

1-1-2017

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Ellen C. Carillo

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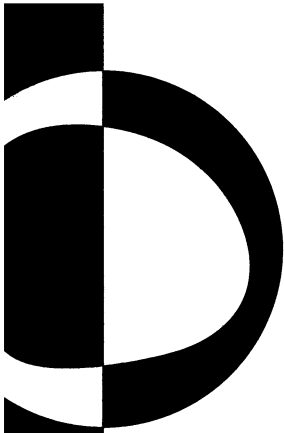
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### Recommended Citation

Carillo, Ellen C. (2017) "Reading and Writing Centers: A Primer for Writing Center Professionals," *Writing Center Journal*: Vol. 36 : Iss. 2, Article 7.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7771/2832-9414.1829>

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Ellen C. Carillo

## Reading and Writing Centers: A Primer for Writing Center Professionals

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### Abstract

Reading and writing are widely understood as connected practices, but writing center studies has been slow to join the larger conversation in composition studies about writing's relationship to reading. Despite the field's neglect of reading in its research and scholarship, writing center professionals regularly work with reading because most college writing assignments are accompanied by or draw on reading in some way. Because writing centers are already engaged in this work, the field needs to know more about it. This primer on reading turns to the disciplines that research and study reading in order to review and summarize this scholarship, as well as to detail relevant applications to writing center work.

The Writing Center Journal 36.2 | 2017 117

## Introduction

In the last five years, there has been a revival of interest in reading within composition studies as many compositionists have returned to crucial questions related to reading, writing's counterpart in the construction of meaning. Compositionists have been conducting studies that explore how instructors attend to reading in first-year writing courses (Bunn, 2013; Carillo, 2015) and how focusing on reading early in students' academic careers can affect their success in their majors (Lockhart & Soliday, 2016). Some scholars address how digital reading practices should affect literacy instruction (Keller, 2013) while others seek to expose what they see as the false print-digital binary that overemphasizes the differences between print-based and digital reading (Horning, 2014; Morris, 2016). There has been little research and scholarship, however, on how writing center tutors support students' reading. When there is little data, our field tends to rely on lore. As Roberta D. Kjesrud (2015) has pointed out in this very journal, such a reliance on lore poses a great deal of problems. Perhaps the most widely circulating lore about reading is that if any reading aloud takes place during a tutoring session, it is the student—rather than the tutor—who should be doing that reading. As discussed below, though, Rebecca Block's (2016) research has compellingly challenged this lore. In an effort to move beyond the lore that exists about reading in writing center studies so that the field can “finally do[n] the mantle of maturity that befits us at middle age” (Kjesrud, 2015, p. 51), this piece, like Kjesrud's (2015), underscores the importance of looking outside of our immediate field in order to expand our knowledge. To help those in writing center studies better understand what is already known about reading, this article turns to the many fields that study reading so that writing center studies can expand its own purview to consider the importance of reading as an interpretive practice.

Reading has been studied in various disciplines including educational and cognitive psychology, neurocognitive science, English education, and composition studies. Looking closely at some of the work on reading in these fields will give the writing center community a sense of the complexities surrounding reading and of the value in attending to reading alongside writing so that writing center studies can begin to address reading in its own scholarship.

A deeper understanding of reading on its own, as well as in its relationship to writing, has important consequences for writing center work. For example, conceiving of reading and writing as counterparts in the construction of meaning—and training tutors within this

framework— lays the foundation for offering more comprehensive literacy support to students, as well as a more nuanced approach to tutor education, since as Muriel Harris (2017) points out, “so far, there is not yet sufficient scholarship available for tutors to learn how to recognize interconnected reading skills” (p. 240). Moreover, a deeper understanding of the relationship between reading and writing can help tutors recognize when writing problems are really indicative of reading problems (Salvatori, 1983; Horning, 1987; Carillo, 2015). This piece, then, acts a primer that summarizes foundational and recent scholarship on reading from the disciplines that study reading in order to teach writing center professionals about reading and outline the value of a more deliberate focus on reading within writing center studies. Before commencing this important work, though, I begin with some definitions and a bit of history that provides insight into writing center studies’ vexed relationship with reading, which began as writing center studies emerged as its own field apart from composition.

### **Defining Reading**

Before discussing reading, it is necessary to first define “reading.” This is no small feat, as Director of the Language Center at Stanford University, Elizabeth B. Bernhardt (1991), notes that scholars “have been concerned with the process of reading for thousands of years” but have still yet to arrive at “a clearly stated, empirically supported, and theoretically unassailable definition” (p. 5). One of the obstacles to defining reading is that each discipline that studies and theorizes reading has its own priorities when it comes to conceptualizing and defining this practice. The intricacies of each definition will emerge in more detail throughout this piece, but in its simplest terms, reading is defined by the field of psychology, and educational psychology, in particular, as a complex cognitive process that involves decoding symbols (i.e., letters) to create meaning. Both the act of decoding and creating meaning are dependent upon a series of other abilities, including background (or prior) knowledge, experience, and linguistic knowledge: “The processing of phonological information is thought to have an inner rehearsal aspect (the articulatory loop) which allows the phonological information needed for the processes of word decoding and reading comprehension to be retained longer in memory” (Verhoeven, Reitsma, & Siegel, 2011).

