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Published online: 17 Feb 2016.

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Building better bridges: Understanding academic text readiness at one community college

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ABSTRACT

The multipronged study described in this manuscript was designed to determine the implicit definition of college-text ready at one community college. The impetus for this study is a need to fully understand what it means to be college-text ready based on the literacy demands, practices, and expectations in introductory-level (or entry-level) general-education courses. Only with this deeper understanding of college-text readiness can college reading professionals begin to design effective literacy interventions to help students who may not be considered college-text ready. Thus, another major goal of this study is to provide information on whether, how, and to what extent, current developmental reading courses are adequately preparing students for the reading expectations of the introductory-level courses that follow. Three component investigations were conducted: one on the text practices and expectations as observed, one on the faculty perspectives, and one on the student perspectives. Data sources included text analyses, classroom observations, faculty surveys and focus groups, and student surveys and focus groups. Findings included a mismatch between developmental reading and general-education courses in terms of the text types and difficulty levels, the purpose for the text, and the text-associated tasks and learning foci. Another major finding was that general-education faculty in this study do not provide explicit instruction on text-navigation. Instead faculty tend to use text-alternatives to deliver content. Finally, in response to the original driving question, the findings of this study suggested that there is not any widely accepted definition of college-text ready at this institution.

Issues related to college and career readiness have been at the forefront of several major educational reform efforts. Indeed, the Common Core State Standards Initiative (CCSSI) exemplifies these issues, especially as the goal of the CCSSI has been to clarify standards beginning with what is considered college and career ready and then systematically backward-benchmark each educational grade level through kindergarten (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2010; Holschuh, 2014). At the forefront throughout the standards are the constructs of academic literacy development and proficiency with a goal of having students exit high school ready for the literacy expectations of the workplace or placement directly into college-level courses. What complicates this goal, however, is that no universally accepted definition of college-text ready has been put forth (and there is much debate, presently, as to whether a single definition is appropriate) (National Center on Education and the Economy [NCEE], 2013). Thus, it is critical that institutions of higher education begin to initiate such explorations of text-readiness. This report details a study that directly addressed this need by seeking to answer the broad question "What are the local constructs and demands of college reading in the introductory-level general-education courses?"

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Literature review

Certainly there has been prior published work on the topic of literacy demands and expectations at the college level, though much of it is of a historical context that suggests more of where we were an academic generation ago (e.g., Burrell, Tao, Simpson, & Mendez-Berrueta, 1997; Carson, Chase, Gibson, & Hargrove, 1992; Chase, Gibson, & Carson, 1994; Maaka & Ward, 2000; Orlando, Caverly, Swetnam, & Flippo, 1989; Richardson, Fisk, & Okun, 1983; Richardson, Martens, Fisk, Okun, & Thomas, 1982; Sartain et al., 1982; Stahl, 1982). The majority of this prior work has focused on faculty reports of what is assigned and what students can and cannot do. Some prior research has focused more on the specific types of reading and writing demands at the college level. For instance, Richardson et al. (1983) in their study (see also Richardson et al., 1982) found little evidence of extensive reading and writing demands and even less evidence of critical literacy expectations in one community college.

More recently, the National Center on Education and the Economy (NCEE) released a report (2013) on what it means to be college ready in community college settings. Through a study of the literacy expectations in eight of the most commonly pursued program areas across seven community colleges, the investigators found, similar to the work of Richardson et al. (1982, 1983) that "the reading and writing currently required of students in the initial credit-bearing courses in community colleges is not very complex or cognitively demanding" (p. 2). More specifically, the report details the reading complexity of the texts used (typically 11th-12th grade readability estimates) and the observation that the high failure rates in most of the observed courses provides an indication that students were not prepared to handle even texts with precollege grade level estimates. Also, the authors observed that "instructors typically make limited use of the texts they assign and use many aids (e.g., PowerPoint presentations, videos, outlines, flashcards) to help students" (p. 2) or what the report's authors referred to as "workarounds" (p. 3).

Additionally, a recent doctoral thesis focused on students transitioning from developmental education toward college completion (Maggs, 2011). The study examined students' academic self-perceptions and compared those to faculty perceptions of students' academic preparation. The NCEE (2013) and Maggs (2011) studies aside, the bulk of the work related to text expectations at the college level is primarily of historical value and limited to reports of what students could and could not do at the time. For this reason, this study sought to provide current insights into what constitutes college-text ready.

Study overview

This study was undertaken at Southside Community College (SCC, a pseudonym), a large college that serves more than 35,000 students and is situated in the suburbs of a major metropolitan area in the Midwest. The purpose of this study was to determine the implicit definition of college-text ready at this institution. It does this by focusing on literacy practices primarily considered to fall under the purview of the reading act (i.e., reading study strategies, active and strategic learning, etc.). The study was driven by the following overarching questions:

(1) What are the text-expectations including text types, tasks, and goals?
   • In developmental reading (DR) courses?
   • In general-education (GE) courses?
(2) How do these text-expectations align?
(3) What constitute college-level text-readiness at Southside Community College ?

These guiding questions were rather broad in scope because this research was intended to provide insights on the overall state of reading at SCC. In attempts to provide a richer explanation of the culture of academic-text readiness across departments and programs at this institution, three

component investigations were conducted: one on the text practices and expectations as observed, one on the faculty perspectives, and one on the student perspectives (for a more detailed report of the study, please see Armstrong, Stahl, & Kantner, 2015a, 2015b).

Investigation 1: Text practices and expectations

The purpose of the first investigation was to gather information on the text expectations and typical text practices in a range of general-education and developmental reading courses intended to be representative of the courses most often populated by first-year college students at this community college. Data for the first investigation were collected from two sources, each described in turn below: a series of text analyses, and classroom observations to determine text usage and expectations.

Text analyses

The text analysis portion of this investigation as presented in this report covered a total of 18 required course texts across 11 different courses across multiple disciplines (Also, in two of the courses—Sociology 101 and Speech 101—different texts were used in two different sections; both were included here). The procedure was consistent across all texts and courses, as will be described in the sections that follow. All of the indices described below use character/syllable-level, word-level, and sentence-level aspects (usually syllables per word and words per sentence) in a mathematical equation that provides a grade-equivalency estimate of a text's readability. Generally speaking, the assumption underlying these indices is that words with fewer syllables as well as sentences with fewer words are more readable, so a reader at a lower grade level would be able to comprehend. It is well-documented, of course, that readability analyses are not without inherent faults (Benjamin, 2012; Goldman & Wiley, 2011). However, because these formulae continue to be used by reading professionals and researchers across educational levels, we included them in this study.

Text-analyses procedures

Rather than applying a single analysis formula or instrument to this part of the investigation, several well-established readability measures were employed: a text-type categorization, multiple traditional readability indices, a Lexile text-measurement analysis, and a Friendly Text Evaluation. Each of these various analyses and the results will be briefly described in the sections that follow.

Text-type categorization. To begin, a holistic analysis was done to determine the general types of texts being used across different instructional areas and disciplines. Four overall categories of text types were identified through this informal analysis: traditional textbooks (T), trade books (TB), workbooks (W), and novels (N). For the developmental reading texts, there were two types: novels and workbook-style practice texts. These types are distinctly different from the more traditional textbook and trade book types represented across the introductory-level GE courses.

Traditional-readability analysis. To ready the texts for the remaining analyses, we sampled four full-page selections at quarterly intervals throughout each book (i.e., first full page, one page at one quarter of the book's length, one page at one half of the book's length, and one page at three quarters of the book's length). Next, we used the text-readability scoring program available at http://www.readability-score.com/ to run the following standard and traditional readability indices for each sample: Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level; Gunning-Fog Index; Coleman-Liau Index; SMOG Index; Automated Readability Index; and Average Grade Level estimate (the scoring program averages the scores for the previous five indices in order to provide an average estimate of grade level). In general, for the DR texts the means of the individual sample grade estimates were more frequently estimated well below a 12th grade level); mean Average Grade Level (AGL) scores ranged from a low score of 6.3 to a high score of 9.5. For the GE texts, means of the individual sample scores were more

frequently estimated at or above a 12th grade level. Mean AGL scores ranged from a low score of 9.1 to a high score of 13.5.

