning, Alice S. (2007). Reading across the curriculum as the key to student success. *Across the Disciplines, 4*. Retrieved from https://wac.colostate.edu/atd/articles/horning2007.cfm.

Horning, Alice S. (2011). Where to put the manicules: A theory of expert reading. *Across the Disciplines, 8*(2). Retrieved from https://wac.colostate.edu/docs/atd/articles/horning2011.pdf

Horning, Alice S. (2013). Elephants, pornography and safe sex: Understanding and addressing students' reading problems across the curriculum. *Across the Disciplines, 10*(4), 1-10. Retrieved from https://wac.colostate.edu/atd/reading/intro.cfm

Horning, Alice S., Gollnitz, Deborah-Lee & Haller, Cynthia R. (Eds.). (2017). *What is college reading?* Fort Collins, CO: WAC Clearinghouse. Available from https://wac.colostate.edu/books/collegereading/

Jamieson, Sandra. (2013). Reading and engaging sources: What students' use of sources reveals about advanced reading skills. *Across the Disciplines, 10*(4). Retrieved from https://wac.colostate.edu/atd/reading/intro.cfm.

Jolliffe, David. (2007). Learning to read as continuing education. *College Composition and Communication, 58*(3), 470-494.

Lea, Mary R., & Street, Brian V. (2006). The "academic literacies" model: Theory and applications. *Theory into Practice, 45*(4), 368-377.

Lei, Simon. A., Bartlett, Kerry, Gorney, Suzanne E. & Herschbach, Tamra R. (2010). Resistance to reading compliance among college students: Instructors' perspectives. *College Student Journal, 44*(2), 219-229.

Manarin, Karen, Carey, Miriam, Rathburn, Melanie, & Ryland, Glen. (2015). *Critical reading in higher education: Academic goals and social engagement*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press. Available from https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/kbcc-ebooks/detail.action?docID=4088470

Marchant, Gregory J. (2002). Student reading of assigned articles: Will this be on the test? *Teaching of Psychology, 29*(1), 49-51.

National Center on Education and the Economy (2013). What does it really mean to be college and work ready?: The mathematics and English literacy required of community college students. Washington, DC: NCEE. Available from http://www.ncee.org/college-and-work-ready/

Nilson, Linda B. (2015). Getting students to do the reading. National Education Association. Available from http://www.nea.org/home/34689.htm

Nowacek, Rebecca S., and James, Heather G. (2017) Building mental maps: Implications from research on reading in the STEM disciplines. In Patrick Sullivan, Howard Tinberg & Sheridan Blau (Eds.), *Deep reading: Teaching reading in the writing classroom* (pp. 291-312). Urbana, IL: NCTE.

Odom, Mary Lou. (2013). "Not just for writing anymore: What WAC can teach us about reading to learn." *Across the Disciplines, 10*(4). Retrieved from http://wac.colostate.edu/atd/reading/odom.cfm

Odom, Mary Lou. (2017). Multiliteracies and Meaning-Making: Writing to Read Across the Curriculum. In Alice S. Horning, Deborah-Lee Golnitz& Cynthia R. Haller (Eds.), What is college reading? (pp. 255-270). Fort Colllins, CO: WAC Clearinghouse.

Office of Institutional Research, CUNY. (2016). 2016 student experience survey: Table 4, use of time (full-time students) by sector. Available from https://public.tableau.com/profile/oira.cuny#!/vizhome/2016StudentExperienceSurvey/MainMenu

Pike, Gary R, Smart, John C., & Ethington, Corinna A. (2012). The mediating effects of student engagement on the relationships between academic disciplines and learning outcomes: An extension of Holland's theory. *Research in Higher Education, 53*(5), 550-75.

Sappington, John, Kinsey, Kimberly, & Munsayac, Kirk. (2002). Two studies of reading compliance among college students. *Teaching Of Psychology, 29*(4), 272-274.

Smart, John C., & Umbach, Paul D. (2007). Faculty and academic environments: Using Holland's theory to explore differences in how faculty structure undergraduate courses. *Journal of College Student Development, 48*(2), 183-95.

Starcher, Keith, & Proffitt, Denis. (2011). Encouraging students to read: What professors are (and aren't) doing about it. *International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education, 23*(3), 396-407.

Sullivan, Patrick, Tinberg, Howard, & Blau, Sheridan. (Eds.). (2017) *Deep reading: Teaching reading in the writing classroom*. Urbana, IL: NCTE.

Wambach, Catherine. (1998). Reading and writing expectations at a research university. *Journal of Developmental Education, 22*(2), 22-26.

Contact Information

Rachel Ihara
Associate Professor and Assistant Director of Composition
Kingsborough Community College, CUNY
2001 Oriental Boulevard
Brooklyn, NY 112135
Email: Rachel.ihara@kbcc.cuny.edu

Ann Del Principe
Associate Professor and Director of Composition
Kingsborough Community College, CUNY
2001 Oriental Boulevard
Brooklyn, NY 112135
Email: Ann.DelPrincipe@kbcc.cuny.edu

Complete APA Citation

Ihara, Rachel, & Del Principe, Ann. (2018, July 20). Encountering internationalizing in the writing classroom: Resistant teaching and learning strategies. *Across the Disciplines, 15*(2), 1-14. Retrieved from https://wac.colostate.edu/docs/atd/articles/ihara-delprincipe2018.pdf