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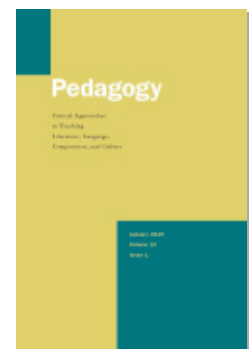
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Navigating This Perfect Storm: Teaching Critical Reading in  
the Face of the Common Core State Standards, Fake News, and  
Google

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## Navigating This Perfect Storm

Teaching Critical Reading in the Face of the Common Core State Standards, Fake News, and Google

*Ellen C. Carillo*

In January 2016, this very journal published a special issue on reading, guest edited by Mariolina Rizzi Salvatori and Patricia Donahue. In their introduction, Salvatori and Donahue acknowledged that while *Pedagogy* has always published articles on reading, the special issue offered the opportunity to give reading more sustained attention and to “registe[r] the presence of various trends within disciplinary and pedagogical sites” (2016: 3) when it comes to studying, researching, and teaching reading. This article contributes to this renewed interest in reading by exploring what it means to teach reading within our current posttruth culture. To do so, though, I begin at the secondary level, where the Common Core state standards (CCSS) largely dictate how reading is defined and taught. In doing so, I am following in the footsteps of others who have taken a similar route. For example, in his review of *Composition in the Age of Austerity*, published in *Pedagogy*, Phillip Goodwin (2017) underscores that collection’s focus on how important it is for those in higher education (and particularly for those teaching first-year writing) to understand the CCSS. Similarly, Patrick C. Fleming has also argued in this journal that, in addition to paying attention to our students’ “past educations,” which now include the CCSS curricula and assessments, “it behooves [postsecondary instructors] to consider debates [surrounding curricula], and

the research behind them, in designing the instruction we ourselves deliver” (2016: 254–55).

### **Tracking This Perfect Storm**

In light of its emphasis on objectivity and text-based evidence, the CCSS would seem to offer a particularly relevant way of reading in our posttruth culture—maybe even an important antidote to this climate wherein personal opinions and emotions seemingly trump objective facts. Reanimating the text-centric reading pedagogy of New Criticism, the CCSS were developed and adopted by forty-six states approximately seven years ago. Like New Criticism, the CCSS eschew the role of feeling when reading and interpreting. First described by New Critics W. K. Wimsatt Jr. and M. C. Beardsley as the “affective fallacy,” the New Critics believed that affect is “another convenient detour” around “objective criticism” that wrongly underscores a text’s “psychological effects” and “ends in impressionism and relativism” (1949: 21). Far less eloquently, David Coleman, a lead writer and architect of the CCSS, defended its emphasis on argument and objectivity (and implicit stance against personal writing) by saying the following: “As you grow up in this world, you realize that people don’t really give a shit about what you feel or think” (2011).

Despite the shock waves Coleman’s statement sent through the secondary school community and the educational community at large, in today’s climate his degradation of unsupported personal opinions and elevation of argument, evidence, and objectivity might be seen as refreshing. In fact, as detailed later in this article, some secondary school instructors who were once skeptical of the CCSS are now viewing them as an unexpected but welcome resource for responding to the diminishing value placed on argument, evidence, and objectivity. But before we assume that the CCSS should be mobilized as a response to fake news and related outgrowths of this posttruth culture, we must address at least two problems. These problems, explored in detail in this article, suggest that the CCSS are not, in fact, the antidote to our current ills but, rather, that the CCSS are playing into and exacerbating them. As I describe here, the state-sanctioned ways of reading furthered by the CCSS complement equally deleterious ways of reading and knowing common in our digital age. Philosopher Michael P. Lynch (2016), who studies technology, has described the dangers of what he calls “Google-knowing,” as well as “knowing as downloading,” both of which have the potential to lead to the uncritical acceptance of fake news and “alternative facts.” As this article details, recent studies, both large and small, have found that even the

digital natives we teach at the secondary and postsecondary levels—whom we expect to be expert navigators of all things digital—are not prepared to read in ways that allow them to understand and discern the credibility of what they encounter online. This article exposes and explores what has become a perfect storm of sorts: a set of educational standards that encourage the reverence of texts and ignore the value of the reader to the reading process, the widespread use of the Internet and related technologies that promote passivity, and a political administration that releases fake news, denounces real news as fake, and provides what it calls alternative facts. Considering these elements independently, as well as the potentially calamitous consequences of their convergence, this article sounds a warning about these consequences and details how instructors might respond.

### **The Common Core State Standards in Our Current Political Landscape**

The results of the 2016 presidential election, along with President Trump's first set of executive orders, left many instructors across the country wondering what they might do in response. Some addressed Trump's Muslim ban and his revoking of Obama's guidelines on transgender citizens' use of bathrooms, as well as his more general xenophobia, by posting statements about inclusivity around their schools. Others wore safety pins indicating their solidarity with those marginalized by Trump and his administration. Trump's words, often shared via Twitter, were disconcerting as well, and the lies and misinformation he spread via Twitter early in his presidency would become a staple. In those early days, despite evidence to the contrary, Trump made false claims about the size of the crowd at his inauguration. When confronted about the misinformation the White House was spreading, Trump's counselor Kellyanne Conway said that the administration was working from what she called "alternative facts." At that same time, Trump also claimed (again without proof) that there was a country-wide problem with voter fraud. About six weeks later, Trump made the unsubstantiated accusation, which was publicly denounced by the country's intelligence community, that former president Barack Obama had tapped the phones at Trump Tower. When asked for evidence of the wiretapping, Trump and his administration could not produce any.