Lexile text-measure analysis. The same four samples (for each text) used in the traditional readability analyses were used in the Lexile text-measure analysis; each page sample was analyzed through the Lexile Text-Measure Analyzer available at http://www.lexile.com/analyzer/. The Lexile text-measure results for DR course text samples ranged considerably from a low of 762.5 L to a high of 1030 L. The mean Lexile text-measure results for GE course text samples ranged from a low of 1012.5 L to a high of 1390 L.

Friendly-Text Evaluations. In order to provide a nonquantitative measure of readability, and to ensure that text content, structure, and style were being considered as well as the more quantitative and linguistic aspects that are addressed in the readability indices, a Friendly-Text Evaluation (Dreher & Singer, 1989; Singer, 1992) was completed independently for each text by two reviewers. Following in-depth examinations and discussions to reduce any disparities where differences between the raters totaled 10 or more points, interrater reliability was found to be Kappa = .89.

Friendly-Text Evaluation results are reported as scores, with scores closer to 34 indicating that the text is friendly and scores closer to 170 suggesting that the text is unfriendly. Using the mean scores across both reviewers, the DR texts scored well above the midrange on the 34–170 scale with 98, 86.5, and 96 for the texts analyzed. The GE course texts more frequently scored closer to the midrange on the Friendly-Text Evaluation scale, with a handful of outliers (84, 92, 95.5, and 101).

Text-analyses discussion

The results of the various text analyses provided several important insights about the DR course texts, the GE course texts, and the patterns and deviations between the two groups. In this section, we begin by discussing the important findings from analyses of the DR course texts as well as the GE course texts; then, we consider findings from our examinations across the two groups.

DR-course texts. As reported above, the six DR-course texts were all categorized as either a novel or a workbook-style practice text, with none of the texts resembling anything like a traditional textbook. Although the workbooks did contain short excerpts (ranging from 75 to 1000 words) of text from varied content areas, they were mostly comprised of practice exercises. Similarly, all novels in the DR grouping were fictional, narrative novels, which were distinctly different from the more traditional textbook and trade book types represented in the introductory-level GE course texts.

The readability scores for the DR-text samples ranged widely; however, very few of these scores were at or above a 12th grade estimate, even though such a readability would likely be the expected level by the end of the final semester in DR, as this is the final stop before college-level coursework at this institution. In fact, the mean AGL estimate across the six DR texts was 7.683 (range: 6.395–9.55). These AGL scores suggested that the DR texts currently in use at this institution for ENG 080 and ENG 081 have readability estimates closer to the upper ranges of middle school and the lower ranges of high school. This was confirmed through the mean Lexile text-measure results, which ranged from a low of 762.5 L to a high of 1030 L.

The range in scores, for Lexile text measures as well as readability indices, was discovered to be dependent upon the content of the page sampled. Specifically, the content and format of these texts ranged from a workbook page to an explanation of concepts or practices to an excerpt from another textbook. Upon closer examination, it was determined that the higher scores for these individual page samples tended to be linked to pages that included content excerpted from other sources. Similarly, and not surprisingly, page samples with lower scores tended to be linked to more workbook-style content (fill-in-the-blank questions, etc.). As part of the Friendly-Text Evaluation, we noted that, indeed, these texts were very much written in a workbook-style manner. We suspect that this may have been a factor in why the DR texts scored well above the midrange on the Friendly-Text

Evaluation, indicating that they were more unfriendly than friendly. Another issue is that the excerpts and passages included in the DR texts from various content areas lack the necessary context of the whole text from which they are pulled. For this reason, it is very likely that, although readability is high, comprehensibility may be quite low. Indeed, our hunch is that such decontextualized excerpting allows for literal-level responses only, and prompts little, if any, engagement in critical reading and thinking processes.

GE-course texts. As mentioned previously, all but one of the GE-course texts were identified through the text-type categorization as being traditional textbooks; the one exception was a trade book. This was a striking contrast from the text types being used in the DR courses intended to prepare students for GE reading expectations. As well, for the GE-course texts, the individual page sample readability scores were more frequently estimated at or above a 12th grade level than were the DR texts (42% of GE-course text samples vs. 10% of DR samples). Given that all GE courses included in this investigation were introductory college-level, readability estimates of at least more than a 12th grade are to be expected. The majority of the AGL scores were at an 11th grade level estimate or above, corresponding directly with the majority of Lexile text measures, which were at 1100 L or above. In fact, the bulk of the GE-course text individual page samples (17/24 or 71%) scored at or above an 11th grade reading level (rather than the 12th grade or above reading level). Finally, through the Friendly-Text Evaluation process, we noted that the GE-course texts tended to score closer to the midrange, suggesting that even though they are not markedly friendly, they are more friendly than the DR-course texts.

Findings across both groups. Through these separate analyses, as well as our comparative analyses across groups, one key finding has emerged: texts, in terms of type, readability, and friendliness, were vastly different in DR courses and GE courses. In addition to differences in text type, GE-course text samples scored at higher reading levels on both the readability indices as well as the Lexile text measures more frequently than did the DR course texts. Although some difference in readability estimates is to be expected between developmental-level courses and introductory-level ones, the differences between the two groups' scores does not seem indicative of a scaffolded curricular progression with students experiencing purposeful levels of text difficulty en route to their GE courses. Interestingly, none of the texts considered in this study was considered particularly unfriendly as a result of the Friendly-Text Evaluation. However, the content and style of many of the DR-course texts was predominately workbook-like material. Given that the GE-course texts did not include such material, but rather far more dense expository and informational text, here again it does not appear that the texts chosen for the DR courses were useful for scaffolding students toward the types of text expectations they will experience at the next level of coursework.

Classroom observations

The second data source for the first investigation was classroom observations. Again, the larger purpose for this investigation was to gather information on the text expectations and practices in a range of first-year GE and DR courses. For this and all aspects of this study, approval was granted by the researchers' institution human subjects board.

Classroom observation procedure

A sampling of 13 face-to-face classes was observed for this portion of the investigation. Although we attempted to observe a sampling of all courses represented in other aspects of the overall study, entrée for observations was restricted by instructor consent for access. A total of two DR courses (highest level) and 11 GE courses (sections of Psychology 101, Sociology 101, Economics 103, Philosophy 103, English 101, Biology 151, Math 128, Speech 101 courses) were observed once in order to gather information on text usage in a typical class period. It is important to note that the

purpose of the classroom observations was to investigate text usage, not pedagogical approach or evaluate curriculum; thus we report here only on our observations of instructor and student text usage.

Observation instrument. An observation instrument designed for this project was piloted for these observations (this instrument is available in Armstrong, Stahl, & Kantner, 2015b). The Text Usage Classroom Observation Checklist allowed observers to gather information on whether texts were being referenced, explained, or incorporated during a class session. Development of similar observation instruments was detailed in prior research investigating the literacy environments of elementary classrooms (Hoffman, Sailors, Duffy, & Beretvas, 2004; Smith, Dickinson, Sangeorge, & Anastasopoulos, 2002; Wolfersberger, Reutzel, Sudweeks, & Fawson, 2004); however, the development of such instruments for use in assessing the literacy environments of postsecondary classrooms has not been well-documented.

