PLAYING TO READ: LEVELING UP READING

SUPPORT IN ENGLISH 130

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Jennifer L. Elliott 2014
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Dedication

To my loves: Marshall, Elise & Madelyn.

For your patience, understanding and unyielding support.

This, like everything else, is for you.

All of it.
Acknowledgments

When I reflect upon the journey that brought me to the writing of this page, I am overwhelmed by how many others have supported, touched and inspired this project.

This thesis would not have been possible without the guidance and support of my committee chair, Dr. Kim Jaxon. For her helpful feedback, continual support, and enthusiasm for our work, I will always be grateful. She truly is a wonderful mentor and working alongside her has been both motivational and inspirational in so many ways.

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ABSTRACT

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Although studies show that students are reading frequently outside of school, teachers often find that students struggle with reading activities inside the classroom. This study uses network and reader-response theories to explore some of the possible reasons for this dichotomy. The author argues that the problem underlying reading issues for students is that they are trying to navigate two distinct reading networks: one created in school and one cultivated outside of school. This separation begins in the K-12 years and continues into college. In order to understand the impact of separated reading networks on freshmen coming into the university, the author conducted an ethnographic study of 200 students. Using surveys, interviews, and observations of students, the author found that students’ perceptions of reading activities are largely shaped by external forces that work to discourage them from forming efficient reading networks. Ultimately, the author suggests using game theory to design assignment sequences or even syllabi, as a way to help students begin to build robust reading networks.
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION:

The Problem with Reading

When questioned about the most important issues facing education today, many educators will say that literacy is at the forefront. What they mean by literacy generally varies, but when educators describe literacy struggles for students and teachers, they are typically using it as a blanket term for problems with reading. Teachers often complain that students just are not interested in reading assigned texts; some will even go so far as to say that students just cannot read at all, despite the fact that numerous studies, statistics and data suggest otherwise. Whether they cite problems with motivation, comprehension, functional reading ability, or fluency, the assessment is typically the same across the board: we are in the middle of an ever-present “literacy crisis,” an idea that seems to remain a prominent fixture in American consciousness (Williams 2007).

Recently, research on reading has focused primarily on the importance of developing independent reading amongst middle and high schools students (“Independent” 1). This is largely due to the fact that, as many researchers point out, most students begin to lose interest in reading during the middle school years, even those that were prolific readers during elementary school (Knoester 676). Unlike many changes during the middle school years, this one is not just a phase. Indeed, this lack of interest evolves into a negative attitude toward reading that they carry with them throughout their
high school years, then into college. According to the 2012 “National Freshman Attitudes Report,” 43.9 percent of freshman report that they “don't enjoy reading serious books and articles and only do it when [they] have to” (14). Additionally, only 28.8 percent of students said that they “would like to receive some training to improve [their] reading skills” (16). The implications of these attitudes and statistics are myriad, and while many researchers are working on developing ways to intervene during the critical adolescent years, there is not as much recent scholarship available that explores the impact of negative attitudes toward reading on college students. Nevertheless, these negative attitudes toward reading are seeping into the classroom, impeding student success and, as Penny Kittl suggests in her book *Book Love*, may even be responsible for the high dropout rates after the freshman year of college (20-21).

The problem continues in college, as much of the work assigned is independent reading. Students encounter instructors that often “rely heavily on textbooks as a primary resource of information for facilitating the efficient communication of course content to a large group of students” (Park 47). It is generally expected that at the college level students are both prepared to complete and are proficient enough in this kind of reading that they will be capable of not only reading the assigned texts, but that they can also engage the ideas presented to them. While students are certainly capable of reading words on the page, a deep level of engagement with ideas is not happening for the average college students because, as Park discovered, most college students are not completing assigned reading prior to class and “even those college students who read their textbooks engaged in a shallow level of reading,” often only skimming them (47). While this may have something to do with the heavy quantity of reading expected by
college students (Kittle reported that students are expected to complete “200-600 pages a week”), it seems fair to ask whether or not students are coming to college with enough practice in the kind of reading college-level instructors are asking of them (21). If they are not, then educators must be prepared to find ways to continue to support reading at the college level in order to ensure the success of students in all courses. Indeed, when an instructor assigns any kind of reading or writing work, they should be prepared to support all students in this work.

In order to do that though, it is important to be familiar with the forces working to shape students' relationships with reading during the K-12 years. For most students reading instruction is largely shaped by rigid, state and district-mandated curriculum and standardized testing, which have become ubiquitous since the passing of the No Child Left Behind Act in 2001. Kelly Gallagher, author of Readicide, explores the ways this kind of testing has altered the teaching of reading in the classroom. He says that in order to prepare students for success on state tests, “teachers are forced to adopt a shallow approach, sprinting through material,” which means that “Students develop into memorizers instead of into thinkers,” harming the motivation of both teachers and students (11). According to Gallagher, the result of this is that we “graduate students who do not develop an interest in any content area” (10). As a consequence students do not develop “authentic interest,” an important component to developing the motivation to learn, not only in the classroom, but in the world (10). Additionally, when teachers are continually modeling this kind of quick reading and memorization of facts in order to pass a test, without ever “delv[ing] deeply into an interesting idea,” students learn that this is the way that all school texts should be read (Gallagher 10).
Not only do these regular reading tests shape reading habits and practices, but schools often use the results of these tests to serve as a gatekeeper to texts. Many schools will track students' reading levels and use them to “[guide] students' future reading choices,” which effectively limits them to only certain areas of the library and to texts of their specific level, or the level at which they tested (Coombs 82). While it is true that students benefit more from reading books at or just above their level rather than attempting to take on books that are far too difficult for them, this kind of limitation prevents students from really “exercis[ing] all regions of their reading brains” (Kittle 7; Gallagher 41). Additionally, when schools develop the habit of putting up barriers to literacy tools, they ensure that “struggling readers will continue to struggle” from both lack of variety and exercise (Gallagher 12). This is especially troublesome for disadvantaged students who often fall into the struggling reader category (limiting their choices in school tremendously) because many of these students do not have access to texts outside of school (Gallagher 30-36).

What happens then is that many students begin to lose motivation to participate in school-based literacy activities during secondary school (“Independent” 1.). This isn't really surprising as much of the reading assigned to secondary school students can be found in textbooks that are “neither well-written nor engaging” (Schoenbach, Greenleaf, Cziko, and Hurwitz 9). Unfortunately, as the research suggests, “poorly written texts” are still in widespread use in many classrooms for a variety of reasons, despite the fact that many teachers realize that “students shouldn't have to read texts that are written in a dry or abstract style” (9). Furthermore, and perhaps more importantly, many students feel that readings assigned by teachers are disconnected from their real
lives and experiences. Kittle says that the reason students feel this way is because “[m]ost of the literature we study in high school was written by adults for adults, and they're good books, some are great books but they're just not interesting to almost all teenagers” (21). The result of this disengagement is that students become very adept at finding shortcuts, like Sparknotes and Wikipedia, that allow them to skip actually doing the reading, but still ensure success on quizzes and tests (Kittle 21). What we then have is a population in which the “majority of U.S. students can read at a 'basic' level” but are unable to “read and comprehend the types of higher-level texts essential to an individual's success in an information-based economy,” at least according to “national tests” on reading (Schoenbach, Greenleaf, Cziko, and Hurwitz 4).

To combat the decline in motivation, many schools have begun to adopt programs that encourage students to read during school hours. One such program is called Sustained Silent Reading (SSR), which permits that students have time to read books of their own choosing during the school day. Often connected to SSR is the Accelerated Reading (AR) program, which is an accountability measure that tests students' knowledge of texts using multiple-choice quizzes for points. The idea behind these programs is that students will be able to exercise more choice regarding texts they read and that they will have the “opportunity to develop a recreational reading habit” (Gallagher 44). These programs, when executed thoughtfully, have very positive effects on vocabulary, comprehension and even test preparedness, however, most of the time these attempts fail because students do not see the value in them, nor do teachers (Gallagher 41-45). This is probably because the only substantive work students complete in these programs is a multiple choice quiz on each text that tests nothing more than their
ability to memorize information from that text. Additionally, these same practices are being encouraged in standard K-12 curriculum in order to prepare students for standardized testing. The result of situating literacy activities in this way is that much of the reading that takes place during school is now done independently, with each student using different texts of different levels. Students do benefit just by having the freedom to choose texts that are meaningful to them on a personal level, however, the texts that students choose to read do not ever become part of the school curriculum, nor are they encouraged to use those texts in any meaningful way.

Further complicating this is that most reading instruction within school teaches that there are two different kinds of reading: reading for pleasure and reading for information. Based on Louise Rosenblatt's work *The Reader, The Text, The Poem*, many educators understand that during reading, students adopt either an “efferent” or “aesthetic” stance toward a text. For Rosenblatt, efferent reading happens when “the primary concern of the reader is with what he will carry away from the reading, while aesthetic reading allows the reader to focus on the event of reading itself” (24). According to Jeffrey D. Wilhelm, most students are never afforded the opportunity to participate in aesthetic reading because the way reading is taught encourages “students to take the efferent stance” in nearly all school-based literacy activities (28). In other words, students are taught that reading functions as a way to memorize information on which they will later be tested. So while the goal of most teachers is “to create lifelong readers” by encouraging students to read a lot and read passionately, many teachers adhere to curriculum that demonstrates to students that enjoyable reading is of little to no value inside of school (Kittle 16; Gallagher 45).
Interestingly, research suggests that students are living rich and literate lives outside of school. A study conducted in 2008 claimed that “92 percent of the 716 youth surveyed,” in a community that was “described as high-poverty and/or underresourced report reading some kind of text outside of school three to four times per week or more” (Moje et al. 120). The same study also suggests that although students are reading a lot of texts outside of school, most of the respondents were confused by what it even meant to read. Their understanding of the very act of reading is so entrenched in school-based definitions of reading that “they may even associate the words reading and writing with compulsory reading.” In many cases all they do know is that they do not like reading, despite the fact that they are regularly reading “magazines, informational texts, digital or electronic texts, or texts written by other youth, whether teen ‘zines, letters and notes, or text messages” (Moje et al. 120). Additionally, if they are participating in any online activities (and we know they are), each and every one of these interactions is mediated by literacy activities (Moje et al. 122). What Moje et al. ultimately discovered in this study is that there is a definite disconnect between the literacy practices valued by schools and those valued by students outside of school (136).

When we look closely at the kinds of reading students are doing outside of school, a few things are revealed to us. First we find that students are motivated to engage in literacy activities outside of school because the reading they choose is situated social practices they value. Matthew Knoester, in his “Inquiry into Urban Adolescent Reading Habits,” identified an “apparent connection between social relationships and reading interest,” which encouraged him to look at the ways in which students use texts and their identities as readers to negotiate relationships with families and friends (678). What he
found is that “students seemed to love to talk about reading material if they enjoyed or found a connection with what they were reading” (680). Likewise, Moje et al. suggest that adolescents will read, but that “They want to read and write texts that offer them social capital in the form of information, ideas for self-improvement, models for identities, or ways to maintain existing relationships and build new ones” (147). In other words, students are motivated to read when the activity expands and strengthens their social networks.

We also learn from examining students’ recreational reading that their choices are highly contextual and depend upon issues that are very personal to their own lives. As Moje et al. suggest, “Youth read inside social networks, in line with identities they recognize and wish to enact, and they look for ways to build social capital in order to meet goals of self-improvement and future aspirations” (148). This is because the way by which young people participate in various social networks is through engaging with the texts of those communities. Indeed, texts provide young people with “access to networks and relationship models,” as well as a safe place to try on a variety of different identities so that they gain “information about being certain kinds of people” (Moje et al. 144). In this way, students feel free to explore both their social identities and their identities as readers, ultimately defining them in contexts of their own choosing.

This kind of reading though, as has already been established, is not happening in most schools, nor is it valued. Moje et al. suggest that “One aspect of this disconnect may be that the texts of school content areas are not embedded — or, at least, are not presented as embedded — in social networks relevant to the lives of youth” because, as their study shows, “Youth read and write when they have a well-articulated purpose, a
purpose that is usually centered in a network of social activity” (146). A more recent trend in research surrounding reading instruction is to encourage educators to try and recreate professional, yet social networks in the classroom. The idea is for educators to “[build] social networks that engage youth in the identity enactments, content representations, and literacy language practices of the disciplinary domains” (Moje et al. 148). While interesting and definitely an idea worth exploring, educators are still working on ways to successfully implement this in the K-12 classroom.

The burden of finding ways to support reading cannot fall on the shoulders of K-12 educators alone. Quite frankly, with as long as it takes to effect change in that environment, we simply do not have time to wait either. As many college instructors will relate, students come into the academy and continue to struggle with literacy activities, especially when asked to work with more than one text at a time. This is largely because, as mentioned above, college instructors will often hand students an armful of texts, tell them to read them all and then return for a lecture or a test. This effectively encourages the same shallow work with texts that K-12 education and testing ask of students, and results in complacency around literacy activities in any field of study, even their own. If we want our students to develop authentic interest, and if we ever hope to facilitate deeper learning, then it is imperative that we find ways to continue to support the work students will do with texts all throughout college and into their professional and personal lives.

