



Motivation and Connection: Teaching Reading (and Writing) in the Composition Classroom

Author(s): Michael Bunn

Source: *College Composition and Communication*, Vol. 64, No. 3 (February 2013), pp. 496-516

Published by: National Council of Teachers of English

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43490768>

Accessed: 28-03-2018 17:29 UTC

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <http://about.jstor.org/terms>



JSTOR

National Council of Teachers of English is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *College Composition and Communication*

Michael Bunn

Motivation and Connection: Teaching Reading (and Writing) in the Composition Classroom

Drawing on qualitative research conducted at the University of Michigan, this article examines the extent to which composition instructors theorize and teach reading-writing connections and argues that explicitly teaching reading-writing connections may increase student motivation to complete assigned reading. The article also discusses using model texts as an effective means of teaching those connections.

Many college students see writing courses as a chore—a hurdle on the track toward graduation. At the same time, many of these students recognize the value of writing and learning to write. In extensive interviews conducted with Harvard students in the 1990s, Richard Light found that “[o]f all skills students say they want to strengthen, writing is mentioned three times more than any other. Most know they will be asked to write an enormous amount at college. Most expect this to continue after they graduate” (54). Around the same time, Thomas Hilgers and his colleagues interviewed students enrolled in upper-division writing-intensive classes in their majors at a large state university and discovered that these students valued assigned writing tasks for various reasons, most notably as an opportunity to “pursue personal goals” such as “satisfying a burning curiosity about a particular topic” or as a form

CCC 64:3 / FEBRUARY 2013

496

of “preparation for postcollege employment” (Hilgers, Hussey, and Stitt-Bergh 330–32).

In her 2009 book, *The College Fear Factor*, Rebecca D. Cox draws on five years of interviews and observations at community colleges to demonstrate that many of the students she observed value writing and writing classes even if they don’t enjoy them. Cox writes that “the distinction between getting an education and enjoying it emerged as a basic theme for the vast majority of students,” and among the evidence she offers is the following passage from Joy, who Cox claims “drew an explicit distinction between learning from the class and enjoying it”:

This class, I would say, is an excellent class. I think it’s a necessary class that all students should have as a freshman, because it prepares you for writing papers in all different classes . . . It is a necessary evil, pretty much, because I don’t know anybody who likes this class, but it is necessary if you want to be successful in your other classes with the papers that you have to write. So I like the class on a learning standpoint.

On a fun standpoint, I hate it. (53).

The students Cox followed placed a high value on writing and learning to write, even though at times they may have hated it from a “fun standpoint.”

In a 2007 study of composition courses conducted at Purdue University aimed at better understanding the extent to which students transfer knowledge from one context to another, Dana Driscoll found that many students—including “students who are not in humanities-based majors but instead from majors across the curriculum”—not only value writing but also may “share some of our most basic philosophies about writing—that is, that writing is a lifelong skill and that practice with writing is the best way to improve” (89). Driscoll found that many students entered their composition courses already “positive about the value of their writing course,” particularly in terms of how the work of those courses might be useful beyond college.

Whether writing is perceived as the opportunity to investigate a topic of personal interest or viewed primarily as a “necessary evil” to help with future coursework and career aspirations, there is little doubt that many students—whether enrolled in prestigious liberal arts institutions, large state universities, or community colleges—value writing and learning to write.

But what about reading?

While many students enrolled in composition courses seem to recognize the value of learning to write, it’s unclear whether students experience this

same level of motivation toward assigned course reading. As Jeanne Henry notes of her own experiences of teaching reading at the collegiate level, “My freshmen were very much *able* to read; they were simply disinclined *to* read” (64, emphasis in original). David Jolliffe and Allison Harl make a similar point

While many students enrolled in composition courses seem to recognize the value of learning to write, it’s unclear whether students experience this same level of motivation toward assigned course reading.

regarding their research on student reading at the University of Arkansas: “In short, we discovered students who were extremely engaged with their reading, but not with the reading their classes required” (600). Thus a pressing question for writing instructors is, how can we teach reading in ways that motivate students to

engage with assigned course reading? Further, how can we draw upon students’ own recognition of the importance of writing as a way to motivate them to read in our classes?

Over the past two decades, a handful of scholar-practitioners have explored the role that reading plays in both collegiate writing courses and composition scholarship.¹ Particularly useful are the ways that these scholars present rationales for including reading instruction in writing courses (Helmers; Horning; Salvatori), suggest reasons that reading isn’t being adequately addressed within the field (Harkin; Morrow), articulate challenges that instructors—including graduate instructors—might face when trying to teach reading in the writing classroom (Adler-Kassner and Estrem; Carillo; Ettari and Easterling; Tetreault and Center), explore approaches to reading promoted in composition textbooks (Huffman), and provide an example of how researchers might utilize qualitative methods to explore the issue of reading (Jolliffe and Harl).