The checklist instrument allowed for an overall tally of whether a number of text-based activities occurred within the classroom context, and, if so, who initiated them (instructor or students). More specifically, the instrument allowed for recording the absolute use (yes or no) as well as the frequency of use of a variety of instructor-initiated text activities including whether the instructor's copy of the text was visible, displayed for students, and directly referenced; whether text organization or structure was mentioned, explained, or a strategy for navigating the structure was provided; whether the class discussions and homework appeared to be more skills-based or text-based; and whether multiple texts or multimodal texts were incorporated in the course readings. Similarly, the instrument allowed for recording the absolute use and frequency of student-initiated references to or student-initiated display of the course text for others. Beyond these tallies, the instrument provided space for comments for each item as well as any relevant observations of text-based activities beyond those accounted for in the instrument.

Following each observation, the Text Usage Classroom Observation Checklist was reviewed and checked for consistency with the observer's field notes. As well, when a syllabus for the respective course was provided by the instructor (10 out of 13 courses), we also reviewed the syllabus looking for evidence of text usage and referencing. Finally, all Text Usage Classroom Observation Checklists were tallied as a group with the goal of identifying any patterns and themes.

Classroom observation results

Based on a tally and analysis of data from the Text Usage Classroom Observation Checklist for 13 classroom observations, a range of text usage was identified across classes. First, related to text-visibility issues, an instructor's copy of the text was visible from the vantage point of the observer in nine of the 13 observed classes. Regarding text referencing, 11 of the 13 instructors observed made some direct reference to the text in class. These text references ranged from general, passing references to topics or sections covered in the text, to reminders of upcoming reading assignments, to more specific and direct references to particular chapters, pages, or graphics. In all cases, however, instructor-initiated text references were focused exclusively on content material that paralleled what was typically text-based discussions or lectures (in seven of 13 classes observed). Usually, these were questions that arose in class lecture/discussion that linked back to something students were to have read. No explicit discussions of text organization or structure were observed, and in only one case was a strategy for reading/studying the course text mentioned.

Beyond-the-text supports and resources were identified during several classroom observations. For example, in six classes, the instructor made reference to accompanying lecture notes, study guides, transparency masters, PowerPoints, and videos made available to students. In a few cases, these resources were uploaded in advance of class time onto the SCC online course management system. For the most part, these resources were publisher-generated, chapter-specific materials that followed the chapter structure and headings directly; however, in the math course, for example, an instructor-created summary of a particular chapter was provided in class.

In terms of students' use of text within the classroom, it was mixed both across classes and within each class. In some classes, no students appeared to have texts with them (or at least their texts were not used or visible from the observer's vantage point). In other classes, some students had texts out, but never opened them, and other students made use of their open texts throughout the class session. Only one instance of a student-initiated text reference was observed in all 13 classroom observations.

In only one case (a philosophy class) was an instructor observed to prompt students at the beginning of the session to have their books out during class because "I will be making several references to it." However, interestingly, whenever class discussion/lecture paralleled or was driven by the text organization, students were more likely to follow along in their texts without prompting. For instance, in the biology class, the discussion was structured by what appeared to be publisher-generated PowerPoint slides of questions and terminology taken directly from the text. Students were observed flipping through the text to the corresponding section/chapter as the PowerPoint slides were advanced.

Classroom observation discussion

In summary, the results of these classroom observations suggest that there is a wide range of text usage practices in the 13 DR and GE courses observed. Although it is not possible to generalize based on such small groupings, it should be acknowledged that far more instructor-initiated text references were made in the two DR courses than in the 11 GE courses. As well, in the two DR courses, class discussion and lecture tended to be more consistently text-driven.

Beyond the DR courses, though, explicit instruction on the text (i.e., discussion about how to use the text, or instruction on a strategy for reading the text) was not typical. Indeed, the most common usage of text was to support discussion of specific content. In most classes, it was clear that texts were included to support and prepare students for the content of the lecture/discussion.

Interestingly, students seemed to recognize and follow easily the text-based discussions/lectures including the additional resources that appeared to be publisher-generated materials. However, both observers noted that whenever students were provided with such supplementary materials, any highlighting or annotations were made on those materials, not in their course texts. In fact, although it was not an entry on the Text Usage Classroom Observation Checklist, both observers tried to make note, whenever possible, of the condition of students' texts in terms of whether they had been annotated or marked up—very few instances were noted where this was observed. Of course, the absence of such could either be a result of students' nonengagement with text or an attempt to keep texts clean for eventual sell-back to the campus bookstore.

Investigation 2: Faculty perspectives

The purpose of the second investigation was to begin to answer the first and third research questions (What are the text-expectations including text types, tasks, and goals? and What constitutes college-level text-readiness at Southside Community College?) from the perspective of the faculty teaching courses frequently taken by beginning college students that were the focus of this study. Data for this investigation were collected from two sources, both described in turn below: an electronic survey and focus groups.

Faculty survey

For the faculty survey portion of the project, a Survey Monkey link was sent out via e-mail to all full-time faculty at SCC. A total of 130 full-time faculty members representing at least 16 different departments responded to the survey. At the time the survey was distributed, Southside Community College employed 211 full-time faculty, indicating about a 62% response rate.

Faculty survey procedure

Survey data were gathered through a revised and updated version of Michelle Simpson's Academic Literacy Questionnaire (see Simpson, 1996, for example), which was adapted for online use through Survey Monkey. Respondents were asked to identify one introductory-level GE or DR course with an explicit reading load that they regularly taught. The remaining 23 survey items then prompted respondents to use the identified course to respond to questions on text usage, reading expectations, course assignments, assessment practices and the relationship to text assignments, course lectures and the relationship to text assignments, and faculty perceptions of students' reading abilities and associated attitudes on reading.

Most of the questions were of a multiple-choice design, with some including an "other—please explain" option. For the analysis of the responses to these questions, basic descriptive statistics, including frequency counts and percentages of respondents selecting particular options, were generated (please see Armstrong et al., 2015b for a fuller examination of these data). There was also one open-ended question; for this analysis, open coding (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) was utilized in the following manner: first, each investigator analyzed the survey responses individually at least twice to identify macrolevel themes. Once patterns were identified, axial coding was employed to make connections across and among the macrolevel themes and subsequently collapse similar themes.

Faculty survey results

What follows are the key results from the survey, organized thematically into three broad categories: text expectations and practices, student challenges, and developmental reading preparation.

Text expectations and practices. We first asked respondents to provide information on the number and types of texts used in their target course. The majority of faculty respondents (68.4%) indicated that the primary source required in their courses was a single textbook, though many respondents also indicated that they relied on sources found on the Internet (46.2%) as well as their own lecture notes (51.3%) as required readings. Few faculty respondents (5.1%) made use of trade books.

In order to gather information on expectations related to students' reading, the next question asked respondents to specify when students were expected to do the required reading: in advance of class sessions (57.5%), after class sessions (6.2%), or both before and after class sessions (36.3%). Next, we asked for information regarding how much reading faculty expected of students. The responses ranged widely, but 28.7% of faculty responded that they expected students to read 25 or more pages per week.

On a related note, we asked respondents to identify how much time they expected students to spend preparing for their target course outside of class time. This could involve reading, studying their notes, or doing other class preparation. In line with standard guidelines, 32.2% of faculty reported that their expectations were between 3 and 4 hours per week of outside preparation. However, some clearly expected more as 27.8% of respondents indicated that they expected between 5 and 6 hours of out-of-class time per week.

The next question asked respondents about their expectations for students' independent comprehension of assigned readings: "I expect students to be able to understand on their own the concepts from the assigned textbook" (116 responses). Of the respondents, 46.6% indicated they "occasionally" expect this of students, with 40.5% indicating "most of the time," and a much smaller percentage (12.9%) indicating "rarely."