This is the aim of the research presented in this thesis. It is my hope that the research and data presented here can shed some light on how students view and work with reading upon entering the university. This insight will serve college-level instructors
in drawing connections between the reading process and the synthesis work we so often ask students to tackle, specifically during reading. Additionally, this project seeks to explore the ways in which instructors can support reading work, by allowing students to expand their reading networks, through the inclusion of not only more texts, but also more of their colleagues.

In order to accomplish this, I started this project by exploring the problems and practices of K-12 reading instruction in this first chapter. The goal in doing this is for the reader to develop an understanding of the forces that work to shape the way incoming university students view texts and literacy activities. Chapter 2 begins as a review of the literature surrounding synthesis work in relation to deep learning. In addition, chapter 2 looks at how networks function and how information moves between participants in a network, comparing these to the information exchange between reader and text that happens during reading work. Lastly, chapter two considers the importance of helping students to build robust literacy networks so that they can form strong connections during reading.

Chapter 3 presents the methods I used to conduct an ethnographic study of incoming and existing freshman at CSU, Chico. Following an ethnographic research cycle and making use of interview protocol, classroom discussions, and field notes, I collected and analyzed data pertinent to this study of reading from students in the Educational Opportunity Program’s (EOP) Summer Bridge and first year composition (FYC) courses. Chapter 4 presents the findings of the data collection and draws connections between Deborah Brandt’s ideas about sponsorship and students’ own observations about their previous reading experience. Additionally, chapter 4 uses
network theory to evaluate students’ perceptions of reading in groups versus individually.

Finally, chapter 5 concludes this thesis by building upon the findings in chapter 4 and proposing game theory as one way by which instructors can structure work around texts to support college-level reading work and to facilitate making connections. Considering the assertion that students are motivated to read when texts are related to “identities they recognize and wish to enact,” the research presented in this thesis project suggests that instructors can effectively use game theory in order to help students develop reading practices that allow the enactment of various identities (Moje et al 148). Rather than attempting to create networks, chapter 5 explores the idea of instructors seeding networks that encourage students to enact social identities, but let the networks evolve and develop through game play. In order to build strong reading networks that generate connections, students are encouraged to enroll any actant necessary during playful interactions.

Furthermore, my position as it is developed over the course of this thesis, is that reading is a practice, one which freshmen are not immediately familiar with. It is the responsibility of instructors then to create a safe space in which students can practice reading in a variety of fields, across a variety of genres, and where they can fail at it without serious consequences. Much like tutorial sessions in games, reading support in FYC should encourage students to try reading in playful ways and, if they fail, should encourage them to try again. Repeatedly if they must. As Gee reminds us, students “need always to see failure as informative and part of the game, not as a final judgment or a device to forestall creativity, risk taking, and hypothesizing” (40). Games encourage persistence through difficulty, critical thinking to address challenges and overcome them
and, believe it or not, intertextual connections. It is not uncommon for someone to make use of a variety of sources, most of which are text based, in order to successfully complete a game. Whether playing a board game or a video game, reading is often heavily involved in simply figuring out the rules and is done so in social ways with friends and families. It has become more and more common though for people to participate in online gaming communities in order to discover new ways to play and interact with the game. Essentially, because games are highly social, so too is the reading that surrounds them. It is for these reasons that in the final chapter I post that in using game theory, instructors will be able to effectively support reading work and students will be encouraged to make connections across texts and people, all of which will serve to strengthen students’ literacy networks. Ultimately, I suggest some ways in which game theory might work in a syllabus for English 130, the FYC class at CSU, Chico.
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE:

Networking Reading

As an instructor of FYC at CSU, Chico, so much of my time is spent teaching writing. The primary focus of the course is often putting words on paper (or screen depending on the instructor) without much attention paid to the other important processes required to write academically, like reading. Typically, the focus in a FYC course is on developing and mapping out ideas, drafting, peer review, research memos and sometimes grammar, when necessary. All of this work is good work, as students certainly need plenty of practice developing these skills and exposure to the tools necessary to do the kinds of writing work they will encounter throughout their time in college. The problems arise though, when students begin to struggle with some of these exercises. Instructors often see struggles begin when we ask students to do any kind of synthesis work, in which they are tasked with putting multiple texts into conversation with one another to produce something like a literature review or an academic paper. After weeks of writing work at the college level, instructors often see students fall back to the book report or perhaps even the 5 paragraph, or summary, essay when assigned synthesis work. This move makes sense when we consider that these genres of writing are comfortable for them, and that the work we are often asking them to do in synthesis assignments is both unfamiliar and very hard. This, however, may not even be due to an inability to write, as
some would like to believe, but may stem from inefficient reading practices that were developed during early educational experiences and from disconnected reading networks.

Synthesis and Making Connections

It is important to stop here and think about what synthesis actually means and what this kind of work entails. Synthesis is best thought of, at least for the purposes of this project, as bringing multiple texts into conversation with one another in an attempt to generate new ideas and insights. This work is often done around a topic, subject, or an area of inquiry and requires that students make use of a variety of different sources that all relate in a way that will be made known in a new piece produced by the student. This type of writing is common in the university and shows up in nearly every discipline and in many writing genres. As Mateos and Solé point out, synthesis “is performed to a greater extent the higher one goes up the educational ladder (especially at university)” (436). The prevalence of this work means that in order to be considered successful and versatile readers and writers in the academy, students need to be familiar with how to do it.

Although this type of writing is commonly seen in the university, as Mateos and Solé make clear, it is “cognitively demanding” (436). Indeed, “Making a synthesis of multiple texts is cognitively more demanding than writing a summary of a single text -- one of the commonest hybrid tasks in school.” This work is so hard in fact, that not only do students struggle to take it up, but teachers often struggle to even teach it. The expectation seems to be that students will be able to do this kind of work when entering the university, which is why college-level instructors often experience disappointment
after assigning and failing to support synthesis work, and then deride students as “terrible writers,” or sometimes even worse. The important thing to remember is that this kind of work is very difficult and, and Mateos and Solé point out, it is largely unfamiliar to students as K-12 primarily focuses on working with one text at a time and completing summary or comprehension work alone.

The importance of helping students develop an ability to work deeply with multiple texts cannot be overlooked; indeed, it is much more important than simply getting a decent grade on a literature review assignment. Synthesis work is considered a critical stepping stone to constructing independent and informed ideas about the area of study, the eventual goal of which is often to argue a claim, or series of claims, supported with evidence from either primary or secondary research. Synthesis work helps students to trace a conversation around a specific area of interest, drawing connections between concepts in new and interesting ways. If our responsibility to our students is to help prepare them for work in the world, it is imperative that we allow them an introduction to and time to practice working with and thinking about systems and connectedness. As James Gee explains in his book *Good Video Games and Good Learning*, systemic thinking is vital to success in our modern global culture. He writes, “when students fail to have a feeling for the whole system which they are studying, when they fail to see it as a set of complex interactions and relationships, each fact and isolated element they memorize for their tests is meaningless” (41). Synthesis work helps students to make connections, and if students understand how to make connections, they are more likely to be able to make successful contributions to systems they belong to.

It is ultimately through work that employs multiple texts and even people,
that, as Mateos and Solé suggest, new knowledge is generated and deepened (436). In other words, not only is cultivating intertextual relationships beneficial to developing professional abilities, but it also fundamentally changes thinking and allows for students to do what Gee refers to as “deep learning,” or learning that is pleasurable, engaging and meaningful (10). For Gee, deep learning is social, as it relies upon “actions and interactions, as well as certain values, attitudes and beliefs” (32). Additionally, it is during social learning that “the emphasis shifts from . . . learning as a matter of getting content into heads . . . to seeing learning as a matter of involving individuals in processes and practices within which knowledge, understanding, and ideas are produced by participants as social accomplishments” (Lankshear 218, emphasis original). Ultimately, this kind of social or deep learning focuses on how to learn, rather than what to learn.

Interestingly, reading is often taught as an abstract skill that is highly decontextualized and focused on drill and memorization during the K-12 years, despite the fact that it is highly social, especially during synthesis activities. As Christina Haas writes in “Learning to Read Biology,” “Authors create texts and readers read texts in a complex of social relationships, motivated by goals sanctioned (or not) by the surrounding culture, to achieve purposes that are always in the broadest sense persuasive” (358). Unfortunately, we currently have “a culture of schooling that encourages students to see texts primarily as repositories of factual information” and “reading and writing tasks — in college as well as high school — seem to be predicated on the doctrine of the autonomous text” (Haas 360). Then, when they get to college, students are expected to be able to work with texts in a highly social way (involving multiple texts, genres or even disciplines) without ever being taught how to do so.
So when we ask students to find connections across multiple texts and they struggle with that task, it is not because they cannot write, nor is it because they cannot read. It is largely because their attitudes toward school-based literacies have been shaped by an institution that discourages making connections in favor of memorization and drill of facts. Furthermore, school is not often a place in which they can see “how they fit into an overall larger system to which they give meaning” (Gee 41). This is especially true of the texts school often asks students to read, which, as was mentioned in the previous chapter, are considered by students to be unrelated or disconnected from their own lives and experiences.

Research suggests that although instructors regularly witness their students puzzling over ways to connect with texts and connect other texts/ideas/concepts to each other, many of them are already doing that outside of class, often, and rather successfully too. As Rebecca W. Black and Angela Thomas found in their studies of fan fiction, participation in fan fiction sites does encourage students to make connections across texts. As Black points out, "Writers and readers in this space are also able to draw from various networks of information that are dispersed across people . . . tools . . . other media and websites" (133). This is a point reiterated by Thomas, whose subjects regularly "weave together elements from their plotting, their diaries, the backstories, the images and descriptions they have created about the culture of their worlds, as well as a host of intertextual references from books, movies, and from their own personal identities" (146).

Unfortunately, the message students are consistently receiving is that these practices are irrelevant to school, so they are often unable or unwilling to transfer those skills to the work they do for school. Or maybe they think they shouldn't. Either way,
most of them struggle with this, and educators continue to assume it is because they cannot do it. But they can, so maybe the work of educators should not be trying to figure out how to teach them to do this, but to encourage them to transfer the skills they are developing outside of school into the classroom. Explicitly telling students to do this doesn't work, so it is time to find a way to encourage them to do the same work they are already doing outside of class in a more academic setting.

Network Theory

In his famous essay “Inventing the University,” David Bartholomae asserts that “Every time a student sits down to write for us, he has to invent the university for the occasion” (511). What he meant by this is that each time an instructor asks a student to write something, they are asking them “to try on a variety of voices and interpretive schemes” in order to write as a professional in each specific field. Instructors, and people embedded in “the discourse of our community,” often take for granted the ease with which students will be able to do this kind of synthesis work. So too do educators assume that reading in each discipline will be intuitive and accessible for students, however, as Bartholomae suggests, “They must learn to speak our language” (511). When this does happen, or as Gee suggests, “when learners adopt and practice such an identity,” as is associated with a domain or field of study, then deep learning also happens (33).

When educators invite students to participate in specific fields through literacy activities, they are essentially asking students to trace the interactions among other participants in that field, or to trace existing networks. By bringing texts into a conversation, and inviting students to find the ways that texts speak to one another,
instructors are asking them to not only be a witness to a conversation that has been happening for some time, but also to make something else happen in that conversation, possibly something that hasn’t ever happened before. Students are being asked to read and make inferences across texts, and ultimately to formulate ideas of their own and contribute something to the network they are tracing. Supporting this kind of work can be difficult, but when instructors think about reading texts as highly social and dynamic, and also as being part of a networked discourse, then it becomes necessary develop an understanding of the ways network function.

In our digitized and globally connected culture, the notion of networking is fairly commonplace. It seems as though everyone, everywhere is concerned with growing or expanding his or her network. Now what they are primarily talking about is their social, or perhaps even their professional network, which they use to make connections that will hopefully be advantageous to them in the future. Additionally, there are television networks, computer networks, weather networks, telephone networks, wireless internet networks, just to name a few. The point is, the word is everywhere and, while each of these networks is slightly different from one another, they all involve connections and the exchange of information between participants.

Because networks have become such an integral part of our society, people have naturally begun to study what they are and how exactly they work. Until recently these studies have been primarily science-based and typically involve the more structural components of a network. Authors like Duncan Watts and Albert-Lazlo Barabási examine the architecture of networks and shed some light onto the ways that networked systems reflect our natural need to be connected to other people. In many ways, what
each of these authors does is help readers conceptualize networks that are large and complex, but are typically man made, yet are interestingly also present in the natural world. According to Watts when thinking about networks "We could be talking about people in a network of friendships or a large organization, routers along the backbone of the Internet or neurons firing in the brain" (27-28). Essentially, networks are about connections, making them difficult to study as they occur everywhere, in every interaction between participants.