Although the field of composition acknowledges the decoding aspect of reading, when compositionists define reading they tend to downplay this aspect in favor of that second aspect of reading—the creation of meaning. Compositionists such as Ann E. Berthoff (1982),

David Bartholomae & Anthony R. Petrosky (1986, 1987), Alice S. Horning (1987), and Mariolina Salvatori (1983), for example, define reading as an interpretive act similar to writing. These scholars, who wrote prolifically about reading in the 1980s—as did many other compositionists—addressed the two practices together, describing both as forms of inquiry and ways of making meaning. For example, Berthoff (1982) argues that “at the heart of both reading and writing is interpretation, which is a matter of seeing what goes with what, how this goes with that” (p. 85). She writes:

Interpretation has survival value. We and all of our fellow creatures must interpret in order to stay alive. The difference between them and us is language: It is language that enables us to go beyond interpreting to interpret our interpretations. This spiraling circularity empowers all the activities of mind involved in meaning making. (p. 85)

In the 1980s, then, within composition, reading is defined as writing’s counterpart in the construction—or *composition*—of meaning. This way of understanding reading and writing as necessarily connected practices of making meaning is echoed in current work on reading in composition studies such as that published by Michael Bunn (2013), Daniel Keller (2013), and Ellen Carillo (2015), as well as those scholars from the 1980s who are also part of the newly revived conversation about reading in composition studies, including Salvatori & Patricia Donahue (2012) and Horning (2012, 2014).

Perhaps the most recent advances in research on reading, which have added nuance to how reading is defined, are studies that use eye-tracking and fMRI technologies to study how the eyes and the brain, respectively, react during the process of reading. Functional MRIs have the potential to tell scientists the specific brain regions that support the processes associated with reading and can help scientists identify which part of the brain is relevant for studying decoding and “processing” problems in students with cognitive disabilities. Scientists in cognitive neurology and neurobiology are, therefore, expanding definitions of reading to include attention to the physical and bodily processes and movements that characterize reading. Eye-tracking technologies used by scientists to “supplement existing methods of observation, interview, and textual analysis” (Anson & Schwegler, 2012, p. 167) are also enriching the ways one can think about reading. Compositionists Chris M. Anson & Robert A. Schwegler (2012) anticipate the uses of eye-tracking:

We can know much more precisely how students read familiar and unfamiliar genres, and we can chart differences in the way they read those genres over time, determining the extent to which

familiarity with certain textual and discursive features changes their behaviors. Data from these reading experiences can then be mapped on to students' composing processes to study the effects (and transfer) of genre experience on discourse production as a function of eye-tracked decisions as well as whether students look at reading material to model features of the genre they are producing. (p. 167)

Although this work is not yet underway, they hypothesize that “such analyses could begin answering challenging questions about instruction, such as whether explicit genre teaching helps students to write texts that are appropriate to a genre and whether modeling, through exposure to texts, is a useful way to build knowledge that transfers into text production” (p. 167). Because eye-tracking technology is not yet being applied in these ways, cognitive neuroscientists' role in the discussion of reading will not be addressed in this piece.

Having established a few basic definitions from fields that focus on reading, this piece turns its attention to writing center studies, specifically, to provide some historical perspective that offers insight into the limited extent to which writing center studies has addressed reading over the years.

### **Reading and the Emerging Fields of Composition and Writing Center Studies**

With so much attention being paid to reading in composition studies in the 1980s and Stephen North (1981), among others, calling for writing center professionals to familiarize themselves with theory and research coming out of composition, the lack of in-depth attention during this time to reading in writing center studies is striking. During this time, writing center scholars often pursued questions similar to those being pursued in composition studies, but these scholars largely neglected the reading question. For example, composition's use of cognitive and rhetorical approaches to studying literacy practices was not lost on writing center professionals including Harris (1982a, 1983, 1986) who often studied writing instruction during tutorials from a cognitive perspective. However, Harris and others never studied reading in this way. Certainly some early scholarship in writing center studies touches on reading, but treatments of reading remain largely undeveloped as described below.

Mary King's (1982) *Writing Lab Newsletter* piece, “A Writing Lab Profile,” calls for writing center professionals to be “trained in composition theory and linguistics” since

otherwise she/he may bring to student writing an interpretive and prescriptive habit of reading, accompanied by an overemphasis on error. . . . Some knowledge about information processing and reading reinforces the teachers' commitment to reading student papers for ideas. (p. 7)

While King (1982) acknowledges the need to train tutors to do more than simply read for error—a likely adaptation of work being done by Mina Shaughnessy and David Bartholomae in composition studies—the thrust of the article is not reading practices or reading processes, but rather a call to create a more open and collaborative “teaching style” within the writing lab. Reading is simply one strategy for doing so. Although more blatant about reading, James Sollisch's (1985) article, “From Fellow Writer to Reading Coach: The Peer Tutor's Role in Collaboration,” published in this journal, addresses reading within the context of collaboration as he describes his experience training peer tutors at the University of Akron:

Once I discovered the importance of defining the tutor's role in collaboration as that of reading coach, I began to modify their training. Previously, every writing problem has been approached from the writer's viewpoint . . . later we began to look at writing problems as readers; we began to discover how our reading processes worked. . . . We then began to translate this knowledge into strategies to be used in group collaborations. (p. 11)

One of the only early articles on reading coming out of writing center studies, Sollisch's (1985) piece explores how redefining the tutor as a reading coach addresses the field's concerns over tutors' authority and the benefits of nondirective tutoring practices, as well as ethical questions surrounding the collaborative nature of tutoring. Although reading is more central in this piece than in others written during this time, reading is largely a means to exploring these other issues.

