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But I'm Not a Reading Teacher!

Introduction

RECENT CALLS FOR MORE ATTENTION TO COLLEGE STUDENTS' READING COMPETENCE assert that inexperience with reading is a barrier to success in college for many students. The latest installment of the National Endowment for the Arts report, titled *To Read or Not to Read,* confirms what many college reading and writing teachers already witness on a daily basis: Americans are reading less and their reading proficiency is declining at troubling rates. The NEA reports that in 2006, 15 to 24 year-olds spent just 7 to 10 minutes a day voluntarily reading anything. It also finds that between 1992 and 2003 the percentage of college graduates who tested as "proficient in reading prose" declined from 40 to 31 percent. In a recent iteration of the call for more attention to reading, David Jolliffe in his review article in *College Composition and Communication,* asserts that "reading as a concept is largely absent from the theory and practice of college composition" (473). As first-year composition teachers, we wholeheartedly agree that this reality—students' lack of experience as critical readers of difficult texts—is one that composition teachers too often ignore. Instead of ignoring this reality, we might view first-year composition classes as an ideal location in which to teach students the practices of close, critical reading that will allow them to interact confidently with texts throughout their college careers and beyond. Nobody likes to clean up someone else's messes. Inheriting the unresolved reading problems of previous classrooms can be seen as an annoying burden, but the freshman composition class is one of the last opportunities to reach these students. As John Perkins argues in "A Community College Professor Reflects on First-Year Composition,"

> In past generations, when first-year composition students arrived at college with more extensive reading experience than today, perhaps it was not altogether necessary for a composition teacher to conduct a serious study of the reading process, as well as a study of how the two processes work together as a larger written language process . . . the time has arrived for first-year composition instructors to become more knowledgeable about the reading process and its application to the process of writing college compositions. (239)

To address reading in first-year composition challenges teachers, who may not feel prepared, and students, who are juggling multiple challenges socially, emotionally, and aca-

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demically during their first two semesters. The benefit of converting reluctant readers to more confident, effective readers at this time in their lives is, however, exceedingly powerful. It can change their lives.

Students approach college reading at a disadvantage when they have lost confidence or interest in reading and, consequently, try to avoid it as much as possible. This resistance to reading is one part of the reality that must be addressed. But even when students are willing to read, they often lack effective strategies for responding to the difficulty they will encounter in texts. Without a repertoire of strategies, students fail to realize that difficulty is not a closed door.

Jolliffe argues that "[s]tudents have to read in college composition, but rarely does anyone tell them why or how they should read" (474). In order to persuade students that they need to read, first-year composition teachers have to understand the purpose of reading assignments in our teaching practices. While we recognize that the readings assigned in a composition course can function as models for rhetorical strategies or as jumping off points for writing about personal experiences and opinions, we argue that first-year composition teachers must highlight assignments that position reading as part of a composing process in which reading, thinking, and writing are dialogically interwoven. First-year composition teachers need to assign reading because reading "teaches us how to think" and "begs us to speak our minds about what we have read" asking us "to substantiate our interpretations and opinions--our readings--with evidence from our lives and the texts" (Petrosky 21). We want to make reading/writing assignments that involve thoughtful reading leading to writing in which students speak their thoughts, substantiating their interpretations with evidence from the readings.

As Jolliffe suggests, composition teachers first need to understand why we assign reading in order to sell students on reading as part of the writing process. Then, we need to teach students "how they should read." Students' reading problems become apparent when they move from reading to composing their own texts in response to the reading. Therefore, we need to teach reading strategies that assist students in becoming strong readers, readers who are prepared to compose a reading and to write about the meaning they construct. These strategies are the moves that experienced critical readers make when they encounter difficulty, including boredom and distraction, when reading. Such reading strategies are routinely discussed in reading pedagogy, but since much of this scholarship is housed in the discipline of education rather than English studies, often with a focus on K-12, "the act of reading is not part of the common professional discourse in composition" (Helmers 4). The authors of this article demonstrate this disparity: Diane, a former high school teacher, has been able to bring her knowledge of reading pedagogy to the college classroom while Carole, who has taught exclusively at the college level, is just beginning to do so.

