Editor's Introduction:
The Peculiar Relationship to Reading in College Curriculum

READING CLASSES IN COLLEGES TEND TO DO ANYTHING BUT TEACH STUDENTS THE nuances of successful, enjoyable, effective reading. Rather, colleges more often than not label these courses "remedial" or "developmental," sometimes incorporating the learning of study skills into them, and gear the curriculum toward understanding the "basics" so as to support students in their attempts at mastering what the academy considers "academic" reading. As Louise Bohr states, "[A] developmental reading program at a college earns its keep by trying to help college students succeed in [other] classes" (63). Reading, then, similar to the perception other disciplines still have of first-year composition, provides a service for the college. In this mindset, reading does not have a subject of its own nor does it carry disciplinary capital.

Yet, if any complaint heard on college campuses surpasses the tired, "My students don't know how to write," it would be, "My students don't know how to read," meaning, variously, that students do not read assigned materials, they do not comprehend textbook prose, they have no interest in pursuing outside readings on a subject, or, simply, they do not read aloud well. The field of reading theory, of course, offers solutions to these problems, but the direction it would lead us would suggest to college educators that at least part of the difficulties students encounter comes from curricular and pedagogical decisions instructors make. As with writing, educators too often pay attention to the product—giving direct treatment to a problem related to a particular assignment—and lose sight of the process. Therefore, students do not transfer "reading skills" from one assignment to the next, one course to the next, or one discipline to the next. Educators bemoan the insufficiency of student preparation and wonder how high schools (and college composition and reading programs) give passing marks to such students. The polemic these educators end up embracing calls for more of the same education (or, more accurately, treatment) that produced the so-called "literacy crisis."

We can analyze student non-investment in literate ways from several angles. Too many of these, though, blame the students, thus safely, from an educator's perspective, shielding higher education from making changes. We see students as having become progressively more slothful, as technology has made life too easy and substituted pop culture for serious study. We see work schedules interfering with time that should be devoted to library research and isolated reading. (And of course, economic and social conditions do impact our

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students.) Further, students' individual choices and psychological make-ups definitely contribute to "reading problems." If we end the analysis there, however, the responsibility for improvement rests entirely with the students; they must merely prioritize more appropriately. A more complex response would involve educators understanding the alienation students feel from academic pursuits and the perhaps deliberate methods in which the system estranges students.

Bowles and Gintis have shown rather convincingly that schools train students to develop in ways that replicate socio-economic class systems: the lower-tier learns to respond to bells and receive high rewards for obedience and cooperation. For example, K-12 schools' reading instruction subjects students to phonics programs, ignoring research that does not fit this agenda. In what Richard J. Meyer describes as a "pre-fabricated mandated curriculum," students lose their uniqueness and learn that "schools are not about standards... [but] about some impossible process of standardization" (82), a standardization that reduces access to power for students beholden to public education. Stephen D. Krashen succinctly exposes the illogic behind the rationale for phonics, explaining that research into the supposed effectiveness of the method contains flaws (see also Allington; Allington and Woodside-Jiron), and recommends, ala Frank Smith's call for students to affiliate with "the club of readers" (113), that access to books and saturation into a culture of reading work toward turning students into readers. Given the class warfare seen in No Child Left Behind and the general celebration of private schools over their public counterparts, conspiracy theories that suggest that the goal of public education is to under-educate students to provide for corporate America a compliant but thoughtless workforce are not too far fetched (see Ohanian on this point). Barack Obama's selection of Arne Duncan as the Secretary of Education does not bode well for turning the tide. As explicated by Giroux and Saltman in their critique of Duncan's tenure as CEO of Chicago Public Schools, students can expect more of the same.

How implicated are we as college educators in this process? When we align our conceptions of literacy with ideologies that rely on "back to the basics" or other such unexamined calls for rigor in curriculum and on notions of privilege and strict disciplinary boundaries for instructors, we become part of the problem. On this latter point, college instructors often try to distance themselves from high school educators. A symbolic act of this distancing is the lack of credit-bearing reading courses in most colleges and universities. The only valued reading on campuses is literature, or at least the canon and contemporary works deemed to be literature by those with status. Professors do not teach how to read as much as they do how to appreciate and interpret a certain body of novels, poems, and short stories. The de-privileging of reading goes hand-in-hand with ignoring the voluminous knowledge on reading theory generated by both K-12 and college instructors. Despite all the reading problems students

experience and no matter how frustrated we get, referring to and adapting ideas from reading research seemingly sullies us, lowering us to the level of teacher and diminishing our role as professor, a position that, after all, stakes claim to advanced, disciplinary knowledge. With such an ideology, we, in essence, continue the sorting system begun in K-12, refusing to let students experience reading and helping them develop into readers, reducing the chances of far too many students toward individual success and the ability to function in a democratic society.

My co-editor John and I designed this issue of *Open Words* to respond to the challenge of making reading theory and research an integral part of the curriculum in English studies. In putting together the call for papers and reading manuscripts, we had to sheepishly admit that we, too, needed to strengthen our relationship with ideas drawn from K-12 educators, educational theorists, and researchers in both secondary and post-secondary institutions. As our first article demonstrates, reading research can inform our teaching. Chris Anson, Robert Schwegler, and Susan Rashid Horn study computer-assisted eye tracking in "The Promise of Eye-Tracking Methodology for Research on Writing and Reading." Eye tracking has been a staple in reading research, and Anson, Schwegler, and Horn use it to focus on the impact on reading of readers' perceptions of error, suggesting that pairing eye tracking with other methodologies will reveal much about writing and pedagogy.

The sad but true reality facing us as instructors is that students dislike reading. Pamela Mason-Egan's "Re-Valuing Readers and Reading in a College Support Program" addresses the low self-esteem students maintain when trying to think of themselves as readers. Using a case study approach, Mason-Egan reviews the misconceptions about the reading process of students and reaffirms what K-12 whole language instructors know: students read better when looking for meaning. Diane DiVido Tetreault and Carole Center in "But I'm Not a Reading Teacher!" pick up on this strand by focusing on ways to counter student avoidance of and non-interest in reading. They argue that reading, thinking, and writing are dialogically interwoven and recommend that writing instructors incorporate reading and reading strategies into the composition classroom.

This issue concludes with Jeanne Henry's "Cultivating Reading Workshop: New Theory into New Practice," where she revisits her version of reading workshop from her seminal work *If Not Now: Developmental Readers in the College Classroom.* She adds to her work by suggesting we use the term "disenfranchised readers" to discuss students whom we previously might have labeled as "reluctant" or "resistant," and like Mason-Egan, embraces the concept of "re-valuing" to help build in students a self-conception of themselves as readers. Her update includes a discussion of the use of multi-modal technology in the classroom.

Much more needs to be done than one issue of a journal can possibly do, but John

and I humbly submit this to you, our readers, in the hope that you will continue the dialogue our contributors have begun. If reading matters—and most of us think it does—we have to teach students how to do it. As Tetreault and Center suggest, we all must become reading teachers.

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