While writing center professionals would continue to address issues related to tutors' authority, collaboration in the writing center, ethical issues, and so on—all still familiar topics in writing center scholarship—the reading thread was never really picked up and developed in writing center studies. In fact, none of the chapters in what are largely considered the first two edited collections to emerge from writing center studies—Harris' (1982b) *Tutoring Writing: A Sourcebook for Writing Labs* and Gary A. Olson's (1984) *Writing Centers: Theory and Administration*—includes sustained attention to the role of reading in tutoring writing. There are certainly some moments in the articles within these collections that move in the direction of addressing reading, but even the more promising ones ultimately stop short. For example, in

Aviva Freedman's (1982) chapter entitled "A Theoretic Context for the Writing Lab," she describes the different steps in the composition process, including "reformulation." During this stage, a student shifts from the composing stage, which (drawing on Linda Flower's work) Freedman (1982) calls writer-based, to a reader-based stage in which students "reformulate their meaning into a form that is acceptable, pleasing and convincing to their readers" by attending to the "characteristics of formal expository prose" (pp. 9–10). Freedman (1982) stops there, though, without detailing what it looks like when the tutor becomes a reader working alongside the student in this process of reformulation.

In a similarly promising but ultimately underdeveloped discussion of the relationship between reading and writing, North's (1982) chapter "Writing Center Diagnosis: The Composing Profile," also in Harris' (1982b) collection, addresses the importance of what he calls "recursive reading." Drawing on compositionist Sondra Perl's concepts of "retrospective" and "projective" structuring, North (1982) spends just a couple sentences describing how students might be prompted to "alternately work to shape meaning for themselves (retrospective) and for their readers (projective)" (p. 47). From there, North (1982) quickly moves into a discussion about editing and revision.

During this time, Berthoff's scholarship foregrounded the connections between the interpretive practices of reading and writing and seemed to appeal to those within composition studies as well as writing center studies. But, in adapting her work for the writing center context, writing center professionals often parsed her philosophies on meaning making in such a way to separate her comments on writing from those on reading. For example, Clinton Lockett's (1985) "Adapting a Conventional Writing Lab to the Berthoff Approach" explains how he transformed the writing center at Marquette University into a "Berthoff-directed" center that exemplified Berthoff's holistic approach and emphasis on meaning. This new approach, Lockett (1985) explains, kept[t] the focus on the students' ideas and meaning . . . no longer did correctness have to be a first concern; no longer were they locked into a rote approach of giving exercise sheets and drills. Instead, using Berthoff's dialectical approach, they could enter into the writing process, listening to, and sharing ideas with the writer. (p. 22)

Although Berthoff largely grants equal attention to reading as she does to writing in her scholarship, and despite Lockett's (1985) commitment to Berthoff's holistic approach, Lockett (1985) invokes only Berthoff's theories of writing and does so to provide an antidote to the fix-it shop conception of writing labs, a common trope during the period.



Lil Brannon & C. H. Knoblauch (1984) also refer to Berthoff's scholarship and specifically to her book *The Making of Meaning* in their chapter entitled "A Philosophical Perspective on Writing Centers and the Teaching of Writing." However, Berthoff's ideas about the connections between reading and writing—and meaning making, more generally—are not discussed. Instead, Brannon & Knoblauch (1984) suggest that writing center professionals might aspire to be like Berthoff, to "become philosophers and researchers in their field" (p. 36) rather than just practitioners. Thus, even when invoking a figure like Berthoff who had such an influence on the study of reading within composition studies in the 1980s, scholarship emerging from writing center studies during this time period missed opportunities to expand its scope to include reading research.

Although the field missed its opportunity in the 1980s to contribute to scholarship and research on reading, writing center studies has another opportunity to do so during this revival of attention to reading in composition. There are some promising signs that this is beginning to happen. For example, *WLN: A Journal of Writing Center Scholarship* received an enormous response to its call for papers on this very subject for its special issue on reading, the first of its kind, published in April 2017. While this is certainly a move in the right direction toward thinking about the role of reading in writing center work, in order to contribute more consistently and more comprehensively, writing center studies needs to know more about reading and the ways that reading has been studied over the years. In order to provide writing center studies with a deeper understanding of both reading and the value of attending to reading in writing center work, the remainder of this piece outlines what the fields of psychology, education, and composition have discovered about reading. The descriptions of the work on reading conducted in these fields are by no means exhaustive. Instead, I have focused on the aspects of the research and scholarship from these fields that would seem to have the most bearing on writing center studies.

### **Psychology's Cognitive Theories of Reading**

I begin with the field of psychology, and more specifically educational psychology, since educational psychology has laid the foundation for much of the other research and scholarship in education and composition on reading in part because it considers reading from both cognitive and social perspectives. I begin by considering what understanding reading from a cognitive perspective has to offer those in writing center studies.

Educational psychologists study the psychological processes that occur while reading. These processes might be divided into the two larger categories of cognitive processes including “word-level processes (including sub-word processes such as phonological awareness and decoding, word reading, and vocabulary, with all of its entailments), and text-level processes as they are grounded in structures, genres, and disciplinary knowledge pursuits” (Pearson & Cervetti, 2013, p. 507). The former category of cognitive processes is most useful in understanding how young children learn to read while the second category is comprised of the processes that influence comprehension. As such, it is that second category—text-level processes—that has more bearing on writing center work at the postsecondary level.

Research in educational psychology has found that a reader’s “knowledge base” (also called “prior knowledge” or simply “knowledge”), which is comprised of many forms of knowledge, is crucial to understanding how readers create meaning. Generally scholars agree that readers bring linguistic knowledge (e.g., phonological, semantic, and syntactic), textual knowledge (e.g., textual conventions and genres), and strategic knowledge (e.g., comprehension and other strategies) to texts. The act of comprehension itself is characterized by connections that readers make between the text in front of them and their prior knowledge as it is collected in their knowledge base.