The next question asked faculty members about the extent to which text material was incorporated into class lectures: "I explain the vast majority (over 75%) of concepts from the text during my lectures" (115 responses). Here, the majority (87%) indicated that they do this "most of the time," with 7.8% indicating they do this "occasionally," and only 5.2% "rarely." Similarly, the next question aimed to determine whether faculty discussed "the textbook's organization and structure" with students in their class lectures (116 responses). A surprising majority (63.8 %) indicated that they do this, whereas another 28.4% of respondents indicated that they do not.

Student challenges. The next two questions aimed to gather information on faculty perceptions of student challenges with course content mastery. First, respondents were prompted to consider the following: "On the basis of my interactions with students, I would say that the challenges they generally face are (check all that apply)" (116 responses). Next, faculty respondents were asked to identify "Of the above, which three are the most serious and most commonly interfere with students' success in your course?" (114 responses). The most serious student challenge was "Not spending enough time studying outside the class" for 75.4% of respondents.

Developmental-reading preparation. We concluded the survey with an open-ended question: "How can the faculty who teach Developmental Reading better prepare students for your classes?" Sixty-five faculty responded, some in great detail, to this question (other respondents skipped this question). Open and axial coding procedures allowed us to identify nine major themes: text selection, quantity or amount of reading, focus on comprehension, vocabulary instruction, emphasis on writing, curricular alignment, strategy instruction, affective issues, and disciplinary literacy instruction. Further coding allowed us to identify patterns across these nine themes that all indicated a need for preparation in DR for students' next-level courses.

Many responses provided insights or suggestions on what type of readings to assign to students as well as how much reading students should be expected to do in a DR course. Responses included calls for students to read materials more relevant to their next-level courses: "Use actual examples which are in the field of the student's interest," and "What DR students read currently (*Newsweek*, *USA Today*, a novel) in no way prepares them for the kinds of reading they'll need to do in English 101." As well as these calls for different reading, there were general calls for more reading: "Please have them read more" and "They should read more and use a varied amount of text."

And, although the term "disciplinary literacy" (see Shanahan & Shanahan, 2012; Shanahan, Shanahan, & Misischia, 2011, for a description of this approach and concept) was never explicitly stated in the responses, this theme of discipline-specific reading practices shined through in multiple responses. For instance, respondents commented that DR faculty should teach students "how different reading is required in mathematics (as opposed to literature, history, etc.)," and to put more of an "emphasis on the skills necessary to read scientific textbooks." Similarly, several responses requested that the DR faculty reach out to collaborate across campus: "Teachers need to know what actually happens in the transfer-level courses," and get the "advice/suggestion of a colleague in the math department."

In addition to these various calls for attention on the reading practices students would later encounter, there were several focused requests on the topic of institutional standards for college-reading readiness. Some respondents implicitly or explicitly made reference to existing minimum competency policies associated with their identified course: "Students must be qualified for ENG 101 before taking my class," and "My course has an English prerequisite, and it would be most helpful if there would be consistency in the standard of the courses that are required prior to taking my course."

Another grouping of responses that was significant enough to comment on has to do with the respondents who simply did not know enough about the developmental-reading program on their campus to provide a response. Eight respondents provided responses such as "Not sure," "I honestly don't know," and "?" The reason this was possibly significant can be inferred from one response grouped into this category that offered an explanation: "I cannot honestly suggest an idea since I do not know how faculty teach developmental reading." In addition, that only about half of respondents responded to the question could be of interest.

Faculty survey discussion

In summary, these results were indication that, by and large, faculty respondents in this investigation are incorporating text-based learning in their introductory-level GE courses. Students are expected to read and prepare for class lectures and discussions independently, and then the text material—most often this is a single textbook in the GE courses—is discussed in

class. And, although faculty tend toward expectations of between 3 and 6 hours a week of course preparation, they reported not viewing students as having spent enough time preparing. Additionally, related to DR, these results showed that there is a general lack of understanding across the institution about the current DR programming including its purposes, goals, and scope. One often-seen suggestion for DR instructors, for example, was a call for more field-specific texts and literacy instruction; in its current form, this does not appear to be within the scope of the DR curriculum, yet GE faculty are calling for it.

Faculty focus groups

We held semistructured group interviews with faculty teaching the GE and DR courses at SCC. The purpose for the focus groups was to gather data on the faculty's explicit and the tacit academic literacy expectations. Some previous research has used focus groups to collect data on faculty perceptions of students' writing across the disciplines (Brockman, Taylor, Krech, & Crawford, 2011). In line with that research, we structured the focus group sessions so that faculty from similar disciplines, departments, status (full-time/part-time), and typical course type taught (developmental/credit-bearing) were grouped together.

Faculty focus groups procedure

The focus group procedure called for the use of semistructured, audio-recorded group interviews. To provide initial structure for each of the 45–60 minute focus group sessions, we developed a list of 11 general questions to guide the discussions. Additional questions were included based on the responses to the more general questions. The overall purpose of the questionnaire was to gather information on specific text expectations and text-based activities in courses at SCC. Thus, it included questions related to faculty perceptions about students' attitudes toward reading, their reading habits and practices, and their specific strengths and weaknesses related to academic literacy. Also, participants were asked about the extent to which explicit instruction was being provided on the expected discipline-specific literacy practices. The final question prompted participants to consider the efficacy of the existing developmental-reading curricula in preparing students for their courses.

Each investigator analyzed these transcripts individually at least twice using open coding procedures. First, each investigator examined the transcripts separately for broad-level patterns and themes. After comparing initial themes, the investigators analyzed the transcripts again with the purpose of collapsing any overlapping patterns and themes. Following several additional rounds of coding and collapsing codes, six overarching key themes were identified on issues related specifically to developmental reading and student text-readiness at SCC. These themes will be discussed in the following section.

Faculty focus group results

As mentioned above, six key themes were identified after analysis. These themes, along with brief explanations, are as follows:

1. Faculty have specific expectations of what students can and should be able to do with text. In short, faculty across disciplines articulated specific expectations for students' levels of text-readiness upon entering their courses including being able to read and comprehend independently, being able to read texts of a certain complexity level, and being able to draw conclusions from texts.

2. Faculty perceive a wide range of student text-readiness in their courses. Throughout these focus groups, faculty indicated that student text-readiness ranges widely depending on a number of variables including the course itself, students' values of reading, students' maturity level/age, and the quality of high school instruction.

3. Faculty perceive students' attitudes toward reading as being generally negative. One common complaint was that many students do not read course texts as a result of their attitudes toward reading.

4. Faculty make adjustments in their courses based on students' text-readiness and attitudes. These adjustments include a number of strategies including keeping text length short, lecturing in depth to compensate for students not reading, providing notes to allow for a work-around of the text, and including other text alternatives such as podcasts.

5. Faculty perceive specific strengths and weaknesses in students' text-readiness. Most faculty focused on the weaknesses, which included vocabulary, sentence construction, and being able to draw conclusions from text.

6. Faculty have limited knowledge about the DR coursework at SCC.

Below, we will provide further detail on two of the most informative themes that arose, the third and fourth themes listed above.

Faculty perceptions of student attitudes. SCC faculty reported some variation in student attitudes toward reading, as the following exemplar response illustrates: "We get some who absolutely positively love to read; I've had others who comment that they never, in high school, read a complete book at all or ever. And, that's very strange." Overall, the sentiment from the faculty tended to emphasize the notion that students' attitudes toward reading are negative, as the following exemplar response suggests: "They hate it. I mean to be perfectly blunt, I think they resent being asked to read."