What this article adds to this growing body of research is attention to some of the ways that instructors theorize and teach reading-writing connections in composition courses and how such theorization and teaching practices may affect students’ motivation to complete assigned reading. As Linda Adler-Kassner and Heidi Estrem note, “Studies that focus on the contexts that *instructors* create for students’ reading . . . are few and far between” (36, emphasis in original). This article is intended to help fill that gap. Examining the ways that writing instructors think about and teach reading—how they perceive connections between the processes of reading and writing and attempt to teach those connections to students—provides a more complete picture of what is happening in composition classrooms. These findings can also inform

the important discussions we need to be having about which approaches to teaching reading will motivate students to engage with assigned texts and help them to read and write better.

I recently conducted qualitative research at the University of Michigan in order to examine some of the ways that instructors theorize and teach reading in composition courses and to better understand how students perceive and respond to assigned course reading. An online survey (Appendix A) was sent to instructors who were teaching, or had taught, first-year writing at the university, presenting them with a range of questions about the ways they theorize and teach reading. In total, 114 instructors were invited to complete the online survey; these instructors were all graduate students or lecturers teaching for the English Department Writing Program (EDWP) during the semester of data collection, and each of these instructors had taught at least one section of first-year writing in the past or were doing so at the time of the survey. The response rate was exactly 50 percent—57 of the 114 instructors invited to complete the online survey did so.

Next, interviews were conducted with 8 instructors who were teaching first-year writing at the time of our interview and who indicated on their survey that they would be willing to speak with me. Five of the interviewees were graduate student instructors (2 studying literature, 2 studying English and education, and 1 studying linguistics), and 2 were full-time faculty lecturers (who had all earned M.F.A. degrees in creative writing from the university).

After holding these interviews, I observed 4 of these interviewed instructors' classrooms during two different class sessions. In each of these four courses a four-question survey (Appendix B) was distributed to students asking for their views on the reading that they were doing for the course. In total, I received survey responses from all 66 students present during the four class sessions—17 students each in three of the courses and 15 students in the other. Though students were given the option to decline the survey, none did so.

This article puts instructor survey and interview responses in conversation with student survey responses to shed some light on how both instructors and students think about reading as it operates in the writing classroom. Specifically, the article addresses four related questions:

This article puts instructor survey and interview responses in conversation with student survey responses to shed some light on how both instructors and students think about reading as it operates in the writing classroom.

1. To what extent do instructors theorize reading and writing as connected activities?
2. To what extent are instructors explicitly teaching reading-writing connections in their composition courses?
3. What effect (if any) does students' understanding of reading-writing connections have on their motivation to complete assigned reading?
4. For instructors who *are* explicitly teaching reading-writing connections, what are some of the specific ways they are doing it?

More fully understanding the ways that instructors theorize and teach reading-writing connections is important because, as my findings suggest, explicitly teaching such connections can influence the extent to which students find course reading valuable and can affect their motivation to complete assigned reading.

In the remainder of this article I discuss a few lessons we can learn and conclusions we might draw about teaching reading based on my research findings. I begin by proposing a definition of reading that emphasizes the cooperation between readers and writers and stresses the importance of conceptualizing reading and writing as connected processes. I then examine the extent to which participating instructors at the University of Michigan theorize reading and writing as connected activities and document the ways they do (and don't) teach such connections to students. I supplement this section with responses from the student surveys to reveal whether teaching reading-writing connections explicitly seems to have any effect on student motivation to read. Next, I present and discuss the method of teaching reading-writing connections mentioned most often by instructors at Michigan: assigning model texts with the hope that students will read to identify particular techniques to try out in their own writing or read to recognize genre conventions. I conclude the article by offering a few suggestions for ways instructors might teach reading-writing connections effectively in composition courses.

Reading Defined as "Negotiation"

Readers construct meaning (at least in part) by drawing on their own personal experiences (Stein; Lindberg) and by drawing on other types of prior knowledge (Hayes; Lemke). As Deborah Brandt puts it, "readers bring to a text stores of prior knowledge about the world and about the nature of discourse that allow

them to fill in the inferences and make the predictions necessary for comprehension" (119). Such interaction between reader and text suggests that the process of reading is a *negotiation* between the knowledge and purposes of the writer and the knowledge and purposes of the reader. In "A Social-Interactive Model of Writing," Martin Nystrand describes this type of negotiation: "when the respective purposes of the writer and the reader intersect as they must when the reader comprehends the writer's text, the meaning that the reader gives to the text is a unique result—a distinctive convergence or interaction—of reader and writer purpose (74).² The understanding and meaning derived from texts are based not only on the characteristics of the text itself and on the reader's recognition and understanding of those characteristics, but also by a connection between writers and readers that links the knowledge and purposes of the author with the knowledge and purposes of the reader (as well as the properties of the text itself) together into a broader meaning-making activity. This negotiated meaning of texts illuminates crucial connections between the activities of reading and writing. As Nystrand puts it, "*meaning is between writer and reader*" (78, emphasis in original).

