ALITERATE COMMUNITY COLLEGE REMEDIAL STUDENTS
AND THEIR ATTITUDES TOWARD READING:
A PHENOMENOLOGICAL EXAMINATION

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in
Education
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by
Linda Myers
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Abstract

of

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A survey of the literature on aliteracy demonstrates that it is considered a widespread problem in academia. Much of the literature provides specific examples of reading patterns and habits of college students without investigating students’ experiences and attitudes as non-readers. This study attempts to explore remedial students’ experiences and attitudes as non-readers, alliterates. The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the experience of remedial community college students who have declared that they do not read and their attitudes toward the reading they are assigned in their college courses. The researcher has attempted to define the relationship between the existing literature that defines aliteracy, the consequences of being a non-reader, and the data collected as part of this study which further analyzes the phenomenon of non-reading in a setting that has traditionally privileged reading as an essential part of becoming an educated human.
To contextualize aliteracy, I reviewed the literature on literacy, aliteracy, remedial reading in colleges, and the after-college consequences of being a non-reader. Using an initial questionnaire to create a pool of self-identified non-readers, I then interviewed ten students using a set of open-ended questions to stimulate video-recorded conversations. Through the conversations, I built individual profiles of the students and looked for common experiences among the group. Among the most common findings, the participants said that they do not read because reading is boring; they cannot remember what they read; they do not understand what they read; and they do not have enough time to read. The conclusions drawn from the study are illustrated with transcribed excerpts from the interviews.

_______________________, Committee Chair
Porfirio Loeza, Ph.D.

_______________________
Date
DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis, and my graduate work in the School of Education and the Department of English, with love to my late husband, Barney Russell, who encouraged me to return to academia in midlife, whose capacity for compassion I strive to match every day, and whose praise and support continues to be “the wind beneath my wings.”
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I wish to express my deep gratitude to the entire faculty of the Language and Literacy Master's Program in the College of Education. Thank you for allowing me into the program as a non-traditional candidate, and for helping me direct my studies toward the adult readers I teach.

Most especially, I wish to thank my thesis committee, Dr. Porfírio Loeza, committee chairman, and Dr. Terry Underwood, second reader. Dr. Loeza was particularly generous with his time and profoundly kind in his assessments of my work in the Language and Literacy Program. His constant encouragement made this task seem light and the goal attainable. I thank Dr. Underwood for pointing me in a direction that expanded my awareness and understanding of the adult population I teach. To both, I am grateful for their guidance in conceiving and carrying out the study that is the background for this thesis and for reminding me what fun it is to be a scholar.
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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

Writing, and hence reading, according to Plato, “is not a legitimate son of knowledge, but a bastard,” that he condemns as a pastime that “would only spoil men's memories and take away their understandings.” To further scorn the technology of readable text, Plato rants, “the living is better than the written word, and that the principles of justice and truth when delivered by word of mouth are the legitimate offspring of a man's own bosom” (2008, para. 20). If today’s college students only knew—they are simpatico with Plato! It is a common rationalization that real experience is better (or more important) than anything that might be read in a book. But, it seems unlikely that such a point of view is at the root of an academic conundrum. It is no secret that a substantial population of college students choose not to read, that they have become what Graves and Kinsley call "elective illiterates" (1983, p. 315), although aliterate seems to be a less pejorative term. For those of the pre-digital generation, it seems counterintuitive that someone who wants a college education would elect not to read. We know that broad reading builds background knowledge, yet many students come to community college without that experience. Without background knowledge and vocabulary built from prior reading, understanding the material in college textbooks looms as a challenge. Moreover, the common practice of not reading their textbooks when they get to college stands as a roadblock to college success for many students, particularly those who must take remedial reading and writing courses before they may enroll in many general education courses. As an educator, I hope to gain insight about
those individuals, particularly college students enrolled in remedial reading and writing courses, who choose not to read. Further, I hope to identify reasons students do not complete assigned readings for courses.