One common complaint by faculty members was that many students do not read course texts as a result of their attitudes toward reading. As one example, one participant said, "I actually ask them, "how many people read this chapter?" and they're very honest, you know. Out of, you know, 15 students… […] probably one or two." A few faculty members offered a small amendment to the reason behind the negative attitude and lack of reading activity. One suggestion was that overall workload, including difficulties in juggling academic and nonacademic obligations, might be to blame for students not reading: "I do think they're overwhelmed in addition to family and work and all the items they do in their life." Another suggestion was that "They're so overwhelmed by all that information we're giving them that they don't know how to decipher what is important." Whether information overload, challenges with work-life-school balance, or a negative attitude, it was clear throughout the faculty focus groups that there was a consistent lamentation that students simply do not read the required texts.

Faculty adjustments to accommodate student attitudes. There was a tendency for participants to report making adjustments to their instruction to account for or accommodate for what faculty perceived as students' negative attitudes toward reading. A few representative comments toward this theme are as follows:

- "It's very hard to get them to read the text; therefore, I lecture in depth. I lecture the chapter almost as it's written so that they get the full benefit of the chapter, but for a student that has reading problems to read that text is terrible."
- "If it's a traditional class, they may never open the book. And it's up to them. I leave it up to them. If they can pass the class using only lectures and notes …perfectly fine with me."
- "We are trying to new alternatives to just reading. We're podcasting. So at least if the students listen, and they kind of like that a little bit more."

In short, faculty perceptions of students' attitudes toward reading impacted their instructional approach as it related to text usage. From reducing required text length or complexity, offering text supplements, or, in some cases, offering text alternatives, faculty reported making important changes to their teaching.

Faculty focus-groups discussion

In summary, it was clear across all faculty focus groups, at least as related to the two themes detailed above, that the participants in this investigation perceive students' attitudes toward reading as being

generally negative. One unexpected finding was that faculty reported making adjustments in their courses based on their perceptions of students' text-readiness and attitudes; this particular theme was fairly widespread, crossing all discipline areas.

Investigation 3: Student perspectives

The purpose of the third investigation was to continue to answer the first and third research questions (What are the text expectations including text types, tasks, and goals? and What constitutes college-level text-readiness at Southside Community College?), this time from the perspective of students. Data were collected from two sources—an electronic survey and focus groups—following the protocol outlined for the second investigation.

Student survey

Just as with the faculty survey portion of the project, a Survey Monkey link was sent out via e-mail to all students at SCC, from across all programs and majors. A total of 447 students responded to the survey: 184 part-time students and 259 full-time students. Of the total number of respondents, 184 participants reported being within their first 12 hours at the institution. As well, more than half of the participants (64%) reported not completing any credits at any other institutions. In terms of student goals, most respondents (53%) aimed to earn an associate's degree and transfer to a 4-year institution; 29% aimed to earn only an associate's degree; only 10 of the 447 respondents were taking classes, but not seeking to earn a degree or certificate.

Student survey procedure

Data were gathered electronically through a revised, updated, and tailored version of Michelle Simpson's Academic Literacy Questionnaire (see Simpson, 1996, for example). Respondents were asked to identify one introductory-level general-education course in which they were currently enrolled. The remaining 20 survey items then prompted respondents to use the identified course to respond to questions related to the reading expectations within that target course including amount and frequency of required reading, text type, and associated text-based tasks. As well, a group of questions prompted students to provide information on the instructional approach, to include the extent to which the instructor taught about text organization and structure, and taught specific strategies that represented expert reading approaches within that discipline. The analysis and coding procedures followed the same procedures as previously described for the faculty survey data.

Most of the items were of a multiple choice design, with some including an "other—please explain" option. Analysis of the responses to these questions, via the use of SPSS, included basic descriptive statistics including frequency counts and percentages of response categories. In addition, there were two open-ended questions for any students currently or previously enrolled in developmental reading. For these two questions, open coding procedures were applied in order to identify patterns or themes (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Once patterns were identified, axial coding was employed to collapse similar themes.

Student survey results

What follows are the results from the survey, organized thematically into key categories: student understandings of faculty text expectations, student perceptions of text-based instruction, and for a much smaller subgroup of student-respondents, perceptions of their developmental-reading preparation.

Student understandings of faculty text expectations and practices. We first asked respondents to provide information on the number and types of texts used in their selected target course. Of the respondents, 49.4% indicated that the primary source required in their courses was a single textbook.

Respondents indicated that professor-designed sources were also used; among the largest categories were the following: professor text/lecture notes (31.5%), professor PowerPoints (34%), and professor study guides (19%). Some student respondents (31%) indicated that their focal course utilized multiple texts.

In order to gather information on expectations related to students' reading, the next question asked respondents when students were expected to do the required reading: in advance of class sessions (51.3%), after class sessions (4.3%), both before and after class sessions (23.5%), or "there is no recommendation" (20.9%). Next, we asked for information regarding how much reading faculty expected of students. The responses ranged widely, but a majority of students (80%) responded that they were expected to read 10 or more pages per week, with only 20.3% of respondents indicating a reading load of less than 10 pages per week. One interesting point is that 33.2% of respondents reported that they actually read 100% of the assigned reading each week, with 29.7% reading between 75% and 100% of the assigned reading, and a combined total of 37.2% reported reading anything less than 75% of the assigned readings (indeed, a very small minority—4.8%—reported reading none of the assigned reading).

On a related note, we asked respondents to identify how much time they were expected to spend preparing for their target course outside of class time. The largest response categories were as follows: 18.5% did not know how much time their instructor expects them to prepare outside of class; another 25.5% of respondents reported that they assumed their instructor expected them to prepare 3–4 hours each week. And, another 8.9% reported that they believe their instructor expected them to prepare more than 8 hours each week.

Student perceptions of text-based instruction. The next question asked respondents to explain the amount of time in class their instructor spends explaining the information in the text. Based on the survey responses, 37.3% of student respondents reported that their instructors explained the text information 75–100% of the time, followed by 32% reporting instructor explanation of text material between 50–75% of the time, and 19.2% explained it 25–50% of the time. Only a small percentage of respondents (11.5%) reported that their instructor explained text material in class less than 25% of the time, including not at all.

The next group of questions prompted student respondents to reflect on the type of text-based instruction occurring in their target class, as well as the timing of this instruction. For instance, among the most interesting response categories, 64.4% of respondents reported that their instructor explained the textbook's organization and structure throughout the entire semester; whereas 12.4% reported not at all (Only the most interesting and largest/smallest response categories are reported throughout this manuscript; thus, not all results will tally 100%). When asked whether and at what point instructors discussed strategies for reading the course text throughout the entire semester, 49.6 % reported such instruction throughout the entire semester, whereas 26.3% said not at all (with minor response groupings in other categories). When asked whether and at what point instructors discussed strategies for learning new vocabulary in the course text, 53.7% reported such instruction throughout the entire semester, whereas 32.7% said not at all. Finally, when asked whether and at what point instructors taught students how to read like an expert in the field, 50% reported such instruction throughout the semester, whereas 38.1% said not at all.

Related to this topic, we did ask student respondents one open-ended question: "If you could make any recommendations to the instructor of this course about how to help you become a better reader in this course, what would they be?" As might be imagined, there was much variation in the content and scope of the recommendations provided, but many of these focused on work load issues, as the following exemplar illustrates: "With all the reading, what reading is nice to know and what portions are need to know? Every instructor thinks you should spend at least 2 hours each day reading for their class. With multiple classes there are not enough hours in the day when you include sleep and other daily activities you do."

In addition to overall calls for "less reading," several respondents made calls for changes in the type of reading to require; one example of these responses is as follows: "I'd like some sort of fantasy reading class where we read *Lord of the Rings* or something akin to that." Other recommendations tended toward more course/teacher evaluations, self-efficacy related comments about the respondent's perceived reading ability, and, interestingly, tips for other students taking the course.