To begin to understand them, Watts calls for the development of a "science of networks" so that a common approach to networks can be agreed upon (27). The problem is though, as soon as a "science of networks," is developed, so is a structure, or a system, which can become incredibly difficult to apply to areas outside of science. This is especially true for something like networks, as they are so diverse. Creating one approach to understanding something that appears virtually everywhere seems like an arduous task. Watts actually recognizes this, claiming that “in the past, networks have been viewed as objects of pure structure” which could not “be further from the truth” (28, emphasis original). Structure, however, is important to his overall project, but he says that the structure must be built upon in order to understand how networks work. He does provide a caveat, one he says has been neglected by network studies in the past. What he says is that, while networks are a system, the most important thing to consider is that networks are “doing something,” they are "dynamic objects . . . evolving and changing in time, driven by activities or decisions" of the components (Watts 28, emphasis original). In other words, networks are incredibly dependent upon the context in which they are being enacted.
If networks are so diverse, and highly contextualized, shouldn't our approach to studying and understanding them necessarily be just as dynamic as the networks themselves? Watts does call for scientists across disciplines to come together in order to develop a “network of scientists” that can “collectively [solve] problems that cannot be solved by any single individual or even any single discipline” (29). While an attempt to transcend diversity and develop a language everyone can speak, he still puts limits on the study of networks, or rather on who can study them. He calls for scientists, rather than academics from all disciplines, and states that “the new science of networks must bring together from all the disciplines the relevant ideas and the people who understand them” (29). This indicates that what he is looking for is a strictly scientific approach to the study of networks, rather than a truly interdisciplinary one.

What, then, are students of unscientific fields to do with networks? After all, networks exist everywhere, even in places that are not inherently scientific. There must be ways in which network theory applies to fields outside of the sciences and in turn, there must be ways in which network theory can be put into practice. In fact, I think that these fields, while often overlooked, are just as impacted by and involved in networks as any other discipline and that looking at them in this new way will yield some new and important insights. That being said, a scientific approach “one of structure and systems” will be hard to apply, especially to something like teaching, as there are so many variables to account for in the classroom space. I do, however, think that network theory can be applied to teaching, and especially to reading instruction, just not necessarily in the manner outlined by most scientists. Perhaps what needs to happen here is exactly what Watts is trying to do, only by taking a slightly different and more accessible
Rather than attempting to build upon the science of networks, what may need to be done is a stripping away of some of the structure and a return “to its bare bones,” which is, according to Watts, “nothing more than a collection of objects connected to each other in some fashion” (27). Out of that comes a freedom to explore some of the more functional aspects of networks, which will permit the development of an approach that is flexible and rooted more in action and interaction. Now, none of this means that knowing the structure of a network isn't helpful, indeed it absolutely is. There are many ways in which having a basic knowledge of network architecture could be helpful to any field of study, however, it doesn't seem necessary in order for everyone to understand what a network does. In fact, when structure is taken out of the equation, at least in the beginning, the focus becomes the actions of a network, its movements and how it works. In many ways this can be more constructive than merely trying to attempt to force a network into a diagram, which isn't always possible and is sometimes detrimental.

This is the approach Bruno Latour advocates in his book *Reassembling the Social*. According to Latour, in studying networks we have a clear choice to make:

Either we follow social theorists and begin our travel by setting up at the start which kind of group and level of analysis we will focus on, or we follow the actors' own ways and begin our travels by the traces left behind by their activity of forming and dismantling groups. (29)

For Latour, attempting to fit any kind of activity into a prescribed theory is ultimately self-defeating as it limits the observers’ understanding of the possibilities of interactions among participants in a group. He would rather follow the activities of a group, and let them reveal how they should be, or how they are. This approach allows for the highly
contextualized nature of networks, as Latour carefully lines out in his introduction to Actor-Network Theory (ANT). According to Latour, ANT is largely concerned with how relationships and interactions function in a network, as opposed to the historical, developmental or even structural aspects of a network. In other words, ANT is a study of the social world and looks at how groups assemble and how each participant is changed or moved as a result of the networked activity.

So, a network is contingent upon connections. In some respects, this is not really worth exploring in depth because as Barabási suggests, “we increasingly recognize that nothing happens in isolation” as “Most events and phenomena are connected” (7). Just as the idea of networks has become pervasive in this culture, so too has the understanding that people everywhere are connected. What becomes interesting then, is not so much that connections are made, but rather the relationships that develop as a result of these connections. Connections in a network are made among participants, which ANT refers to as actants, or actors. According to Latour, actants are not limited to human beings, but to all participants in an activity. This includes objects because, as Latour states, it is “things [that] might authorize, allow, afford, encourage, permit, suggest, influence, block, render possible, forbid, and so on” (72). It is also important to understand that ANT suggests a lack of hierarchy among participants. In other words, each interaction is marked by equally distributed agency among all participants, including objects. The relationships that are enacted as the result of participation of all actants in a network are based on enrollment in an activity. This is especially important because, as John Law suggests, “Actor network theory . . . assumes that nothing has reality or form outside the enactment of relationships” (Turner 141).
Similarly, Wolfgang Iser, in his article “The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach” suggests that “literary texts . . . do not correspond to any objective reality outside themselves” (Richter 1003). It is Iser’s understanding that a literary text comes into existence in the convergence of the reader and the text (Richter 1002). For Iser, the meaning of the text, indeed, its ability to be actualized, comes from the relationship between reader and text, and occurs somewhere “halfway between the two.” The idea that the reader plays a fundamental role in “shaping the literary experience” is not unfamiliar to reader-response theorists like Iser, but that does not mean that the text is not also working to shape the experience of the reader. (Richter 962). Indeed, literary theory generally understands that there are many different layers of relationships happening around any given text. For now, these relationships can best be thought of as that between the author and the text, and between the reader and the text. The relationship between the text and author is forged in the act of writing the piece, where the experiences and intentions of the author are enrolled in the activity of creating the text. Furthermore, the act of reading itself constitutes a relationship between the reader and the text, and it is here that more similarities to networks can begin to be seen. As someone reads a text, they create connections with it, which, according to Iser, is something people actively seek out in a text. He says that as people read they are “seeking a consistent pattern in the text” even to the point of “uncovering other impulses which cannot be immediately integrated or will even resist final integration” (Richter 1009). The result of this is a kind of relationship developed in the activity of reading between the author, the reader, and the text.

Forging a relationship though, is just not quite enough; networks require
movement. This is why simply telling teachers to recreate social networks in the classroom is essentially setting them up for failure, because networks cannot just exist, they must do something. Although this movement is not necessarily physical, or one of location, Latour does refer to a kind of movement happening within or through networks, which he describes as a back and forth “movement,” like that of a fan (“Networks” 5). For Latour, this movement is the result of interaction between participants in a network, the sending and receiving of information between two or more actants. Latour goes on to claim that through this movement, the network propels things to change, causing a transformation to occur. Movement in networks is essential, as they must work, do and transform in order to be functional at all. Furthermore, for Latour, this movement is not only happening during an activity, but as the action itself moves through networks or actants. He states that "the notion of network is of use whenever action is to be redistributed" among participants (“Networks” 2). This movement happens in the interactions among participants in the network and the relationships that are developed between them are ultimately transformed, as are the individual participants. As Alexander Galloway and Eugene Thacker point out in *The Exploit*, networks are always moving, they are dynamic, alive. They “exist though process” because “networks are only networks when they are 'live,' when they are enacted, embodied, or rendered operational” (Galloway and Thacker 62). By “live” the authors are implying that networks are always evolving, changing and the actants and relationships among the actants are always being altered, depending on the activity and the context.

Clay Spinuzzi, in his book *Network*, wrote specifically regarding texts that for actor-network theorists the function of texts is to persuade or “put each other into motion,
mediate each other, and transform each other” (40). With this understanding it becomes easier to see the text as an actant within the activity of reading, and also as an actant of significant agency. The action of reading then becomes an enactment of a network and a relationship is cultivated, which is ultimately transformative for all actants involved. The text transforms in the mind of the reader, while the reader is also transformed by their experience with the text. For Iser this transformation is tangible, however, it is “never named, let alone explained in the text, although in fact it is the end product of the interaction between text and reader” (Richter 1003). Thus, when texts and readers are enrolled and participating in a network, and the network is functioning as it should, something new emerges from those interactions.

Interestingly, there are several different layers of interaction happening between the reader and the text during this activity. More immediate, is the reception by the reader of the author's written text. This includes the words written on the page, and the images, symbols and ideas the author intends the reader to understand. These are essentially the more explicit connections made in the text, the textual evidence people point to when studying or analyzing a text. More abstractly though, there is what Iser calls the “unwritten text,” or the things inferred by the reader during the process of reading the text. These are the result of the reader's imagination interacting with the text in a way that is unique to them. Iser says that it is this “‘unwritten' part of a text” that “stimulates the reader's creative participation” (Richter 1003). For Iser, creative participation is an essential component to “draw[ing] the reader into the action” of the text, and also helps the reader to fill or “shade” in areas that are perhaps missing from the text. When a reader can enroll their creative participation, which would function as
another actant in the networked activity of reading, they can then not only find a way into
the text, but also begin to ask questions of it. Moreover, with the enrollment of their
creative participation, they can also begin connecting it to other texts, their own
experiences, and the experiences of others.

The extent to which the imagination can participate though is mediated by the
written text. Iser notes that “the written text imposes certain limits on its unwritten
implications in order to prevent those from becoming too blurred and hazy” (Richter 1003). However, this can be modified to say that the written text attempts to impose
limits, because the reader is still able to interpret the text in ways that suit the connections
they are trying to make. Either way, the written text functions as a kind of mediator in the
reading process. According to Spinuzzi, “in actor-network theory, mediation involves
coming between two actants - whether human or nonhuman - and creating a relation
between them” (86). The outcomes of the mediated relationships are unimportant at this
point, as is the activity of the relationship; all that is to be considered is that some kind of
interaction happens and that interaction works to make change in some way. In the
reading of a literary text, it is the written text which comes between the reader and the
unwritten text in an attempt to “transform, translate, distort, and modify” the imaginings
of the reader (Reassembling 39). As will be seen in upcoming sections of this study,
mediators can take a variety of shapes and sizes, however, they will always “make others
do unexpected things” (Reassembling 72, emphasis original).

Bringing it together

What an understanding of network theory allows us to see is that just as
networks are dependent upon an interaction between actants, so too is the act of reading. It has been established that in the independent act of reading, the reader not only creates a network, but each time they do so they effectively enroll another actant into their own reading network. Essentially, it is through the interactions made between actants during reading that new ideas emerge for readers, which is why it is important to encourage students to build a robust reading network and to support them as they do this. In fact, as explained above, people actively seek out these networks as though they want to make connections to their own lives and to other texts. The problem is that in order for a network to be successful, it must produce something meaningful and, due to the disconnect between school-based and recreational literacy activities, this is nearly impossible. The reading that students are motivated to engage in is viewed as “independent reading,” which most schools view as “a solitary activity,” while the reading that is valued in school is often not valued by the students, nor is it situated as a social activity (“Independent” 9).

What happens then is that students come to college essentially oscillating between two different and largely disconnected reading networks: one they have created is based on their personal interests and motivations and the one that school has created for them. Networks though, as Latour suggests, thrive on making advantageous and plentiful connections by enrolling as many actants as possible. When students are forced to navigate two separate reading networks, it seems plausible that neither one of them is developed or strengthened to their fullest, nor are they operating efficiently. While students are encouraged to connect to texts in very personal ways in college, especially in an inquiry-based program, chances are they have never been allowed to enroll their
personal reading network into their school network before. For many years most of our students have probably been discouraged from making personal connections to school-based literacy activities, which is something they will have to unlearn in order to be successful in college. Fortunately for them they are in college to learn, but instructors must remember that reading is a practice and that many people need guidance throughout their college experience. Moreover, instructors should encourage students to bring personal connections to bear on any reading of any text because, as Latour suggests, “To be social is no longer a safe and unproblematic property, it is a movement that may fail to trace any new connection and may fail to redesign any well-formed assemblage” (Reassembling 8). Sometimes connections may seem messy and underdeveloped, however, telling students how to read something, or that their readings are incorrect may damage their ability to ever make connections at all. Indeed, this tells a student that they can never actually make any connections when reading because they have already been made by some other authority – a situation that happens all too often.

According to Latour, ANT tells actors “’We won’t try to discipline you, to make you fit into our categories; we will let you deploy your own worlds, and only later will we ask you to explain how you came about settling them’” (Reassembling 23). Rather than telling students how to read a text or providing them the lens by which they should read it, letting them find their own way through a text may be more useful for creating liveliness in the classroom and a positive attitude toward reading. Additionally, if students are allowed this freedom in working with texts, the idea is that they will be encouraged to build robust reading networks that lead to deep learning. On that note, Latour reiterates that people should not completely forgo the “search for order and
pattern,” but rather should simply wait for that to come after the connections begin to be made (*Reassembling* 23). In other words, patterns begin to reveal themselves as the text is navigated, as long as students have support and access to the tools that enable them to witness these patterns.

All of this is very different from letting students choose their own texts. In college especially, and in work, people will be asked to read things they don’t necessarily want to read, but that does not lessen the importance of the work involved in reading that text (Schoenbach et al. 9; Moje et al. 137). People must learn how to do this same kind of work regardless of the text that sits before them; further, it is not realistic or helpful to send students the message that the only kind of reading that should matter to them is the reading they choose to do. This is why it is so fundamental that instructors reshape our attitude toward the teaching of reading. It is not enough to simply let students choose their readings, but educators must also help them to develop ways to navigate texts, ways to come to understandings of what they read and tools they can use to aid them in any reading. That must begin with changing the attitude toward reading - for both teachers and students. Teachers should value student processes, ideas and methods, while students should learn to like, if not love, reading as a way by which they can learn new information, communicate ideas and share with those around them.