**Issues Associated with Aliteracy and Reading Skills in College**

*Young people who cannot read at all are far outnumbered by young people who can read (poorly or well) but won’t. The latter, who choose not to read, for whatever reason, have little advantage over those who are illiterate.* (Holbrook, 1983, p. 38)

The issue of non-readers is compounded in community colleges where the institutions’ broad missions in higher education and their open door policies attract a population that is quite different from that of universities. In addition to providing general education and transfer credit for students moving on to university, certificated trade skills programs, and life-long learning opportunities for individuals not seeking degrees or certificates, community colleges have become a primary resource for students who do not have sufficient skills in reading, writing, and mathematics to succeed in college-level courses (Desai, 2012 p.113). The percentage of students who must take remedial courses is startling high. At the community college where I teach, in school years 2009-2012, a rough average of 58 percent of the students who tested for reading competency were referred to remedial reading courses (Basic Skills, 2012, p. 4). That statistic gives pause to the question: is the problem of students’ choosing not to read proceeded by inability to interact with text in a meaningful way? While the proposed study does not seek to make a link between reading and student success, it is hoped that the study participants' self-reported attitudes and experiences will provide greater insight into reading issues that may be a barrier to academic success.
Nearly every college professor has looked around a classroom encountering blank stares or students, heads down, avoiding eye contact lest they be called upon to answer a question that could have been found in the assigned reading. We rely on students reading texts and other course materials in order to provide classrooms where students can expand their understandings of the assigned topics and develop critical thinking skills. When students do not do the reading, we find it frustrating that lessons and activities do not reach that level of that *teachable moment* for which we all hope.

As academics, we recognize that reading is a fundamental skill for acquiring knowledge in spite of Plato’s predictions, yet most would agree that students seem to do less reading every semester, so educators continue to examine the growing phenomenon, the attitudes, experiences, and behaviors of college students, in an attempt to find solutions to this ever-growing issue (Baier, Cochran, Hendricks, C., & Hendricks, J.E., Warren & Gorden, p.7).

**Significance of the Problem**

At the community college where I teach, most of my students are in remedial reading and writing classes Thirteen years ago when I began teaching, academics bemoaned students’ failure to comply with required reading (Sappington, Kinsey, & Munsayac, 2000, p. 59), More recently many professors report that students’ writing is correspondingly less skilled (Brockman, Taylor, Crawford, & Kreth, 2010, p.43). That connection between reading and writing is common in assessments of student writing (Delaney, 2008, Brockman, et al, 2010, p. 44).
The ability to make connections in their reading-to-writing process is essential because college students are expected to discern both main and subtle ideas in assigned reading and be able to summarize, analyze, and synthesize what they have read in their writing (Brockman, et al, 2010, p.45). Moreover, employers require reading and writing skills of college graduates. A 2006 survey of employers by a consortium of non-profit human resources organizations found that 89 percent of employers rated writing, and 87 percent rated reading, as very important basic skills (Casner-Lotto, Barrington, & Wright, p. 17). More than 35 years ago, the business community approached the Board of Trustees of the California State University (CSU) system with the complaint that CSU graduates' did not meet business standards. That interchange resulted in the Graduation Writing Assessment Requirement (GWAR), an assessment of upper-division academic writing in English, becoming a graduation requirement in the CSU's in 1976 (A review, 2003, p. 6). CSU campuses system-wide provide a series of writing instruction courses that begins as low as two levels below college writing courses (commonly labeled college composition) which is meant to prepare students for the rigors of college-level writing and for passing the GWAR. The California Community Colleges (CCC's) provide an even broader array of literacy skills. Many have reading, writing, and grammar courses that begin with fourth-grade skills (Basic Skills, 2012, p.3; Guide, Competencies section) which are not transferable to four-year institutions. College-level courses at the CCC's provide transfer credits that are accepted by the CSUs (CSU, 2012). Unfortunately, students who must enroll in remedial reading and writing courses before they are allowed
to take college-level transfer courses graduate with a four-year degree far less often than those who enter college at level (Attwell, Lavin, Domina & Levey, 2006, p. 915).

A get-to-know-you questionnaire that all of my students fill out at the beginning of each semester indicates that many of my remedial writing students do not read well, or elect to be non-readers. That, coupled with the knowledge that few will complete bachelor's degrees, that drives my inquiry (Attwell, Lavin, Domina & Levey, 2006, p. 915). This research will examine the experience of community college readers enrolled in remedial writing courses who self-identify as non-readers. While this study examines writers, it focuses on their reading habits and skills. The students in the study had taken, or were taking at the time of the study, remedial reading classes. With few exceptions, the questionnaire indicates that the individuals in my remedial writing classes are also taking remedial reading, or have assessed into remedial reading classes, suggesting that the remedial reading and writing populations may be the same individuals.

**Research Questions**

This study sought to gain the perspective of students who, on their get-to-know-you questionnaires, have identified themselves as being non-compliant with regard to require reading for their college courses. Research questions were framed in an attempt to provide insight that might lead to instructional methods and materials that will help them better understand the content of their college level courses, to write papers that meet academically appropriate standards, and for the participants in the study, to develop better critical thinking skills through the metacognitive exercise their participation provides.
What are the common experiences or prevalent attitudes among non-readers in community college? That is the primary question this study sought to answer. The interviews were conducted for the study as a means to provide a dialogue between the researcher and the participants that would illuminate their experiences and attitudes. That dialogue was developed with a framework of survey questions that might lead to answers to the following questions.