Reading Reluctance

Reluctant readers have adequate reading ability but don't read. They may not find the time to read, have come to a point in their lives where they are not reading, or choose not to read because they do not like reading (Booth 43). As instructors, some of the symptoms we see include reluctant readers missing the author's intent, ignoring significant details that contribute to creation of the author's argument, and avoiding unfamiliar words, complex sentences, and challenging paragraphs. It's also common to observe students giving up after meeting any obstacle in the reading process and, instead, creating their own version of what the piece is really about. Many just stop reading because they feel uncomfortable with the challenge that lies ahead of them. Identifying reluctant readers in a first-year college composition class can be tricky business, yet it's a critical first step for both the student and professor.

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At the beginning of the semester, students need to know that this freshman composition class deals with reading as well as writing; these two skills are interconnected and top priorities. It's also crucial to have a class discussion about the ways in which college reading and writing are different from high school and non-academic reading and writing. *College Success Strategies* by Sherrie Nist and Jodi Patrick Holschuh tells students, "College is different from high school in many ways. You must think differently about the expectations, learning conditions, level of responsibility and study methods than you did in high school. This is not bad. It simply means you will have to make some transitions in the way you learn and study in order to be successful" (8-9). It becomes clear that the expected level of critical thinking is higher; therefore, making meaning and pushing beyond the obvious are important skills that may have not been in the forefront of students' previous experience in reading and writing. Calling attention to the differences in independence, pacing, study effort, evaluation, responsibility and the importance of being proactive helps to highlight potential problems at college and assist students in finding strategies to overcome them.

Students' comments about their preconceived notions of reading or themselves as readers provide a wealth of information that might have gone undiscovered. The student responses become the fodder for the first series of notes next to each student's name in the grade book. It's the beginning of the differentiated instruction that's needed even though few teachers or students want to admit it. Here are some sample notes in Diane's records:

Student A: I can't read long books without zoning out.

Student B: I don't read anything unless I like it.

Student C: I hate to read and won't ever, ever read aloud in class. So don't ask.

Student D: I like to read, but never have the time.

Student E: I used to love reading, but if I do it now, people will think I'm a nerd.

Student F: I'm a slow reader. I struggle, really struggle.

Student G: I want to be a good reader, but it never happened.

Student H: I want to be smarter through reading.

Student I: I have ADD, and reading is a hassle.

Student J: I'm dyslexic, and I don't like to read. I'd rather play soccer.

Student H: I work two jobs and have a family. There's no time for books in my life.

This feedback gives a clearer picture of what students think of reading and themselves as readers. It reveals the often hidden agendas and baggage that get in the way of a successful composition class. Some reluctant readers are quite visible (or audible) and may brag that they never have read a book throughout their four years in high school: "I never had to read the book. If I waited long enough, the teacher would give enough details that I'd piece with SparkNotes, and I could get away with it." Many reluctant readers, however, seem to have an uncanny ability to be invisible in many classrooms. They hide and slip through the cracks. That's how they end up as college freshmen with difficulty reading and writing critically.

Problems

Reluctant or inexperienced readers are at a disadvantage when they face writing assignments that ask them to reflect on readings. Such assignments generally call for students to summarize and discuss what the reading says and then respond by articulating their own thoughts about the reading. These assignments are based on the belief that we develop something to say in interaction with others' ideas and that reading, therefore, is a form of invention (Bartholomae 99). Weaker readers will have problems with both parts of these kinds of assignments: they will not feel confident enough about their understanding of the reading to summarize it with authority, and having read passively or incompletely, they will not have constructed a response to the reading that gives them something to say back to the author. But writing assignments in which students respond to readings are crucial if we are to invite students to enter a dialogue with readings and to write from the dialogic connection between reading and writing.