Perhaps then, rather than attempting to create social networks for students as Moje et al. suggest, teachers can let them navigate their way through texts in social ways (137). When students engage in a text, their motivation is to create a network, and to be social with the people around them. They genuinely want to both participate in the reading of the text and to share that reading with other people. It seems as though what
readers are seeking to do is strengthen the network they created during the reading of the text by enrolling more actors: typically the people and the texts around them. This kind of activity demonstrates the kind of reading instructors typically want all students to know how to do by the end of college: reading that is meaningful and is based on connections to both people and other texts. If the hope is to foster the same kind of passion, motivation and inquiry that drives students during outside literacy practices, then it is the job of educators to design an approach to teaching reading that supports students as they develop their reading network.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY:

Beginning To Look at How Freshmen Read

This chapter narrates the process by which I collected, stored, and organized data pertaining to a study I conducted examining the reading attitudes and habits of university freshmen. The chapter is organized in three main sections and begins by exploring the motivations behind the study, including the research questions that guided the study early on. The following section explains the overall data collection and storage processes utilized during the study. The final section, titled “Research Cycles,” explains in detail how data was organized and worked with during each of the three research cycles. Additionally, this chapter begins to provide some analysis for the data; however, the point of this study was to trace the perceptions of freshmen surrounding reading. For this reason, as the data collection process unfolded, it was largely altered by student responses, needs, and interests, rather than by my own intentions or as a result of my influence as the researcher. Consequently, it made more sense for the data and analysis to be presented together in the findings chapter.

As the previous chapter discussed, many students struggle making connections across sources or texts. Although this is often considered a problem with writing, or perhaps even thinking, I began this thesis project curious about the role of reading in this struggle students seem to experience so often. My early research had
revealed that there are indeed problems in reading instruction in both K-12 and higher education learning environments, however, these ideas were very general and expansive, and the solutions proposed typically applied to the K-12 classroom. In order to find ways to develop reading support for students in the university, specifically in FYC, it became necessary to gather the thoughts and opinions surrounding reading from a large student body.

Beginning in July 2013 and concluding in March 2014, I conducted an ethnographic study of the reading attitudes and practices of students entering into the University. Using interviews, field notes from classroom discussions, and free writes, this study attempted to capture, not only students’ reading habits and practices, but also their understanding of the purposes of reading and their expectations of the kinds of reading they will be asked to do in the University. I specifically chose to work with incoming and current freshmen because, as newcomers to the University, they are often in need of the most immediate support. Additionally, they make up the primary population of FYC courses, which is the target group for the approach to reading instruction I propose in the conclusion of this thesis project.

The questions that guided this study at its inception are as follows:

- What kinds of literacy activities were students participating in during earlier educational experiences? How did these activities shape their feelings and attitudes toward literacy activities, specifically reading?
- Why do students seem to struggle with synthesis work, specifically while reading?
- Is there a difference between reading a text individually and reading it with a
group? Which kind of reading encourages making connections, to other people, texts, or both?

To begin answering some of these questions, I followed the model of an ethnographic research cycle (Spradley 28-31). I designed an interview protocol that relied on open-ended questions for students to respond to via writing (see Appendix A). As is typical of ethnographic research, questions began to develop and emerge as data collection proceeded; therefore, it was necessary at times to modify and add questions to follow a related line of inquiry. Additionally, due to the open-ended nature of the questions, there were times in which conversations deviated from the original interview protocol. When these deviations remained focused on the topic of reading, I included them in my field notes; however, when unrelated I simply left them out. To accompany the interview protocol, I designed an assignment sequence to be used after an individual reading by students and then again after they had worked with a reading as a group in class. Much of this work asked the students to be reflective of their work as readers and evaluators and was submitted to me in writing.

Data Collection

The data collection for this study occurred in three cycles, the first of which took place during the Summer of 2013 in the Educational Opportunity Program (EOP) Summer Bridge program. The second and third research cycles were conducted during two sections of English 130, in the Fall 2013 and Spring 2014 semesters. During each research cycle student writing was stored on Google Drive and each document was shared with me. The data collection was conducted in accordance with Human Subjects
guidelines. The anonymity of the data from EOP Summer Bridge was inherent, as the students conducted interviews and kept notes with interviewee responses on their own document (see Appendix A). In each of these situations then, I have the name of the interviewer, but the interviewee remains unknown to me. As a result, while compiling information from these student interviews, pseudonyms were created and assigned to all samples of writing included in this project. The data that I collected from English 130 students during the Fall 2013 and the Spring 2014 semesters was directly linked to students’ actual names, which required me to create pseudonyms that were kept separated from the student work and their actual names. The pseudonyms and the actual names of these students remain securely separated from one another on a locked computer, using two programs that are password protected. They will remain there until the completion of this project, at which time they will be destroyed. All students were informed of the project in writing and gave both verbal consent and written through the voluntary sharing of their Google Documents (see Appendix C).

Research Cycles

The first research cycle began with The Educational Opportunity Program’s (EOP) Summer Bridge experience. This program takes place on the CSU, Chico campus during the first week of July and allows incoming freshmen, who have been admitted into EOP, to experience college life for one week. During this week, students live in the dorms, attend a variety of workshops, and develop relationships with students and staff that they will meet again in the fall. There is also an English component to Summer Bridge, where students participate in a variety of activities around reading and writing.
This population of students served as the ideal sample population for my study of reading, as they had only recently graduated from high school. Thus, the perceptions and understandings about reading that were cultivated throughout their time in K-12 were still fresh in their minds and they would be able to provide an accurate idea about how many freshmen students would approach reading in the Fall semester.

EOP Summer Bridge was made up of approximately 150 students during the Summer of 2013. Due to the size and scope of the population, coupled with the intense pace of the program, it was impossible for me to conduct individual interviews with every student individually. So that I was able to collect a large and diverse sample, the interviews were conducted by students with one another, at the direction of another instructor or mentor in the program. My participation during this first phase of data collection was passive, as I designed the initial interview protocol and questions to guide discussion (see Appendix A), and I was present during portions of the interviews, but I did not conduct the interviews myself (Spradley 59). Additionally, prior to the student interviews, program mentors met with students to have group conversations about reading texts using some of the questions from the protocol. During this time I observed and took field notes.

During this first research cycle, I included any responses that may have strayed from the interview questions, but were still focused on reading or reading processes. Not all students participated in or submitted the interview section during the first research cycle, so I collected the responses that did and pulled from responses that addressed reading specifically. I also intentionally left out responses that were contradictory, for example when a student wrote “I became less interested in reading as I
grew older” and then answered the following question with “In high school my love for books grew.” Perhaps they meant to say that they began to read again in high school, but without being able to directly communicate with the students, it was unhelpful to consider those responses. Furthermore, some responses were written in a kind of shorthand that made them difficult to make sense of in a way that would be reliably useful to this study.

After the end of each day during Summer Bridge, I compiled the data I collected and analyzed it simultaneously. Using Google Drive, I read every student response and organized the responses according to their commonalities, or themes. Very early on, I began to notice that there were trends in students’ responses that were connected to the idea of literacy sponsorship, as presented in Deborah Brandt's essay “Sponsors of Literacy.” According to Brandt, sponsors are “the figures who turned up most typically in people's memories of literacy learning” as they “set the terms for access to literacy” (556). Brandt suggests that sponsors serve to shape the ways that people think about and approach literacy activities. When asked to think metacognitively about reading, it makes sense that students would recall people or things related to sponsorship. In order to explore this further, and because the intention of this study was to witness the emergence of students’ ideas about reading, I began to categorize student responses at the end of each day in separate documents depending on the sponsor each addressed. The major themes that emerged from this early study demonstrated that students largely pointed to parents, school, and testing/grading as forces that shaped their early literacy activities. In addition, future conversations, including the interviews, sought to explore the impacts of these early literacy sponsors on students' relationships to literacy activities.
Aside from sponsorship, students appeared to be specifically interested in the kinds of reading that they would be expected to do in college and how that would differ from what was expected of them in high school. The responses that discussed future reading in college were collected and organized in yet another folder.

Once I had data that reflected the attitudes toward reading that students were coming into the University with, more questions began to arise regarding student attitudes and practices employed during reading once they had actually started college-level classes. Specifically, I began to wonder if students were continuing to use strategies developed during interactions with earlier sponsors in college-level literacy activities. Additionally, in this second phase of research, I wanted to begin to explore how students were thinking about and working with specific readings rather than just inquiring about reading overall, as I had done during Summer Bridge. Furthermore, though I had surveyed students regarding their attitudes toward reading, I was curious whether or not there were more practical reasons students seemed to struggle with synthesis work while reading. These observations and questions led to the second phase of my research cycle. During the fall semester I was not teaching my own course, so I did not have direct access to a student population to work with. In order to find out what kinds of reading work students were engaging with during their first semester of college, I asked my thesis committee chair, Dr. Kim Jaxon, if she would be willing to let me survey one of the sections of FYC she was teaching. She agreed and we mutually decided to work with a class in which over half were studying to be teachers, thinking that their interest in education would encourage their participation in the study. Additionally, I had developed a rapport with the students in this section as we had previously worked together when I
substituted for Dr. Jaxon.

Using a portion of the assignment sequence I designed (See Appendix B), I collected information from the students in Professor Jaxon’s FYC class regarding how they approached a reading assignment for that specific class. The prompts were given to the students as free writes and students responded on Google Docs that were shared with me. The students were informed of the project, and of their ability to refuse to participate before they shared their documents with me, however, the entire class chose to participate in the survey. My participation during the second phase moved from passive to moderate as I was still an observer, but had gained some insider access to the classroom community I was surveying (Spradley 60). At the end of this cycle, I compiled student responses in a separate Google Doc, using pseudonyms I assigned.

Because the goal in this second phase was specifically to explore the reading strategies of students during their first semester of college, when organizing this data I specifically looked for responses that illustrated how students approached reading. I organized information from this data collection cycle according to the techniques the students used in reading and writing for the assignment they had due in their FYC class, which was a blog post based on an article of their own choosing. Following my approach to the data in the first research cycle, I witnessed trends as they emerged from students responses and discovered some interesting connections between what students were doing with reading in college, to what they were taught to do in K-12, specifically with regard to memorization. Many of the students during this second cycle reported reading their chosen article between two and four times before attempting to write the blog post at all. The data suggested that the tendency for these students seemed to be to try to hold
information from readings inside of their heads, despite the fact that the assignment was not a test, but rather a written response to an article they chose to read. Additionally, data collected during this second phase demonstrated that students tend to view the text they are reading as authoritative, hesitating to ask questions of it, just as Christina Haas found in her study (358).

During the third phase of research, I incorporated the instruments used in the first and second phases, before adding the full assignment sequence in the third phase. This cycle was dominated by my curiosity to discover how students work with texts individually versus how they work with them in groups, in order to see if either reading approach is more conducive to generating connections when working with texts. My aim here was to have a sample population of students be reflective of their feelings toward reading, their reading habits, and then to explore the kinds of work they do with texts, both individually and in groups and then ask them to reflect upon that work. The population during this cycle was comprised of one section of English 130 from Spring 2014, eight of whom were EOP students and participated in Summer Bridge. I am the instructor of this section of English 130, which makes my participation in data collection during the third cycle that of a complete participant, or an insider in the community I am studying (Spradley 61).

For the third cycle of research, the interview questions from the first cycle were turned into free writes, and the free writes from the second cycle were included in the assignment sequence (see Appendix B). Additionally, the students in the third cycle wrote individual reading responses to a specific classroom reading and then reflected on how their readings and understandings of the text changed after completing classroom
activities surrounding that same text. Some responses were given to me on paper, while others were submitted via Google Drive. Field notes were also taken both during and after classroom discussions, some of which were subsequently included in this study. After each assignment was completed, I compiled pertinent information from the responses and was sure to keep any pseudonyms securely separated from the original student work.

