

Recognizing Acts of Reading: Creating Reading Outcomes and Assessments for Writing

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ABSTRACT

While it is a truism in Composition Studies that academic reading and writing are integrated, reading is not consistently theorized with the same rigor as writing, in both the program and scholarly domains. Yet when the role of reading in a writing program is not articulated, students can experience classroom expectations for reading and writing working at cross-purposes. This essay recounts how one WPA responded to an administrative imperative to improve reading scores by designing and implementing an assessment of reading in Basic Writing classes. What resulted was a collaborative process to account for the often overlooked role of reading that further aligned our curriculum. Articulating reading objectives for composition courses has the potential to improve program outcomes and student learning, and more research is necessary to help WPAs in this process.

One day in 2007, during my first year as WPA at New Mexico Highlands University, the Dean came into my office with a sheet of paper in his hand and showed me a graphed distribution of student test scores. He pointed to the five or six marks on the far left, those that represented scores converting to 3rd- and 4th-grade reading levels and asked, “what are we doing to help these students?” As a new WPA, I felt overwhelmed by the question. As someone trained in composition studies, I knew that test scores did not assess a student’s “general reading ability.” Even so, the test scores indicated struggles in reading comprehension or testing situations that seemed wholly outside of my area, and I wondered how to address the needs of students who were represented on the sheet in front of me as statistical outliers. The Dean and I value different kinds of data—he wants to see numbers go up, distributions move to the right—but I am grateful that he asked and kept

asking, as the research and collaboration ensuing from that initial conversation has greatly improved our program. What are we doing to help these students, indeed?

This essay serves two purposes: the first is to demonstrate a process undergone to design and implement reading outcomes and assessments in our Basic Writing-equivalent course. We first implemented a reading examination in fall 2009, and our 2009–2010 and 2010–2011 one-group pre/post-test study results show a statistically significant increase of 12 points in mean test scores. What began as an administrative mandate transformed into a productive interrogation of the role of reading in our program, and this account of the process may be helpful to WPAs currently working under similar administrative imperatives. While a curriculum and its assessment is context-dependent, an account of how one program designed and assessed learning outcomes and met administrative mandates may especially serve WPAs at universities whose Basic Writing programs are currently threatened with elimination. Finally, while my focus is on our Basic Writing course (because its “remedial” status prompted the administration’s demand for reading improvement) the process of creating outcomes and assessments is of course relevant to any writing program.

My second purpose is to argue that articulating the role of reading in a writing course can help align a program’s objectives, assessments, and curriculum, consequently improving student learning. To this end, more scholarly attention to the role of reading in writing programs would strengthen the field. In an online search of WPA annual meeting abstracts for the last three years, I noted that in 2009 and 2010 only one panel was explicitly devoted to reading, while the 2011 meeting marked an increase to two. I believe this means we are giving insufficient critical attention to what constitutes a great portion of our work. We would do well to remember that learning to write for a new discourse community requires learning to read for it, that the challenges any beginning graduate student experiences in meeting expectations for writing, for instance, are largely shaped by the demands of graduate-level reading. Such is the case for all first-year college students, whether or not they are placed in Basic Writing. For a WPA, elaborating the full implications of reading as a composing process and its constitutive relation to academic writing requires time and buy-in, but it can make a writing program more coherent and its objectives more visible, and achievable, to instructors and students.

THE ROLE OF READING IN A WRITING PROGRAM

The “basic writer” varies by institution and is always a local construct, making the student population and placement procedures crucial to understanding who this learner is at any institution (Gray-Rosendale, et al. 42). So first, some context. New Mexico Highlands University is an open-admissions Hispanic-serving institution in Las Vegas, New Mexico, population 14,000. In fall 2008, 59% of our first-year students were first-generation; 51% were low-income, meaning their families reported incomes of less than \$45,000; and 17.9% came from families with incomes below the federal poverty line. However, due to the state’s scholarship program, any New Mexico high school graduate who immediately enters college receives scholarship funds. In fall 2008, 92.9% of full-time first-year (and first-time) Highlands students received some kind of tuition scholarship (*New Mexico Highlands University Self-Study* 14). At Highlands, incoming freshmen are placed through ACT and COMPASS Reading scores: students who score lower than 17 on the ACT or lower than 80 on the COMPASS Reading exam place into English 100, or “Reading and Writing for College.” Approximately 40% of incoming freshmen place into English 100; most of these students are Hispanic and male.