As David Bartholomae argues, such assignments position reading at the heart of the invention process in which writers discover something to say by "collecting and shaping information" (96), reassembling a new text "by discovering patterns of significance" (97). Effective academic writers transform source texts to create their own new texts by moving from the meaning they compose when they read to the meaning they compose when they use the source texts in the context of their own writing (Spivey). To understand what we need to teach students about reading, we need to identify the kinds of writing problems that students experience when they attempt to transform source material in order to use the text in their own writing. These may appear to be *writing* problems, but they are, in fact, *reading and writing* problems. Reading and writing are "hybrid acts of literacy," blended processes in which the successful reader-writer imposes an organization on both the read and the written text, selects the important and relevant content, and makes connections to pre-existing knowledge (Spivey). The overlapping and intersecting problems students exhibit when working with a source text include 1) selecting quotes without careful reading, 2) misunderstanding the source text, and 3) failing to move from writer-based to reader-based prose when presenting textual evidence. Errors in reading may well predominate in the first two scenarios while errors in writing predominate in the third, but reading and writing clearly intersect in all these situations. Our point in discussing these student missteps is not to demean students or their abilities, but to try to understand the logic of the errors students commit in order to recommend appropriate interventions by teachers. In doing so, we position ourselves within the tradition exemplified by Mina Shaughnessy in *Errors and Expectations*, a tradition of examining students' ideas and texts not only in order to illustrate the kinds of problems that composition students run into but also "to tease out the reasons that lie behind the problems" (Shaughnessy 6).

Students who quote without careful reading choose textual evidence by "plucking" a provocative quote from the text without fully considering what the passage means in the context of the reading. They treat the reading as they would a list of pithy quotations. Thus, in a first-year composition course, in which students read Stephanie Coontz's *Marriage, a History* to gain a sociohistorical perspective on the theme of marriage, a student who wanted to argue that marriage was a "blessing" for some and an "aggravation" for others, plucked a quote from Coontz and presented the quote—"it is remarkable that people still considered it a dreadful inconvenience" (139)—as if "it" were the necessity of marrying. In fact, it is clear from the context that "it" refers to the complicating presence of love in arranged marriages. The student liked "dreadful inconvenience" as a synonym for aggravation and applied the phrase to marriage even though Coontz is not talking about marriage as an inconvenience in this statement.

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 counterclaims with the author's own claims. As a result, they often misrepresent the textual evidence they select. Students working with Stephanie Coontz's *Marriage, a History* had great difficulty distinguishing between propositions that represent Coontz's own conclusions and propositions that she would put forward and then refute. For example, in a chapter discussing the reasons that marriage exists, Coontz acknowledges the biological explanation advanced by some and then rejects that explanation, saying "when we move beyond the most superficial similarities, we find nothing in the animal kingdom that remotely resembles human marriage" (25). Several students missed the refutation, latching on instead to Coontz's descriptions of the biological explanation. Thus a student uses a partial sentence from Coontz to argue that there is a biological basis for life-long, love-based marriage, quoting part of the first sentence in a paragraph—"there is a biological basis for love and even, perhaps, for long-term pair bonding" (25)—but missing both the end of the sentence ("although one scientist who believes there is such a biological base in humans claims that it is limited to about four years") and the way that Coontz's argument develops in the paragraph as she goes on to reject this explanation as partial at best. Perhaps the student has plucked a quote that serves the purposes of the arguments she wants to make, but, more likely, she reads what appears to be a claim made by the author and fails to understand it as the opening proposition in a paragraph that comes to a very different conclusion.

Another kind of misunderstanding that showed up in students' papers when they integrated textual evidence from Coontz was the confusion of descriptions of historical facts with Coontz's own ideas. Thus, a student reads a passage from Coontz describing the emergence of a sharply divided division of labor based on gender differences in the 17th Century as an endorsement of rigidly divided gender roles. In the following passage, the student writes that this claim by Coontz is one of two influential readings that caused the student writer to question her own beliefs about female breadwinners:

> I personally disagree with the idea that female breadwinners can throw off the balance of a marriage. But by two influential readings, my belief may be swayed. In the book *Marriage, a History* by Stephanie Coontz, she states that "The theory of gender differences divides humanity into two distinct sets of traits. The male sphere encom-

> passed the rational and active ideal while the females represented the humanitarian and compassionate aspects of life. When these two spheres were brought together in marriage, they produced a perfect, well-rounded whole" (156).