The forms of knowledge in this base often work together automatically to help readers understand what they are reading. At times, though, there is a breakdown, and Keith E. Stanovich (1980) has developed the interactive-compensatory model to detail how during the process of reading, one source of knowledge might compensate for a knowledge gap. John Hedgcock & Dana R. Ferris (2009) offer the following useful example: “A reader who encounters a novel word and lacks knowledge of its meaning may compensate for that knowledge gap by using the linguistic context to generate inferences about the word’s meaning” (p. 29). Whether a single word or a complex concept, students may struggle because the interactive-compensatory model does not always function as it is supposed to. If tutors understand how knowledge bases inform reading, they can help students determine the gaps in their forms of knowledge and intervene in productive ways. The tutor might prompt the student to try to identify the gap in knowledge that is creating the problem. Perhaps the student does not have enough knowledge about the discipline to understand the text or lacks the requisite linguistic knowledge. Maybe the student ignored (or misread) the genre of the piece or, perhaps, the student lacks productive comprehension strategies. Once a tutor and student determine the source of the gap, a tutor can

work with the student to imagine other forms of knowledge that could be brought to bear on that moment. Understanding the process of reading through the lens of cognitive psychology, then, gives tutors insight into why a student may not understand something and allows tutors to recognize and respond to these challenging moments in more strategic and informed ways.

### **Psychology's Social Theories of Reading**

In addition to exploring the cognitive aspects of reading, educational psychology offers socially inflected theories of reading that have important implications for writing center work, which is social by nature and dependent on social constructivist notions of learning. The field of educational psychology has studied the effect of “discussion-oriented approaches” on reading comprehension and has largely found that “talk not only helps students to internalize expert ways of interacting with text, but also helps readers to clarify and consolidate their learning from text” (Pearson & Cervetti, 2013, p. 528). Lev Vygotsky’s theories are a touchstone for educational psychology’s social constructivist views of reading because of their emphasis on the dialectical relationship between the individual and society, as well as Vygotsky’s claim that the social sphere fosters the development of higher order abilities like reading (and writing). Educational psychology often invokes Vygotsky’s two different learning zones: the Zone of Actual Development (ZAD) wherein a student can complete a task independently and the zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) wherein a student needs support from someone in order to complete the task. Not surprisingly, Vygotsky’s (1989) point is that it is in the ZPD—the social zone—where learning occurs: “What the child can do in cooperation today he can do alone tomorrow” (p. 189).

Although Vygotsky did not live long enough to outline the implications of ZPD, educational psychologists have situated this work as a way of acknowledging the potential of students, which is often neglected in favor of testing students’ current abilities. For example, linguistics professors Tayebbeh Fani & Farid Ghaemi (2011) explain that traditional testing reflected only the current level of learners’ achievement, rather than learners’ potential for development in the future. The zone of actual development (ZAD) does not sufficiently describe development. Rather, it reflects what is already developed or achieved. . . . The ZPD provides a conceptualization of how developmental potential might be understood. (pp. 1550–1551)

Within writing center studies, John Nordlof (2014) has invoked Vygotsky's theory because with its focus on growth it "provides a reasonable framework within which we can move beyond the directive/nondirective continuum" (p. 58). Although Vygotsky's theories focused on young children, his theories are often adapted beyond that sphere in educational psychology, education, composition studies, and writing center studies, as the above examples suggest.

The postsecondary tutoring session certainly qualifies as a ZPD and, as such, a space in which to explore students' potential. Tutors already do this work regularly by acting as motivators and coaches when it comes to students' writing. Educational psychology has conducted extensive research on motivation—a means by which students reach their potential—for decades now, research that can help those in writing center studies better understand how these theories of motivation can be applied to reading. The two major kinds of motivation that have been delineated by the field are intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation. The former, of course, is a drive that comes from within while the latter is dependent on external factors—including praise or punishment. What educational psychologists have to say specifically about motivating students to read is relevant to writing center tutors who often already help motivate students to become more engaged writers.

Those who study motivational psychology as it relates to reading focus primarily on metacognitive strategies and instruction in these metacognitive strategies with the goal of developing readers' "declarative, procedural, and conditional knowledge about the metacognitive strategies that characterize effective reading" (Spaulding, 1992, p. 183). In psychology, questions surrounding motivation emerge when students who have this knowledge—know the reading strategies, can carry them out, and know when to use them—do not do so. The issue, educational psychologists have found, seems to be one of self-efficacy. Students who do not believe they have this knowledge or do not believe that this knowledge will lead to better comprehension are not likely to engage the reading in these ways. This is problematic in at least two ways. First, this lack of self-efficacy can undermine students' intrinsic motivation. If students do not feel as though they are competent, they may not choose to engage in the reading task. Second, if students do not see the long-term benefits of working on reading, they may not be extrinsically motivated, either. Despite a range of individual differences among learners, which educational psychology concedes makes this a highly complex problem, educational psychologists recommend instructional scaffolding, which is intended to provide students with the support they need to increase both their actual and perceived confidence" (Spaulding, 1992, p. 192).

Then, instructors strategically remove some of the scaffolding—a bit at a time—as students are prepared both intellectually and emotionally to take ownership and control of their learning.

Scholars in writing center studies are already adapting research on both motivation and instructional scaffolding to tutoring, albeit with a focus on writing. For example, Jo Mackiewicz & Isabelle Thompson (2013) have noted how tutors can use motivational scaffolding to “build rapport and solidarity with students and to engage students and keep them engaged in writing center conferences” (p. 47). Mackiewicz & Thompson (2013) describe five types of motivational scaffolding: “Praise on the students’ performance; statements of encouragement or optimism about students’ potential success; demonstrations of concern for students; expressions of sympathy and empathy; and reinforcement of students’ feelings of ownership and control” (pp. 46–47). Although these forms of motivational scaffolding are described within the context of tutoring writing, there is no reason why tutors cannot use them to motivate students to read. In fact, “motivation theory itself argues against adopting distinct frameworks. . . . to explain students’ engagement with tasks as similar as reading, writing, and interpreting literature” (Spaulding, 1992, p. 191). As Mackiewicz & Thompson (2013) conclude, their work on motivational scaffolding

can help tutors to become more aware and make more conscious choices about what they say to students. . . . The more we know about the linguistic possibilities available in writing center conferences and the more often we pass that knowledge on to tutors, the better we can serve students. (p. 68)

Going to the source of theories of motivation enriches writing center studies’ understanding of motivation. In fact, findings from educational psychology underscore the similarities between motivating students to read and to write. We, therefore, learn that contemporary theoretically-informed methods of motivating students to write within the writing center context are valid when it comes to motivating students to read, as well.