In response to this understanding of reading and writing as connected activities, a key focus of my research was to discern whether instructors conceive of reading and writing as connected activities, and the degree to which they are (or aren't) teaching reading and writing as connected processes in the classroom.

Reading-Writing Connections: Instructor Perceptions and Assumptions

Nearly 100 percent of instructors who completed the online survey (56 of 57) report that they conceptualize reading and writing as connected activities (one instructor didn't respond to the related question). Not all of those instructors explain or teach those connections to students, however. This creates a potential disconnect between instructor theorization (recognizing important connections between the processes of reading and writing) and instructor pedagogy (*not* teaching those same connections to students).

In reply to the open-ended survey question *Do you believe that reading and writing are connected activities?* all 56 instructors who answered the question express the belief that reading and writing are connected. Their answers distribute as follows:

<i>Yes</i>	25
<i>Absolutely</i>	15
<i>Of course</i>	6
<i>Yes (or absolutely), but . . .</i>	4
<i>Definitely</i>	2
<i>Certainly</i>	1
<i>It is a fact, not a belief</i>	1
<i>They are fundamentally the same act</i>	1
<i>Often, but not always</i>	1

As this distribution indicates, only 5 instructors express any form of reservation or qualify their answer in any way. For example, 2 of those instructors make a point to note that it's not *always* the case that good readers are good writers, and vice versa:

Yes. But I have also seen struggling readers write wonderful things and struggling writers read and interpret challenging text.

Yes. They influence each other recursively. However, in my personal life, there are people who challenge this belief for me . . . people I know who write very well, but don't read much . . .

This type of qualification doesn't really challenge the idea that reading and writing are connected, but offers a useful reminder that, in the words of 1 of

these 5 instructors, it's not always an exact "one-to-one ratio."

While all 56 of the participating instructors express the belief that reading and writing are connected activities (with 5 offering some form of qualification), this belief doesn't always translate into pedagogy.

While all 56 of the participating instructors express the belief that reading and writing are connected activities (with 5 offering some form of qualification), this belief doesn't always translate into pedagogy. In response

to the question *How (if at all) do you teach a connection between reading and writing to students in first-year writing?* 10 instructors report that they *don't* explicitly teach those connections to students. This survey question elicited responses such as the following:

Good question. I don't think I have addressed this connection explicitly.

I don't draw connections explicitly, but I constantly tell them that the best way to improve their writing in a given genre is to read a lot in that genre.

I'm not sure I teach that connection explicitly, though I believe the connection is made obvious by writing assignments and studies of texts.

I'm not sure that it's something I teach directly. This may be a fault on my part. Instead of telling them the connection is important, I assume they already know or they'll see the connection as we work toward reading texts objectively.

A sentiment expressed in these responses is that instructors don't need to teach reading-writing connections explicitly or that such connections are already clear to students. As one instructor claims:

This connection is not something necessary to parse. First of all, the students realize that by reading and questioning texts, they will better engage in analysis which will directly translate into their own writing.

This instructor's response not only assumes that students will automatically recognize how certain reading practices influence their writing, but also that such reading practices "directly translate" to student writing—both without any intervention on the part of instructors.

Another instructor discusses the assumption that students will automatically recognize connections between course reading assignments and course writing assignments. During our interview, Sally, a graduate student studying English and education, elaborated on this assumption: "I assumed today, since we're talking about narrative and they're going to be writing narratives, I assumed that [a connection between the course reading and course writing assignments] was evident. But I think we assume a lot of things, and shouldn't."³

The Benefit of Explicitly Teaching Reading-Writing Connections

In our interview, Sally went on to say a bit more about why it's important for instructors to make connections between reading and writing assignments explicit to students. As she makes clear in the following excerpt, Sally believes that if instructors explicitly teach reading and writing as connected activities, students are more likely to complete assigned reading because they recognize its value in relation to the rest of the course.

Sally: The reading, I believe, should always tie into what we're doing.

MB: And when you say "what we're doing" you mean the writing assignments?

Sally: The writing assignments. I don't think that I always make that explicit to the students? . . . I think earlier on I made it more explicit, but I think that that's something that I should continue to make explicit.

MB: Why? Why do you think that's worth doing or important?

Sally: . . . Well, one: Buy in . . . I mean student motivation, and in terms of doing the reading, they can understand why it's valuable because I've made that explicit to them. It's not valuable just because I've told them to do it. It's valuable because it's going to be applied.

In other words, students don't have to settle for the instructor's suggestion that reading is worthwhile. When reading-writing connections are made clear, students see that the reading they do will "be applied" in their writing; this helps them "buy in" to the work of the course.

Sally's view that students may be more motivated to complete assigned reading if they recognize how that reading relates to their writing is supported by the survey responses of several students. In response to the question *Are you motivated to read for this course? Why or why not?* 5 students specifically mentioned being motivated to read because the reading helped them with their writing assignments, while 9 other students mentioned that they weren't motivated to read because the texts seemed unrelated to the rest of the course. The following excerpts convey the range of those responses:

Yes, I am motivated [to read] because all of the readings relate very directly to the essays that we are assigned.