1. Why do students choose not to read?
2. What is it like to be a remedial reading student in a community college? (What is the nature of the experience?)
3. How do non-reading students cope with day-to-day course work at the community college (not just remedial but other courses)?
4. How do these students feel about their progress as learners?
5. What expectations do these students hold for their academic futures?

**Definition of Terms**

*Aliterate, aliteracy:* as a condition of having skills in reading but not utilizing these skills, aliteracy, like literacy, needs to be viewed as a complex, multi-dimensional, and contextual phenomenon. It represents a pattern of thinking and behaving towards print. Aliteracy is a continuum, involving these components: attitude toward reading, reading behavior, types of text read, motivations for reading, intensity of motivations for reading, and reading ability. These components, each a continuum, interact with each other to form a configuration that may be highly individual, leading to the conclusion that there are many types of aliteracy (Joyce, 1991, p.8).
Assess, assessment, assessed: a placement process by which students wishing to enroll in reading or writing courses are directed to courses with the appropriate level of instruction.

Critical thinking: the intellectually disciplined process of actively and skillfully conceptualizing, applying, analyzing, synthesizing, and/or evaluating information gathered from, or generated by, observation, experience, reflection, reasoning, or communication, as a guide to belief and action.

English Learners (ELs): Students whose first language is something other than English, often students who were born in the United States but who lived in insular language communities and who spoke little English before kindergarten.

Literacy refers to the ability to read for knowledge, write coherently, and think critically about the written word.

Non-Reader: in the context of this study, college students who have the fundamental ability to decode written text, but who have elected not to read.

Remedial Courses: reading and writing courses at colleges and universities for students whose skills are not adequate for college level academic work.

Transfer level courses: community college courses that carry units accepted by most universities.

Context of the Study

The context of this study is an era in which the literature and anecdotal evidence demonstrates that it is common for college students to be non-compliant with regard to reading assignments in college. It is an investigation of the experience of being a non-
reader in college. The study was conducted at a Northern California Community College among remedial writing students who self-identified as non-readers. Study participants will complete a survey in which they answer general questions about their reading habits, experience, attitudes, and educational backgrounds. The survey was followed up with 15-20 minute interviews with individual participants based on students' responses. It was expected that the interviews would take on a narrative quality as students told their own stories. The process was twofold: the researcher prompted the participants to express their worlds candidly, as they live them, in unqualified terms, and the researcher explicated these utterances as both brief profiles of individual students and correlations of repeated themes. The findings are presented in this phenomenological report intended to provide thorough and textured descriptions of their lived experiences—first-person explanations of the phenomenon of being non-readers.

Much of the past research focused on deficiencies of college readers has focused on the outcome: how many students must take remedial classes? How likely are they to graduate? What skill level is necessary for the rigors of college-level reading? How we know that college students do not read? The proposed study attempts to understand "elective illiterates" (Graves & Kinsley, 1983, p. 315) at the "lived" level by focusing on the qualitative information that may be gathered through participants experiences. In their own words, why do college students not read? What are the economic and social conditions that may keep them from reading? Do they see reading as an essential component of their degree quest? When did they stop reading content texts? What are the consequences of not reading?
For those outside of academia, it often comes as a surprise that we teach reading to college students. The truth is that most students enrolling in California Community Colleges are not reading proficient (Boroch, 2007, p. 10; Grubb, Boner, et al., 2011, p.4). At a Northern California community college, in the fall of 2011, more than 56 percent of the 24,000 enrolled students assessed into reading classes below transfer level (Basic Skills, 2012, pps. 2-3). The statistics are startling. It is difficult to imagine that well over half of those who make it to college by graduating from high school or by obtaining a GED, or simply taking advantage of the community college open portal to higher education, cannot read well or choose not to read. Although reading proficiency is an essential skill for success in college affecting students' performance in courses across the curriculum (Baer, Cook, and Baldi, 2006, p. 10), many fail to make the connection between reading skills and habits as a key element in reaching their academic goals (Cunningham and Stanovich, 1998, p. 140).