Developmental-reading preparation. Of the 359 respondents who answered the question related to their experiences with DR, only 89 responded that they were currently or previously enrolled in a DR course. Of those 89, 44.9% indicated that the preparation received in that DR course was "excellent," 42.7% reported that the DR course prepared them "moderately," and 6.7% noted that the DR course prepared them "minimally."

We asked this subgroup of respondents, "If you could make any recommendations to the staff at SCC about how to improve the developmental-reading courses, what would they be?" These responses ranged from the very positive ("Making it required for all students new to the college") to several very critical commentaries on the level of rigor. One exemplar critique is as follows: "I think taking the developmental-reading course I was required to take was a complete waste of time and money. I felt like a child in the class, it was so easy. I could've failed my final with a 0% and still gotten an A in the class." Ten other respondents provided specific instructional suggestions such as "Make the classes more interactive" or "Take time to do more practices for My Reading Lab."

Student-survey discussion

In summary, these results were indication that respondents in this investigation have varied understandings of the text expectations and practices in their focal courses. Interestingly, several potential misconceptions came to light in this investigation. First, it seems that some student respondents may be unclear about established standard expectations for academic workload, including reading. Also, 20.9 % of student respondents reported that they had not been given a recommendation for when to read for class, and 18.5% reported not knowing how much time their instructors expected them to spend outside of class reading and preparing for class sessions. Although it is possible that such explicit information about expectations was not conveyed, there was no indication that these respondents had followed up to query their instructors for clarification. Finally, student respondents' recommendations to their instructors often suggested misconceptions about the role of text in college courses with calls for less reading or more interesting texts.

Student focus group

The student focus group, like the faculty focus groups, employed a semistructured conversational interview approach. For the student-focus-group portion of the project, a total of 15 students participated. Four student focus groups were attempted, but only one true focus-group situation emerged (seven students, all were enrolled in DR).

Student focus group procedure

The focus group procedure called for the use of semistructured, audio-recorded group interviews. Although specific methods for conducting focus groups with college students have not been detailed (Billups, 2012), prior research from a range of higher education-related fields has implemented focus groups to gather student feedback on a survey (Ouimet, Bunnage, Carini, Kuh, & Kennedy, 2004). Issues such as perceptions of a particular instructional approach (e.g., Frailey, Buck-Rodriguez, & Anders, 2009), the impact of a particular instructional design on their attitudes about college (e.g., Barbatis, 2010), or on their transition to college (e.g., Hadley, 2006) have all been explored through student focus groups. Similarly, a focus group was employed to gather information on students' perceptions of overall literacy preparation for college, their perceptions and attitudes toward their

current and past literacy instruction, and their perceptions of the transition to college-level literacy expectations.

To provide initial structure for the 45–60 minute focus group session, we developed a list of 11 general questions (plus subquestions and follow-up questions) to guide the discussions. In an attempt to parallel the kinds of information gathered from the faculty, we asked students about the amount, frequency, type, and tasks associated with their required course readings. Follow-up questions focused on how these actual text practices compared with their initial expectations, how these practices compared with their high school experiences, and the extent to which they felt their high school experiences were effective in preparing them for the text expectations in their current courses.

Each investigator analyzed the transcript individually at least twice using open coding procedures. This initial analysis led to six codes, but a second round of coding prompted the collapse of a few code categories, leaving a total of four coding themes identified on issues related specifically to text expectations and practices in GE and DR courses at SCC.

Student focus group results

As mentioned above, four key themes were identified after analysis. These themes were as follows:

- Frustration with placement testing process. Students provided very specific concerns including the relevance of the cut scores, lack of preparation for the test, and the test itself (Compass).
- Frustration with the level of rigor in the developmental-reading courses. The students who participated in the focus group expressed their concerns over the content, pace, and difficulty level of these courses, and several indicated that they had experienced more challenging reading expectations in high school.
- Questioning of the overall rigor of college work in general.
- Understandings of what is or is not relevant or conducive to text-based learning.

Below, we will discuss in more depth two of the most informative themes that arose, the second and fourth themes bulleted above.

Frustration with the level of rigor in the developmental-reading courses. Several student participants commented on the level of rigor in their DR coursework, usually noting that it was far easier than they had initially expected. A few representative responses are as follows:

- "I was thinking that there would be an actual higher level of reading going on …it seems more like they're high school, part 2-level books."
- "The book we're reading right now feels like something I read in like fifth grade."
- "They should challenge us because otherwise we're not going to learn anything."

This negative commentary toward the level of rigor was not a universal response; indeed, several student participants offered neutral or even positive comments about their DR courses. However enough, such comments were offered that we identified this as an important theme, and particularly so when compared to students' commentary on the rigor of the GE courses, which many respondents viewed as being too difficult.

Understandings of what is or is not relevant or conducive to text-based learning. Student participants had several comments and recommendations about what instructors should include that is relevant or conducive to their own learning:

- "I don't think we should have a due date on reading because then what if we're busy up until that point and we really didn't have time to read it until like the day after that?"

- "They're [course texts] filled with so many statistics, which are great, but you don't want to read into the statistics as much as what's actually in there."
- "Just tell me what I need to know and explain to me what we're going to be doing so that I can study that and be a better person in that part of the class rather than having to read articles or something random that is just time consuming, and taking up time in class when we could actually be learning what we need to learn."

Such comments provided evidence that students who participated in this study tend to hold misconceptions about text-related expectations in college courses. For one, students appear to favor a single mode for delivery of content material (either the course text or class lectures, for instance). As well, although many student survey respondents acknowledged spending time preparing for class, focus group participant comments led us to question whether standard expectations for out-of-class time associated with college courses were actually being applied.

Student-focus-group discussion

In summary, it was clear that, at least for the student participants in the focus group, there was an overall critique of the level of rigor in their DR courses coupled with calls for improvement regarding relevancy, time investment, and focus in their college courses overall. Just as with the student survey results, it appears that students' understandings of college-level reading and learning expectations vary differently from standard faculty assumptions.

Findings

In this section, findings across the three investigations are presented in relation to the original research questions.

Research question 1

The first research question was What are the text expectations including text types, tasks, and goals? This question was answered both in terms of the developmental-reading courses as well as the general-education courses.

Regarding the texts used in the courses explored in this study, the textbook analyses revealed that for the DR courses, two types of texts are predominant: workbook-style practice texts and novels. By contrast, in the GE courses, more expository texts are used (typically field-specific textbooks). In addition, in GE courses, what was used were predominately traditional college textbooks, and, although not all were above a 12th grade estimate, most were close to that. By sharp contrast, the DR textbook analyses revealed a preponderance of texts in those courses that were well below a college level of readability and of an unrelated (to most of the GE courses) text type. Further, the classroom observations of the introductory-level GE courses led to the realization that very few of the observed class sessions included instructor-initiated text references, and that most of the text references observed were focused on content issues rather than text-navigation instruction. On the other hand, the DR classroom observations reflected that these courses were more focused on skill and competency with text than the GE courses that clearly privileged content knowledge. Also, most of the discussion in the DR classes was focused on supporting students' reading growth in a manner often found in the K–12 arena.

On a related note, based on GE faculty responses to the survey and within GE focus groups, it became clear that GE texts were intended as a support for preparing for the content of class lectures and discussion, and that students should be doing the reading independently. There did not appear to be any instruction on how to navigate texts or extrapolate text content occurring in the GE courses, yet the GE faculty called for DR faculty to do more of this action; therefore, it also seems that the expectation is for students to be fully competent for the specialized types of text practices

(often discipline-driven) upon entry into the GE courses. This expectation is complicated by the fact that faculty respondents in general tended to view students as having negative attitudes toward reading, and they assumed students often did not read. For these reasons, they reported (and students confirmed) lecturing more and providing text-alternatives or "workarounds" (NCEE, 2013) to text reading despite their own expectations of students.