Highlands students who place into English 100 frequently test at scores that convert to 5th–7th grade reading levels. Given the low socioeconomic status (SES) of our student population and the correlation between SES and standardized test scores, this is not surprising. For example, using 2001 national data, Rebecca Zwick found that the average ACT Composite score for students with family incomes of over \$100,000 was 23.4; for students from families with incomes less than \$18,000 the average was 18.1 (205). This correlation between family income and ACT scores consistently appears at Highlands: in 2001, 80% of our students reported ACT Composite scores, the average of which was 17.92, and it has varied only within a one-point range in the years since. While the link between wealth and test scores may be familiar ground, Zwick found that other indicators of academic achievement such as class rank and GPA are also linked to family income, so intertwined is SES with educational opportunity. Teacher quality is also a factor; Zwick found that the most credentialed and experienced teachers are concentrated in schools with the lowest proportion of students eligible to receive free or reduced-price lunches. In 2007, 66.8% of elementary school students and 52.8% of high school students in New Mexico were eligible for free or reduced lunches, a state concentration of poverty second only to Mississippi (Table A-25–3).

I explain these correlations to show how I began to read our students' placement and diagnostic scores. Highlands students' ACT or COMPASS scores are not static measures but an indication of their experience with schooling and their history of educational opportunity. Few will initially demonstrate the classroom attitudes and behaviors that lead to the social and economic benefits accruing to middle- and upper-middle-class students. In this way, our student test scores provided local evidence of inequities in educational opportunity and motivated me to consult the impressive body of research on reading, most of which is conducted within education, language, and developmental studies.

Until 2009, administrators judged English 100's effectiveness through one measure: a standardized COMPASS pre- and post-test that ostensibly measured improvement in reading skills but was not connected to course content in any way. Every instructor designed his or her own syllabus, requiring different texts and assignments. Students were initially tested in class, but later testing moved to the Student Services building. In both testing situations, about half would consistently score lower on the post-test than on the pre-test, indicating an assessment result that could just as likely have occurred if no writing course were taken at all. I should say here that unlike many universities, Highlands sustains a commitment to its diverse student population, a commitment also evident in the fact that people of color comprise 38% of Highlands faculty. To my knowledge, proposals to eliminate Basic Writing never get off the ground. The administration and faculty consider English 100 central to the university's mission, but this translates to a tremendous amount of oversight. For example, the undergraduate catalog description for English 100, "Reading and Writing for College," stipulates that in addition to earning at least a C in the course, all students will "pass a committee-graded exit exam" to enroll in the first-year composition course, English 111 (*New Mexico Highlands University Undergraduate Catalog* 50). The C requirement, the exit exam, the use of invalid standardized tests to assess learning and the withholding of graduation credit all mark an iterative process of addressing learning through accountability measures. In the pursuit of objective assessment and oversight, the administration eventually began putting pressure on the English department to take assessment out of the hands of instructors who taught the course and under the purview of tenured and tenure-track faculty, many of whom never taught the course at all, a proposal that did not sit well with anyone in English. This institutional situation compelled me to develop alternative teacher-driven methods of assessment and oversight that would yield quantitative data, beginning with reading.

Rather than an elementary activity, reading comprehension is itself a complex set of practices implied, but not usually elaborated, in our writing programs. Tenaha O'Reilly and Kathleen Sheehan propose a framework for assessing reading competency that privilege "model-building" and "applied comprehension," two required skills for developing reading competency. "Model-building" here refers to the reader's activity of constructing a "mental model of a text's meaning." Inferring, generalizing, and summarizing are all acts of model-building. "Applied comprehension" refers to the act of taking it further, of using the constructed model to "achieve a particular goal (e.g., solve a problem, make a decision, create a presentation or Web site)" (5). As writing instructors, we require students to perform applied reading comprehension when we ask them to evaluate, critique, integrate, synthesize, or explain (4). A standardized test's efficacy is limited here, as it cannot capture how reading functions in our writing courses. Instead, research on assessment in reading, much like research on assessment in writing, tells us that we should assess the processes we teach in the course. Stahl, Simpson, and Hayes argue that "[r]ather than an over-reliance upon standardized measures that are typically product orientated, instructors should consider the use of assessment procedures that reflect the reading/learning tasks students will be required to take in lower division courses . . . through simulation of a typical learning process"(3). To assess improvement on a student's performance, the test should assess content and procedures made routine in the classroom by asking students to perform the same activities they are asked to perform for the assignments in the course.