I have attempted to define the relationship between the existing literature that surrounds the experiences and outcomes of being a non-reader and the data collected as part of this study which will further analyze the phenomenon of non-reading in a setting that has traditionally privileged reading as an essential part of becoming an educated human. My experience tells me that many students assume that merely attending and passing their classes mark them as "educated." I attempted to determine if students make an intellectual connection between reading and being educated. I attempted to reconcile the experience of being a non reader with the demands of being college student and used the existing literature to help explicate the problem and its consequences.
I am not a K-12 teacher credentialed by the state. My interest in non-readers was prompted by my career as a community college English instructor. Being steeped in both theory and practical experience that include such areas as reading disability, juvenile and young adult literature, literacy development in linguistically and culturally diverse populations, and program evaluation, this inquiry provided an opportunity to develop insight into the experience, motivation, and attitudes of the adults I teach. It also offers the background knowledge that might be used for planning and delivery of effective reading courses and the integration of reading strategies into courses across the curriculum.

At my college, according the department chairperson, most of the Reading Department faculty, adjunct and full-time, developed their reading pedagogy as part of their K-12 credential programs. While a master’s degree is required for the community college positions, most have degrees in English, Education, or related disciplines. Few have specific graduate-level training in adult literacy pedagogy. The purpose of this study is an attempt to span the gap between the theory and practice of teaching children to decode and comprehend text and teaching adults, whose readings skills have stopped developing many, many as early at second grade, to read for the content of their college courses.

My intention is to fill that gap – applying the focus of adult literacy in my CSUS Language and Literacy Program to improve my reading and writing pedagogy for all of the community college courses I teach.
Little research on college readers has been done from the student's point of view, with the exception of studies on motivation (Ryan, 2006, p.136), reading for pleasure (Salter, & Brook, 2007, p. 32), and the effects of television and Internet on reading habits (Mokhtari, Reichard, & Gardner, 2009, p.610). The study is unique in that it provided detailed narrative input on the experience of being a non-reader from the students' perspectives.

**Methodology**

It is difficult for me to understand why intellectual curiosity does not exist in all humans. The phenomenological approach to this study allowed me to peek into the world of non-readers whom I have always assumed lacked curiosity, absent intrinsic physical or developmental issues. What are the connections among curiosity, creativity, critical thinking, and reading? This study challenged my preconceptions and caused me to examine the data through multiple lenses – my own and the participants'.

Phenomenology interests me because it is creative in that the product is a collaborative of participant and researcher. It is an approach that has allowed me use my word-smithing skills and apply them to quantitative and qualitative data in a paper that I hope will be engaging as well as informative.

The collection of qualitative data through assessment of reading level skills using standardized tests added an additional dimension to the phenomenological approach. The data gathered through the interviews allowed participants to react as a kind of metacognitive analysis of their own attitudes and experiences.
The strength of this methodology is that it produces a study of experience from the first person point of view. Many forms and uses for phenomenology have evolved since Husserl founded the disciple as "the proper foundation of all philosophy" (Smith, 2008, Section 1, para 3). As a method of analysis applied to study a discrete phenomenon, this design examines the nature, structure, and meaning of an experience as it is lived by participants. In its simplest form, phenomenology can be described as reflective, evidential, and eidetic –approaching phenomena as both "encountering and objects as encountered" in a descriptive, narrative form (Embree, et al, 1997, p. 5).

Embree, et al described five positivist features that are generally accepted in most disciplines:

(1) phenomenologists tend to justify cognition (and some also evaluation and action) with reference to evidence, which is awareness of a matter itself as disclosed in the most clear, distinct, and adequate way possible for something of its kind;

(2) phenomenologists tend to believe that not only objects in the natural and cultural worlds, but also ideal objects, such as numbers, and even conscious life itself can be made evident and thus known about;

(3) phenomenologists tend to hold that inquiry ought to focus upon what might be called encountering as it is directed at objects and, correlatively, upon objects as they are encountered (this terminology is not widely shared, but the emphasis on a dual problematic and the reflective approach it requires are);
(4) phenomenologists tend to recognize the role of description in universal, a priori, or "eidetic" terms as prior to explanation by means of causes, purposes, or grounds; and
(5) phenomenologists tend to debate whether or not what Husserl calls the transcendental phenomenological epoche and reduction is useful or even possible. (Embree, 2001, p. 7)

Phenomenological research is often driven by the researcher’s own experience or observations. In the case of remedial college readers, my curiosity about their reading skill level, habits, and experiences comes from years of observation in a previous career and a more recent career as a community college professor.