Yes, because I believe the readings really help me with writing my own paper . . .

Yes, but only to help my writing . . .

I am not motivated to read for the course because I feel the reading does not relate to what we talk about in class. It does not help me improve my writing so I am not interested in it.

I sometimes know that the reading will not connect to the class, which makes it harder for me to focus and concentrate on the reading.

I am not motivated to read for this course because the readings are unrelated to what we are writing about.

These responses suggest that the degree to which students are motivated to read assigned texts is influenced by whether or not they perceive connections between that reading and other aspects of the course, especially their writing assignments. Such motivation is crucial, for as Jill Fitzgerald, professor of literacy at the University of North Carolina, explains, “People must feel some urge, some motivation, some reason to read or write. If there is no urge, there is no reading and writing” (84). John Guthrie and Allan Wigfield, faculty members at the University of Maryland College of Education whose research focuses on motivation, make a similar point, that “a person reads a word or comprehends a text not only because she can do it, but because she is motivated to do it” (404).

Instructors appear to have a genuine opportunity to motivate students to complete assigned course reading. What this requires, however, is that students believe the assigned readings directly relate to, or will help them to produce, their writing assignments. If instructors *explicitly teach* reading and writing as connected activities rather than assuming that students will identify such connections on their own, students stand a far better chance of recognizing how assigned course reading relates to and can help them with their writing tasks.

If instructors *explicitly teach* reading and writing as connected activities rather than assuming that students will identify such connections on their own, students stand a far better chance of recognizing how assigned course reading relates to and can help them with their writing tasks.

The Use of Model Texts

An important strategy for teaching reading-writing connections surfaced again and again as instructors answered a range of survey questions, and most notably in responses to the question *How (if at all) do you teach a connection between reading and writing to students in first-year writing?* Assigning model texts is discussed by 17 different instructors and referred to a total of 27 times throughout the surveys.⁴ These model texts—mostly published pieces, though sample student papers are occasionally mentioned as well—are primarily discussed in two different ways: as displays of writing techniques and strategies that students can identify and then try in their own writing, or as examples of the specific genre that students will eventually be assigned to write.⁵ What

distinguishes these two types of reading—which both utilize model texts selected and assigned by the instructor—from many other approaches is that they emphasize reading as a means to learn *about writing*, not as a means to better understand a topic, issue, or worldview. These two uses of model texts call on students to study the text with an eye toward their own eventual writing, to read in a way that greatly resembles what I have described elsewhere as *reading like a writer* (“How”).

Several survey respondents mention the first of these two purposes for assigning model texts: wanting students to identify specific writerly techniques or writing strategies that they can try out in their own writing. Here is a sampling of those responses:

I ask students to pay attention to various techniques utilized by the authors and “steal” the ones they find helpful for their own writing.

I ask them to engage with the texts they read by responding to them in writing (challenging them, asking questions, etc.) and then to pull out strategies to use in their own writing.

We ask a lot of questions of texts that are relevant to the essay they are in the process of writing to help them ask questions from which they can write. I also focus heavily on the structure and rhetorical approaches used in the published essays we read, pointing out that these are models for them to use in their own essays.

We’ll examine the strategies used in introductions and conclusions in the published texts to get students thinking about what strategies they may want to use in their essay. Students should use the published readings as models, essentially looking for things they appreciate and want to use in their own work.

In each of these responses the instructor describes using model texts to demonstrate strategies and structural techniques that students can adopt in their own writing. The idea is that students will recognize elements to which they responded as a reader and use these elements in their own assigned writings.

Sally presents a specific classroom activity intended to encourage students to read for what they can use in their own writing:

[W]e’ve been sort of informally keeping a personal style journal where after we read a text and we’ve examined it for structure and we’ve looked at the argument,

we also talk about the aesthetic piece. What did they notice that they like, and what can they take from that text to try out in their own writing?

So, if we found a really good example of a parallel sentence, if they have never tried that before, then they make a note of it and they've got it in the text so that they can refer back to it.

This exercise prompts students to read with an eye toward their own writing by locating specific strategies and techniques that they intend to use and reinforces the idea that both texts and reading serve purposes beyond the transmission of content.

Another instructor describes in a survey response how he or she encourages students to reflect upon the specific ways that they imitate assigned texts:

I have students analyze claims, evidence, organization, metaphors, and language in articles we read. I encourage them to adopt one or two strategies in their papers using imitation in their writing. I ask them to try to make it seamless (to not let me see it). However, I ask them to write a submission note about their writing process, and in this, they are invited to explain how they mimicked a writer we have read and what the experience felt like as well as if they believe the result is rhetorically effective.