I decided that in English 100 we would assess reading—at least in part—through writing. Isolating reading from writing in order to achieve a "pure" assessment extracts reading from the contexts and uses that make it meaningful in college. Separating reading and writing also contradicts the recommendations of compositionists and reading researchers who insist that reading and writing must be pedagogically integrated (see Horning; Adler-Kassner and Estrem 37; Stahl et al. 8). Alice Horning argues that reading "must involve getting meaning, but in addition, it must also entail moving beyond meaning to analysis, synthesis and evaluation . . . readers must be able to go significantly beyond getting meaning from print to using that meaning in very specific ways" (2). In other words, it is not enough to assess reading through the kinds of options offered on standardized tests, nor is it enough to treat reading as incidental to writing program objectives—students must construct and reconstruct meanings, often intertextually, and they must do that in writing.

Linda Adler-Kassner and Heidi Estrem have also urged foregrounding the role of reading in a writing program. In "Reading Practices" the authors

cite their curriculum guide's statement exhorting teachers to sustain the integration of reading and writing: "Remind students that in their writing, they need to incorporate reading/s that help readers [of their essays] to understand how they see what they see in the reading—this means *using evidence*, and *explaining what the evidence they have used demonstrates*" (37). This reminder situates writing as an activity that tightly connects readers and texts and explicitly defines the reading expectations for writing. However, I suggest that any writing outcome that requires "evidence"—and most composition courses require it at some point—implies that students must account for how they read to another reader. This requires working with texts in ways unfamiliar to most first-year college students. Our English 100 students began the semester, for example, with little conception that a text was something one returned to. Reading theorists have said this before: Bartholomae and Petrosky stressed teaching students what to do with texts in *Facts, Artifacts, and Counterfactuals*, and Salvatori and Donahue's "difficulty papers" teach students a method for articulating how texts exclude them. However, my argument is that emphasizing what to do with texts helped us address poor reading comprehension and the administrative demand to quantitatively assess it.

Our new curriculum and pedagogy also diverge from those of Bartholomae, Petrovski, Salvatori, and Donahue by *not* privileging difficult texts. Instead, we foreground the procedural knowledge required to identify and solve a problem presented across multiple texts. In *Integrations*, our new required English 100 textbook, Robinson and Altman identify improving reading comprehension as the first goal of improving writing: "The most basic problem our weak student writers have is that they are poor readers" ("To the Teacher"). *Integrations* requires different kinds of reading in each chapter and includes case studies of increasing syntactic and conceptual difficulty within chapters. Instructors then make these distinctions explicit and teach the procedural knowledge of interacting with texts while content knowledge is not yet challenging (Hillocks 147–69; Vygotsky 187–90; Smith and Wilhelm 122). For each assignment, students are given a case study and a problem to solve; the relationship between the readings constitutes the problem and creating this relationship is the meaning-making process, the activity of reading and writing, in which students engage for each assignment. It is the activity of rereading and returning to the text, of referring to the text in class discussions, that we wanted to prioritize. But deciding on that priority was the result of a different process. I now turn to an account of how we arrived there.

CREATING READING OUTCOMES

An important early component of my research was attending the 2008 WPA Workshop in Denver. Chris Anson led a session on John Biggs's *constructive alignment*, which is the process of aligning goals and outcomes for learning with instruction and assessment. They are:

1. Define learning outcomes based on input from stakeholders;
2. Design assessment tools, criteria, standards linked to the outcomes;
3. Implement assessment tools to gather evidence of student learning;
4. Analyze and evaluate collected data;
5. Identify gaps between desired and actual results;
6. Document results and outline needed changes in curriculum, instructional materials, teaching strategies. (Biggs 95–110)

If we wanted a meaningful assessment of reading (step #3), we would have to begin by deciding what kind of reading we wanted students to learn and perform (step #1). An effective exam assesses the content and procedures of the course, so our course could not attempt to do everything. We had to identify the reading objectives that would most help students achieve writing objectives, implement an appropriate course, and design an exam that would require students to perform reading procedures made routine in the classroom. In fall 2008 several English 100 instructors agreed to serve on a committee that would study our students' struggles with reading and create reading objectives for the course. The committee included three faculty members, one full-time instructor, and one graduate teaching assistant.

Our committee objectives were: identify and develop a common vocabulary for our students' most significant reading struggles and create learning outcomes to address them. These objectives hewed closely to constructive alignment step one: Define learning outcomes based on input from stakeholders. We decided to meet every other week in spring 2009. To establish a common vocabulary, we began with Alice Horning's "Reading Across the Curriculum as the Key to Student Success" and her discussion of the ACT's research on the features of college-level texts that students struggle with the most. In a 2006 study, the ACT classified reading difficulties into six distinguishing features: relationships, richness, structure, style, vocabulary, and purpose, or RSVP (qtd. in Horning). We administered an in-class writing assignment asking our students to summarize a one-page essay, and these samples of student writing served as our starting texts.