Teaching students to craft sound arguments by summoning credible and relevant evidence to support those arguments is especially difficult in a climate that scoffs at such things. As such, instructors at all levels are looking everywhere for help. The CCSS, once derided by many, are slowly becoming one place to turn: "Seven years ago, I could not imagine that I would be

pleased about the Common Core,” writes veteran teacher and language arts coordinator Collette M. Bennett on her popular blog, “but the push for text-based evidence may be exactly what our students will need. . . . All of this hunting for text-based evidence may be the best training our students could have received as preparation for this posttruth world where pundits dismiss facts as unnecessary and media platforms promote factual inaccuracies through fake news” (2016). Bennett goes on to lay out the most relevant elements of the CCSS to today’s posttruth culture. She points to the standards’ promotion of “text-based evidence gathered when students ‘read closely’” and their stance that “prior knowledge and experience are no substitute for evidence.” She also draws attention to how the CCSS “outlin[e] the skills students need to identify and to incorporate relevant facts they will use to write argumentative or explanatory responses.”

I agree that these aspects of the CCSS look promising, and there is no doubt that Bennett is a seasoned teacher and administrator. But, before we hastily rally around the CCSS, we need to consider the assumptions that they make about reading and readers and, by extension, about our students. I say *our* students because, although I teach at the postsecondary level, this affects all students and all instructors at the secondary and postsecondary levels. The students who are subject to the CCSS now will be my students, and all that they will bring with them to their college English classrooms—literature and writing classrooms alike—will necessarily be inflected by the CCSS. As this article details, though, the CCSS are not only at odds with what, I think, we want to (and now must) teach our students about reading and related evaluative practices but also may undermine those very efforts.

### **The Reader in the Common Core State Standards**

New Critics Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren’s directive to pay attention to “the object in itself” in their textbook *Understanding Poetry* (1938) echoes throughout David Coleman and Susan Pimentel’s “The Revised Publishers’ Criteria for the Common Core State Standards” (2012), the document intended for curriculum developers and publishers who support the implementation of the CCSS. That document insists that the center of literacy instruction must be the “text itself” and “everything included in the surrounding materials should be thoughtfully considered and justified before being included. . . . Surrounding materials should be included only when necessary so as not to distract from the text itself” (10). As is well known, Brooks, Warren, and other New Critics strongly rejected the use of biographical and historical information in literary study—what the “Revised Publish-

ers' Criteria" seemingly calls "supporting materials"—and maintained that the poem must be treated "as an object in itself," just as the CCSS regularly describes the importance of grasping fully the "text itself."

In the "Revised Publishers' Criteria," the "text itself" is consistently prioritized over the reader and what she might bring to the act of reading: "At the heart of these criteria are instructions for shifting the focus of literacy instruction to center on careful examination of the text itself. . . . The standards focus on students reading closely to draw evidence and knowledge from the text. . . . The criteria make plain that developing students' prowess at drawing knowledge from the text itself is the point of reading; reading well means gaining the maximum insight or knowledge possible from each source" (Coleman and Pimentel 2012: 1). This passage describes students not as active participants in the creation of understanding or insight but as scavengers who must "draw" knowledge and "gain" insight from the text, where knowledge and insight are contained. In locating meaning in the text itself, the CCSS disregard a foundational element that has infused literary study since at least the 1970s, namely, that the reader plays a role in the construction of meaning.

By foregrounding the text and blatantly neglecting to describe how readers' experiences and background knowledge necessarily affect the interpretive process, the CCSS's English Language Arts standards themselves also remove the individual reader (and how readers make meaning) from the equation. The Anchor Standards for Reading are listed as follows:

1. Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.
2. Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.
3. Analyze how and why individuals, events, or ideas develop and interact over the course of a text.
4. Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone.
5. Analyze the structure of texts, including how specific sentences, paragraphs, and larger portions of the text (e.g., a section, chapter, scene, or stanza) relate to each other and the whole.
6. Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.  
(Common Core State Standard Initiative n.d.-a)

The repetition of the phrase the “text itself” throughout the “Revised Publishers’ Criteria” and the CCSS not only disconnects the students’ experiences and background knowledge from the reading process but also excludes the reader from the act of reading, as the text is described as totally separate from the reader. I wonder what tools students are relying on—if not other reading experiences, lived experience, and background knowledge (all derided by the CCSS)—to read the text explicitly, make logical inferences, determine central themes, summarize, analyze, and interpret.

Despite the standards’ disregard of the reader’s role in the construction of meaning, as compositionist and rhetorical historian Patricia Harkin points out, readers-as-meaning-makers has become a normalized concept and is “simply assumed in every aspect of our work” (2005: 413). She explains further, “Readers make meaning: readers—and not only authors—engage in an active process of production-in-use in which texts of all kinds—stories, poems, plays, buildings, films, TV ads, clothes, body piercings—are received by their audiences not as a repository of stable meaning but as an invitation to make it” (413). Yet, the standards’ conception of reading is an unfortunate throwback to a time when texts were situated as stable repositories of meaning, and by extension, teachers were cast as the masters and safeguards of these meanings.