By requiring students to reflect on their adoption of techniques and strategies they locate in the model text and compose a submission note in which they assess the effectiveness of this borrowing, this instructor prompts students to identify and consider direct connections between their course reading and writing.⁶ The submission note and student paper serve as tangible proof that the reading done for the course has influenced the student's writing.

The other primary reason that instructors offer for assigning model texts is that they want to provide students with an example of a *genre* in which the students will eventually be asked to write.⁷ This use of model texts asks students to look at the overall structure of the text or the conventions associated with a particular genre, rather than focus on individual writerly techniques and strategies that they can adopt, as we see in the following two examples from the instructors' surveys:

We read examples of the kinds of essays they would be writing—descriptive narratives, researched arguments, etc. I subscribe to the theory that students should read models of the genre in which they will be writing.

If I'm teaching prosody, it makes sense to use metered poetry. If I'm teaching the personal essay, it makes sense to use other personal essays as models. The same can be said for the teaching of other genres.

Instructors assign these texts intending for students to read them as models of genre, but it remains unclear whether instructors are actually teaching students *how* to do this. While the majority of instructors who report assigning model texts so that students can adopt techniques and strategies mention taking time in class to show students how to read for them, this is not the case for most of the instructors who reported assigning model texts as examples of genre. This is a potential disconnect in the course: instructors want students to read for genre conventions but fail to explain this to students or teach them how to do it.

During our interview, Don, a full-time lecturer, noted that this is a potential problem because students don't necessarily know how to read for genre conventions or how to use the texts to improve their own writing:

It can't be like whoa, look at these four models. Let's just do what they're doing. They can't really—can't really see what's happening in those pieces. I think they see an analytical essay and like—I use the word analytical essay because you know it is a kind of genre. You know but to them it's totally *not* a genre, and I think they're kind of blind to most of what is happening.

Don suggests that students are ill-equipped to use model texts effectively on their own. This view is confirmed by at least one student who explained in a survey response, "I am not very motivated to read for this course because I never really know what to look for in the reading." If instructors can teach students how to read and use model texts, they may be able to combat this sort of lack of motivation on the part of students. It's not enough to merely assign certain kinds of texts. After conducting his own study of student writers using model texts, Peter Smagorinsky reached a similar conclusion, warning, "Simply reading a model piece of writing . . . is insufficient to teach young writers how to produce compositions . . . most novices need more direct instruction" (174).

Teaching Model Texts Effectively: An Example

One of the instructors I interviewed and observed, Tawnya, a graduate student studying literature, attempts to provide the kind of "direct instruction" that Smagorinsky recommends by being very explicit with students about potential connections between their assigned reading and their writing assignments:

Tawnya: For both of the papers they've done so far, I've given them readings that do what I'm asking them to do, with the hopes that when they sit down . . . they can re-read it and say "Okay, how can I use this as a template for my writing?"

MB: And when you say "ask them to do," you mean readings that are demonstrating a genre or something?

Tawnya: Right, so the first one was a descriptive analysis, and the second one was the review, due tomorrow. And then for the third one as well, which is more of a standard argumentative paper, I will do the same, so that they can use it as a template . . .

By encouraging students to use these texts as models and read with an eye toward their own eventual writing—to read them as examples of the specific genre in which they will be writing—Tawnya helps students to connect the assigned reading to their writing tasks.

Her belief that reading in this way helps students improve their writing is a belief shared by many of her students. In response to the question *Do you find the reading that you do for this course helpful in improving your writing?* Tawnya had the highest total

number (14) and percentage (82 percent) of students who said *yes*. The following three responses represent how nearly every student in her class mentioned the benefit of reading texts that serve as models for their writing assignments:

The readings are useful because they typically display the style of writing that needs to be utilized in the upcoming paper. For example: in preparation for writing a critique of a live performance, we will read different styles of critiques from various periodicals.

The reading done for this class is helpful because it usually relates to a paper we are going to write. This makes the process of writing papers easier by giving students a reference.

Yes, I do because the readings we do are often the same as the paper we are writing. When we discuss the readings we look at things they have done well and we might want to do in our papers.

This third comment suggests that at least some of the students in Tawnya's course are developing their understanding of specific writerly strategies and

By encouraging students to use these texts as models and read with an eye toward their own eventual writing—to read them as examples of the specific genre in which they will be writing—Tawnya helps students to connect the assigned reading to their writing tasks.

techniques in addition to understanding genre conventions: they are locating things in the assigned texts that the author has “done well” and that they “might want to do” in their papers.

A key to Tawnya’s success is that beyond simply assigning models of specific genres, she talks with students about how they should be reading the model texts. Tawnya’s students get direct instruction in how to read model texts for *both* writerly strategies they can adopt and for genre conventions.⁸ While observing Tawnya’s course, I witnessed this kind of explicit instruction firsthand. Tawnya initiated discussion of the assigned essay by telling students, “I thought maybe we could go through this part-by-part and talk about . . . [how] he is doing an analysis and his use of detail, his ability to state his thesis and what he’s thinking. It should hopefully help you.” She then directed the students to reread the first paragraph. When they were finished, she asked the class, “What did you think of this introduction? Why was it either effective or ineffective at pulling you in as a reader?”