Using RSVP vocabulary, we familiarized ourselves with how to recognize these features as our students had difficulty with them. We also looked to our own classes for what they could teach us.

Here is one example from my Freshman Composition 1 class that semester, a class that included several of my previous semester's English 100 students. In an activity to prepare students for reading William Bennett's "What Really Ails America," I gave them the first paragraph, reprinted in the passage below, and then asked them to choose the most accurate of three summaries:

A few months ago I lunched with a friend who now lives in Asia. During our conversation the topic turned to America as seen through *the eyes of foreigners*. My friend had observed that while *the world* still regards the United States as the leading economic and military power on earth, *this same world* no longer beholds us with the moral respect it once did, as a "shining city on a hill." Instead, *it* sees a society in decline. (137, my italics)

Which of the following summaries is most accurate?

1. In "What Really Ails America," William Bennett writes that while lunching in Asia a friend told him that people there respect America's strong economy and military.
2. In "What Really Ails America," William Bennett tells of a friend who is afraid Asia has declined and no longer commands the moral respect it once did.
3. In "What Really Ails America," William Bennett repeats a friend's claim that despite America's strong economy and military, those outside the United States respect it less.

Now, I was looking for the third summary, but few students chose it. As we discussed this passage in class, I discovered that the very references that hold the paragraph together for a strong reader—that the italicized terms in the passage above all rename but refer to the same thing—made it challenging to my students. This tendency to read sentence-by-sentence rather than sentences-in-context is one example of the kind of reading difficulty we saw often as we read student work. Students also struggled to understand the purpose behind sudden shifts in perspective and topic when reading the personal essays so common in our composition classes. And even when connections between texts were made explicit, students tended to experience each reading as compartmentalized and discrete, rather than as the sequenced intellectual journey we imagined for them.

This kind of reading is not particular to Highlands, of course. David Jolliffe and Allison Harl note in their University of Arkansas study that even though the weakest academic readers could be heavily engaged in their reading for personal growth and leisure, “it was the rare student who, like Pauline, would make connections between and among texts that she was reading for her classes” (612). Moreover, evidence of how students make meaning of their reading in writing constitutes what students struggle with already in many composition courses. DeVido Tetreault and Center write that

Students who misunderstand what they read often work hard at the reading, but despite their efforts, these students fail to grasp the thrust of the argument as it is developed in the text. Students who misread confuse statements of fact and acknowledgments of counter-claims with the author’s own claims. As a result, they often misrepresent the textual evidence they select. (50)

This description of students’ responses to arguments will be familiar to composition instructors: students may conflate their own and the author’s beliefs, confuse evidence and claims, or select a passage without making meaning of it in relation to the work as a whole or as a stage in a developing argument.

Our committee discussions and our desire to foreground connections between texts led us to identify “relationships” as the most significant difficulty for our students and what we most wanted them to learn to read for in English 100. We then collaboratively wrote the following reading outcomes for English 100:

1. Communicate an ability to read texts strategically;
2. Demonstrate understanding of relationships between ideas in a text and relationships between texts;
3. Communicate an ability to synthesize information/ideas in and between readings, social experience, and the world.

These reading outcomes support the writing outcomes we later wrote, below:

1. Compose an essay that responds accurately to the writing situation and sustains a controlling idea;
2. Select and use textual, cultural, and/or personal evidence as primary research to support the controlling ideas in their writing;

3. Maintain focus by organizing paragraphs that are tied to the essay's controlling idea.

At this point our committee work was done, but we needed a test and a course that would assess student performance.

ASSESSMENT, RESULTS, AND CONCLUSIONS

For fall 2009 we adopted Robinson and Altman's *Integrations* across all sections of English 100. Case studies, rather than individual readings, comprise the book, so it foregrounded the inquiry and intertextual reading procedures our new objectives required. Students read, evaluate, and synthesize arguments, but they begin with familiar situations. For example, an early case study presents students with a teenager who wants to take a low-paying job against her parents' objections; a later case study asks students to take a position on censorship of a student newspaper, complete with Supreme Court decisions and arguments by local stakeholders. Students develop the habit of using textual evidence while the readings themselves are not yet difficult.

