

ATD Reviews

A Review of *Reconnecting Reading and Writing*

Edited by Alice S. Horning and Elizabeth W. Kraemer, 2013. Reference Guides to Rhetoric and Composition. Anderson, SC: Parlor Press. [ISBN 978-1-60235-459-3. 325 pages, including index. \$32.00 USD (soft cover).]

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Reconnecting Reading and Writing is a comprehensive guide designed to energize explicit instruction in reading as it relates to college-level writing. Authors of the ten-chapter volume provide compelling arguments for why attention to reading at the college level should not be overlooked. Reading, writing, critical thinking, information literacy, and other forms of literacy development are *interconnected* processes that students continue to develop *throughout* college. Furthermore, as the introduction points out, many new college students, whether monolingual English speakers, multi-, or trans-lingual, arrive at college vastly underprepared for the reading they will need to complete both academically and professionally.

While first-year writing college instructors and others in English Studies may be somewhat more familiar with students' reading competencies, instructors across the curriculum may not be sufficiently aware of students' reading levels for a variety of reasons, including class size, focus on disciplinary content, and, perhaps, a general perception that students are prepared for college-level reading simply because they are in college. However, as Horning and Kraemer convey in their introduction, according to ACT's College Readiness Benchmark for Reading (2005), only 51% of U.S. high-school graduates are ready for college-level reading. This finding is supported by many current research reports including a 2011 Princeton-Brookings collaboration, "Literacy Challenges for the 21st Century," which reveals that reading test scores in the U.S. have remained stagnant since 1970 and that higher-level literacy skills are essential to young Americans if they are to compete in the globalized labor market (Murname, Sawhill, & Snow, 2012). "Literacy Challenges" also provides evidence that reading competence is correlated to family income.

As *Reconnecting Reading and Writing* points out, advanced literacy requires strong critical thinking and problem-solving skills, and these skills are closely linked to students' reading abilities and information literacy practices. Early in *Reconnecting Reading and Writing*, editors Horning and Kraemer define reading as the ability to:

...[get] meaning from print, whether the print is viewed on paper or on a screen. In college courses in writing and elsewhere, however, reading must go beyond just getting meaning: Readers must be able to analyze texts to see how parts fit together. They must also be able to synthesize different readings on the same topic or issue so they can see a range of perspectives and/or research on the topic or

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issue. In addition, they must be able to evaluate the materials they read...Finally, critical reading entails students' ability to make use of what they read for their own purposes. (10)

The Princeton-Brookings report supports this definition and advocates for a revitalization of reading curricula and a renewed focus on reading at all learning levels.

All ten chapters of *Reconnecting Reading and Writing* offer useful information that will help educators better understand and implement best practices for reconnecting reading and writing at the college level. While the introduction substantiates the need for re-focusing on reading, the nine chapters that follow address the following topics: background information on the history of reading in English Studies; international pedagogical approaches to reading; best practices and guidelines for working with basic writers; teaching integrated reading and writing skills to L2 students (108); understanding common core standards and how and why they may, or may not, prepare students for college; selecting textbooks that support best reading practices; and developing information literacy skills through collaboration with librarians and in digital environments. All chapters offer an abundance of theoretical and practical ideas for both new and experienced instructors and program directors who want to enrich and support pedagogies with regard to reading.

For example, the following three chapters may be particularly helpful for instructors and program directors seeking to better understand how to teach reading in first or second-year college classrooms. First, David Joliffe's chapter, "The Common Core Standards and Preparation for Reading and Writing in College," provides an overview of the 2010 Common Core Standards for teaching reading and writing to students in kindergarten through twelfth grades. These standards have been implemented in most U.S. states. This document provides eleven sets of standards with corresponding student learning expectations (SLEs) and addresses the importance of teaching both literary and informational texts, but falls short of explaining what these texts should be and addressing how reading and writing work together to assist students in writing effective arguments and narratives (143). College instructors interested in supporting students with reading practices in their college-level classes can gain a better understanding of how the standards were developed and possible weaknesses involving their implementation from the chapter.