Throughout the discussion that ensued, Tawnya pushed the students to explain in specific detail why they did or didn’t find the introduction effective. She also led students to examine some of the specific choices the author had made. For example, she asked the class to consider the pros and cons of only discussing two areas of the country in an essay dealing with the polarization of America. Two students offered responses to her question:

I thought the pros were because he only focused on two places he could go into more in-depth analysis of the places, but because he only focused on two places, while maybe fundamentally red and blue states are still there, there are still differences everywhere. So if he wanted to make a more specific essay he should focus on those two, but if he wanted to get a really good grasp of the difference between red and blue he should have covered more ground.

I think it works for his purposes because these places are so polar opposite.

Both of these students responded insightfully to the author’s strategy of only covering two locations in the essay, particularly the first student who offered an alternative strategy that the author *might* have used (as well as a rationale for that alternative). In proposing an alternative strategy for composing the essay, this student displays the kind of understanding about writing strategy that can develop when instructors take the time to teach students to read in this way.

A bit later in the same discussion, Tawnya asked the students to look at a specific metaphor operating in the text and told them that they too could use a

metaphor to help structure their next paper: “This is another kind of strategy you can use in papers is coming up with a metaphor that describes what you’re trying to say. So you analyze your performance, and then you come up with a clever way of expressing it to your audience.” With this move, Tawnya directs students’ attention to a specific technique operating in the model text and tells them explicitly that they can make a similar move in their own writing. It’s difficult to imagine a more straightforward way of connecting the reading and writing that students do.

I present Tawnya’s approach as a successful example of teaching reading through the use of model texts for a couple of important reasons. First, she assigns students to read model texts with the *dual* purpose of reading for individual writing techniques and strategies that they can try out, and of reading the text as an example of the genre that they will be working in themselves. She prompts students to use the model texts in both ways simultaneously; this means that students get direct instruction in how to use the model texts for both purposes, each of which can be helpful as they think about their own writing. Second, she demonstrates for her students *how* she would like them to read, and while doing so she emphasizes connections between the reading they are doing and their writing assignments. She has carefully considered how her reading and writing assignments connect and makes an effort to help students recognize those connections.

“Let’s say we were going to bring you to campus and arrange for you to speak with all of our writing instructors. What would you tell them? What would you say that could help us improve the ways we teach reading?”

Conclusion

A few weeks after I finished analyzing my data, I had the opportunity talk about my research with the director of writing from another midwestern university and one of his faculty colleagues. As I told them about my findings and about the apparent need for instructors to teach reading-writing connections explicitly, his colleague looked over at me and asked, “Let’s say we were going to bring you to campus and arrange for you to speak with all of our writing instructors. What would you tell them? What would you say that could help us improve the ways we teach reading?”

There are several suggestions I would like to make to a room full of writing instructors about how to teach reading. Here is where I might start:

- I'd think about the extent to which and the ways in which I perceive reading and writing to be connected activities. This pedagogical awareness can help me to design a course in which the reading and writing assignments build upon and reinforce each other. It's clear from the interviews with instructors at Michigan and from several years of working with new writing instructors at three different institutions that many instructors begin designing their course by *first* selecting the texts to be read, often with little consideration for how those texts connect to course writing assignments.

Selecting the readings first—independent of the course writing tasks—makes it far harder for us to conceive of how the reading and writing tasks connect and increases the likelihood that they won't connect. If instead we select readings and design writing prompts simultaneously, there is a far greater chance that we will be aware of connections between the two and be able to articulate those connections to students.

- I'd talk with students during class about the connections between assignments. Students indicated in their survey responses that they were more or less motivated to read assigned texts depending upon whether they viewed that reading as relevant to their writing assignments. This simple step to explain the scaffolding we've done can help generate motivation on the part of students to complete assigned reading and can help them to understand that reading and writing are connected activities.
- Assigning students to read model texts isn't enough; students usually don't know how to read for writerly techniques or for genre conventions on their own. We must teach students *how* to read model texts in ways that will inform the eventual writing that they will do and teach them to read in ways that help them to develop their understanding of writerly strategies and techniques *and* that help them to identify genre conventions so that they are better prepared to write in those genres.

Teaching reading in terms of its connections to writing can motivate students to read and increase the likelihood that they find success in both activities. It can lead students to value reading as an integral aspect of learning to write. It can help students develop their understanding of writerly strategies and techniques. Most of us firmly believe that reading improves writing. Let's make sure that we are teaching reading in ways that make this happen for students.