After mentioning the second influential reading, the students goes on to say "I see that there is some evidence that in fact a female breadwinner in a marriage can throw off the balance of that marriage," implying that Coontz's statement is such evidence when it is a description of a centuries-old attitude, not a statement of Coontz's ideas about gender roles in current marriage practices.

There were so many instances of this kind of misunderstanding when students tried to incorporate Coontz's ideas into their writing that we were relieved to come across a discussion of students experiencing very similar problems in a composition course described in Russel Durst's ethnography *Collision Course*. In one of the composition courses Durst observed, students read an essay on changes in the American family, "The Paradox of Perfection" by Arlene Skolnick, and, despite adequate scaffolding, misunderstood Skolnick's argument. Durst reports that "[s]tudents' misunderstandings mainly entailed their thinking that the author was herself taking the positions that she was actually attempting to characterize and, in some cases, to critique" (136), precisely the problem our students were experiencing.

Even student writers who construct attentive, active readings may find it difficult to convey their understanding of the text to their own readers. In presenting textual evidence, these students fail to adequately introduce and explain the quotations they select. Generally, students who fall into this category fail to make explicit for readers the relationship between their discussion and the textual evidence they have selected to support or illustrate that discussion. Perhaps these student writers fail to realize that what they are thinking will not be evident to readers unless they say it, or perhaps they haven't developed facility in using punctuation or signal phrases to convey the relationship between the quoted text and their discussion. Students consistently fail to use a colon to show that the quote that follows a sentence is an illustration of what the sentence is saying. Beyond this seemingly intractable failure to use punctuation to help readers see the connections that the writer is making, students working with Coontz's *Marriage, a History* would sometimes present textual evidence without making the historical context or even the pronoun antecedents clear, leaving their readers somewhat mystified. In the following passage, the student writer causes confusion for her readers by supplying an illustration without labeling it as such:

> During early medieval Europe, divorce was quite frowned upon, and remarrying was completely unheard of. It was extremely hard to get around the strict divorce laws set forth by the Church. "In 1152 the divorce of King Louis VII of France and Eleanor of Aquitaine was approved when the couple pointed out that they were related within

> four or five degrees" (Coontz 100). The only way the couple was able to get a divorce was proving that they were related.

The writer intends to use the historical example as an illustration of the difficulty of divorce in that the royal pair had to go to such extremes to obtain permission to divorce. But without some introduction to the quote, this relationship between the writer's claim and the example that illustrates that claim is unclear.

Omitting a comment after a quote causes similar confusion. At times, it appears that student writers fail to clearly state the connections they see between what they have read and a point they are making in their writing because they lack confidence in their own thinking. Perhaps they imagine that it will be safer to float a connection out there and let readers draw their own conclusions rather than take the risk of making their own thinking explicit. That may be happening in the following opening paragraph:

> Marriage is a loving and caring intimacy between two human beings. In something as sacred and precious as marriage, there arises a new question. Why then are there cases of abuse, torture, or even rape in the marriages of today? And as you look deeper into this question, you then find yourself looking at a whole history of domestic violence, abuse, torture, and even rape. In Stephanie Coontz's Marriage, a History, she states that "Writers on domesticity across Europe and the United States held that women could exert a unique and sorely needed role in the public world through their influence at home. Only a wife could combat the businessman's tendency to close his ears to 'the voices of conscience' as he competed in the struggle for 'world aggrandizement'" (Coontz 165).

Since the paragraph ends at this point, there is no way to know what connection the writer is making between "the darker side to marriage" (the title of the paper) and wives' influence on husbands' behavior. Possibly the quote has been misunderstood or ill-chosen since it refers to public behavior while the student in discussing private behavior. But perhaps there is a connection that is not immediately apparent. Unless the student makes that connection explicit, her point is lost.