Here I should explain how English 100 writing assessment informed our reading assessment. Our twice-monthly instructor meetings were central to conducting what Patricia Lynne calls a meaningful and ethical assessment practice (117). An assessment is meaningful when the relationships among its purpose, object, and circumstances are clear, and ethical when its practices enact collectively defined values and procedures to achieve fairness. Meetings provided a forum for instructors to read and assess student writing and revise the six-point writing rubric to accommodate readings everyone agreed were fair. While I hold that there are good reasons why informed readers may evaluate writing differently, English 100's institutional location demanded a design that minimized these differences. One technique was to aggregate the learning outcomes in every essay rather than—as in English 111—distribute them across different writing assignments and genres. In this kind of sequence, students repeat the same procedures with increasing difficulty, giving instructors repeated opportunities to calibrate their reading and assessment of student work.

Instructors' collective work on the writing rubric also helped us limit our assessment process to one reader. Every English 100 student had to be assessed during fall finals week, which was a potentially huge burden on instructors teaching a 5/5 load. In a process adapted from the semester assessment described by Irvin Peckham in "Turning Placement into Practice," all instructors received their students' individual writing assess-

ment scores, their instructor mean, and the course mean, data that functioned as ongoing faculty development but not made public. Instructors knew that they would receive feedback in the form of a peer's assessment of their students' work, but they collectively shaped their understanding of student writing objectives and their evaluative criteria all semester. While it sounds labor-intensive, this process distributes the labor of teaching in a way that further aligns objectives, assessments, and pedagogy and makes actual grading and assessment easier and more ethical in Lynne's conception of the term. Importantly, it also provided a convincing alternative to the administration's request that only tenured faculty perform English 100 writing assessment, transforming what could have been a high-stakes summative assessment of students and instructors alike into a low-stakes formative program assessment.

In this way, attention to student reading and writing was integrated at bimonthly meetings as instructors shared how they were teaching the writing process for each assignment and integrated the procedures students would follow on the reading exam. We first implemented the new curriculum and the pre- and post-test in fall 2009. The test consisted of four parts: a checklist of study strategies, a true/false portion, a summary, and a grade prediction. Only the true/false portion and the summary were graded. Given its similarity to the multiple-choice questions on any standardized test, I should explain why we included a true/false portion at all. I adapted the construct from research on effective reading strategies and a study of strategic reading instruction, where teachers created pre- and post-tests through twelve multiple choice questions requiring literal, interpretive, and applied reading. I converted the multiple-choice section to true/false so it would resemble a reading guide, a pedagogical tool created by many of our composition instructors to assist students with their reading. Originally designed by Harold Herber in *Teaching Reading in Content Areas*, reading guides are instructor-designed literal, interpretive, and applied statements corresponding to the reading assignment. As students read for evidence to judge the accuracy of each statement, they engage in the same thought process as their instructor. In this way the guide teaches, not tests, reading comprehension and enables the kind of text-based class discussion that students otherwise find difficult. Our program's composition instructors are taught how to make reading guides as part of their ongoing professional development and training, so the format was familiar to students as a pedagogical tool and structure for reading. The true/false portion accounted for 40% of the exam grade.

The written portion counted 60% and began with the following prompt: "Thoroughly summarize the problem described in the three documents. Be

sure to include main arguments and evidence from the three articles, and explain the issue as completely as possible.” (See the appendix for the complete test). By asking students to summarize the “problem,” rather than the reading itself, we were requiring an act of applied reading comprehension through synthesis. In class, we drew on Rebecca Moore Howard’s reading pedagogy of summary writing for individual documents and built on that as students integrated new information and arguments with prior ones. Students practiced it all semester as part of the writing process for each writing assignment. Like evaluation of literal, interpretive, and applied statements, summary writing and synthesis are activities that can teach and assess reading comprehension (Caverly 27; O’Reilly and Sheehan 4–5).

For the 2010–2011 exam, students were given three articles about child-care in three different countries. Before the fall semester began, we (English 100 instructors and I) took the test ourselves. We then met to clarify and fine tune the true/false statements and discuss what we wanted to see in the writing portion. We compared our own work and discussed what ideas and evidence from the articles we considered integral to an accurate summary of the problem. From these discussions we created a six-point rubric used to score the writing portion of the reading exam, each point of which was converted into its relevant percentage. (See appendix). The same test over the same material, the same instructions, and the same grading protocol were administered as both the pre-test and post-test. For both tests, students took the readings home one week before the test date and were given 75 in-class minutes to complete the open-book pre- and post-test. Instructors made up their own course and student codes and submitted their coded test packets to the English office. At the meeting where test packets were distributed we calibrated our assessments of the written portion with anonymous samples. All exams were only graded once but instructors could request a second grader if they wanted to challenge an exam score.