Flying in the face of what we have known about reading for at least fifty years—and an additional twenty-five if you go as far back as Louise Rosenblatt’s work, initially published in 1938—the CCSS base reading pedagogy on long-outdated notions of what it means to read largely because Coleman imagines the CCSS as a necessary corrective to what he sees as reader-response theory’s overbearing touchy-feely, anything-goes approach. But Harkin reminds us that reader-response theory was initially characterized by “very considerable theoretical sophistication,” and only as time went on did it come “to be associated, almost exclusively, with pedagogy . . . as compositionists sought to use reader-response theory to teach students to read difficult texts” (2005: 419). In the last several decades, scholars have built on Rosenblatt’s work, further detailing the roles that each reader’s prior knowledge and lived experience, as well as various aspects of that reader’s personality, culture, worldview, race, gender identity, religion, and ethnicity, play in how each reader reads.

All of those theories of reading were obviously well established when I initially wrote about this subject (Carillo 2016), but with a current administration that normalizes xenophobia, racism, and anti-Semitism, I have become increasingly concerned about the potential consequences of

the CCSS and, particularly, how the standards' dismissal of the role of the reader necessarily "diminish[es] the concern with the human meaningfulness of the literary work" (Rosenblatt 1983: 29). Rosenblatt explains, "The ability to understand and sympathize with others reflects the multiple nature of the human being, his potentiality for many more selves and kinds of experiences than any one could begin to express" (40). Not only have the CCSS encouraged less reading of literature—in favor of informational texts—thereby potentially reducing students' opportunities to understand and empathize, but by ignoring the reader altogether, the CCSS have also dehumanized students and, as Daniel E. Ferguson (2013/2014) points out, have silenced their voices. Others agree. Literacy expert Thomas Newkirk has characterized the CCSS as presenting an "inhumanly fractured model of what goes on in deep reading" (2013: 1), and Jason Endacott and Christian Z. Goering have noted that "our children have become akin to new products some 'edu-corporation' wants to research and develop before bringing to market. Not surprisingly, the product reflects exactly what big business values in its workers—emphasis on analysis, argument, and specialization—at the potential expense of beauty, empathy, personal reflection and humanity" (2014: 90). With an administration looking to cut the arts significantly and in a country already suffering from a surge in racially and religiously motivated crimes thanks to citizens who have been emboldened by the administration's religious bans and related xenophobic policies, we cannot afford to turn away from beauty, empathy, personal reflection, and humanity.

### **Knowing and Understanding in a Digital Culture**

The text-centric approach of the CCSS is especially worrisome in a digital culture that already encourages a passive model of reading. As Lynch notes, "A key challenge. . . is not letting our super-easy access to so much information lull us into being passive receptacles for other people's opinions. That can encourage in us the thought that all knowing is downloading—that all knowing is passive. That would be a serious mistake" (2016: 39). "If we want more than to be just passive, receptive knowers," Lynch continues, "We need to struggle to be *autonomous* in our own thought. To do that is to believe based on *reasons you can own*—stemming from principles you would, on reflection, endorse" (39). Yet, the CCSS do not give students the opportunity to imagine themselves as readers, as autonomous thinkers who are encouraged to bring their background knowledge, experiences, and reflective powers to the act of reading. Instead, they are positioned as "downloaders" of the meaning of the text rather than co-constructors of it. Under the CCSS, stu-



dents may come to *know* texts but not *understand* them. Parsing out the difference between knowing and understanding becomes important to exploring the potential consequences of the CCSS in a digital world.

As Lynch points out, understanding and knowing are two different things. He explains that understanding “is a kind of knowing that involves grasping relationships, the network, or parts and whole” (2016: 165) and involves being able to speak to the how and why of things, which is why a person who understands something can really explain it. Someone with knowledge has a less comprehensive and more superficial grasp of independent facts, which is what Lynch calls Google-knowing. He explains that, while “Google-knowing is a terrific basis for understanding in the way that reading a textbook is . . . it is not itself the same as understanding because it is not a creative act” (180). And because “creativity matters to human beings” and “the act of understanding something or someone else can help you understand yourself,” Lynch argues that even if someday we are able to “outsource” understanding the way in which knowing has seemingly been outsourced to Google, “it is not clear that we should want to” since to do so “risks something deep, something that makes us not just digitally human, but human period” (184). It is that “something deep,” that valuing of creativity—that human element—that seems missing from the standards’ definition of reading and readers. With their text-centric approach to reading, the CCSS value knowledge over understanding. Precisely because our digital culture already threatens opportunities for understanding and privileges (Google-) knowing over understanding, there is more at stake now than there was in the early twentieth century when the New Critics touted their text-centric theories. Educational institutions should be promoting understanding, which both the digital culture and the CCSS seem to undermine. If not at these institutions, where will students learn to be creative and reflective readers and thinkers who understand themselves, as well as the texts that surround them? Not only do we need instruction that helps mitigate the value that the digital world is assigning to knowledge at the expense of understanding, but we also need instruction that prepares students to know what to do with their knowledge and how to develop it into understanding.

### **Research on Students’ Reading Abilities**

Teaching students how to move from a place of Google-knowing into understanding is no small feat. In fact, it turns out that the digital natives we assume to be so proficient at reading online—at navigating the Internet and social media—are not. Both large- and small-scale studies have indicated that stu-

den's online reading abilities are rather weak. In their study of just over two hundred college students, Ericka Menchen-Trevino and Eszter Hargittai (2011) found that students largely did not understand Wikipedia's editing process (despite using it regularly), which makes them particularly susceptible to believing whatever they read on Wikipedia. James P. Purdy's (2012) study of 523 students' reading habits indicated that students choose sources based on their ease of use as opposed to the relevance to their subject. Relevance was, in fact, one of the least important criteria students reported using to choose an online source.