Solutions

Given this evidence of the problems students face when attempting to transform reading into writing, composition teachers need to intervene by both deepening and broadening students' reading. To deepen students' reading, teachers must design activities that invite students to muscle their way into the text and continuously redirect them back to the text, to reread and rethink, as they work to transform reading to writing. Activities for deepening reading include annotation, double entry notebooks, identifying and responding to significant statements in texts, Salvatori and Donahue's difficulty paper assignment (9-11), and Rosenwasser and Stephen's method for looking for patterns of repetition and contrast (48). In responding to the problems in drafts, such as those in the three categories we have just explored, teachers need to pose questions that send students back to the reading. In addition, teaching students the steps necessary to "sandwich" quoted material between an introduction and an explanation will strengthen students' reading as they return to the text and reexamine the quote in order to explain it to readers. The template sentences in Graff and Birkenstein's *They Say/I Say* are particularly useful for teaching students some of the "stock formulas" for introducing and commenting on quotes (xi). Effective writing moves—moves that communicate the writer's understanding of the reading clearly to readers—are thus entwined with deeper, more careful reading.

At the same time that teachers are setting up activities to deepen students' reading, they must also construct opportunities for students to broaden their reading. The activities of analysis and rereading that students must pursue in order to deepen their reading call for concentrated penetration of a text. These should be accompanied by reading assignments that allow students to stretch out as readers by increasing the amount and variety of reading. The value of increasing student reading by encouraging reading both for class and for recreation is supported by research from multiple sources. In *The Power of Reading,* Stephen Krashen states that this research shows that "[m]ore reading results in better reading comprehension, writing style, vocabulary, spelling and grammatical development" (17). Broadening reading, through opportunities such as self-selected reading, will allow students to acquire and reinforce effective reading strategies in the context of reading for pleasure and to validate their existing competencies as readers, albeit readers in unfamiliar genres, such as text messaging.

As instructors, one of the first places to begin is in selecting reading materials that support, not thwart, the students' attempts to create a dialogue with the written word. This means being mindful of the topics as well as length and difficulty of reading, Too often we teach what we love, regardless of the audience. If there is an institutionally required text, perhaps it can be supplemented with handouts of reading that offers a greater opportunity for the student to be successful. For example, Emerson's essay "Self-Reliance" might be among the department's required texts, but reading portions of Horatio Alger's *Ragged Dick* or Janet Tashian's *The Gospel According to Larry* will make the required text more palatable. Also, it is critical to keep the number of pages to be read in synch with the amount of prep time expected for each class; a reluctant reader maybe be able to read and process a five-page essay well, but be unable to stay focused on a thirty-page piece of writing.

Because each reading assignment requires an active engagement, it became important for the length of the reading to be manageable. Giving a reluctant reader thirty pages of reading while trying to re-teach successful reading skills is counterproductive. Less is more; if there are less pages to read, the instructor can require closer textual analysis and more active engagement with the text. A review of more than twenty anthologies/readers revealed that very few are compiled with reluctant readers in mind. Most selections were quite lengthy and challenging pieces. As Jolliffe comments, such reading selections imagine an ideal student reader very unlike most reluctant readers who "consider themselves both fortunate and prepared if they have read the assigned work once before they come to class" (476). Other textbooks had excerpts from works that are required readings in many high schools. They were tired. Enthusiastic, strong readers probably won't flinch at these issues, but struggling readers will easily add the texts to the long list of books they will not read.

Reading problems can only be ameliorated by teaching in a way specifically designed to strengthen students' reading competencies. There is no silver bullet for meeting the needs of the reluctant college reader, but there are reasonable strategies and approaches to explore. Collecting data from the questionnaire during the first week of class allows the professor an opportunity to create a curriculum that more adequately addresses the students' long overdue needs. One size does not fit all, especially in a first-year composition class. The data also show that there are students who do enjoy reading and could use the supportive environment to strengthen these already established skills. It also exposes the heterogeneous nature of the class and provides data for the professor's inquiry process. Student input plus teacher observation and experience shape the focus of this class. A review of the results of the survey is a perfect opportunity to have a discussion about these questions and clear up many misconceptions that these students have about themselves as readers. It becomes a teachable moment to explain the various ways people learn how to read and to expose the joys and agony they've experienced in deciphering the written word.