Given that our standardized pre- and post-test had for years resulted in test scores that showed no improvement over the course of a semester, our main objective was to see whether the curriculum-based pre- and post-test scores would demonstrate gain. Our Office of Institutional Effectiveness ran three one-way analyses of variance (ANOVAs) to determine whether any significant differences across the four semesters would indicate the presence of cohort, instructor, or term effects. These analyses yielded no significant differences across semesters for the reading pre-test ($F[3, 286] = 3.360, p = 0.019$), reading post-test ($F[3, 286] = 2.077, p = 0.103$), or difference scores ($F[3, 286] = 0.192, p = .901$). No instructor or term effects were found. A slight cohort effect may be indicated by the moderately significant difference in pre-test scores across semesters, one I believe may be

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attributed to tuition increases, as some students who might have gone to more selective universities chose Highlands. Because we were interested in gain and difference scores were constant, however, this cohort effect is not a meaningful one.

Results indicated that taken as a two-year group, reading exam scores increased significantly from pre-test (mean = 59.5) to post-test (mean = 71.5), $t(289) = 13.53, p < .000$. The descriptive data for all semesters are shown in Table 1:

Table 1.

Term	Reading Pre-Test			Reading Post-Test			Difference between Post-Test and Pre-Test		
	<i>n</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>
Fall 2009	125	57.7	12.2	125	70.5	13.4	125	12.8	15.6
Spring 2010	33	55.4	10.5	33	67.1	20.0	33	11.7	19.2
Fall 2010	108	61.9	16.7	108	73.3	15.8	108	11.4	13.5
Spring 2011	24	63.6	14.0	24	74.9	9.5	24	11.3	14.1

Further data analysis demonstrated a positive correlation ($r = .4658$) between pre-test and post-test scores, indicating that students who achieved higher scores on the pre-test tended to achieve higher scores on the post-test. However, a negative correlation emerged between pre-test scores and difference ($r = -.4763$) meaning that, on average, the lower a student's pre-test score, the more improvement that student demonstrated on the post-test. This negative correlation held every semester, ranging from $r = -0.1926$ to $r = -0.7697$.

The results suggest that the aligned curriculum is associated with improved student performance on the reading exam. The curriculum was implemented for all students, so we have not established a causal relationship between the curriculum on the one hand and test results on the other. Students may have improved on the post-test by simply doing their course reading. Yet anyone who has struggled to motivate students to complete course readings will see even this possibility as no small feat. Students only haphazardly completed their reading in previous years, where the purpose of reading and its relation to course objectives was not articulated. Under

conditions like these, unaware of what reading is for, students may choose not to read or not know what to read for if they do. What I see as valuable in these results, what they contribute to professional knowledge, is not a specific curriculum or pedagogy. What I see as valuable is that a programmatic attention to the often unexamined role that reading plays in a writing program can further align a program's objectives, curriculum, and assessment. Such an analysis can prevent what is often the default condition of conflicting classroom expectations for reading and writing, in which students experience reading and writing demands at cross-purposes.

However, I joined my fellow instructors by finding the average gain oddly disappointing as the small movement didn't correspond to the gains we imagined based on our classroom experience. We also found no correlation between reading improvement or post-test scores and final course grades. Although the practice of using one reader in our writing assessment may suit our program context and purpose, it does not meet reliability standards sufficient to test correlations between writing assessment scores and reading scores. Education researcher Sharan Merriam reminds us that "both qualitative and quantitative data are interpretations of experience. In one case the experience is mediated through words; in the other situation, through numbers" (68). That this mediation proved unsatisfying, that a number cannot capture a complex social process, that it does not reflect the achievement of students—students who we believe demonstrated expectations for college reading with increasingly thorough treatments of readings and evidence—will not be surprising to anyone reading this essay. To gather another form of quantitative data that might better capture our classroom experience, my assistant Stephen Weatherburn and I conducted manual word counts of the pre- and post-test writing portions. This count did not consider content in any way and does not constitute a random sample—because we gathered exams in the summer, we worked with what was available to us. Nonetheless, writing portions on these pre-tests averaged 190 words while the post-test average turned out to be 448, marking an increase in an average of 258 words. While this data is not as significant to the administration, it better reflects our classroom experience by indicating increased student *fluency* when writing about reading.