Based on the data gathered, the content of the DR courses was largely text driven; however, it should be noted that the text-associated tasks in DR courses were mostly geared toward a skill-building approach measured by comprehension checks. Reading guides, for example, provided students an opportunity to respond to specific questions about the novels in order to demonstrate understanding. In addition, there was an emphasis on additive vocabulary-development tasks and reading strategy instruction. By contrast, in the GE courses, the tasks were far more likely to be content-based quizzes and tests, with some text-supported essays.

As might be expected, the tasks associated with texts in these courses reflect these larger goals. The goal for students' use of texts in the DR courses, for example, was aimed at providing practice with identifying generic main ideas and other fundamental reading skills, developing academic vocabulary, and reviewing strategy usage. By contrast, the goal for students' use of text in the GE courses was as a support, and in a few cases, a supplement to the instructor for learning the course content; indeed, text in the GE courses was used to a lesser degree in some cases to publisher-provided (or, in some cases, instructor-created) workarounds that mirrored/summarized textual content.

Research question 2

The second research question was How do these text expectations align? The answer to this question is that there is definitely a gap between DR expectations at exit and GE expectations at entry, both in the implicit assumptions about college-text readiness and in how these assumptions get played out in practice as text expectations. What became clear throughout these various analyses, however, is that this practical gap may well be caused by larger conceptual gaps. More specifically, not only are GE faculty unclear on the purpose, scope, and goals of the DR courses, but so too are students. In fact, students who participated in the surveys and focus group as part of the third investigation tended to be quite critical of the rigor of the DR courses. As well, given the calls by GE faculty for changes to the DR curriculum, it would appear that the DR faculty may also not be well-informed about what are the GE faculty expectations for college-text readiness.

Research question 3

The third and final research question was What constitutes college-level text-readiness at Southside Community College? Although faculty in both DR and GE articulated specific expectations and identified particular student strengths and weaknesses with regard to their text-readiness, it became clear through our various analyses that there is not any explicit or widely accepted definition of college-text ready at SCC. There are, however, some distinct differences in practice between GE and DR that emerged from the results across the three investigations that may help shed some light on an implicit understanding of college-text ready. It is clear that, by and large, faculty in the GE courses assume that students should be able to read their college-level textbooks independently upon entry to their courses. However, faculty reported encountering a wide range of student text-readiness levels.

In and of themselves, these issues do not make for a coherent or consistent definition of college-text ready; however, when compared to the precredit (DR) courses, a general definition of college-level reading begins to emerge based on the expectations and practices in the introductory-level GE courses. The texts in the DR courses are vastly different from those in the GE courses in terms of type, readability, and content. Also, through the observations in Investigation 1, we learned that much of the discussion in DR classes is text based, whereas it is content-based in the GE courses.

This suggests a very different level of independent comprehension expected, but also a very different instructional focus, especially because GE faculty clearly privilege content over other text issues through the use of workarounds.

Overall discussion

Following the analyses of each of the three investigations, we looked across at the complete data set as a whole, paying particular attention to the patterns and themes that were identified across data sources and investigations. The identified patterns came in two forms: convergences and contradictions. In general, similar themes identified across data sets were considered convergences. However, with each thematic convergence, there were also seeming contradictions at work within the data when compared across investigations. These themes, their convergences and contradictions, along with the associated implications and recommendations, are outlined below.

Theme 1: What is valued is what is taught

Convergence 1

Both GE and DR faculty at SCC generally viewed texts as an important part of their course curricula. For example, in both the faculty surveys and in the faculty focus groups, all faculty expressed that reading is essential to the learning in the courses they teach.

Contradiction 1

It is clear that the faculty who participated in these investigations rely on texts as an instructional tool. However, reliance levels do range, largely as a result of what is valued in the course in combination with the widespread faculty perception that students' negative attitudes about reading often meant they did not complete the required reading. During faculty focus group sessions, several instances were identified wherein faculty reported using nontextbook alternatives, or workarounds (NCEE, 2013). The purpose for these text alternatives was to ensure that students still learned the course content, which was highly valued in the GE courses.

Implication 1

In such a situation where students are required to purchase textbooks, but are clearly relying on (and being encouraged to rely on, however implicitly) nontextbook supports, several questions arise. Is this a self-defeating approach? Does the action of providing lecture notes or study guides, for instance, lead to surface-level learning as opposed to deep-structure mastery? As prior research has found (e.g., Richardson et al., 1983, 1982), does this lead to an absence of critical literacy? Does providing course notes encourage students, however unintentionally, to overlook or disregard the reading of the text?

And, of course, on some level there is a larger question that may need to be asked here: What is the purpose of the GE courses? Is the purpose to master certain content or to develop specific competencies (including text-related competencies) or to evaluate and construct knowledge? In short, what might be viewed as positive activities designed to promote learning/comprehension may actually have unintended negative consequences (see also Richardson et al., 1983).

Recommendation 1

Generally the objectives that define the content in a college course also define the curriculum and instruction, yet after a course is well-established in practice, in many cases what defines both is actually a textbook. This is particularly so with adjunct faculty who may not be involved in curriculum-development. Through our exploration we learned that when GE faculty perceive that students are not using the required course texts, they implement workarounds (NCEE, 2013) because what is really valued is the subject-matter content even more so than the learning objectives.

However, this unfortunately may be producing a spiral of aliteracy because the more faculty allow for workarounds, the more students avoid texts. Further, such reliance on workarounds at the expense of additional course texts and materials is suggestive of an expectation that students read at the literal/factual level, rather than for a deeper level of meaning and understanding. This, too, is illustrative of a pedagogical approach that privileges content, perhaps to the detriment of deeper learning and the generation of new knowledge. Thus, our findings suggest that the use of instructor or publisher-created workarounds that allow for avoidance of text should be interrogated for pedagogical soundness.

Theme 2: En route to alignment of text expectations

Convergence 2

SCC faculty in GE courses articulated general text expectations of students in their introductory-level courses, and they were able to identify particular text-related strengths and weaknesses that students bring to each respective course. Numerous examples of these were identified in both survey responses and faculty focus groups. Specifically, the most often-named general expectations included being able to read and comprehend a college-level text independently, being able to identify main ideas in a text, and having a certain comfort with academic vocabulary, which are similar to findings from prior research done in this area (Burrell et al., 1997; Carson et al., 1992; Chase et al., 1994; Orlando et al., 1989; Sartain et al., 1982; Stahl, 1982).

Contradiction 2

Although SCC faculty named general text-readiness expectations for beginning students, there was very little agreement both across and within disciplines/areas on the specific literacy expectations for introductory-level students. For example, several faculty—in survey comments and in focus groups—noted that students should be able to read and comprehend a college-level text independently. However, given the wide variation of text practices being required, modeled, and encouraged, this is problematic at best. Further, given the use of alternate modes of content delivery (through workarounds such as preposted lecture notes, study guides, and PowerPoints), it is unclear what constitutes independent comprehension at SCC, whether it be simple literal recall or deeper learning allowing for actions such as synthesis, evaluation, or knowledge generation.

Implication 2

Given that SCC faculty are obviously thinking about students' text/literacy issues, several questions might be useful in moving toward a common definition of college-text readiness. Can there/should there be an institution-wide definition of a college-level textbook? Does this differ depending on the discipline/area? Are departments/areas/faculty cognizant of text types/ genres/readabilities when making textbook or alternative text selections? Finally, what tasks, specifically, do faculty across the institution expect incoming students to do with texts? Are these expectations clarified for students? Are they being enacted, modeled, and reinforced through classroom practice?