This is an opportune time to discuss strategies successful readers use. What do good readers do? How can our students learn from research about successful readers? Chris Tovani's book *I Read It, But I Don't Get It* is an excellent teacher's source for this discussion. Tovani refers to P. David Pearson's research on characteristics of proficient readers and his list of seven strategies commonly used by successful readers:

1. They use existing knowledge to make sense of new information (also the inquiry method we use in first-year composition).
2. They ask questions about the text before, during and after reading.
3. They draw inferences from the text.
4. They monitor their comprehension.
5. They use "fix-up" strategies when meaning breaks down.

6. They determine what is important.
7. They synthesize information to create new thinking. (17)

These strategies are taught, modeled, reviewed, practiced as a group as well as in pairs and individually. They are the missing tools that the reluctant reader can finally find in the first-year composition classroom.

We discuss the different types of reading a student does daily. The list includes everything from reading food labels, to the sports page, to internet blogs, magazines, comic books, junk mail, cook books, required novels for classes, textbooks, Instant Messages, e-mail, and non-fiction required class reading. We then analyze what is required to do each of these different reading tasks well. On an overhead, they'll see a sample food label and as a group, we'll pick it apart. Why would you read a food label? How do you read a food label? What problems do you bump into? How do you solve them? What does it take to read the food label well? How is this similar and/or different from other reading you do? Next we move on to another form of reading they're all too familiar with: Instant Messaging. The sample IM is shown on the screen and we ask the same questions: Why read it? How do you read it? What problems do you bump into? How do you solve them? What does it take to read the IM well? Compare/contrast IMing to other reading you do. Add the additional question: Who does IM better, you or your parents? Why? It's empowering for them to realize that they have more control of some uses of language than more experienced readers.

> "they see that this instructor is not a speed reader"

We continue with the process by studying an e-mail, internet blog and then a few newspaper selections (sports, entertainment, front page article). In each case the words are on a large screen, and the instructor models how she reads the first few sentences and then turns it over to the class. Typically, modeling demonstrates exactly what's going on in the instructor's head while reading the passage aloud. The process involves questions the instructor asks herself, emerging from confusion experienced, connections made, items that seem important, and vocabulary that is unfamiliar. Modeling makes it clear to them that reading is thinking, and good readers are actively engaged in making meaning. It doesn't happen by waving a magic wand. They see how a "good reader" works to make meaning, and they start to learn some new methods. One interesting by-product is that they see that this instructor is not a speed reader; some types of content can be read quickly, but others need more of an engagement in order to get satisfaction. For many, that's a surprise; they were under the impression that good readers just glide over difficult material and absorb it automatically by osmosis.

The whole concept of reading speed becomes important. Once students see that different texts require different pacing, they start to realize that they can approach a text as a puzzle to be solved, and they get to choose which strategies they might want to use. A newspaper article about a celebrity's new clothing line will be read at a faster pace than last night's text on social democracy. Expose them to multiple strategies and require that they try them all. For example, an assignment to read a selection from their class anthology is always accompanied by an annotation or writing assignment that requires their full engagement with the text. No "drive by" reading is allowed! Students will be required to mark up a three-page text with at least 10-15 comments. Check to see that this work is done and hold students accountable. Alternatively, they'll be asked to write five questions that point out any confusion they might have with the text and five questions that can each generate five minutes of thoughtful class discussion.

A careful, slow reading of a meaningful text encourages dialogue, especially when the student is asked to create lists of questions raised throughout his/her reading. Some student sample questions include the following:

To Mark Twain: Why do you use slang in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*? It's hard to read.

To David Mamet ("The Rake: A Few Scenes from My Childhood"): Why write about such disturbing, awful events? Don't you want to forget all this horror?

To Toi Derricotte ("The Black Notebooks"): What ever happened to you after this phase in your life? Did you survive or crawl up in a ball and die?