No test can assess the learning that a course aims to achieve and how each student experiences it. In our instructor meetings and teacher training, I emphasize course objectives and pedagogy, not data, so that instructors do not begin to feel their job performance will be evaluated simply on how well their students perform on the post-test. I am mindful of a recent study at the U.S. Air Force Academy whose results showed that students making high grades on tests in introductory courses tended to do worse

in the subsequent course than students making lower introductory course grades; those high scorers had less-experienced teachers who focused on test content. Tenured and tenure-track professors, on the other hand, situated course content in and through disciplinary concepts. Their students earned lower course grades in their introductory courses but outperformed other students in their subsequent sequenced courses (Carrell and West). Although the researchers focused on mathematics courses, the study is a compelling one, because it points to the limits of each assessment in the context of a learner's intellectual life and within a sequenced curriculum. We assess what we value, but that does not mean that everything we value is or can be captured. It is my hope that keeping the course outcomes, curriculum, and assessment aligned will continuously justify a goal of improvement, while keeping our goal modest will help curb any pressure on instructors to reductively teach to the test. To that end, we now have a program goal of demonstrating a mean improvement of 10 points per semester.

Inside the program, we continually revise the exam to align with course content and reading pedagogies. The format of the test should reflect the content and procedures of the classroom, and in this way the content (three documents that set up a problem) and the writing portion (summarize the problem) do just that. However, the reading guides that looked like the true/false portion of the test were not as common as I wanted them to be. This does not mean all instructors were not teaching reading procedures. In our meetings instructors regularly shared activities and scaffolding procedures to help students complete reading assignments and do something with them. Nevertheless, the inconsistency means this portion of the exam should perhaps be redesigned or eliminated. Consistency can be difficult to achieve because over the two years of this study, only one instructor taught English 100 during each of the four semesters. The other sections were covered by a rotating staff of full-time instructors and tenured and tenure-track faculty. This rotation requires ongoing faculty development and training, but it also means that we saw student gains through reflective practice rather than through a single pedagogy. Conducting research on a specific reading pedagogy would benefit the field, but it would have to be done in a program with more resources than ours.

In their "Critical Thinking" and "Reading Practices," Linda Adler-Kassner and Heidi Estrem trace their efforts to make the uses and purposes of reading apparent to students and teachers in a writing program. As the authors demonstrate, however, even in a program where reading and writing are integrated in program documents, many instructors tend to teach the way they have been taught and construct students as passive readers ("Reading Practices" 39). Adler-Kassner and Estrem's solution is to

make explicit not only readers' roles but the kinds of reading required, so that instructors can more easily identify the purposes of reading for their students.

Adler-Kassner and Estrem's account of the construction of passive readers is a habit easier to fall into if students are responding to texts beloved (or loathed) by instructors, or texts that encourage instructors and TAs to draw on their own training to construct the "right" reading—a process that scholars note allows students to witness the instructor's learning and interpretive process but does not teach them how to do it themselves (Blau 7; Smith and Wilhelm 89). Our English 100 curriculum has helped to curb this tendency, because case studies position the instructor to focus on the process of inquiry and privilege open-ended questions rather than a "right reading" of a single text. In addition to aligning curriculum and pedagogy, this kind of discussion can improve reading comprehension. In his meta-analysis of reading research, Martin Nystrand found that interpretive rather than transmission pedagogies most effectively improved reading comprehension, especially student-led small-group discussion (395, 398). Teachers utilizing this "problem-solving organization of classroom discourse," and who posed open-ended rather than yes/no questions proved especially effective for struggling students (398–99). A curriculum that inspires instructors to ask open-ended questions rather than one that reinforces beginning instructors' tendency to elicit "right answers" can indirectly benefit students' reading comprehension.

How any WPA designs outcomes, assessments, and curricula is a local concern driven by the student population it serves, certainly, but also informed by the teaching staff, resources, and other factors too innumerable to name here. The fact that I am the only composition faculty member in my department mattered a great deal; it would be irrelevant in most. For those who have not yet addressed the role of reading in their programs, it may seem a daunting process. Beginning a conversation about what stakeholders want reading to accomplish, how it constitutes the writing and learning goals of a course, can set that process in motion.