Appendix A: Instructor Survey

1. How many semesters of first-year writing have you taught, including this one?
2. How many total writing courses have you taught, including this one?
3. Do students arrive (at the university) prepared to read at the college level?
4. What kinds of reading do students do for your first-year writing course?
5. Do you teach students to read visual images or nonwritten texts? If so, what do you do?
6. What is the reading skill, or particular reading approach, that is most important or beneficial for students to learn in first-year writing?
7. Do you teach students to do a particular kind of reading or adopt a particular reading approach?
8. Do you believe that reading and writing are connected activities?
9. How (if at all) do you teach a connection between reading and writing to students in first-year writing?
10. Are there any differences between the ways that you ask students to read the writing produced by their classmates and the ways you ask them to read published texts? If so, what are the differences?
11. Are there any classroom activities or assignments that are better suited to use one type of text as opposed to the other—either published writing or student-produced writing? Please explain your answer.
12. Please discuss a few of the factors that have most influenced your ideas about how to teach, or not to teach, reading in first-year writing.

Appendix B: Student Survey

1. Do you find the reading that you do for this course helpful in improving your writing? Why or why not?
2. Do you have a preference between reading published writing or the writing produced by your classmates? Please explain your answer.
3. Are you motivated to read for this course? Why or why not?
4. Have you learned about possible connection(s) between reading and writing in this course? If yes, what have you learned?

Notes

1. The topic of reading has received increased attention in the past few years. In 2009, the journal *Open Words: Access and English Studies* devoted its entire spring issue to articles exploring college-level reading—including some discussion of

reading's place within collegiate writing courses. In 2010, the journal *Reader: Essays in Reader-Oriented Theory, Criticism, and Pedagogy* devoted its fall issue to exploring disciplinary ways of teaching reading, including attention to some of the ways that reading is taught in composition. Most recently, at the 2012 Conference on College Composition and Communication in St. Louis, a new annual Special Interest Group dedicated to exploring "The Role of Reading in Composition Studies" met for the first time.

2. Kathleen McCormick prefers an "interactive" model of reading that she believes stresses that "first, both readers and texts contribute to the reading process and second, that both texts and readers are themselves ideologically situated" (69). However, I prefer Nystrand's description of reading as a "negotiation" over other conceptions of reading, including Louise Rosenblatt's notion of "transaction," because negotiation—more than any other term—implies the degree of cooperation and even compromise needed for writers and readers to make meaning effectively from a text. Negotiation implies that two parties—in this case the writer and reader—are approaching the enterprise with the *mutual* goal of creating meaning.

3. All instructor and student names are pseudonyms.

4. This emphasis on model texts may be common at other institutions as well. While conducting a comprehensive study of writing in the undergraduate curriculum at the University of Pittsburgh, David Bartholomae and Beth Matway found a similar use of model texts among faculty from a variety of disciplines: "Many of those interviewed use models in their teaching—either examples of student papers or examples of professional writing—in order to give students a point of reference for genre, format, and style."

5. Although they don't specifically mention the use of model texts, Linda Adler-Kassner and Heidi Estrem found that writing instructors at Eastern Michigan University had "three relatively clear purposes for reading within the program. *Content-based* reading . . . asks students to summarize and interpret, to consider connections between ideas, and to use reading to develop ideas. *Process-based* reading focuses on the work of the writer/researcher, scrutinizing the text to look at the decisions made by the writer in the process of textual production as a possible model for students' own writing/research work. *Structure-based* reading asks students to focus on the conventions reflected in and used to shape content; the emphasis is on developing genre awareness so that student writers can make conscious decisions about how to use different genres and conventions, and can make conscious choices about how, when, or whether to use them" (40–41). The second two of these purposes—*process-based* and *structure-based* reading—seem nearly identical to the two primary ways that instructors participating in my research describe wanting students to read in conjunction with model texts.

6. These submission notes are similar to Jeffrey Sommers's "student-teacher memos" in that they are each "intended to take both student and teacher behind the paper, into the composing process which produced the draft" (77). Sommers asks students to submit a memo with each writing assignment aimed at helping students to "describe and comment on their composing processes" (78). This surveyed instructor's "submission note" may actually do more, however, to help students connect the process of reading with the process of writing, since Sommers's questions focus almost exclusively on writing and the student's written text.

7. Throughout this article I use the term *genre* to indicate a category or type of text (e.g., a review, an opinion column, an argumentative essay) in the traditional literary sense. While I'm aware that other conceptions of genre transcend this limited conception and construct genre as a way to define various situations and social actions, it's clear that instructor participants (such as Don) were using the term exclusively to indicate forms and types of writing.

8. Although Tawnya shows that these two uses of model texts—as providing techniques to adopt and as examples of genre—aren't mutually exclusive, nearly every instructor who mentions using model texts refers to either one use or the other, but not both.