Like the previous two cycles, the data collected from the third research cycle was collected and analyzed simultaneously. All student responses were read and categorized in separate electronic documents by individual reading and group reading responses, and then by student perception of each activity. Once responses were organized, I revisited some of Latour's ideas, specifically about the importance of enrolling more actants to make networks stronger and more functional. As a reminder, Latour suggests that when networks work, movement happens between participants or, in other words, information is shared between them and, as a result, new ideas are free to emerge (Reassembling 38). Since the synthesis work we are trying to help students navigate requires that they both form relationships around texts and then create something new from them, Latour's ideas provided a framework for analysis of the data collected in this study. There were definite themes in the data, which illustrated that students certainly read differently when they read individually, employing different strategies and methods, and in these situations they also approach reading with a different attitude than they do when reading together or in a classroom setting. Additionally, the data suggests that students' understanding of the text and their ability to make connections to both other texts and people is shaped by who they read with.
Limitations to the Study

During EOP Summer Bridge, small sections of students are placed with mentors who oversee their progress and provide them guidance about writing and university life. There were occasions in the responses from Summer Bridge students where mentor names were directly cited, even when students were asked about their own feelings or attitudes toward reading. Although these sections were intentionally excluded from this project, there may have been moments in which students used mentor words and ideas as their own, without citing any names. Furthermore, due to the subjective nature of reflective responses (which make up nearly all of the data in this project), readers should be cautious of the potential for unreliability in student responses. Because in many cases I was unable to actually speak to students and clarify intention or meaning, there is room for ambiguity in the data. Nevertheless, there are definite trends in the data that reveal some interesting things about how students view and work with texts. In an attempt to balance this out, the next chapter focuses specifically on those trends, but also includes the perspective granted by the far outliers in the groups.
CHAPTER IV

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS:

Themes in Student Attitudes Toward Reading

Two sets of data will be analyzed and discussed in this section. The first explores the reflective attitudes of incoming freshmen toward literacy activities. Using Deborah Brandt’s ideas about sponsorship and literacy, I draw connections between student attitudes or perceptions of literacy activities and their practices during the first semester of college. Additionally, comparing Brandt's ideas about sponsorship to Latour's concepts of actants, the first set of data analysis explores the ways that people function as actants in students' reading networks. The second set of data is also reflective and explores students’ attitudes toward reading connected texts, both individually and in groups. The analysis of the second data set also uses Latour’s ideas to consider the function of the text as an actant in formation and development of students' reading networks.

As was mentioned in the previous chapter, in this section data results will be interwoven with analysis. Additionally, because students were not restricted to the interview questions alone, but were instructed to use them as a guide or inspiration only, the interview questions will not dictate the presentation of the data in this chapter. The purpose of this study was to witness the emergence of trends in students’ ideas surrounding reading. As a result, interview questions and prompts will generally be
missing from the data (they are included in Appendices) and instead results will be
discussed thematically.

**Sponsorship**

In her essay, “Sponsors of Literacy,” Deborah Brandt examines the ways in
which people gain, or are denied, access to literacy. She explains that there are “sponsors
of literacy,” which she defines as “agents, local or distant, concrete or abstract, who
enable, support, teach, model, as well as recruit, regulate, suppress or withhold literacy”
(556). According to Brandt these sponsors, or gatekeepers, of literacy have a vested,
economic interest in the either the promotion or suppression of literacy. She also claims
that these sponsors of literacy are always in a position of power over the sponsored, citing
examples like the media, older adults like teachers or supervisors, military personnel and
even priests.

The impact of these sponsors on a person’s literacy development cannot be
understated. Indeed, as Brandt suggests, often “literacy takes its shape from the interests
of its sponsors . . . Obligations toward one’s sponsors run deep, affecting what, why, and
how people write and read” (558). Interaction with sponsors then, be they positive or
negative, are essentially internalized by the sponsored. As a result of this deep-seated
impact, students coming to college are doing so with the ideologies inherited from
interactions with their literacy sponsors. Interestingly, many people are “oblivious” to
“this ideological burden” surrounding literacy activities (557). One of the things this
study revealed is the ways that sponsors work to impact views of reading for students
entering into the university.
Assessment as Sponsor

In reading through the writing of the nearly 200 students studied, I found that for most students, reading is often situated around testing and grading. During an interview, Tara reported that she “was and is not a fan of reading” because she had to “faced the fact that she will always have to take test” [sic]. Similarly, Alex said that his experience with reading was typically “vocab quizzes, read outside books to increase your reading level.” As happens in the AR quiz and SSR programs, many students recall being assigned a reading level, which encouraged them to think their reading was either at or below a specified target. Students did not report needing to improve or explore reading, unless it was specifically for a grade. As Tara later said, “i usually take more time when its school related. i try alot because its my grade. try taking my time and just turning it in” [sic]. Likewise, students like Robert said, “Teachers always give a feedback sometime good and bad, and it help [me] to correct is reading or writing” [sic].

Ultimately, reading assessment functions as a kind of sponsor that encourages students to view reading as something that can be done in a right or wrong way, something that they are either good or bad at. In evaluating students’ responses, it became clear that students have learned to view themselves as either proficient readers or struggling readers. If they are good enough, then it is deemed that they have the skills necessary to read anything and scaffolding for reading more difficult texts often falls away. As a result, these students seemed to feel that no more reading work or support is needed for them to be successful, and that there is not any reason to push themselves to read more and more difficult texts. Regarding reading, Mina's only remark during her interview was that her “reading was at where it was supposed to be,” during her K-12
years, yet her writing struggled. As a result, Mina said that she received years of writing support, but none in reading. Likewise, if reading levels are not considered on target, students are typically relegated to lower levels and often denied access to tools that might improve their work with texts.

The lack of support for reading work is evident when examining the skills students employed during their first semester of college. When asked about the practices they used to search for and read a text for their upcoming inquiry projects, most students reported simply using Google to find something “interesting” or that they “connected with.” They then, like Keith, wrote in his reflection on the work, were “very traditional with extracting information from the text.” Now what Keith meant, and what many other students described, was that they “simply read the article about two or three times” (some reported reading up to four times), before “writ[ing] my blog post.” So, rather than taking notes on the reading during the first time through, as they encountered ideas, students had a tendency to fall back on the practices associated with K-12 reading and they read as though they were memorizing the information in the text. Joe describes reading an assigned text, saying that “I was just reading it, I wasn’t really analyzing what was happening in the article. The reason for that is because I felt like I could memorize everything that was going on.” The kind of writing they would then produce, after these memorization readings, was primarily in summary form. Reading in this way is remarkably similar to the kinds of reading encouraged by content-based drill and standardized testing.

School as Sponsor

When asked about reading in school more generally, students largely report
feeling restricted, in both choice of text and how to read it. Amy said that her “struggle to read,” along with her disdain for the activity in general, is because school “is a more strict environment and when it comes to reading its more dreading and less imagination than I can produce.” In Amy’s response the desire can be seen to enroll the “creative imagination,” as Iser called it, into school reading. Because they have been trained not to use their imagination, many students report feeling a lot of “pressure” during the reading of assigned texts. Moreover, students often describe reading as a “process” which requires that they, as Janice wrote, “read the text thoroughly” and then “go back and highlight/take note what is most important.” Interestingly, students seem to feel concern over understanding the right way to read the text. As Pat says, she was “taught the structure of reading,” as though there is a single approach to all texts and that reading is something that a structure can be prescribed to.

This attitude toward reading seems to be reinforced even at the college level. During the spring semester, after being in college for at least one full semester, students still report feeling anxiety around reading activities because, as Henry wrote “sometimes reading for an academic class can be stressful.” Sources of this anxiety range from “worry” over understanding the main idea, or “getting the text,” to a general feeling of being “overwhelmed” by reading academic texts. One student even wrote that she “gets the main idea from her teacher,” indicating that she has been told specifically how to read texts in the past and still is. As a result, students often report having to “prepare both mentally and physically” before reading for class. Students reported “not looking forward to reading,” and struggling to focus because “reading for school is forced.”

Perhaps reading feels so forced for students because, even in college, the text
continues to be an authority of which they are not supposed to ask questions. This is especially true of textbooks, which, as Christina Haas argues, “always seem to be written by nobody and everybody, as if the information embodied in them was beyond human composition, and beyond human question” (360). Data conducted during this study reiterates Haas’ point and takes it a step further, suggesting that it is not only textbooks that students assume to have absolute authority, but really they have been conditioned to see all texts as having authority. Ruby, a freshman in Dr. Jaxon’s Fall 2013 FYC course, said she had “research questions” before reading the article she chose for her blog post. Once she read one article though, she reported finding that “This article answered all my questions.” Likewise Jack, one of Ruby’s peers, said “i just post recently is through researching my question on google. i read through the source online to find the answer i need” [sic]. What is interesting about these responses is that they seem to indicate that students are beginning to ask questions, but upon reading one text those questions seem to be answered and, as a result, they think they are done reading to answer those questions. Students then are not using texts as a jumping off point where they can ask more questions, nor do they seem to be critically reading or asking questions of the text itself, but rather they are taking each reading at face value. This appears to be happening despite Jack’s report that the article he chose “did not use any resources to do it at all.”

Perhaps positioning the text as the authority for students contributes to their struggle with synthesis work. As mentioned above, instructors often see students resort to summaries when working with multiple texts, rather than putting the texts into conversation with one another. If students think of the text as an authority, or one that can answer any question someone has about a subject, then it makes sense that we often see
student work that serves the text and the claims within it, rather than using the evidence from the text to support their own ideas. Although it is our hope that students will try being an authority in college, and that they will begin to see themselves as academics or, at the very least, as people with enough agency to present their ideas to the community they are learning with, the work we are having them engage in does not seem to be allowing for that to happen.

Students do seem to have a definite difference in their perceptions about reading in school versus out of school. About reading for pleasure, Morgan wrote that “there is less pressure in a free reading then an assigned reading,” and as a result she “[gets] more from free readings.” Likewise, Christie directly opposed academic reading and reading for pleasure because “the books [she chooses] to read are usually books written on something [she enjoys] and want[s] to read.” Finally, Kami said that “Reading for fun is more effortless than reading for an academic class.” Not only do these insights indicate that students are operating two separate reading networks, but they also demonstrate that students are indeed motivated to read outside of school, but are not as interested in reading in school.

While it would be easy to suggest that these attitudes toward in school reading are directly related to perhaps laziness or an unwillingness to engage the mind when reading, even more interesting is that students reported loving reading as young children, but then as Kristen wrote, “over the years I just lost interest.” This is a theme that was woven throughout many student responses: that reading was something they loved to do, but then moved away from as they grew older and advanced through school. In this way, perhaps the confines they experience during school-based literacy activities hinder later
literacy activity for some students (Brandt 567). Interestingly, the data does not reveal a
difference in current reading practices between those who reported to love reading as a
child and those who didn’t. They nearly all said that they participate in functional reading
on electronic devices, but none of the students surveyed reported enjoying reading as an
adult or participating in it regularly as a recreational activity.

Parents as Sponsors

As Brandt argued, school and school-related activities are not the only literacy
sponsors; parents have an equal amount of influence on literacy development. While
some students saw their parents as encouraging of reading both in and out of school,
others found that “no efforts were put forth to encourage reading and writing” at home.
Indeed, it was common for students to recall experiences similar to that of Stefan, who
said “when I was young, I would be curious with reading and writing. My mom just tells
me, I will learn about it when I get to school. I guess the value was that, you go to school,
you learn” [sic]. Joe also said that after nearly two semesters in college that he still “hates
reading.” When I asked him why, he responded with “I guess I didn’t grow up with books
around my home and I never been a fan of it” [sic]. These responses suggest that parental
reading habits strongly influence literacy development of children, which often carry over
into adulthood.

When questioned further about the literacy practices of their parents, students
seemed acutely aware of the forces that impacted parental involvement with reading. The
most common reason students said that their parents did not typically read at home was
because, as Brian reported, “his parents never attempted to read and write other than
grade school because once they finished grade school they went straight to work.” Some
students said that they regularly saw their parents read things like bills or perhaps the newspaper, but that they did not discuss those readings with them. Only one student reported regularly talking with his mother about in and out of school reading. What these observations essentially do is reinforce reading as a school-based activity, one that does not have much impact on their lives outside of school. If that is true for students, then so is the inverse: that their lives outside of school do not have much impact on their participation in reading or other literacy activities.

Another common theme was language. Students whose parents spoke a primary language other than English reported feeling behind in reading for school. Jose, an EOP student in Summer Bridge, said that “when he was in elementary school it was difficult for him to read and write at their level because his family always spoke Spanish and that was how he was raised with nothing but Spanish so learning English was definitely a challenge for him.” Language barriers certainly impact literacy development, but they are not necessarily the responsibility of the parents only. Indeed, ESL students often feel this way because of problems with the ways schools classify and assess their abilities or skills, but not because they do not have literacy, as many people try to suggest. Maria wrote about this directly, saying that “she wasn’t very good at reading, and was placed on ESL. Once she got to middle school, she was taken out of the program, and her reading and writing skills improved a lot.” Nevertheless, language barriers are an area around which home and school sponsorship converge, and have a powerful impact on the ways that students develop perceptions of literacy activities.

In the situations where parents expected more of their children with regard to reading, students often struggled to articulate intrinsic motivation to read. Lucy explained
that the attitude of her family was that “it was critical to like school because it was essential for life.” Similarly, Marco said that his parents told him that he doesn’t want to be like them then he has to do well in school. That told him that he had to study and work hard to achieve his goals even if it involved reading and writing [sic].

For these families reading becomes a key to success, the value of which is to achieve something, namely an “education.” In many ways, this can add to the pressures surrounding reading, discouraging students from viewing reading as a practice, and perpetuating the idea that reading is a skill they can attain and by which they can achieve an end.

Expectations of College-Level Reading

During EOP Summer Bridge, students expressed some hopes for the reading work they would be expected to do in college. It was very common for students to say that, although the reading work in college will be difficult and require a lot of thinking, they were excited for the opportunity to “choose on what to read as long as it interests” them [sic]. Their expectation of reading after Summer Bridge was that “it will not be as strict because that’s not what reading and writing is all about” [sic]. Talking as authorities about reading and writing certainly seems bold, but as Edgar said, this experience taught him that “in college they let us express ourselves more in our own way and they don’t really give us a format to follow.”