Recommendation 2

Certainly, faculty at SCC are aware of text/literacy issues their students face. However, text expectations are clearly not aligned and are also not articulated to students consistently. Thus, working toward a specific definition of college-text ready is critical for a number of reasons, both for clarifying expectations for students and also for allowing faculty an opportunity to determine shared text expectations across the institution. In addition, such information should be shared with feeder high schools and middle schools to ensure proper scaffolding toward college-text ready.

Theme 3: Lack of communication

Convergence 3

Across the studies, we found evidence of a common thought that existing DR course work should ready students for their next-level general-education courses. In short, GE faculty assume that DR faculty are preparing students for the specific text expectations within their introductory-level courses.

Contradiction 3

Although GE faculty assumed that DR courses should be preparing students for their courses, they indicated that they did not know much, or anything, about DR. There were also concerns that DR faculty should know more about what happens in courses following DR. To further complicate this issue, the DR faculty appeared to be equally uninformed as to what goes on in the GE courses. Thus, neither faculty group appeared to realize the degree to which there is a misalignment in both DR course goals and content and student preparation. This is, of course, not a new or unique concern. Given their training, culture, and disciplinary knowledge, DR faculty teach literacy-oriented, competency-based courses that are fundamentally different from the content-focused orientation of the GE courses where faculty reflect different forms of training, cultures, and disciplinary knowledge.

Implication 3

Issues related to faculty communication and knowledge of expectations beyond one's immediate program area were among the most important findings of this study. These findings all point to the realization that alignment of curriculum requires open and frank communication.

Recommendation 3

Throughout this study, students and faculty alike called for text selection and literacy instruction that focused on more field-specific texts that would better prepare students for the types of literacy practices they would encounter in their GE coursework. To better address such calls for alignment, DR faculty should meet regularly to discuss these alignment issues with faculty in various GE departments. In addition, DR faculty may benefit from teaching experiences that allow for greater exposure to the GE courses. For example, faculty may find it useful to attend other classes on a regular basis (i.e., DR faculty could sit in on GE courses and vice versa).

Theme 4: The gap for students

Convergence 4

Investigation 3 allowed us to include the voices of students to gain further insight into what constitutes college-text readiness. Their perspectives proved to be essential to understanding that although there is not an explicit operational definition of college-text readiness at SCC, there is a significant gap between what is done in DR and what is done in GE. For instance, students expressed frustration with a lack of perceived rigor in the DR courses as compared to their expectations and perceived needs in the introductory-level courses.

Contradiction 4

Despite students' common frustrations, when asked for recommendations for their GE instructors, they complained of too much reading, and not seeing the purpose of the required reading. In short, the text expectations of the DR courses seemed too easy, but the text expectations of the GE courses seemed too difficult. This provided much insight into an implicit understanding that college-text ready—for students—is somewhere between the two.

Implication 4

Through all this, we noted that students hold some serious misconceptions about reading expectations in college. Indeed, as we learned through analysis in investigation 3, much variation exists in terms of what students think are their instructors' text expectations. As well, we began to recognize that the students in this study tend to think that content should be provided in just one mode. Thus, when workarounds are provided, they tend toward abridgments of content rather than textbooks.

Recommendation 4

In addition to, and as part of, continued audit work, findings need to be extended directly back to the practical realm with a particular emphasis on how text complexity levels might best be expanded across the final DR course from the beginning of the semester to the end of the semester in order to purposefully scaffold students toward preparedness for entry into GE courses. This would not only serve toward remedying the problems with alignment, consistency of expectations, and communication, but would also allow students a better understanding of the purpose and goals of college reading across their careers. As well, alignment can be furthered by attaching embedded supports in DR courses.

Limitations

To provide a comprehensive view of text-readiness at Southside Community College, multiple sources of information and multiple layers of data collection were implemented. In spite of these efforts, however, some limitations persist. First, this study focused on a single community college site, and the representativeness of this particular site is unknown. Second, because convenience sampling was used and participants were recruited on a strictly volunteer basis, the various samples of faculty may not reflect a representative sampling of the SCC population. Third, only one class period in each of the 13 courses was observed. Though we have no reason to believe it, it is possible that the observations were scheduled during atypical class sessions. Further, these specific 13 classes may not entirely reflect the overall text usage in classrooms at SCC. Fourth, the text analysis and classroom observations were limited by the artifacts provided and instructors providing entrée. Lastly, Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle (e.g., Crotty, 1998; Patton, 2002) acknowledges that the very act of observing affects what is being observed. The researchers' presence during classroom observations and focus groups could have affected the discourse and interaction despite efforts toward being unobtrusive.

Research implications

Previous research does not provide a curriculum audit model for determining whether, how, and to what extent current developmental-reading programming aligns with general-education coursework, which was a goal of the present study (see also Armstrong et al., 2015a, 2015b). Such a model has potential to inform developmental-reading and beyond and to include all areas associated with college learning. In addition to a broader range of audit foci, we have identified additional populations who should be included in future audits: administration, students who have successfully completed their programs, and students who have dropped out of their programs.

Another issue driving this study is a paradigm shift that has been happening over the last 20 years or so within the larger discipline of literacy, but which has, as of yet, unfortunately not gained nearly as much attention within the field of college reading as it has in K–12 contexts. Given this important paradigmatic shift from content-area reading to disciplinary literacy, coupled with the Common Core State Standards Initiative and the various assessment protocols emerging to assess students' college and career readiness, it is more important than ever before that experts in DL undertake research that demonstrates both the curricular successes and shortcomings. This is especially important as they relate to how DR programming prepares students for the disciplinary literacy

challenges they face once they transition out of their developmental courses (however this is structured) and into their introductory-level coursework.

Finally, future research must also include introductory-level career technical education (CTE) courses. With a growing focus for pathways programming and for the completion agenda, a better understanding of text-readiness for the highly specialized text practices in the CTE fields is critical.

Conclusion

The current national emphasis on college readiness (CCSSI, 2010; Complete College America, 2011, 2012) is essential for developing a solid transition pathway from high school to college. Developmental education exists to provide a bridge when there is clear misalignment in student competency levels. This study was designed to provide a fuller and more current picture of what it means to be college-text ready. Overall, throughout this study, much evidence has been identified that suggests a lack of alignment between the DR courses and the introductory-level GE courses, not only in terms of the types of texts used, but also the focus, scope, and goals of the text-based or text-supported instruction. This is not intended to be a derogatory statement of either DR or GE faculty, of course, but rather a question about whether policies and cultures within the college context for this study have created unproductive boundaries that prevent the synergy that might promote greater teaming and, ultimately, more effective pedagogy. Indeed, we argue that if developmental education programs had undertaken audit-type activities such as the study described here, (or reality checks, as described in Simpson, 1996) on a regular basis across the past decades as advocated in the literature, we postulate that the field would have been able to use data to make incremental changes to curriculum and instruction to a far greater degree than happened. If so, the current large-scale reform movement with both its positive and its detrimental outcomes would not have been a factor in impacting the field.

In considering what the DR courses do entail (novels, workbooks, short excerpts, highly readable texts, and comprehension-check tasks), there is a thought that the DR courses are currently aimed too far below introductory-level college courses to provide any sort of purposeful scaffolding into the GE courses. In addition, based on our findings, it is clear that the nature of preparation needed for DR tasks is radically different than the preparation expected for a GE course. Indeed, no evidence of an intentionally scaffolded progression from DR courses to GE courses was identified in any of this study's investigations.

It is also important to note that college-ready for reading is not a monolithic conception, and, in fact, varies by institution, discipline, and area. Although some will argue for a consistent (national or state-adopted) definition of college-text readiness, it is evident that no such universal definition exists. Considering this study's finding that no institutional definition of college-text ready existed (beyond a single placement test score), if such a widespread understanding of college readiness is a goal, then many more institution-level studies such as this are first needed in order to fully understand the differences and similarities across contexts.

Funding

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