These questions start to open the dialogue and encourage students to see their reading as a product of a writer. They are asked to notice how writers use words and create arguments; they will be doing the same in their writing. The connection between writing and reading takes time, but it can begin with the student having a dialogue with the assigned text.

Sometimes students will be asked to write the three most important ideas expressed in the reading and map how these ideas are developed. This is a reasonable time to spend several classes teaching mapping and the use of graphic organizers; students need to see how a piece of writing is organized and creating thinking maps that track arguments and the best evidence that builds these arguments helps deconstruct the piece they're reading while providing a model for building compositions of their own. David Hyerle has several excellent sources about mapping; the Venn diagram is just the beginning! Each class begins with a discussion about what it was like to read the particular selection. Paying attention to the act of reading, and honoring it as a worthy discussion topic, sends an important message to the students. It also allows them to *talk* about reading, something good readers do.

If instructors are able to choose the text for their first-year composition course, a good choice for reluctant readers, as well as all learners, is a textbook that appeals to multiple learning styles: information presented visually, graphically, and chunked into manageable pieces enables more access from a broader base of students. Making the connection between writing and reading clear should be a priority. Students can be taught to deconstruct reading selections and simultaneously link this process to the creation of their own pieces of writing. They're not just reading for comprehension; they're reading to see how writers write. Also, it's helpful to use a text that shows that writing is a multi-phased process including pre-writing, brainstorming, mapping, and multiple drafts. The reluctant reader is often a reluctant writer and needs to learn that the first pass at either is not the last. Rereading a text in slow motion and rewriting a piece is honorable work and what good readers and writers do. This is a new idea for many reluctant freshmen.

Giving students choices in what they read and write about has proven to be another important teaching strategy. Giving the student the option to read three out of a list of five or six is an effective tool. They own the pieces they select; the old power struggle between student and professor is diminished. Additionally, each essay assigned gives the student the responsibility of selecting his or her own topic as well as the piece of writing s/he is responding to or analyzing. Again, one size seldom fits all.

In addition to the class text, students are required to be actively engaged in self-selected reading. Yes, reluctant readers can and do select books to read in and outside of class. It's one of the more empowering parts of reaching reluctant readers. Last semester 49 freshmen read more than a total of 164 books in Diane's classes: that's an average of 3.3 books per student. How does this happen? It's not magic; it's pretty simple and very easy to replicate. When given free choice and encouragement to select books for pleasure reading, people of all ages do it. There are basically just a few rules: choose a book (not a newspaper of magazine) you like, read until page 30, and if it doesn't grab your interest, drop it and find another. Instructors might try specifically telling the students, "Drop it like a bad boy/girlfriend." They remember that. Also, read every day and tell somebody about what you're reading. This idea came from Nancie Atwell, a noted educator who has used it successfully in lower grades. It's supported by research from multiple sources including *If Not Now: Developmental Readers in the College Classroom* by Jeanne Henry, who applies Atwell to the college classroom. If one of our teaching goals is that students achieve independence and confidence in using literary and critical strategies, self-selected reading gives them a vehicle to express their own thoughts and ideas while understanding those of professional writers. Another benefit of self-selected reading is that often students are able to fluidly read texts of their own choosing; this develops confidence as a reader which often transfers to required texts. One freshman student recently commented "I never like to read anything but once I got hooked on *Tuesdays* *with Morrie,* I had to read Alblom's other books. Then I realized that I wasn't so afraid to read the required reading. At first, I just didn't think I could do it"

Giving students permission to be involved with a book for 30 pages and then letting class members decide to keep or drop the book is a powerful tool to give to reluctant readers. It puts them in control of their reading and gives them ownership. No, there are no preferred books. The choice is all theirs. The titles they choose fill an entire literary spectrum. Last semester's titles included *The Devil Wears Prada, The Lovely Bones, The Bluest Eye, The Kite Runner, The Secret Life of Bees, Teach Like Your Hair is on Fire, Tuesdays with Morrie,* the *Shopaholic* series, several books about sports figures, and a vast array of others too numerous to list. All that matters is that students find books they can fall in love with and read every day. Even busy people can find ten minutes a day to sit down and read a book, so this works for students with fully packed schedules.