### **Psychology’s Research on Reading Aloud**

In addition to developing theories of motivation, which writing studies has drawn upon over the years, educational psychology has researched and developed theories associated with reading aloud, a common practice during writing center sessions. Most important for the purposes of this piece is that psychology has studied reading aloud to test its efficacy as a comprehension tool whereas within writing center studies, theo-

ries of reading aloud have largely focused on the benefits for students' writing (rather than their reading) abilities. Research and scholarship from writing center studies tells us that reading a text aloud can help students recognize moments in their writing that could use additional attention in the form of revision or editing. Although nondirective and minimalist approaches to tutoring demand that students (rather than tutors) read their work aloud, scholars who focus on English language learners have noted that the opposite may be more beneficial for these students: "It may be more helpful for the ESL writer to hear the tutor read the paper out loud—to note when the reader stumbles, pauses, fills in missing articles and modifiers, or reads smoothly" since "for many ESL writers, reading their paper out loud may shift their attention to the pronunciation of the English language—an aspect of language proficiency separate from writing in English" (Bruce, 2009, p. 225). Whether the tutor or the student reads the paper aloud, there are many issues to which the student might attend during this practice, including fluency, organization, word choice, and so on, all of which support writing. Reading a piece aloud certainly enables students to gauge which aspects of their writing need additional attention, but studies in educational psychology have found that reading aloud has benefits for reading comprehension, as well.

Thinking about ways that reading aloud may support the reading process rather than only the writing process means shifting attention away from the student-written piece to whatever assigned reading needs to be incorporated into the student's writing. Much of the research in educational psychology on how reading aloud can improve students' comprehension was conducted in contexts similar to the writing center tutorial using what are called peer-assisted learning strategies (PALS), wherein peers read aloud to each other and then summarize the readings. These studies, conducted in high school classrooms, indicate that PALS improved students' reading comprehension (Fuchs, Fuchs, Thompson, Svenson, Yen, Al Otaiba, Yang, McMaster, Prentice, Kazdan, & Saenz, 2001). Whereas improvements in fluency were not always registered in these and similar studies, reading comprehension consistently improved when students read texts aloud.

For writing center work, these findings suggest that tutors can use reading aloud as a strategy when faced with a student who does not seem to understand the reading that is associated with the writing assignment. Because reading a text aloud is already a widely-practiced tutoring strategy, writing center tutors would simply have to adjust their goals for doing so. While research conducted in educational psychology showed the importance of students reading the central text—rather than

someone reading it to them—with English language learners it may be more beneficial for tutors to read the piece aloud so the students would not be at risk for getting distracted by pronunciation issues (Bruce, 2009). It is worth noting, though, that Block (2016) recently looked into reading aloud practices in writing centers and has determined that “our field’s concerns with who reads writers’ papers may be overstated, and that the bigger factor influencing the types of writing issues initiated by writers and tutors is the reading method itself” (p. 33). Whereas the field’s lore tells us that students should read their own writing because it promotes ownership and active learning, Block (2016) finds that it is the *method* of reading (whether “point-predict” or some other method) rather than who reads the text that has the most influence on the session content. Her findings show “how the reading methods we use affect the writing issues that arise so that we are able to make (and prompt tutors to make) more informed decisions, rather than having sessions unfold by happenstance” (p. 51). Similarly, understanding that gaps in reading comprehension can also be addressed by reading aloud can inform tutors’ development of a plan to address students’ reading issues.

### **Reading in English Education**

Because some of composition’s roots are in English education, it should come as no surprise that education scholars Robert J. Tierney & P. David Pearson (1983) were some of the first to describe reading as an act of composition, a definition that compositionists studying reading in the 1980s depended upon and developed through their research and scholarship. Defining reading as an act of composition allows Tierney & Pearson (1983) to capitalize on the similarities between reading and writing, which they do in their foundational piece “Toward a Composing Model of Reading” by showing how concepts usually associated with writing can also apply to reading. For example, Tierney & Pearson (1983) describe drafting, revising, and monitoring as processes associated with reading in order to underscore the similarities between and recursive nature of both reading and writing.

Tierney & Pearson’s (1983) use of aspects usually ascribed to the writing process to describe the reading process has the potential to open up ways for writing center tutors to recognize the continuities between reading and writing and to enrich and expand how they conceive of the relationship between reading and writing. For example, just as writing center tutors engage students in discussions about “revising” and “monitoring” their writing, which prompt them to reflect on the effectiveness of what they have written, so, too, can tutors use this strategy—and the

same concepts—to encourage students to reflect on the effectiveness of their reading.