Works Cited

- Adler-Kassner, Linda, and Heidi Estrem. "Reading Practices in the Writing Classroom." *WPA* 31.1/2 (2007): 35–47. Print.
- Bartholomae, David, and Beth Matway. "The Pittsburgh Study of Writing." *Across the Disciplines* 7 (Oct. 2010). Web.
- Brandt, Deborah. "Social Foundations of Reading and Writing." *Convergences: Transactions in Reading and Writing*. Ed. Bruce Petersen. Urbana: NCTE, 1986. 115–26. Print.
- Bunn, Michael. "How to Read like a Writer." *Writing Spaces: Readings on Writing*. Vol. 2. Ed. Charles Lowe and Pavel Zemliansky. Anderson: Parlor P, 2011. 71–86. Web.
- Carillo, Ellen C. "Making Reading Visible in the Classroom." *Currents in Teaching and Learning* 1.2 (2009). 37–41. Web.
- Cox, Rebecca D. *The College Fear Factor*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2009. Print.
- Driscoll, Dana. "Pedagogy of Transfer: Impacts of Student and Instructor Attitudes." Diss. Purdue U, 2009. Web.
- Ettari, Gary, and Heather C. Easterling. "Reading (and) the Profession." *Reader* 47 (Fall 2002): 9–37. Print.
- Fitzgerald, Jill. "Reading and Writing as 'Mind Meeting.'" *Reading and Writing Together: New Perspectives for the Classroom*. Ed. Timothy Shanahan. Norwood: Christopher-Gordon, 1990. 81–97. Print.
- Guthrie, John, and Allan Wigfield. "Engagement and Motivation in Reading." *Handbook of Reading Research*. Vol. 3. Ed. Michael L. Kamil, Peter B. Mosenthal, P. David Pearson, and Rebecca Barr. Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2000. Print.
- Harkin, Patricia. "The Reception of Reader-Response Theory." *College Composition and Communication* 56.3 (2005): 410–25. Print.

- Hayes, John. "A New Framework for Understanding Cognition and Affect in Writing." Ruddell and Unrau 1399–430.
- Helmets, Marguerite, ed. *Intertexts: Reading Pedagogy in College Writing Classrooms*. Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2003. Print.
- Henry, Jeanne. "Cultivating Reading Workshop: New Theory into New Practice." *Open Words* 3.1 (2009): 1–4. Print.
- Hilgers, Thomas, Edna Lardizaball Hussey, and Monica Stitt-Bergh. "As You're Writing, You Have These Epiphanies': What College Students Say about Writing and Learning in Their Majors." *Written Communication* 16.3 (1999): 317–53. Print.
- Horning, Alice. "Reading Across the Curriculum as the Key to Student Success." *Across the Disciplines* 4 (May 2007). Web.
- Huffman, Debrah. "Toward Modes of Reading in Composition." *Reader* 60 (Fall 2010): 204–30. Print.
- Jolliffe, David, and Allison Harl. "Studying the 'Reading Transition' from High School to College: What Are Our Students Reading and Why?" *College English* 70.6 (2008): 599–617. Print.
- Lemke, Jay. "Social Semiotics: A New Model for Literacy Education." *Classrooms and Literacy*. Ed. David Bloome. Norwood: Ablex, 1989. 289–309. Print.
- Light, Richard. *Making the Most of College: Students Speak their Minds*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2001. Print.
- Lindberg, Gary. "Coming to Words: Writing as Process and the Reading of Literature." *Only Connect*. Ed. Thomas Newkirk. Upper Montclair: Boynton/Cook, 1986. 143–57. Print.
- McCormick, Kathleen. *The Culture of Reading / The Teaching of English*. Manchester: U. of Manchester P, 1994. Print.
- Morrow, Nancy. "The Role of Reading in the Composition Classroom." *JAC* 17:3 (1997): 453–72. Print.
- Nystrand, Martin. "A Social-Interactive Model of Writing." *Written Communication* 6.1 (1989): 66–85. Print.
- Rosenblatt, Louise. "The Transactional Theory of Reading and Writing." Ruddell and Unrau 1363–98.
- Ruddell, Robert, and Norman Unrau, eds. *Theoretical Models and Processes of Reading*. 5th ed. Newark: International Reading Association, 2004. Print.
- Salvatori, Mariolina. "Conversations with Texts: Reading in the Teaching of Composition." *College English* 58.4 (1996): 440–54. Print.
- Smagorinsky, Peter. "How Reading Model Essays Affects Writers." In *Reading/Writing Connections: Learning from Research*. Ed. Judith W. Irwin and Mary Anne Doyle. Newark: International Reading Association, 1992. 160–76. Print.
- Sommers, Jeffrey. "Behind the Paper: Using the Student-Teacher Memo." *College Composition and Communication* 39.1 (1988): 77–80. Print.
- Stein, Victoria. "Elaboration: Using What You Know." *Reading-to-Write: Exploring Cognitive and Social Process*. Ed. Linda Flower et al. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1990. 144–155. Print.
- Tetreault, Diane DeVido, and Carole Center. "But I'm Not a Reading Teacher!" *Open Words* 3.1 (2009): 45–61. Print.

Michael Bunn

Michael Bunn is a full-time faculty member in the University of Southern California Writing Program and co-founder of the CCCC Special Interest Group "The Role of Reading in Composition Studies."