High school reading, on the other hand, was described as “lenient and straightforward,” “relaxed,” and “taught” as though there “wasn’t anything to question.” One student, Toua, even went so far as to say that in high school “we don’t take the time to
actually think about it and analyze, especially when it comes to reading. When we read something assigned, we just read it and don’t take the time to think about it thoroughly and discuss it with others.” These remarks seem to indicate that students are acutely aware of the problems of reading instruction in K-12, and even more importantly, they realize that they are not prepared to do this work in college without support. Also, incoming students seem to connect analyzing texts with discussing them with others.

After the Summer Bridge experience, where student work centered around common texts with which they worked and discussed, students were excited about the prospect of being challenged by “complicated” texts. Moreover, after this work, students began to consider reading differently. Where it was initially considered work that they dread, they began to see it as “relating to our own personal lives.” Christine concluded her free write by saying that reading is a way to “satisfy my curiosities because when I want to learn about something new then I can go and read about it.”

These insights seem to suggest that instructors have a population of students coming into the university each fall that are excited and ready to learn new ways of reading, to explore new genres, and to follow their curiosities while battling difficult texts. Although this sounds like a nearly perfect situation, it is important to remember that sponsored ideologies about literacy activities will always be at play in the way students take up this work in the classroom. However, this does not have to be a negative thing; in fact, as Deborah Brandt suggests, “sponsors . . . often forc[e] the formation of new literacy requirements while decertifying older ones” (567). As students enter college, not only will they be exposed to new authors and genres, but to new sponsors as well.

Indeed, there are ways in which sponsors could, and should, be considered
actants in students' reading networks. Like Brandt says of sponsors, remember that Latour also suggests participants in a network “might authorize, allow, afford, encourage, permit, suggest, influence, block, render possible, forbid, and so on” the ways in which action occurs in a network (Reassembling 72). Sponsors then, like school, testing, parents, peers, and the like, function as mediators in that they impact activity and the relationships between actants in a network. Rather than ignore or disregard sponsors as purely in the past, and further segregate students' reading networks, it may be more beneficial to their work in the university to consider these early sponsors as actants in their networks. As Latour posits

If you treat what comes from the outside as mediators offering an occasion to the next agent to behave as a mediator, the whole scene of the inside and outside might be modified for good. (Reassembling 216, emphasis original)

When we acknowledge the influences of previous sponsors on students' reading development, we also allow for and encourage students to begin connecting their reading networks. Doing this effectively strengthens these networks, because “the more attachments it has, the more it exists. And the more mediators there are the better” (Reassembling 217). Perhaps it is time to find ways to be “innovative with this ideological burden” of literacy sponsorship when we encourage students to begin making connections between school-based networks and personal ones through the use of reading (Brandt 557). This is one of the ideas addressed in the next section and in the conclusion of this thesis.

Connected Again

Some of the initial questions that drove this study asked why students seem to
struggle with synthesis work and to what extent issues with reading contribute to this struggle. After working with Summer Bridge and considering some of the ways that sponsorship shapes attitudes toward reading and the formation of strong literacy networks, it became abundantly clear that students want more support in reading and that instructors need a reminder to build this work into their courses. So that I might be able to offer some ideas about how to help instructors do this, I needed to ask more students what they thought; however, this time I decided to ask them about their reading work individually and then again after group work around two texts.

Using Latour’s ideas about watching a network unfold through the enrollment of a variety of actants, this assignment began with the students choosing a text to read together as a class. This was an activity we had done before, which involved the students researching and writing an annotation on any article of their choosing. Divided up into groups, the students read a small group of the class annotations and nominated one for the class. After compiling a small list of possible sources, the class then read those annotations and voted on two. The first reading was used for a separate activity that involved keyword selection.

For each article, the students were asked to write a reading response before coming to class and post it to the class blog. This reading is what I called “individual reading,” and in most of these blogs I saw the kinds of shallow, cursory reading that students admitted in their later reflections. They generally were not interested in the article at all, and those that were expressed anger toward the author for what they thought was “targeting an ethnic group.” Indeed, over half of the class believed that the author was guilty of racism in the article, when in fact her project was to explore how some
members of the media targeted an ethnic group after an assault. This led to an interesting classroom discussion on making claims and then supporting them using textual evidence. Furthermore, it demonstrated that during individual reading students are often skimming or not reading at all due to their heavy reading loads. As a result they can miss the important nuances in a text, which can be misleading and detrimental to their overall understanding, not to mention any future work with texts.

After the students read this article, they randomly gathered into groups and selected another article that was related to this one. Using research strategies previously learned in class, each student found one related article and verbally explained it to their group. Each group then picked their own connected text. They read that and were instructed to pay attention to overlapping concepts between the original article and the one their group chose. Essentially, they were encouraged to look for places where the articles have points of commonality. They then returned to class and each group created a concept map for the two readings. Prior to creating the map, they were given a brief introduction into concept mapping, the definition of which was derived as a class and for the class, using examples from online sources. Through classroom discussion, the concept map was defined as a mind map that outlines the main ideas that texts have in common, including examples and evidence from the texts to support each main idea. For the purposes of this activity, the concept map functioned as a way to illustrate how the texts were talking and responding to one another.

After this activity was over, I asked the students to return to their individual reading and compare it to their current understanding of the text. They were then asked to consider how reading in a group impacted their experience, engagement with the text and
their learning. These reflections revealed interesting and compelling ideas about individual versus social reading, which are outlined below.

Student responses after this group work indicated that students seem to think that social reading combats some of the issues around reading activities outlined above. As students previously reported, analysis and engagement are less likely to happen for the majority of students, given their exposure to and support in analytical literacy activities. This is especially true when students read individually. In the reflection after this activity, students frequently commented that reading a text individually exposes them only to their thoughts and perceptions of a text, which they typically considered “limited.” The most common understanding of this kind of individual reading can be seen in Mia's response, which said that when “reading a text individually you only have your ideas, purpose and personal connection to it, making it a very limited view.” Although they often considered their singular point of view limiting, it should be noted that individual connections to texts should be valued in the classroom, as they are certainly an important part of students' reading networks. Indeed, students should be encouraged to continue to forge personal connections to texts during independent reading, but also to recognize that individual and group reading offer different ways of interacting with texts.

When they were allowed to participate in connected reading, students reported feeling encouraged to utilize analytical power. Mia wrote that “in the group reading of the text . . . I was making connections to my and other’s personal experience, made connects to other text other people have read, and re-read over parts I may have missed before” [sic]. This perception was not unique to Mia though. Every single one of the 27 students that participated in this activity described gaining a more rich perspective on the
After working in groups and after reading it alongside connected texts, despite some of them preferring to read alone.

Similarly, group work with texts seems to alter student understanding of texts. Jodi wrote that when reading in a group, “others ideas influence and trigger more ideas and spark questions about my ideas.” Likewise, students like Harry explained that it is beneficial to share thoughts in a group because “not everyone’s thoughts will be similar, so it expands the meaning of the work through different viewpoints. In this regard, group work around texts helps students think of texts as connected because, as Morgan reported, other perspectives serve to “point you in the right direction for further research in order to understand a concept.”

Furthermore, connected reading has an impact on engagement with texts. As Joe wrote after this activity, “Reading a text by yourself is honestly a drag because it seriously bores me, but when you read in a group it is a lot easier because [it] kind of motivates you.” Additionally, Cory wrote that his engagement changed when he had another, connected article that helped him to understand the original reading in a new way. Like so many other students said about reading academic texts, Cory said that he just was not interested in the first article; however, after reading both, he was “able to understand and think more” about the concepts presented in each.

Students value the insights of their peers and believe that they benefit from their perspectives. When they are exposed to new thoughts and ideas about texts, they also have the opportunity to practice evaluating one another’s opinions. Kami said that she “had to think more when reading in a group because [she] had to take in other peoples’ opinions and evaluate them.” If students are having to evaluate the assertions of
the peers in these negotiations of group work surrounding a text, then they also have the chance to practice arguing for their reading using support, like evidence from the text, from other texts they have read, or even from personal experience. Ellie mentioned having to “fight” for what she thought about the text in her group. Additionally, students reported that they like to be able to work together to decipher the difficult sections of a text, rather than have a teacher simply tell them how to read it.

Some students preferred a combination of reading individually and reading as a group. Those students said that reading individually, although limited, allowed them to focus on the text in a more serious way. One such student, Mandy, reflected that “I think it’s best to read it individually at first like skim the article/text and then clarify the overall message in a group.” A few others agreed, saying that their level of engagement did not really change with the group activity, but that they ultimately learned more about the text while working in the groups. Perhaps then, the best reading support to address the learning needs of all students is to have students do both individual and group-based reading activities. Having students, especially freshmen, do reading activities in this way may encourage them to strengthen their individual reading, but would also give them the benefit of forming connections with others and negotiating their readings of texts in social settings.

This second data set reveals that students seem to think that, like Latour’s understanding of actants in a network, social or connected reading can mean multiple texts, multiple people, or both. Indeed, for students, both people and texts have an impact on the ways that students interact with the texts they work with. This means that texts, like people, are actants in students' reading networks and, if we follow ANT, they have
equal influence on the formation and development of these networks. During the choosing of connected texts, the student groups all went in very different directions, despite that they all had one text in common. I observed students making connections from the original common text to very different fields of study, ranging from psychology to media to anthropology. Additionally, when narrating their process during classroom discussions, students outlined questions for future research and began to talk about where they would search for more information if they were to continue researching this area of inquiry. After this activity, I noted that students discussed what kinds or genres of texts they would search for based on the concepts that emerged after reading both texts in groups, and they outlined the search terms and databases they would likely use when conducting that research. Essentially, when they were allowed to trace the connections between texts without being told how to do so by someone else (like a teacher), the students worked together to negotiate meaning and generate new ideas from the convergences of the texts, along with their individual and group readings.

According to Latour, “the task of defining and ordering the social should be left to the actors themselves, not taken up by the analyst” (Reassembling 23). Students then, should be able to enroll the various actants in their reading networks (which have been established as sponsors, peers, texts, and their own ideas) to trace connections between texts. Additionally, when students are encouraged to view reading as social, and furthermore, as networked or connected to other people or texts, they understand that their readings of the texts will be modified as a result of that interaction. The problem is, if we don’t help students to see that there are many ways into a text and help find ways to support the tracing of networks or conversations in their disciplines, then they will never
be able to really (re)invent the university, nor will they be able to be truly deep learners (Bartholomae). As long as we continue to treat reading as an individual activity in the classroom, and as something students are incapable of doing effectively without guidance from an authority figure, students will be positioned outside of the conversations of the fields they are studying. Furthermore, the opportunities they have to contribute their ideas to the conversations happening in any field of study will be stifled. They will feel as though they are perpetual outsiders, looking in on the conversation and maybe hearing snippets, but only ever watching and never fully participating.
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION:

The Gamification of Reading Support

This chapter concludes the research presented in this thesis and is organized in two main sections. In the first part, I examine the ways in which games and game theory may help instructors to think about working with texts in their classrooms. Additionally, it is my assertion that game theory can help instructors to combat some of the problems with reading instruction highlighted by the research presented in this thesis. In the second section, I outline some ways that games can be used in the design of a FYC syllabus.

Although research shows that students spend a great deal of time reading outside of school, as the research and data presented in this thesis have shown, the interaction between students and previous sponsors have left many feeling negatively toward reading in school, and sometimes reading overall. Unfortunately this is likely because education has failed to allow students the opportunities to build robust reading networks by enrolling their personal and preferred reading practices into school literacy activities. What happens then is that students come to college oscillating between two reading networks: the one they have created for themselves and the one school has attempted to create for them. However, the two networks are separated by a lack of communication or movement between the two. The problem is, these disconnected networks leave students feeling frustrated and cultivates negative attitudes toward literacy
activities. As has been demonstrated in the research presented in this thesis, these attitudes carry over into reading practices and have significantly impact the ways that students approach reading and writing, and how successful they are in the work that is generated from these activities. Furthermore, the work they are doing in their personal reading networks (e.g. reading a lot, making intertextual connections, arguing claims, writing a lot based on reading, and forming informed opinions based on readings) is not happening in school. This is probably because school typically discourages this kind of work by forcing students to read specific texts in very specific, sometimes even scripted ways, rather than allowing students to find their ways through texts, tracing connections to other texts and people along their way. Changing how we teach and work with texts in the classroom is necessary and requires a fundamental shift in the way we approach reading instruction. Based on the research and data collection presented in this thesis, it is up to instructors to look for ways in which they can structure literacy activities that motivate students and help to make connections in social, fun, and challenging ways.

To begin, I would like to propose that instructors incorporate some and, if possible, all of the following when assigning reading work:

- Motivate students to read by allowing them to choose readings that matter to their lives. Rather than selecting all texts for students, consider allowing students to find their own texts, with guidance from instructors and peers on where and how to find them.

- Foster the creation of connections through social reading, and provide opportunities for students to read and work with readings with their peers.

- Encourage students to trace connections in ways that are meaningful to them, rather than telling students how to read texts and how to interpret them. Also, allow
students access to the tools that can help them read effectively and then let the students decide how and when to enroll these tools in their reading process.