Helping students become more effective readers is one of the goals of those in education whose research focuses primarily on K-12 students. As such, the field has done extensive work on teaching elementary students to read, some of which has been adapted to postsecondary learning environments (Parr & Woloshyn, 2013) and could certainly be adapted to writing center contexts. In particular, studies of young students who are just learning to read indicate that students' levels of comprehension improve most when they are taught explicit comprehension strategies and when these strategies are modeled by the instructor (Parr & Woloshyn, 2013), approaches that were replicated in the first-year writing classroom by Cynthia Parr in order to determine the efficacy of these approaches in the postsecondary setting. Parr taught her students a series of comprehension strategies including how to monitor a text for meaning, identify text structure, develop questions, paraphrase, infer, summarize, and synthesize. Acknowledging the limits of self-reports, Parr finds that “the student reflections provide some evidence that students' knowledge of evidence-based comprehension strategies increased over the duration of the course,” which supports her own perceptions about students' growth (p. 16). Parr and Vera Woloshyn (2013) “acknowledge the need for continued research including the use of quantitative measures such as grade point average and achievement scores for determining students' use, transfer, and generalization of strategic processes as introduced within the context of this and similar courses” (p. 16). Parr and Woloshyn's (2013) emphasis on the transfer of learning here is not surprising as transfer of learning—arguably the primary goal of education—has long been an important aspect of research in the field of education.

Those in the education field have found that the successful transfer of learning depends in part on how instructors frame their teaching. Education experts Randi A. Engle, Diane P. Lam, Xenia S. Meyer, & Sarah E. Nix (2012) have detailed the importance of “expansive frameworks,” open and flexible teaching contexts that stand in opposition to narrower, mastery-driven, “bounded” contexts. These researchers have developed these terms to describe which educational contexts are most conducive to the transfer of learning, in which “learning in one context or with one set of materials impacts on performance in another context or with other related materials” (Perkins & Salomon, 1992). Describing the difference between bounded and expansive frames, Engle, Lam, Meyer, & Nix (2012) offer the following examples: “A teacher can frame a lesson as a one-time event of learning . . . or as an initial discussion of an issue that students will be actively engaging with throughout their



lives” (p. 217). Having studied these frames both within classroom contexts, as well as tutoring contexts, their findings indicate that bounded frames “tend to discourage students from later using what they learn” while expansive frames “tend to encourage it” (p. 217).

Although the language of expansive frames has not been picked up by composition or writing center studies, the goal of teaching within expansive frames—namely the transfer of learning—has. In her primer on the transfer of learning published in this journal, Bonnie Devet (2015) points to the centrality of transfer to writing center work since students who visit the center are expected to use what they learn there in their courses and other contexts. As such, this research in the field of education can help those in writing center studies better understand how to work with students on reading in ways that promote the transfer of the knowledge they construct about reading during tutorials. Writing center studies’ growing interest in transfer will be explored below, particularly in terms of what writing center studies can contribute to transfer research focused on reading. First, though, let’s explore the research and scholarship on reading that has emerged from composition studies to see what insights this field—the one most closely associated with writing center studies—has to offer.

### **Reading in the Emerging Field of Composition Studies**

As mentioned above, compositionists began studying reading—as writing’s counterpart in the construction of meaning—in the 1970s and 1980s as the field was coalescing. The work that emerged on reading from this period has been recovered recently (Carillo, 2015) in an effort to lay a foundation for additional work on reading in composition. Just as this earlier work informs current work on reading in composition, it is also worth considering what it might offer those in writing center studies. As such, I focus on this earlier moment in the history of composition before moving to current research and scholarship on reading from the field.

In the 1980s, compositionists developed specific pedagogies that allowed instructors to capitalize on the relationship between reading and writing so students might make gains in both areas. The concept of difficulty became a touchstone for those who studied reading in the 1980s and continue to do so, including Salvatori & Donahue. Salvatori & Donahue built their reading/writing pedagogy around the concept of difficulty in the 1980s, which was eventually transformed into a full-fledged pedagogical program described in their 2004 textbook *The*

*Elements (and Pleasures) of Difficulty*. Salvatori & Donahue (2004) contend that engaging difficulty is crucial in one's academic career and beyond:

Readers who engage, rather than avoid, a text's difficulties can deepen their understanding of what they read and how they read. If they move away from those difficulties or opt for somebody solving them for them, chances are that they will never know the cause of those difficulties, and the means to control them. And insofar as reading involves thinking—thinking the thoughts of another, inhabiting somebody else's mind—temporarily adopting somebody else's argument—learning to read in ways that nurture flexibility of mind can be good preparation for encountering and working through difficult life situations. (p. 3)

This concept of difficulty was also the centerpiece in Bartholomae & Petrosky's (1987) widely circulating composition reader *Ways of Reading*, now in its 11th edition. The readings for that text were, in fact, chosen "with the understanding that they were difficult to read" (p. 10).

This emphasis on engaging difficulty as a means to helping students become stronger readers (and writers) can be embraced by writing center studies as one way of approaching reading. Specifically, tutors might ask students to develop a difficulty inventory that lists those elements that the student finds challenging and that are standing in the students' way of either understanding the text or of writing about it. Then, the tutor and student can work together to figure out how to work through these difficulties. A dictionary and context clues within the text might help with difficult vocabulary; a quick internet search on reputable sites about a particular historical event can fill in a gap in background knowledge; and certain reading strategies can help a student follow a text's argument. The very act of developing the list and working with a tutor to imagine which resources can provide the necessary support will help students feel less overwhelmed when reading difficult texts and give them the confidence to address these difficulties. Educating tutors about why students have difficulties reading and training tutors to help the students understand this and support students as they develop the tools to manage these difficulties is a potentially powerful approach to tutor education.

While in the 1980s some scholars imagined reading pedagogies that encouraged students to embrace difficulty, others looked to psychology for models of how to study reading. For example, scholars such as Christina Haas & Linda Flower (1988), as well as Linda Flower & John R. Hayes (1981), have studied reading from a cognitive perspective. These researchers sought to capture and study cognitive processes through "read aloud protocols" in which students reflected aloud on

their reading processes. Also taking a cue from scholarship on writing, Haas & Flower (1988) posit that reading, too, could be understood and taught as a rhetorical act. Again using think-aloud protocols, Haas & Flower (1988) famously studied the strategies that experienced (i.e., graduate students) and less experienced (i.e., undergraduates) readers use while reading. They ultimately conclude that graduate students used “rhetorical” reading strategies to make sense of the text before them and undergraduates used these strategies rarely as they largely understood reading as information exchange. Certainly, these early findings about the importance of rhetorical reading strategies to strong reading practices are relevant to writing center studies, which already draws on the field of rhetoric. The field would simply need to adopt a more comprehensive understanding of rhetoric to include its value for reading instruction in addition to writing instruction.