Editor Alice Horning, the author of "Writing and Reading Across the Curriculum: Best Practices and Practical Guidelines," offers ten well-developed strategies and ample resources to assist instructors in reconnecting reading and writing in college classrooms, including ideas for creating engaging curriculum and using interactive visual media. Horning also encourages instructors to: incorporate various genres of reading material, determine outcomes and "work backward," diagnose students' reading abilities, address their own skills and expertise with regard to teaching reading, and work collaboratively across the disciplines with librarians and other faculty.

William Grabe and Cui Zhang discuss working with two types of L2 students—those international students who come to the U.S. to earn a post-secondary degree and the Generation 1.5 college students who arrive in the U.S. as immigrants. In their chapter, "Second Language Reading-Writing Relations," Grabe and Zhang point out that a lack of attention to reading instruction in the composition classroom is particularly detrimental to both populations of L2 students, who may not have developed the same reading competencies as their L1 counterparts. The chapter assists instructors by citing research addressing the challenges L2 students face with combined reading and writing activities and by providing strategies for supporting L2 students with reading and writing. The chapter also presents and elaborates upon four "themes" concerning the reading-writing relationship: summary, synthesis, research, and plagiarism. Additionally, the authors discuss the interrelationships among writing and reading tasks and other language skills including, grammar, vocabulary, and listening, asserting that L2 students need to "receive as much attention to their reading comprehension needs as to their writing production needs when they move into the composition classroom" (129).

Reconnecting Reading and Writing offers Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) program directors, writing centers, faculty, graduate students, and administrators a clear, direct, and comprehensive overview of the importance of reconnecting reading and writing in academic classrooms. As WAC program directors strive to engage faculty across the curriculum in developing sustainable pedagogies that include writing projects pertinent to their disciplines, attention to reading and its interconnected relationship with writing must not be overlooked.

Although this guide makes the connections between reading, writing, and advanced literacy clear, one additional area of research that might be of great service to instructors who are trying to reconnect reading and writing would involve assessment. Instructors can start this process by understanding that reading, like writing, is a very complicated process, and that all students have their own individual reading histories, weaknesses, and strengths. Additionally, students who have poor reading skills have often had negative (even traumatic) academic and personal experiences with reading. Therefore, to better assist students in developing their literacy skills, instructors must be able to assess students' weaknesses and strengths as readers, and more diagnostic tools are needed for this purpose. Instructors can start by dedicating more class time to reading activities and paying closer attention to the individual needs of students with regard to reading. Students are often willing to discuss their reading strengths and weaknesses in class and during conferencing—making reading visible through ongoing reading activity and discussions about both what and how to read will benefit students. Instructors across the curriculum should not assume that students are reading proficiently just because they are in a college classroom.

Additionally, although Kathleen Skomski's chapter, "First Year Writing: Forward Movement, Backward Progress," provides a helpful model for cognitive development called Revised Bloom's Taxonomy (RBT), additional understanding of students reading behaviors and cognition might also be beneficial to educators wanting to improve their approaches to teaching reading. For more information about the science of reading and cognition, supplemental texts might include Maryanne Wolf's *Proust and the Squid: The Story and Science of the Reading Brain* (2008) and Stanislas Dehaene's *Reading in the Brain: The New Science of How We Read* (2009). Both texts may help educators understand how students read and problems that may arise for student readers both cognitively and behaviorally.

A cornerstone text for WAC directors and those instructors concerned with stronger connections between reading and writing in their own programs and classrooms, *Reconnecting Reading and Writing* is designed to deepen classroom practice and provide a foundation for further research for educators interested in helping students succeed in college. As Charles Bazerman notes in the preface to the volume, "The assumption that reading is a fundamental skill learned once and for all errs in the same ways as the assumption that writing is a fundamental skill learned once and for all. Our reading schemas develop in tandem with our writing schemas" (xi). For further current and complimentary information on the reading-writing connection and its role in developing advanced literacy skills, see Ellen Carillo's *Securing a Place for Reading in Composition: The Importance of Teaching for Transfer* (2015) and the January 2016 edition of *Pedagogy* edited by Mariolina Salvatori and Patricia Donahue.

Reconnecting Reading and Writing is available from Parlor Press, in book stores, and free on the Internet at The WAC Clearinghouse (<https://wac.colostate.edu/>).

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