A large-scale study titled Project SAILS (Standardized Assessment of Information Literacy Skills; [www.projectsails.org](http://www.projectsails.org)) lends additional validity to these smaller studies. With a standardized test designed by faculty and librarians at Kent State University (and now owned by Carrick Enterprises), based on the Association of College and Research Libraries' Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education, Project SAILS tests students' information literacy skills, including how well students access, locate, evaluate, understand, and use online information. As literacy expert Alice Horning (2012) points out, only 50 percent of about 6,400 high school, community college, and four-year college and university students were deemed to have the essential information literacy skills. These findings, of course, raise questions about students' most fundamental abilities to successfully understand online information.

Most recently, a similarly large-scale study of middle schoolers through college students, conducted by the Stanford History Education Group (2016), found that students are not adept at evaluating the credibility of—or reading—online sources. The study, titled “Evaluating Information: The Cornerstone of Civic Online Reasoning” (hereafter referred to as the Stanford study), which included responses from 7,804 students from schools (both underresourced and well resourced) across twelve states, as well as students from six universities, sought to gauge students' capacities for “civic online reasoning.” The study began well before Trump's election, but the study's results—especially after his election, which brought with it a rash of fake news and alternative facts—are harrowing. The researchers found that “when it comes to evaluating information that flows through social media channels, [students] are easily duped” (4). Detailing their methods, the Stanford researchers explain in the executive summary:

We did not design our exercises to shake out a grade or make hairsplitting distinctions between a “good” and a “better” answer. Rather, we sought to establish

a reasonable bar, a level of performance we hoped was within reach of most middle school, high school, and college students. For example, we would hope that middle school students could distinguish an ad from a news story. By high school, we would hope that students reading about gun laws would notice that a chart came from a gun owners' political action committee. And, in 2016, we would hope college students, who spend hours each day online, would look beyond a .org URL and ask who's behind a site that presents only one side of a contentious issue. *But in every case and at every level, we were taken aback by students' lack of preparation.* (4, emphasis added)

Overall, the middle schoolers, high schoolers, and college students were ill-prepared to successfully complete their assigned tasks. The executive summary explains that “more than 80 percent of the middle-schoolers believed that the native advertisement, identified by the words ‘sponsored content,’ was a real news story. Some students even mentioned that it was sponsored content but still believed that it was a news article” (10). Across all grade levels, the high school students who participated in the study “were captivated by the photograph” of the misshapen flowers growing near a power plant. These students

relied on [only the photo] to evaluate the trustworthiness of the post, ignoring key details, such as the source (none was named) of the photo. Less than 20 percent of [these] students constructed “Mastery” responses, or responses that questioned the source of the post or the source of the photo. On the other hand, nearly 40 percent of students argued that the post provided strong evidence because it presented pictorial evidence about conditions near the power plant. (17)

The participating college students had trouble evaluating tweets, a form of social media with which they regularly engage:

Only a few students noted that the tweet was based on a poll conducted by a professional polling firm and explained why this would make the tweet a stronger source of information. Similarly, less than a third of students fully explained how the political agendas of MoveOn.org and the Center for American Progress might influence the content of the tweet. Many students made broad statements about the limitations of polling or the dangers of social media content instead of investigating the particulars of the organizations involved in this tweet. (23)

In all of these cases, all three populations failed to adeptly read the online information. Instead, these students accepted what was before them: they read the “sponsored content” as a news article; they read the photograph of

the flower as pictorial evidence despite no mention of its source; and they ignored the significance of the credible polling firm behind the information shared via the tweet.

The CCSS only exacerbate the issues students encountered in the Stanford study because the standards encourage a reverence for texts. As Brian White has pointed out, Coleman describes literature as “‘the master class’ for which he has ‘a certain reverence,’ and himself as the ‘teacher and the student and the servant of it’” (2015: 33). With its repetition of the phrase “the text itself” and its admonition to students to stick within the “four corners of the text,” the CCSS seem to strive to inspire a similar reverence in students for all kinds of texts, including informational texts, which the CCSS favors. This is especially worrisome in a posttruth culture. The standards’ emphasis on informational texts and text-based evidence, which would seem to be of great import within a posttruth climate, has yet to prepare students to read the texts that surround them, as suggested most notably by the recent Stanford study. In fact, because the CCSS encourage students to revere texts, it really should not come as a surprise that students in this study were not inclined to question the texts (and the evidence therein) placed before them.

These findings about students’ difficulties with reading and assessing online information ultimately reveal a lack of understanding, as defined by Lynch. In the Stanford study, students were unable to recognize the relationships among a piece of (so-called) evidence, the credibility of its source, and the authenticity of the evidence. Students did not realize that these relationships were worth exploring (why would they, if texts are simply to be revered?). Because of this, students did not understand how all of these elements “fit together” (Lynch 2016: 177); they did not and could not understand what they were reading and viewing. The standards’ text-centric, narrow approach to reading does not prepare students to engage texts in deep ways—to question, challenge, and maybe even seek to disprove them.