- Resist the urge to test or grade reading. Instead consider ways to encourage students to read deeply by asking questions of them and by modeling how to ask questions of texts, so that the focus of reading can be on learning, rather than memorization for assessment.

- Remember that the students are unfamiliar with college-level literacy activities and that they are in our classes to practice participating in a discourse community. This means that in the classroom failure can, and should, happen often so that students can progress as readers and writers. Growth happens when we allow students to participate in literacy activities and make mistakes. When students are not afraid to fail, they learn from their mistakes, reevaluate their approach, and try again. Classroom structures should support these cycles.

- Structure reading activities in ways that allow for their own processes to shine. Create a space that values individual reading approaches in your classroom, so that students can begin to incorporate their independent reading network into their school reading network.

Of course, making radical shifts in the way we teach, let alone in the way we think about reading, is easier said than done. Indeed, given all that I have presented in this thesis what I have outlined above is a tall order, but in reflecting upon these ideas I have come to see that what instructors should be trying to cultivate during reading activities is similar to what can be found in a gaming environment.
Gamifying the Classroom

Many of the things that we seem to be hoping our students find in the classroom are not only happening in fanfiction circles (as Thomas and Black found in their studies) but as James Gee argues, they are happening in video game play as well. What is interesting about this is that we continually see people become more and more immersed in video games. The fact is, games are fun and people want to play them. As the industry keeps growing, new games and consoles are being released all the time, and along with that, there is more and more merchandise and new websites for gamers available. While many people may view this phenomenon as good marketing, others, like James Gee and Jane McGonigal, recognize that more is happening here. Gee writes that game designers have discovered and implemented “profoundly good methods of getting people to learn and to enjoy learning” (29). A careful look at how games actually work will reveal that this is true. First though, let us look at what games do.

When we consider the popularity of games, it is clear that they motivate people to participate in playing them. According to the article “The Benefits of Playing Video Games,” games are “a ubiquitous part of almost all children’s and adolescents’ lives, with 97% playing for at least one hour per day in the United States” (66). The game play, however, is not limited to children. As Jane McGonigal says in her book Reality is Broken, many gamers are actually adults who “have jobs, schoolwork, families, commitments, and real lives that they care about,” yet in addition to their regular lives, they choose to “come home and apply all of the smarts and talents that are underutilized at work” in gaming environments (2-3). Although so many people report lacking the motivation to read, especially for school, McGonigal and others have found that people
are highly motivated to play games. Thinking about this, it is interesting to consider what games have that other activities, like typical practices of reading in school, do not. Along those same lines, because we are looking to cultivate these same elements in our classrooms, it might be helpful to consider how reading can be like playing a game, in the right atmosphere.

When it comes down to it, people like to play games because they are fun. As Gee reminds us “Game designers can make worlds where people have meaningful experiences, experiences that their places in life would never allow them to have or even experiences that no human being has ever had before” (29). It makes sense then that when asking students to do synthesis work in which they may have to create something new and perhaps previously unthought of, that we would encourage them to do so in playful ways. After all, that “deeper learning” that we are looking to cultivate in classrooms, “can occur through playing,” because “real learning is always associated with pleasure” (Gee 60-61). In other words, people really learn when they are having fun.

The ability to give “meaningful experiences” is the result of games providing people the chance to take what Gee calls the “projective stance.” The projective stance occurs in video games that allow players to “inhabit” a character and a world, in which they “inherit” special characteristics and abilities from the game design (71). Gee refers to these abilities as affordances, and says that they all contribute to the achievement of some sort of in-game goal. What is interesting about this is that there is often a convergence between the player and character in the process of attaining these in-game goals. While the goal of a character in a game is often some sort of end result (e.g. collection of an item, finishing a level), the methods by which it is attained are typically
left up to the player. This choice is what ultimately allows the player entry into the world as an “actor” in which the player can “become that sort of person, but also attempt within that framework, simultaneously to realize goals and values that are part of the core itself” (Gee 71). In this way games become truly immersive, as the player becomes an actor in a simulated world and is free to exercise the abilities of the character within the game world. As a reminder, it is in these moments of immersion that deep learning happens.

Interestingly, much of the fun in gaming stems from the challenges players face during play. The obstacles (typically things like enemies, opponents, or limitations imposed by the game design, like health, supplies, and quest chains) that all players face during a good game encourage persistence. Gee refers to these feelings of persistence as “pleasurable frustration,” one of the hallmarks of “both deep learning and good gaming” (61). These are the moments when a player encounters a difficult section of the game, in which they must try a variety of techniques and use a whole host of different combinations of moves or tools to eventually surpass. The puzzle (which tool will provide the best result in each specific situation) intrigues people and players have the powers and tools to navigate through these difficult scenarios. As Gee suggests, “humans feel expanded and empowered when they can manipulate powerful tools in intricate ways that extend their areas of effectiveness” (33). Games will often provide players with a variety of tools that they can utilize in different ways and at different times, but ultimately how the players choose to move their characters through each scenario or task is up to them. Indeed, a “game typically consists of the need to find or continue at once a response which is free within the limits set by the rules” (Caillois 126, emphasis original). Providing players with a wide variety of tools from which they can choose
different combinations in different scenarios not only creates a sense of agency in game play, but also encourages players to bridge gaps in the information presented by the game in creative and innovative ways.

This is not unlike the idea of building robust reading networks through the enrollment of as many actants as possible. If we want to both motivate and challenge students to read academic texts, perhaps choosing difficult texts for them to read is not the only way. Borrowing from game theory, one of ways by which we might encourage students to do this work is by exposing them to a variety of tools, texts, and people (e.g. peers, authors, professors) and allowing them to activate those which best fit their interests and purposes. In this way reading, like gaming, becomes inherently social and involves, like Latour suggests, movement between participants or actants in the network. Likewise, in a game “the group can draw on the differential real-world resources of each player” (Gee 28). For the purposes of this project, players can also be considered actants, which includes humans and non-humans or essentially any tool used in an activity. In truly social reading then, students ultimately have agency over their experiences by deciding how they battle texts and navigate reading activities.

Doing this is often difficult for the instructor, as the ultimate outcome of student work with texts would be uncertain. Uncertainty though, is part of game play, as it is part of reading (Cailliois 126). At the outset, there is no prescribed way for a game to turn out; it is left to unfold during the exchange that happens between players. Similarly, as I found during the third phase of research, reading and the connections made during reading are largely shaped by the ways that readers enroll actants. As the students in my FYC class experienced, reading with peers alters the ways that they participate with the
text. Additionally, the texts that students choose to read alongside one another can shape, not only the ways they read the texts, but also what they ultimately produce from their readings. The tools, or actants, students decide to use will accomplish different things and will impact their readings in different ways. Just like in a game, obstacles in reading can be overcome using some tools, but not others, and in some combinations and not others. The important thing is that, as in gaming, students are free to try different tools, enrolling actants of their choosing in different ways and that they find what works for them.

Games then, are really strong motivators because they are fun and challenging. Furthermore, they are interactive and encourage social activity between both people and texts, which assists people in building effective networks around the activity of playing. For these reasons alone, it seems enticing to incorporate gaming principles into the classroom; however, this can often seem a daunting task. In order to even begin thinking about this, it is important to think about how games actually work. That games are so good at motivating people to participate in playing them is also what makes them successful, which is likely the result of a variety of different components. As McGonigal suggests, there are four defining traits games must have in order to be successful games: they need to have a goal, rules, a feedback system, and voluntary participation (21). McGonigal argues that feedback in games should be immediate and both Katie Salen and Gee agree with this idea and add that there should be a problem to overcome in order to build expertise and that each level should be slightly more challenging than the one before (Salen “Extended”).

Looking at these components, the most troubling one should be addressed first: the idea of voluntary participation. In order to truly be play, players must “be free to
leave whenever they please” (Caillois 125). Indeed, “Play must be defined as a free and voluntary activity . . . A game in which one would be forced to play would at once cease being play.” Although we are dealing with college students in this particular case and they are usually enrolled in school because they want to be, too often the work that we do feels coerced. This may just be part of school, but it probably has more to do with the grading factor; it is tough to create a space in school that students can become fully immersed in, as there is always someone supervising, and that person will eventually assess the performance with a grade. Because of this, it is difficult to imagine a classroom that can ever truly become, what Gee calls, an “affinity space,” or a place in which “people 'bond' first and foremost to an endeavor or interest and secondarily, if at all, to each other” (98). Affinity spaces are valuable, according to Gee, because people meet to accomplish something; in other words, they are productive together. In these spaces, everyone participates equally and voluntarily, meaning that knowledge is distributed and there are many ways to participate (Gee 99-100). This, unfortunately, does not sound anything like a classroom, which typically does not offer students “multiple routes to participation, engaging students in different levels, in different contexts” (Gee 103).

Similarly, we don’t see school as a simulation or a tutorial before the real thing. Gee tells teachers to “Let [students] act and experience consequences, but in a protected way when they are learners” (81). Instructors often forget that school is supposed to be a place where students try on various identities and practice ways of being, learning, and interacting with colleagues through these identities, much of which takes place through text. School, and the reading done within it, is high stakes and we remind students of this regularly, often through the use of punitive measures. So instead
of inviting students to “inhabit” a character and play around with what it means to participate in or be a member of that discourse, we often attempt to force them to internalize it and prove their competence, before they are allowed to perform as an existing member of that discourse. Games, however, remind us that play allows people to perform tasks before competence is tested. This is especially important to reading instruction and support because, as we have seen, assessment fundamentally alters the ways in which students participate in literacy activities, meaning they often resist them once assessment and labeling begins. Furthermore, students are often refused access to the “powerful tools” of a discourse until they demonstrate that competence.

The Game

Combining the principles of gaming and network theory to support the kinds of reading students are asked to do in college, I have designed some approaches for implementation in a FYC course, or perhaps even for an earlier meeting with students (like EOP Summer Bridge or an orientation program) that requires in-depth textual work and encourages connections. I have designed this game with several primary goals in mind:

• Helping students to identify moments of connection across texts, or moments when texts are in conversation with one another.

• Inviting students to create a metacognitive awareness around their own reading practices, so that they are aware of the kinds of reading they are engaging in and can employ specific strategies to handle that kind of reading.

• Understanding how to find a way into a text, and what to do when this does not
I think that in creating a way to play with some of these ideas and problems, we can begin to change some of the problems incoming college students face when encountering reading assignments. What I present here is an outline; however, it can be modified for use by any teacher in any subject area.

This game is a quest-based adventure through varying “realms” or areas of inquiry. For this example outline, there will be three realms, which will include three texts each. The texts will be chosen by the instructor and will be contained under interesting and diverse umbrella areas of inquiry. The instructor should take care to choose texts that are current and relevant to students’ lives. In this way the instructor will essentially seed a network around an area of inquiry using texts that are engaging and short, but allow for students to begin some group work. Students will begin the semester by reading descriptions of each realm in order to make an educated decision about which realm they want to explore. The students will then be put into groups of five to explore the realm they are most interested in and they will spend approximately four weeks completing a variety of group and individual quests related to work with texts. These early quests will ask students to read individually at first, before coming to class to work together with texts in social ways.

Within the groups, each student will occupy one of the following roles: Scribe, Leader, Presenter, Time Keeper, and Data Collector. The point of this is to utilize
the idea of the Gee’s projective stance, and is essentially the function of an avatar in a
game, one that allows players access to the game play itself. Within games, the point is
often to bolster or improve the avatar's ability to interact with the game environment. In
the classroom though, this becomes difficult as they are physically present and
participating in the work. I think that one way to accomplish this same idea is to have
students choose which role best suits their abilities and expertise and then fill out a
character sheet in the beginning that outlines their responsibilities as well as their powers
within the group. In this way students will know and understand the expectations of their
own role within the group early on, which will serve to make group work time more
efficient and will lend more time to direct work with readings each day.

The quests will function like assignments, but upon completion of each quest
the students will earn experience points (XP) and they will unlock a new item, often a
new tool or resources. These are the new actants students can enroll to strengthen their
reading networks and with which students can explore texts individually and in groups.
Each quest will contain a goal, with an explanation as to why the goal matters to the
overall mission, where to go for the quest items (which can be virtual or physical), step-
by-step instructions to accomplish the quest, proof of completion and the reward. For
instance, the first quest will look something like this:

Deciding Your Fate: In order to fulfill your mission to become the most proficient
in your class, you must learn more about the worlds available to you. While each of
your choices will teach you much about the ways of the world, do not underestimate
the challenges that await you in all of them. You must be thoroughly informed and
ready to embark with your team when we meet again. Go to our class website and
read the descriptions about each world and decide which you want to explore. Then
read about the roles, and thinking about your strengths and weaknesses, decide
which you would be best suited for. Rank your preferences for each in order from 1-
3 and bring this back to your instructor. You will receive further instructions upon
your arrival. Reward: 10 XP, Group Membership, Character Sheet.

The quests are designed to encourage work with texts, and they also take the focus off of the kind of school-based reading students often said they preferred not to engage in. Each quest thoroughly explains each assignment. From the first quest, students will follow a chain of quests with each one getting progressively more complicated and making use of rewards opened up in previous quests. A sample quest line can be seen in Appendix D.