Part of this strategy is that the reader has to talk to somebody about what s/he is reading. It's what good readers do. Share what you're reading. Diane was reading *Reading Lolita in Tehran* and got excited to read some of the other novels it discusses. So, she reread *The Great Gatsby* and just bought Nabokov's *Lolita*—something she has never read, sharing all of this with the class. This kind of "book talk" happens regularly now at the beginning of class. They will start to talk about the book they're reading. It's casual and relaxed talk: "My book is about.... I like how the main character behaves in the second chapter. This book reminds me of...." After a short while, we're all aware of what each other is reading, and we're kind of curious about some of the titles. Reluctant readers are much less reluctant to read. As the semester progresses, the book talk becomes contagious. It also becomes not only "safe" to talk about books, but actually cool to talk about what book you're reading.

Excited readers start to read at night before they go to bed. Some say that having time alone to read every day is an enjoyable way to relax. Others said it was one of the few nice things they did for themselves in the midst of a very busy semester. They get protective of their time with their book. That's not a bad thing! And they borrow books from each other.

Students need to select their own reading materials and engage in free voluntary reading (Pilgreen 9). If we really want our students to become lifelong readers we need to ensure that they have the opportunity to do so and the choice to read what they find interesting (Ivey and Baker 35). Of course, they can apply all of the skills and strategies that we have taught them.

At the end of the semester, students write about their self- selected reading experience (SSR). The results are overwhelming. These comments were typical:

- I personally like self selected reading, and I have not liked reading my whole life. It gives me a chance to go at my own pace and read something I like.

- Self- selected reading reminded me that reading is fun and good books are awesome to read. Reading is a much better way to spend my time than playing online or watching TV.
- SSR reminds me that I don't hate reading.
- I got in the habit of doing my SSR late at night. I almost look forward to it now. It got me to start reading again, and it feels good!
- From SSR I feel that my vocabulary expanded and I also feel that I am a better writer because of it. I write more detailed, informational sentences.
- I was finally able to pick out books that interest me, and I'm able to enjoy reading rather than feeling that it was forced upon me.
- I always hated reading, but SSR got me to enjoy it. I found myself not being able to put the book down. This has never happened to me before.
- I learned that reading fast is not what reading is all about.

What began in September as an arduous burden ends up being quite a celebration.

Conclusions

Working with reluctant readers of all ages has taught us that in order for the students to change their opinion of reading, we have to change our approach to teaching. Reluctant readers don't have the same learning style as we did when we were students. Their experience with books was not the same as ours. In order to reach these students, we had to change gears and reach to meet their needs. Teaching smart reading strategies that they might have missed, making connections between reading and writing, and giving students a choice of writing topics and reading titles are three reasonable places to begin. Another is to recognize that the old mantra "All teachers are reading teachers" is true in most classrooms, but especially true in first-year composition classes.

We set ourselves up for failure when we enter the classroom full of enthusiasm for an assigned reading and become disappointed, even angry, when we find that students were bored or confused. This is not a failure, but it is the moment when we need to become reading teachers and help students use the approaches to difficulty that they have been learning. It is always helpful to model our own difficulties with a reading and how we dealt with them. By modeling, we not only show skills and strategies, but also we show our vulnerability and our willingness to expose that making meaning can be a challenge, hard work, but also fun, like solving a puzzle or unraveling a mystery. Most importantly, we show that learning is an ongoing process that requires engagement, and engagement can push students out of their reluctance and into active learning.

As the NEA report, "To Read or Not To Read" makes clear, reading transforms the lives

> of individuals—whatever their social circumstances. Regular reading not only boosts the likelihood of an individual's academic and economic success—facts that are not especially surprising—but it also seems to awaken a person's social and civic sense. Reading correlates with almost every measurement of positive personal and social behavior surveyed. It is reassuring, though hardly amazing, that readers attend more concerts and theater than non-readers, but it is surprising that they exercise more and play more sports—no matter what their educational level. something that most readers know but have mostly been reluctant to declare as fact— books change lives for the better (6).

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