### **Reading in Contemporary Composition Studies**

Although attention to reading flourished as the field of composition was emerging in the 1970s and 1980s, there was also a long period from roughly 1990–2010 wherein composition went largely silent about reading. As mentioned in the introduction, in the past five years or so we have seen a revival of attention to reading in the field, and as their predecessors did, current compositionists are developing reading pedagogies that complement postsecondary writing pedagogies. By looking at contemporary iterations of research and scholarship on reading from composition—the field most closely associated with writing center studies—we can begin to imagine how writing center studies might join this current conversation.

As did composition scholars in the 1980s, compositionists today are also developing ways of connecting reading and writing in their classrooms so that students can develop their abilities in both practices simultaneously. In his scholarship on reading, for example, Mike Bunn (2011) describes his use of the “reading like a writer” strategy to connect reading and writing in his classrooms, an approach that is readily adaptable to the writing center context. This reading strategy connects reading and writing through an imitative activity wherein students read in order to identify authors’ choices and understand where those choices are surfacing in their own writing (p. 72). “The idea,” Bunn (2011) explains, “is to carefully examine the things you read, looking at the writerly techniques in the text in order to decide if you might want to adopt similar (or the same) techniques in your writing” (p. 72). Bunn (2011) uses the phrase “writerly techniques” to describe

the ways that writers present their ideas and make their points. Bunn (2011) further explains that this reading approach is not about learning or understanding the content of a reading. Instead, when one adopts this approach, it is to learn about writing. Although Bunn (2011) espouses the benefits of a single technique, in a rarely seen piece on reading in the mid-1990s, Nancy Morrow (1997) provides perhaps the most comprehensive topography of the kinds of reading that she thinks should be cultivated in students, including “reading to build an intellectual repertoire; reading for the unexpected; reading for the play of language; reading for strategies of persuasion; and reading for genre conventions” (466–469).

Drawing on Bunn’s (2011, 2013) work and Morrow’s (1997) topography, although contrary to Morrow’s (1997) position that “no one course could possibly explore all these ways of reading,” in *Securing a Place for Reading in Composition, I* (2015) contend not only that composition instructors could explore multiple ways of reading in a single course, but that they *must* if they want their students to have the tools to read both widely and deeply in and beyond first-year composition. Drawing on the compositionists’ work from the 1970s and 1980s, as well as research from education and educational psychology, which indicates that better readers use more strategies and monitor their own comprehension more consistently than poor readers (Block & Pressley, 2001; Rapp, van den Broek, McMaster, Kendeou, & Espin, 2007), I describe how teachers should be teaching students a range of different ways of reading (e.g., rhetorical reading, reading like a writer) within the expansive framework of what I call “mindful reading.” Mindful reading is best understood *not* as yet another way of reading, but a *framework* for teaching the range of ways of reading that are currently valued in our field so that students can create knowledge *about* reading and *about* themselves as readers, knowledge that they can bring with them into other courses. I use the term “mindful” to underscore the metacognitive basis of this frame wherein students become *knowledgeable*, *deliberate*, and *reflective* about *how* they read and the demands that contexts place on their reading.

Alice Horning’s (2011) scholarship focuses on the importance of metacognition, too. Horning’s (2011) approach is also based on research about the reading practices of stronger readers and explores how to best prepare students to read “extended informational prose text on paper,” which she contends “is a kind of gold standard in a variety of disciplines, even with variations in genre, purpose and so forth.” In comparing how (field) experts read to how novices (e.g., students) read, Horning (2011) notes that “expert readers have some essential meta-cognitive

awareness of text structure, context and language as well as skills in analysis, synthesis, evaluation and application.” Novices, on the other hand, “lack awareness of these kinds and do not have as complete an array of skills as they could and should.” Although reminiscent in some ways of Flower & Hayes’ (1981) early work on the reading practices of more and less experienced readers, Horning (2011) addresses her recommendations across disciplinary boundaries: “Teachers in every discipline can and should help students develop the awarenesses and skills to become expert readers in their field.”

Whereas Horning (2011) focuses on print-based information prose, Keller (2013) has directed attention to how different media affect students’ reading practices and why that should be of interest to those in composition. Keller (2013) argues that the shift toward digital reading practices has meant that instructors and students now must navigate “a wide range of ever-changing literacy contexts” (p. 9). Based on case studies, Keller (2013) argues that the two defining features of literacy in the contemporary moment are acceleration and accumulation. The term “acceleration” is meant to indicate how speed is being prioritized over quality. Impacted by the expectations of social media, as well as by over-crowded curricula, students are expected to read and write at rather fast speeds. Keller (2013) uses the term “accumulation” to describe the consistent emergence of new forms of literacy. What all of this means for Keller (2013) is that instructors must help students “gain versatile, dexterous approaches to both reading and writing” (p. 9) that “reflect the dynamic range of contexts and media in which students will read and write” (p. 7).

Having provided an overview of what writing center studies might learn about reading from the fields of educational psychology, education, and composition, let’s now consider what and how writing center studies might contribute to this contemporary conversation about reading within composition studies. Of those fields discussed in this piece, composition is, of course, the closest field to writing center studies. It makes sense, then, to look there for guidance on research about reading that might be conducted within the writing center context. Just as composition studies has looked for ways to adapt learning theories and instructional strategies to postsecondary contexts that were developed in the fields of education and educational psychology for K-12 curricula, writing center studies is uniquely positioned to adapt research on reading emerging from composition, as is discussed in the following section.