The findings from studies of students’ general critical reading abilities are no more encouraging than those that address students’ digital reading abilities and information literacy skills. The SAT Verbal/Critical Reading portion, for example, has shown a steep decline over the last several decades in students’ reading abilities. Despite criticisms of the test, its long history allows for comparisons over time, which reveal that “in 2015, the average score on the SAT verbal test was near historic lows” (American Academy of Arts and Sciences 2016). Like SAT scores, ACT scores are also used for admission and placement. Recent scores on the test’s Reading portion from

approximately 2 million students nationwide also indicated a decline. As Horning points out, in ACT's 2015 report, "forty-six percent of students hit ACT's cutoff score of 22 on the Reading section, needed to be 'successful' in college. ACT defines success as having a 2.0 GPA and returning for a second year of study. It's worth noting that this result is a decline from the 51 percent who hit the cutoff score as reported in 2006, when ACT did a big study of students' reading performance" (2017: 3).

Although focused on students' source-based *writing* habits, the Citation Project, a multi-institutional, empirical research project, revealed disturbing data about students' reading habits. Rebecca Moore Howard, Tricia Serviss, and Tanya K. Rodrigue found that students focused on a very limited amount of text while summarizing the sources they used in their writing, raising questions about "whether students understand the sources they are citing" (2010: 189). Students avoided working with the larger ideas in the sources, often constructing arguments "from isolated sentences pulled from sources" (189). These findings have led Sandra Jamieson, a member of the research team, to conclude that "students lack the critical reading and thinking skills necessary to engage with the ideas of others and write papers reflecting that engagement in any discipline" (2013).

Certainly the studies glossed in the last few pages have their problems. The large-scale studies depend on timed tests, multiple choice questions, and students' readings of very short passages of text. The smaller studies are really too small to yield broad conclusions. Together, though, they paint a consistently bleak picture of students' reading abilities. Rather than hastily turning to the CCSS and relying on the baseless assumptions the CCSS make about students' needs, we must use the qualitative and quantitative findings from the studies mentioned here (and any others we can find and/or develop) to craft our response to the current climate. I conclude by exploring how we might do so.

### **Forging Ahead**

Professor of education and history at Stanford University, as well as the lead author of the Stanford study mentioned above, Sam Wineburg contends that the education system is outdated. In his interview with Kelly McEvers, he explained that education has "not caught up to the way [online] sources of information are influencing the kinds of conceptions that we develop on a day-to-day basis" (2016). Wineburg noted that in "many schools there are internet filters that direct students to previously vetted sites and reliable sources of information." But "what happens," he asks, "when they leave

school and they take out their phone and they look at their Twitter feed? How do they become prepared to make the choices about what to believe, what to forward, what to post to their friends when they've been given no practice in doing those kinds of things in school?" "Consequently," he continued, "what we see is a rash of fake news going on that people pass on without thinking. And we really can't blame young people because we've never taught them to do otherwise." The findings from all of the studies detailed above seem to corroborate Wineburg's description of the education system as failing its students in this area. Thus, we must ask ourselves, how can we do better?

To address the difficulties that students have reading, understanding, and evaluating online sources, we can develop assignments and activities that promote this work. The researchers who conducted the Stanford study have released the reading assignments they used in that study so that instructors can incorporate these vetted activities into their courses. That is certainly a place to start. Just as Project SAILS used the Association of College and Research Libraries (2015) information literacy standards to test students' capacities to understand and use online texts, so can instructors refer to these newly revised standards and to their own campus and school librarians as they imagine their pedagogical goals and the assignments they will create for students. The Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing, developed collaboratively by representatives from the Council of Writing Program Administrators, the National Council of Teachers of English, and the National Writing Project, is also an important resource. The framework (CWPA, NCTE, and NWP 2011) lists eight habits of mind—curiosity, openness, engagement, creativity, persistence, responsibility, flexibility, and metacognition—described as “ways of approaching learning” that are “essential for success in college writing.” Particularly if one imagines how these habits also correspond to reading, writing's counterpart in the construction of meaning (Carillo 2017), these habits, as Patrick Sullivan (2012) has pointed out, direct attention to “qualities” rather than target test scores or some other criteria. These (and other) habits of mind are also explored in Richard E. Miller and Ann Jurecic's unorthodox textbook *Habits of the Creative Mind* (2015), another valuable resource that shifts attention toward the importance in literacy instruction of helping students cultivate specific habits of mind.

Testing students' habits of mind or reflective practices is clearly more difficult than the text-centric questions that the CCSS prepare students to answer. And, as Chris Gilbert points out, the standards' text-centric approach is no accident: “It is no coincidence that the text-centric analysis promoted by the standards readily lends itself to standardized assessment.

These tests do not prompt students to connect text to life, or to consider how language has informed their view of the world” (2014: 32), even though studies show that students struggle with this (Jolliffe and Harl 2008). I would add that neither is it a coincidence that Coleman, a lead writer, architect, and the face of the CCSS, is also the president and chief executive officer of the College Board, the testing company that owns the Advanced Placement (AP) exams and the SAT exam. In fact, Coleman recently redesigned the SAT so it is linked to the CCSS. The point is that we need to push against text-centric pedagogies that lend themselves to standardized assessments developed by someone who benefits from those very standardized assessments. We must instead focus on what research on reading indicates that our students need.