If we take seriously the mutually constitutive relationship between academic reading and writing, then the role of reading in a writing program should be made explicit. However, the research, scholarly activity, and conference presentations on reading remain scant, and attention to reading in graduate programs pales compared to the space dedicated to writing. Even as most composition courses are organized by the production and consumption of texts, reading often functions as a pre-text or an afterthought. And I have not begun to address the demands that multi-media and online environments place on our less privileged students, as well as the potential

consequences for them articulated by the New London Group in *Multiliteracies: Literacy Learning and the Design of Social Futures* (Cope and Kalantzis). If we do not recognize the role of reading, the *other* act of composition, in our writing programs and our field, we aren't recognizing the complexity of our textual world, and the student from the wrong zip code is more likely to become just another statistic.

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Table A-25-3: Poverty Concentration in Public Schools. *National Center for Education Statistics*. U. S. Department of Education, 2007. Web. 21 July 2010.

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APPENDIX: READING PRE/POST TEST (FALL 2010/SPRING 2011)

Number: _____

Grade: _____

Part 1: *Study time*. About how much time, total, did you spend studying for this exam?

Study strategies. Please read the statements below and check off each one that you performed as a study strategy.

- I annotated, or wrote on, my case study.
- I created examples or analogies to better understand the case study.
- I made connections between two or more concepts.
- I wrote down or reflected on my prior knowledge of the topic before reading.
- I created "why" questions before, during, or after reading.
- I organized the information I read in some way.
- I summarized sections of the reading so I would understand it better.
- I made up questions and answers.
- I worked with a classmate on one or more of the above strategies.
- I studied in these other ways that work for me:

Part 2: *True/False*. (40%)

Instructions: Your answers below should only pertain to the readings, not your personal experience or something you have read before.

Read the statements below and clearly mark each one T for "true" or F for "false." A statement is "true" if the same information can be found in or supported by any of the three articles.

1. _____ In the U.S., all states are required to perform background checks on child care workers and regulate day care centers to protect children.
2. _____ More and more, Canadians view child care as the parents' responsibility alone.
3. _____ Some Canadian families pay \$70/month for childcare that costs \$800-1200/month in the northeastern United States.
4. _____ Due to the recession, the French government has recently cut medical, retirement, and child care benefits.
5. _____ Whereas understaffed day care centers deal harshly with children's behavior issues, fully and professionally staffed centers do not react more appropriately.

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6. ____ Although it requires government investment, research shows that quality early child care can have beneficial long-term effects for the individual child and the national economy.
7. ____ There are more child care workers per child in American day cares than in French day cares.
8. ____ The French generally trust the government to meet their child care needs, while Americans are more likely to trust community and corporate solutions.

Instructions: Choose **two** of the statements below. Mark the statements you choose T for “true” or F for “false,” and give one reason from the reading *or* your own experience to support your decision. Write on the back of this sheet if you need to.

1. ____ It is important that the American government stay out of early child development.
This statement is true/false, because:
2. ____ College graduates would have more career options if the American government invested in affordable, quality early child care.
This statement is true/false, because:
3. ____ Government-subsidized day care may work in Canada and France, but it would never work in the U.S. .
This statement is true/false, because:

Part 3: *Summary*. (60%)

Instructions: Thoroughly summarize the problem described in the three documents. Be sure to include main arguments and evidence from the three articles, and explain the issue as completely as possible. Write on the back of this sheet or attach additional sheets of paper if necessary.

Part 4. *Prediction*. What grade do you predict you will earn on this exam, and why?

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1		2	3	4	5	6
May be opinion only; may be too brief to evaluate; topic may not be relevant to the reading	May be too brief to evaluate; coverage may be scant (such as only treating first document)	Quality and/or cost may not be addressed; may note ideas but not offer evidence (or vice versa); implications may not be addressed at all; coverage may be too short (briefly treats 2 documents)	Includes evidence/examples of quality and cost; mentions implications, however tangentially; may note distinctions between cultural perspectives or worldviews; logically connects or synthesizes all 3 documents Opinion may be present but doesn't detract from content	Thoroughly addresses quality and cost as defining features of the child care problem; clearly establishes relationship between ideas and evidence given for them; communicates social, national, or economic implications; responds to documents as arguments; logically connects or synthesizes all 3 documents Opinion may be present but doesn't detract from content	Thoroughly addresses quality and cost as defining features of the child care problem; clearly establishes relationship between ideas and evidence given for them; communicates social, national, or economic implications; responds to documents as arguments; logically connects or synthesizes all 3 documents Opinion may be present but doesn't detract from content	Presents child care as a social, national, or economic issue; coverage of issue is thorough; responds to documents as arguments; synthesizes all 3 documents Opinion may be present but doesn't detract from content