### **Writing Center Studies and Reading: Some Potential Avenues of Inquiry**

This final section returns to some key moments in this piece to explore what writing center studies might add to these ongoing, cross-disciplinary discussions about reading. Let's begin with one of the most common strategies that writing center tutors use in tutorials and a strategy that is often studied and explored in scholarship that emerges from writing center studies: the practice of reading aloud.

As discussed above, reading aloud is a common strategy used in tutorials to help students recognize aspects of their writing that need to be improved, but it is one that Block (2016) has recently revisited in order to challenge the field's lore about the importance of who does that reading during the tutorial. Block (2016) calls for additional research into this issue, and I would posit that this research might test Block's (2016) theory in relation to comprehension. The goal of such research would be to determine the extent to which different reading methods (as opposed to who does the reading) enhance students' abilities to comprehend. Moreover, whereas there may be sufficient time in a tutorial to read an entire student essay, the same may not be possible with the reading that accompanies a writing assignment. As such, it becomes important to determine not just which methods of reading best facilitate reading comprehension, but how to choose which sections of a text to read aloud in order to maximize the effectiveness of the strategy. Research into additional uses of the reading-aloud strategy during tutorials has the potential to expand the number of strategies that tutors have overall and add to the strategies they have for dealing directly with students' reading.

In addition to exploring the effectiveness of reading aloud for improved comprehension, writing center studies might also consider adapting reading pedagogies emerging from composition for use in tutorials. Both Bunn's (2011) "reading like a writer" strategy and Horning's (2011) work on expert readers, for example, invoke the importance of modeling in reading. Writing center studies scholars can extend this work by investigating the effectiveness of modeling reading strategies and related metacognitive exercises during tutorials. Amanda Greenwell (2017) has described a model-centered project she has undertaken in her writing center at a small liberal arts college. Tutors create reading guides for students by performing rhetorical readings in the margins of papers from across the disciplines in order to mark the various features of a text from a reader's perspective. This supports the tutors' understanding of the relationship between reading and writing within particular dis-

ciplines and offers students a model not only for thinking through the characteristics of disciplinary-specific assignments but also for reflecting on these elements during and beyond the tutorial.

As is suggested by the emphasis on reflection in Greenwell's (2017) and other approaches to supporting students' reading, it is crucial to position students to transfer what they learn in the tutorial into future contexts. As noted above, writing center studies is already contributing to discussions of transfer. The field could extend that contribution to include discussions about reading transfer by researching the extent to which students transfer what they learn about reading during tutorials beyond those tutorials. This research might have at least two complementary goals: 1. to provide tutors with strategies for deliberately and thoughtfully working with students on their reading, including meta-cognitive strategies that are thought to promote the transfer of learning; and 2. to help tutors develop more reflective reading habits that they take with them to future contexts. Just as Dana Lynn Driscoll (2015) has followed tutors to future contexts in order to determine the extent to which their writing knowledge transferred beyond the peer education course, researchers might do the same with reading knowledge.

As writing center studies looks to expand its research on transfer to include the transfer of reading knowledge, the field might also continue contributing to research and scholarship on multimodality, which as Keller (2013) points out, is an important part of students' expanding literacies. Arlene Archer (2011) argues that

tutors need to realize that reading and writing practices are only one part of what people have to learn in order to be literate, and thus they need to learn strategies to help students understand and gain competency in multimodal composition. This process includes learning how to produce well-designed print and digital texts. It also includes knowledge about the appropriate use of visuals and the integration of visuals in multimodal texts. (p. 12)

Archer (2011) mentions both reading and writing above, but her focus—as is the case in most writing center scholarship—remains on writing or producing digital texts. Educating tutors on how to help students not just create, but read multimodal compositions is equally important, and writing center studies has the potential to contribute important insights into the most productive ways of supporting students in this form of reading. As Keller (2013) recommends that instructors must “gain versatile, dexterous approaches to both reading and writing” (p. 9) that “reflect the dynamic range of contexts and media in which students will read and write” (p. 7), writing center studies, too, needs to continue refining its approach to and research on preparing tutors to engage and

support the range of literacies that students are expected to develop and demonstrate in their postsecondary careers.

### **Concluding Thoughts**

Adapting and testing the efficacy of contemporary reading pedagogies and strategies for writing center use, as well as exploring the other lines of inquiry I have outlined above, will allow writing center studies to enter recent vibrant conversations about reading that are circulating within composition studies. Understanding what other fields already know about reading positions writing center studies to begin imagining ways of enriching and expanding the attention that is inevitably already being paid to reading in writing centers. Writing center professionals' perspectives have the potential to enhance theoretical discussions on reading across these various fields, and their work on the ground has the potential to support more comprehensive literacy tutoring.

### **Acknowledgement**

*I am grateful to WCJ editor Kerri Jordan for her encouragement and ongoing support of this project, and I appreciate the helpful feedback and guidance from the anonymous reviewers and the other editors at WCJ.*



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**Ellen C. Carillo** is an Associate Professor of English at the University of Connecticut and the Writing Coordinator at its Waterbury Campus. She is the author of *Securing a Place for Reading in Composition: The Importance of Teaching for Transfer* (Utah State UP, 2015), *A Writers Guide to Mindful Reading* (WAC Clearinghouse, 2017), and *Teaching Readers in Post-Truth America* (forthcoming, Utah State UP). Ellen is co-founder of the Role of Reading in Composition Studies Special Interest Group of the Conference on College Composition and Communication.