While digital reading practices are incredibly important, we must not forget some of the most fundamental aspects of reading that should inform our teaching of digital reading and online evaluative practices (Leu et al. 2010; Horning 2014). At the secondary and postsecondary levels we must push against text-centric views of reading. I am not advocating that secondary school teachers reject the CCSS (although some have), as there is simply too much at stake. With the CCSS so directly linked to standardized tests and with teachers’ jobs dependent on their students’ test scores, teachers understandably feel pressure to teach according to the CCSS even though the CCSS are not (technically) pedagogical mandates. Still, there are ways to honor what students bring with them to the reading process (i.e., experiences, prior knowledge) in order to push back against the standards’ narrow understanding of reading. There is a long history of activities like freewriting and journaling—two common first steps in the writing process—that ask students to draw on their experiences and prior knowledge to ultimately develop a piece of writing that moves beyond the personal even though these early steps often traffic in the personal. Decades of reading research (Pearson and Anderson 1984; Beach 1990; Garrison and Hynds 1991; McMahon et al. 1997; Smagorinsky 2001) suggest that the same is true about reading: students who begin with personally inflected reading responses can be prompted—often more successfully than students who do not—to use what they always already bring with them to ultimately move their thinking to a more critical place.

Specifically, encouraging students to reflect on their reading processes in a reading journal by commenting on how and why they think they arrived at the reading they did reinserts them, the reader, into the equation and suggests that “what lies within the four corners of the text” (Coleman and

Pimentel 2012: 4) may define where the text ends, but it does not define how reading works. As I have noted elsewhere, reflective exercises help students understand that they do not randomly arrive at interpretations but that interpretations are inflected by a range of factors. Teachers might also focus on the range of different readings and interpretations (rather than coaxing students toward one) that students have developed. This activity highlights that reading is dependent on more than the text. And while some readings will likely be more tenable than others—an important part of the discussion in and of itself—teachers could focus their time on the why (we arrive at different readings) and the how (that happens) of reading rather than the content, the what. This reflective work has the potential to help sharpen students' abilities to read without privileging the text at the expense of the reader. None of the reflective activities described above is revolutionary, but since I first described these activities (Carillo 2015), their relevance has seemingly grown. They remain first steps toward (a) reinserting the reader (and all that reader brings with her) in the process of reading, (b) giving students the agency that the standards' reading pedagogy denies them, and (c) preparing them for the metacognitive work they will be expected to do in college.

### **Meeting Students' Needs by Focusing on Annotation and Modeling Exercises**

In addition to emphasizing the reader's role in the construction of meaning through the use of reading journals, freewriting, and metacognitive activities, students also need direct instruction in reading, as suggested by the studies and research discussed above. As Robert Scholes points out, though, reading is invisible:

We normally acknowledge, however grudgingly, that writing must be taught and continue to be taught from high school to college and perhaps beyond. We accept it, I believe, because we can see writing, and we know that much of the writing we see is not good enough. But we do not see reading. We see some writing about reading, to be sure, but we do not see reading. I am certain, though, that if we could see it, we would be appalled. (2002: 166)

If we are committed to teaching our students to become better readers, we must find ways of making reading as visible as writing so we can work as deliberately on reading as we do on writing. One way in which reading is made visible is through the process of annotation. This activity allows students to see their reading and reflect on it in much the same way they would



reflect on their writing. Annotation also allows instructors to see students' reading and provide feedback as they would on students' writing.

Targeted annotation strategies can help prepare students for engaging with the texts that surround them in this posttruth culture. For example, teaching students to read rhetorically and to mark the text—to annotate it—according to the ways in which a text is acting on them by paying attention to ethos, pathos, and logos can help prepare students to recognize and reject fake news and alternative facts, particularly when they notice that these often traffic in ethos and pathos rather than logos. Another strategy that emphasizes how texts work rhetorically (on the reader) is the says/does approach, wherein a student goes paragraph by paragraph marking next to each paragraph what it says—its content—and what it does: its rhetorical function. Students can also be prompted to engage in what Peter Elbow (2008) calls the believing/doubting game, wherein the reader reads and marks up a text twice, first as a believer and then as a doubter, giving students the opportunity to inhabit a perspective different from their own, valuable in our current divisive climate wherein we are having such difficulty seeing things from others' viewpoints. An especially important practice particularly in today's climate is to read and annotate for credibility. If taught within a framework that fosters the transfer of learning (Carillo 2015) so that students are positioned to transfer what they are learning about reading to other contexts, including when they engage with the media and social media, this repertoire or tool kit of reading and annotation strategies can be very helpful in preparing students to navigate this posttruth culture.

A second challenge when it comes to teaching reading, and one related to its invisibility, is that students do not necessarily know what good reading looks like. As such, I would argue that another way of directly teaching students how to become better readers is to use models of good reading in the classroom. Exploring how the ancient practice of imitation might play a role in contemporary literacy instruction is especially appropriate because our current climate demands alternative models to the problematic widely circulating interpretive models that produce fake news and alternative facts. Of course, I realize this approach is rather controversial, as evidenced by the debates about the value of the templates that Gerald Graff and Cathy Birkenstein include in the handbook *They Say/I Say* (2016). Besides the very narrowly focused responses to Graff and Birkenstein's approach, modeling and imitation exercises have not been all that openly or consistently discussed in the field of composition in decades—not since the demise of formalist pedagogies in the late 1970s, which also meant the demise of modeling and

imitative exercises that were considered too prescriptive and impediments to students' creativity and individuality. Despite "composition's official line" that "imitation is incompatible with process approaches to the teaching of writing" (Farmer and Arrington 1993: 75) and the lack of scholarship on the subject, the regular use of models in the teaching of composition complicates this "official" position. Research involving the teaching of writing (Thaiss and Zawacki 2006; Jolliffe and Harl 2008; Bartholomae and Matway 2010; Bunn 2013; Carillo 2015) has demonstrated not only that instructors are using models in their classrooms across disciplines, but also that the models are having a positive effect on students' motivation to read since the models overtly connect the reading for the course to the writing for the course.