In addition to quests, students will be able to earn achievement points upon completion of a variety of achievements. These points, along with XP, will inform students’ grades over the course of the semester. The list of achievements will be long and will allow students to be co-creators and active participants in the classroom space, as they can choose which achievements they want to complete and in what order. Because reading for school often feels forced or limited for students, often because they are led to believe that reading should be done in a specific way, the achievement system is designed to allow for them to decide how they will approach reading. It allows students access to information “at the appropriate level, often 'just in time' and 'on demand,' or in other words, when they decide they need it” (Gee 158). Furthermore, implicit in this system is the idea that students will decide what their reading goals are for the class and the achievements will help them accomplish those goals. The achievement system is also designed to provide students with a kind of immediate feedback (something Gee, Salen and McGonigal agree is imperative), as they receive points upon completion of a task. Achievements might look something like this:

Complete character sheet - 5 AP

Bring Text to Class - 5AP, with writing on it +5 AP
Check out a book from the library - 10 AP
Use Interlibrary Loan - 20 AP
Start Twitter account - 10 AP
Start Storify account - 10 AP
Use resources earned here in another class - 20 AP

The achievement system is highly customizable, depending on the needs and goals of the class. There can also be some achievements related to genre exploration, for example “collecting 5 pieces from varying genres related to a reading, worth 50 AP,” and then “writing an explanation of how they connect” could add another 50 AP. It would be great to then coincide these achievements with some work in the class. For instance, there could be some deeper work with genre analysis during the semester, including some written work. Additionally, students should be asked to keep a reading journal that asks them to reflect on the kinds of reading they do both in and out of class, including an analysis of the practices employed in reading each text. The reading journal would encourage students to read everything, to read it often, and to think metacognitively about their reading processes. I can imagine that if it is done well, the reading journal would help students to explore what reading really means to them in a personal way and would give them a space to explore their personal reading practices in a way that has value within school. To ensure this, every entry would earn them achievement points and this should be the only achievement that is not optional.

The game will eventually end with the creation of a map through their realm. What this will ultimately look like will depend upon the needs of each person’s project and texts. The quest will be to create a map that allows a newcomer to the world a kind of
walkthrough to understanding the ideas, conversations, places and people of interest related to the topic. This quest will be the last of the reading quests, so the reward upon completion will be access to multimodality (Prezi, Infographics, iMovie, etc) for writing their inquiry papers. I also plan to create a mini game, perhaps trivia based, for the division of new resources to create the maps. This quest will take several days to put together and my intention with this is to get students thinking and mapping out the ways in which the texts they have encountered speak to each other. It also serves as a kind of collaborative concept map, which, as a reminder, is a way to group sources together by concept, allowing readers to trace specific conversations happening in a field of study by overlapping concepts present in texts. These concept maps also help generate search terms for future research, identify holes or gaps in the information the student has already compiled, and helps students to begin thinking about a logical progression of their concepts in a future written draft.

Reflection

Now that a draft of this game has been created, I must stop and ask myself if it meets each of the standards of good games, as previously mentioned. Let’s take them one by one.

Does the game have a goal? Good question, and actually quite important when we remember that students are more motivated to read when they have a well-articulated purpose (Moje et al. 146). While there is an overall goal in earning XP and AP for a grade, and each quest has a small goal, these are not the most compelling goals for students. Additionally, at this phase and given this design, students are not given
problems to solve, which McGonigal, Salen and Gee all argue is a critical component to motivating people to play games. This is something that could easily be added in through the addition of a storyline and then connecting the themes of the realms directly to that storyline. Another way this could be handled is by providing students with the opportunity to create a public piece of writing, or even an anthology of texts (perhaps a Wiki) that helps to address problems they have identified within their realm.

Does the game have rules? Yes, while there will not be restrictions on how someone reads or even what they read, each quest will provide students with guidelines to follow that will hopefully serve to create tension by imposing constraints upon the player. Constraints are important because as Gee reminds us students need them to function as "guidance as to what are good choices, decisions, or problem solutions" and to encourage students to find their own paths to the goals of the course (79).

Is participation voluntary? No, unfortunately this is not really a possibility in the classroom. As I mentioned above though, this is the reason for the achievement system. Students may not be able to opt out, but they can decide how they navigate their way through the course and ultimately how they participate in that space. This is in the spirit of McGonigal’s assertion that participation is about “knowingly and willingly accept[ing] the goal, the rules and the feedback” (21).

What about an immediate feedback system? According to McGonigal a feedback system often looks like "points, levels, score, or a progress bar. Or in its most basic form, the feedback system can be as simple as the players' knowledge of the objective outcome" (21). The achievement point system built into the game will function as a way for students to monitor their progress in the course without tests or grades
applied to how they read. Also, this system will discourage them from thinking of themselves as good or bad readers and instead as simply participants in an activity. It will be up to them to track their points so that they are always aware of where they are relative to their goals.

Other Options

Of course, not everyone is interested in gaming, nor do they want to create an entire syllabus that revolves around playing a game. For these individuals, there are other ways to experiment with and embed gaming principles into the classroom. Instructors should feel free to incorporate any of the components of good games into their entire syllabus, assignment design, one activity, or even assessment practices, but it certainly does not require a complete overhaul or the full implementation of video gaming systems in the classroom. All that is required to incorporate these ideas is an openness to playful work with texts and a desire to support students in doing that work. Playful work simply means that we invite students into a space where we play to learn, play to read, and read in playful ways.

Playing a game may not make students better readers, but thinking about reading and gaming will frame reading in a way that supports the work we are asking students to do with texts in college, specifically with regard to finding and making connections. It is my understanding that more playful reading work will also ease some of the fears and doubts students come to the university with surrounding reading, which impede their success. Even if instructors choose to incorporate just some of these gaming principles into classroom work with texts to support the development of strong reading
networks, students would benefit tremendously. When we think of reading as something like game play, as something we can do without expectations or concern over the right or wrong ways to do it, we begin to shed some of those reading restrictions. It is only when this happens that we overcome obstacles, as connections begin to unfold and networks reveal themselves.
WORKS CITED


Salen, Katie. "Quest to Learn: Rethinking the Design of Teaching and Learning." Speech.


Elliott - Interview Protocol and Questions to guide Classroom Discussions
The purpose of these questions was to inquire about students’ attitudes and perceptions of reading. Some of these questions were used to guide discussions between mentors and groups of students, while others were used as inspiration for having a discussion in pairs.

Why do we read?
What is the difference between reading for school and reading for pleasure? How do you approach each kind of reading? What techniques do you use?
How do you keep track of the information you have read?
What does it mean to read a text?
What is a text? Can you read things like movies, videos, songs, lectures? If so, how?
What kinds of resources do you use to help you understand and analyze a reading? Do you talk about things you read? With who?
What communities do you belong to and what kinds of things do they read? How do they read?
How was reading assigned and talked about in your previous school experience? Was reading valued by your peers?
Who are you as a reader?
What kinds reading do you expect to do in college?
Where do you usually acquire your reading material?
In-Class Assignment
Individual Reading Analysis (To be given to students prior to any group meetings that will discuss the readings, in order to understand how students work with texts individually):

1. Begin by providing a brief description of the source, including an overview of the argument(s) made by the author. Consider the following questions: What is the author trying to do? What is their project? Who does their audience seem to be? How does the author present their information? What are the claim(s) they are making? What kind of evidence do they cite?

2. Reflect on the source, considering the following questions: Does the source seem credible? Is the author persuasive? Why or why not? What kinds of questions arise for you after reading this source? Can you make any connections to other sources? In other words, does this text remind you of another text you may have read, a movie, a song, an idea you heard somewhere, or maybe even a person? If so, explain how they relate?

3. Detail your own approach to reading this text. First, think about the reading processes you used. Did you read this source on a computer, or print it out? Did you write on it or take notes at all? What were some of the techniques you used to accomplish the reading? Next, consider how you came to understand the content of the source. Where there any parts of the text you found particularly interesting? If so, why? What did you find to be difficult in the reading of this text? Why? Did you use any resources to help you understand or make meaning of the ideas in the text?

Post-meeting and conversation analysis/Reflection on reading memo (Will be given to students near the end of the session as a way to see how their analysis of the text changed after researching and talking with their peers):

1. Briefly summarize the source(s) in your own words. Then consider the following questions: What is the author trying to do? What is their project? Who does their audience seem to be? How does the author present their information? What are the claim(s) they are making? What kind of evidence do they cite?

2. Thinking about all of our writing, conversations and research, read over your initial analysis of the source(s). Comparing your earlier reading of the source to the one you just composed, please respond carefully to the following questions:
How has your understanding of the source(s) changed over the course of our session together? In what ways is reading a text individually different from reading with a class? Did you notice a difference in your level of engagement with the text in either situation? Which approach do you think contributes more to learning and retaining the information in a text? Why?

3. Were there places in the text that were difficult for you to read initially? If so, how did you go about making sense of those sections? What kinds of sources did you rely on to help you make meaning of the information being presented to you? Why did you use those sources? If you wanted to continue researching this area of interest, where would you look for more information?

4. Which reading practices (i.e. annotating, note-taking, summarizing, researching, comparing sources, etc) do you find to be the most helpful for your own reading? Why?
Human Subjects Consent Form For “Networked Reading”

My name is Jennifer Elliott and I am a student in the English Program at CSU, Chico.
I would like you to allow me to use your data in the research I am conducting on reading.
The objective of this study is to understand how students draw upon various resources in
order to read and understand a text, and to develop some techniques to support students in
reading texts. Specifically, I want to look at how students, when reading a text, make
connections to other texts, both academic and popular, to experiences, to people and to
the world inside and outside of the classroom.
If you agree, I will analyze my field notes and any writing done by you during the
summer 2013 EOP Summer Bridge session.
The risks of the research are that you might find some of your documented behavior
embarrassing or you may be uncomfortable sharing your written work. I will take care to
minimize these risks.
There is no substantial benefit to you from the research. I hope that the research will
benefit teachers by increasing our understanding of teaching practices related to teaching
reading.
All of the information that I obtain from surveys, my field notes, and your writing will be
kept confidential. I will store all writing, and my notes about it on a password-protected
laptop. I will use a pseudonym to identify your writing and my notes about it. I will keep
your name and its pseudonym in a separate locked cabinet. I will not use your name or
identifying information in any presentations or published findings of my research.
Your participation in this research is voluntary. You are free to refuse to permit me to keep the record of your participation. Whether or not you permit me to use your data will be kept confidential and will have no bearing on your standing in relation to the English Program or EOP Summer Bridge.

If you have any questions about the research, you may email me, Jennifer Elliott, at jlelliott@csuchico.edu. You may keep the other copy of this form for future reference.
Sample Quest Chain

Day 1 - Make!
On the first day, students will get into groups of 5. Each group will be given a box of materials and asked to create something. There will be some instructions, some of which will be visual and others textual. They will have to figure out what they are going to make once they come to understand their instructions. The contents of the makes will be related somehow to the realms. Reward will be the opening of Quest 1.

Quest 1
To be completed by all students for day 2.
Read about each realm and role description, decide which they want to play and rank in order from 1-3.
Reward: XP, Party membership, Character Sheet.

Before beginning quest 2, students will get into groups depending on which realm they want to explore and will have some time to get to know each other...

Quest 2 - Into a Brave New World
Students/Players will decide upon their role and fill out character sheets.
Reward: Access to realm will be opened, New Tool: iPad

Here the students will receive access to texts and the next quest in the chain will open.

Quest 3 - Raiding the Archives
Retrieve texts and bring copies to class. The mission with the texts on this day will be: As a group choose 1 of the 3 articles to read, either together or individually. After reading it only once through, work together to decide what the most important parts of this text are and explain why.
Reward: XP, New Ability: writing on the text

Quest 4 - Making your mark
Choose the next text to read as a group. Bring it back marked up.
Reward: XP, Access to Google Drive

Here instructor will introduce reading logs, which are to be kept on Google drive.
Entries will earn players AP.

Quest 5 - What does the Bird Say?
Based on readings so far, begin compiling a list of key terms in Google drive.
Reward: XP, New Resource: Twitter
Quest 6 - Consulting the Council
Using some of the search terms, begin looking at what others are saying about similar ideas online. Follow relevant people/Twitter pages, tweet about them.
Reward: TBD

Quest 7 - Finding your Path
Read the final reading, mark up the text and generate a list of keywords. Think about how these keywords are similar or different from those of other readings.
Reward: Access to TED talks, XP

Quest 8 - Battle of Wits
Defeat the other team in your realm in a keyword/clue game over texts. Winners will earn additional AP; everyone will earn the ability to find their own sources to add to their realm.

Quest 9 - Sharing is Caring
After students have chosen their own text, they will try to convince their group to adopt their reading into the realm. Each group will choose 2 new readings to add. They will have to explain why/how it speaks to the other authors already read.
Reward: XP and TBD

Quest 10 - A Gathering of Minds
Group annotating 2 texts: one in Google drive, one with pen and paper
Reward: New tool-Storify, XP

Quest 11 - Storify Time!
Using everything you have read and collected, create a storify as a team.
Reward: XP and Blog access

Quest 12 - Atlas Composed
Create a map to guide a newcomer through your realm.
Reward: XP, Multimodality