Introducing models into the teaching of critical reading is not synonymous with asking students to slavishly imitate these models or to come to some specific reading (political or otherwise). In fact, exploring the potential in the ancient practice of imitation for contemporary literacy instruction allows us to recover elements of a deliberate and critically inclined method of composition that was far more sophisticated than it is given credit for. Quintilian addresses imitation throughout book 10 of *Institutio Oratorio* and regularly challenges our contemporary notion of imitation as an act of submission: "First of all, then, imitation is not sufficient on its own. For one thing, only a lazy mind is content with what others have discovered" (2001: 323–24). Quintilian reminds his students, "And nothing does grow by imitation alone. But if we are not allowed to add to previous achievements, how can we hope for our ideal orator?" (324) Imitation as described by Quintilian is not about menial or subservient copying. Instead, imitation involves considerable work on the part of the student, who must "first understand what it is that he is going to imitate, and to know why it is good" (331). Instructors committed to teaching students what strong reading looks like would first help them understand what they are imitating and why it is good, by looking at different models of reading as they are represented in annotations. Then, students develop their own readings, modeled upon these elements. Strong models of reading might include texts that have been annotated with comments that help contextualize the subject, make connections between that text and another text, define key terms, ask questions, notice gaps, fill in gaps, and recognize how the text is working rhetorically.

But where can we find annotated texts that, by making reading visible, model for students how strong readers read? Digital and print models of annotation are more available than ever before. The *Washington Post*, for example, has been using annotation to provide for their readers what they

have called “context and commentary” (Cillizza 2015), publishing annotated versions of everything from a series of Trump’s speeches to Al Franken’s recent resignation speech. In 2015, there was an exhibition on annotation at the New York Society Library titled “Readers Make Their Mark,” and annotated versions of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence were released in 2009. Digital projects that track readers’ commentary on texts, including *Book Traces* and *Annotated Books Online*, have also emerged, and Kindle’s “popular highlights” and “public notes” features allow readers to see which passages other readers have highlighted and commented on. Beyond these published and publicly circulating models, I encourage instructors to share their own annotations with students and spend time examining these annotations in order to develop a list of characteristics of what we might call “expert” reading.

As Horning (2011) has pointed out, there has been a significant amount of research on the development of expertise generally, as well as specifically about developing expert literacy practices. Although Horning does not address the use of models in her own scholarship, she outlines the reading practices of experts so that instructors can help their students, novice readers, develop these practices. Drawing on research from educational psychology conducted by Maria Scardamalia and Carl Bereiter (1991), as well as Ruth C. Clark (2008), Horning describes how experts are able to “apply teachable and learnable strategies to achieve comprehension of the text itself and integration. . . along with skimming, scanning and adjustments to speed” (2011). Moreover, explains Horning, drawing on Clark, “Expertise arises from extended, deliberate practice within the domain or area that is of interest to the learner.” When experts get stuck, they draw on their experience and what Clark calls “adaptive expertise” (2008: 13), which is the ability to remain flexible and integrate that prior experience and expertise into a new situation, to adapt it in such a way that allow experts to become “unstuck.” On the other hand, our students, whom Horning labels “novices,” tend to lack strategies for comprehending texts and are not particularly adept at making adjustments to how they read because they lack the reflective capacity to judge when this is necessary. Moreover, when novices get stuck, they often lack the strategies to get unstuck. As David Bartholomae and Anthony Petrosky point out, students often “believe that difficulty in reading is a sign of a problem, either theirs or the book’s, and not a sign that there is some work for the reader to do.” If a student does attempt to surmount that difficulty, instead of returning to a text that has been annotated, as would likely be the case with an experienced reader, the novice reader often returns to a

blank text, “and so a rereading stands only as the act of going back again to an empty text—to read it again; this time, they hope, to get it right” (1986: 18).

Bartholomae and Petrosky’s description of the student reader also seems to suggest that students often read without a specific purpose other than “getting it right.” Linda B. Nilson has marked this as a key difference between novice and expert readers. As experts read, explains Nilson, they are “looking for something that’s useful and important to [their] work. Students often tackle assigned readings with no purpose at all” (2015). Based on their extensive research on students’ reading and writing practices, Christina Haas and Linda Flower noted: “While experienced readers may understand that both reading and writing are context-rich, situational, constructive acts, many students see reading and writing as merely information exchange: knowledge telling when they write, and ‘knowledgegetting’ when they read” (1988: 182). In her own work, Linda Flower explained that the “distinction between reading to compose and reading to do something else matters because different purposes push the reading process into distinctive shapes” (1990: 6).

Keith Hjortshoj points out that, while instructors can often be heard claiming that students don’t know how to read, what they are really commenting on is students’ inability to read with purpose: “The impression that college students do not know *how* to read usually results from the fact that they do not know *why* they are reading assigned text” (2009: 125). While there are as many reasons to assign reading in a course as there are reasons to directly teach reading, the most compelling reason right now is that students must be prepared not just for the critical reading we expect from them in our classrooms but for the difficult interpretive work they will necessarily undertake as twenty-first-century citizens in an information-rich, posttruth culture characterized by the circulation of oversimplified and impoverished models of reading, many of which come directly from our own president.

### **The Teachers’ Role in Forging Ahead**

As we think about developing pedagogies that meet our students’ literacy needs in this information-rich culture, we must pay close attention to the role we assign to teachers. As Richard E. Miller points out in this journal, prior to the Internet it was the teacher’s job to provide content and knowledge, as “the professor was once the library’s mobile memory drive. . . . When information was scarce, schooling involved getting the information out of the library and into the students’ heads, with the professor doing double duty as the conduit for the flow of information and the quality control manager” (2016: 154). But

now that information is “ubiquitous, it is no longer possible to master a content area. . . . The professor’s role in this new digital learning environment is not to play the part of the master of content; it is to be the master of resourcefulness. In this role, the teacher models how to think in the face of an endless torrent of information” (155). We need to think about what this means for reading since, despite the paradigm shift Miller describes, the CCSS privilege the text’s content—as accessed through a very New Critical kind of close reading—and locate teachers as masters of that content. As Miller argues, this role for the teacher no longer makes much sense.

I should at this point make a long-overdue admission: I have nothing against close reading. In fact, I have been assigning what I call passage-based papers (i.e., close reading assignments) to my students for close to twenty years. I teach close reading, and I teach it in all of my classes. However, I do so within a metacognitive framework (described in this journal and other publications) that demands that students regularly reflect on their close readings, both independent of and in comparison to the many other ways of reading I teach. This work positions students to understand the texts we read and to understand themselves as readers.

Metacognition, mentioned only once—and in passing—in the “Key Design Considerations” (Common Core State Standard Initiative, n.d.-b) document associated with the CCSS, is a crucial element of expert reading, as noted by Horning, Clark, Nilson, and Flower above, as well as college-level reading. Horning has declared: “Our goals are clear: moving students toward expert awareness of the texts they read, developing metacognitive assessment of them, and developing their skills in analysis, synthesis, evaluation, application in every course, every term, digital and traditional, high school and college” (2014: 51). Horning, who thinks of college students as “apprentices on the journey between novice and expert,” has highlighted the importance of students’ experiences and backgrounds to the college reading experience. She writes that “apprentice readers should engage in dialogue among texts and authors, be engaged in talk about texts, and draw upon their own experiences and understanding to reach higher levels of reading comprehension” (48). If students are arriving at college from high schools where they have been forbidden to draw on their own experiences and understandings, per the CCSS, then they will actually be less prepared for college than previous generations. The most recent studies detailed in this article suggest that we are already seeing as much.

## Concluding Thoughts

Students' lack of preparation for college is perhaps not nearly as significant as their lack of preparation for participating in a democracy. In fact, the findings from the Stanford study led the members of its research team to conclude that “democracy is threatened by the ease at which disinformation about civic issues is allowed to spread and flourish” (Stanford History Education Group 2016: 5). The term *disinformation* is crucial here because it reminds us that an informed citizenry is not enough to sustain a democracy. There is plenty of information to go around. Citizens in information-rich cultures like our own must be taught ways of reading and understanding all that surrounds them, particularly in such a “cacophonous democracy” (McEvers 2016). Citizens must be reflective. They must understand rather than just know. They must be taught to question and challenge texts rather than just revere them.

Maybe it is the inability to remove ourselves from the contemporary moment that leads us to believe that something is happening now that has never happened before, but it really does feel like democracy is at stake. Our students are simply not receiving the reading instruction that prepares them for college or for being active and thoughtful participants in our democracy. More than three decades ago, Scholes lamented: “The students who come to us now exist in the most manipulative culture human beings have ever experienced. They are bombarded with signs, with rhetoric, from their daily awakenings until their troubled sleep” (1986: 15). “The worst thing we can do,” warned Scholes, “is to foster in them an attitude of reverence before texts” (16). This was, of course, before fake news, before alternative facts, before the CCSS. It is not my intention to pin all of this on the CCSS, or on Trump and his administration, or on the Internet. Rather, as I note in the introduction to this piece, it is the confluence of all of these elements that should both alarm us and set off alarms.

As the CCSS enact what Scholes deems “the worst thing we can do” by fostering in students a reverence for texts without recognizing the potentially disastrous consequences of this way of reading in a posttruth culture, educators are uniquely positioned to mitigate these consequences in the ways I have described throughout this article. We must reject the CCSS’s narrow definition of reading and in its place embrace definitions that describe reading—of (capital L) literature, as well as informational texts—as complex interpretive work dependent on far more than that which resides within “the four corners of the text” (or screen). In doing so, educators can reinstate the crucial role of the reader in the act of reading.

As readers are under unprecedented pressure to navigate the range of texts that vie for their attention and acceptance, foregrounding and deliberately teaching the interpretive practice of reading as it is defined in this piece is one way of responding to the diminishing value assigned to this complex interpretive work that is crucial to participating in an information-rich democratic society. We must work together to strengthen and reaffirm our commitment to reading as a form of active critical inquiry and to the crucial role of this work in an advanced democracy.

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