The Role of the Researcher

Years ago, I ran across an article on leisure reading that labeled those who choose not to read “elective illiterates” (Graves & Kinsley, 1983, p. 316). The term rang true with me as I looked back at a long business career in which I reviewed contracts and associated writings of the people I supervised. On preprinted forms, there would often be a disconnect between the printed portion of the document and contractual provisions that could be hand written into blanks. For instance, where the form would say, "Any required pest control repairs shall be performed by ___________________." The hand written entry might say, "The carpet is to be professionally cleaned before COE [close of escrow]." Or, a contract might include a provision related to occupancy with the following non sequitur written in: "the backyard fence is falling down." The issue was persistent and more frequent among newcomers who were less familiar with the standard
forms. When questioned about such confusing attempts to create an agreement between the parties, responses often led to confessions that the individuals had not read the entire form or did not understand it. Nevertheless, I identified the issue as one of writing, rather than reading, because the errors were in the handwritten text. I began to notice the poor writing produced at the state and local trade associations where I was an officer; at the city where I was obligated to read reports from the planning department because I was a planning commissioner; in the environmental impact reports produced by professionals in that field; in official state documents that I read as part of an advocacy team for a non-profit organization. I was stunned! How was it possible that the (mostly) college-graduates who wrote these public documents could not write with enough clarity of thought, sufficient detail, or adherence to the conventions of standard English to communicate adequately?

My experience with non-readers, aliterates, expanded when I began to teach. I taught writing to both English learners (ELs) and native English speakers at a California State University, Sacramento. Students there were tested for placement in writing courses and directed into college-level writing classes or into pre-college classes – one and two levels below. I taught all levels – native speaker and English as a Second Language (ESL).

I could not help but notice that students of the 1990s (both remedial and at-level) had a much different undergraduate experience from my own a couple of decades earlier. As an undergraduate, I had consumed every written word I encountered. In my first classes as a teaching associate, I was confronted with students who approached reading as
busy-work, or even punishment. Again, I was stunned. Students did not read enough of their syllabi to remember their instructors’ names or the textbooks that were assigned. This time, I was able to see that the writing problem was actually a reading problem. Students did not complete the requirements of assignments because they did not read the writing prompts. They could not write essays responding to or synthesizing multiple texts because they had not read the assigned material.

In studying non-readers, the methodology is relevant because phenomenology examines the world that is lived and experienced. It is a qualitative inquiry into a world “that appears meaningfully to consciousness in its qualitative, flowing given-ness; not an objective world ‘out there,’ but a humanly relational world” (Todres as cited in Findley, 2008, p.2). Finley called this lived world, “Pre-reflective . . . [taking] place before we think about it or put it into language” (p. 1). It is the very idea (in the belief of this researcher) that non-readers become so before they think about it, or articulate non-reading as a choice, that makes the phenomenon of non-reading in an academic setting worthy of study. What is the experience of being a non-reader on a community college campus like? What does it feel like? What are its invariant constituents?

**Limitations**

An obvious limitation is inability to make generalizations from the small number of participants (10); however, as a phenomenology there is the ability to detect recurring themes or similar threads in the narratives of the participants. A significant limitation is the reliability of any quantitative data collected through the survey and interview process. Although selection of participants was from classes designed for native English-speakers
or those who have achieved near native-like oral and writing skills, it is probable that the participants will include students who learned English as a second language or who speak a non-standard dialect of English because of the diverse population at a Northern California community college and the ability for students to self-place in the lowest level English and ESL courses. Another limitation was the ability of the researcher as an observer and reporter of a wide range of factors associated with the interview, including, but not limited to environment of the interview, subjects' mannerisms, facial expressions, body language, tone of voice, and level of comfort or agitation.

This study did not address reading difficulties: cognitive disabilities, physical limitations, or the pantheon of syndromes collectively addressed as "dyslexia." The selection of the participants includes a series of delimitations. Participants were selected among volunteers who self-identify as non readers and who are enrolled in remedial reading and writing classes at a Northern California community college. Students enrolled in ESL courses were not included.

The preliminary steps taken prior to conducting the study included the following.

**Obtaining permission.** Upon receipt of approval from School of Education IRB, that form and response was submitted to the community college planning and research office for permission to do the study on that campus. Permission and disclosures to student participants were included on the survey form.

**Deciding on and selecting the characteristics of the group members who were included in your study.** The population studied was ten community college students who self-identified as “non-readers” and were at the time of the study, or previously,
enrolled in remedial reading classes. Students who were enrolled in remedial writing classes (the same population that is in reading classes) were asked to volunteer for the project. The volunteers were from my remedial writing classes at a Northern California community college.

**Developing tools.** An informed consent document was included on the survey that provided demographic information and a preview of the interview questions. The consent form included an explanation of the research, a description of foreseeable risks or discomforts to the subjects, descriptions of any benefits to the subjects and to the academic community, a disclosure of the procedures, and a statement of confidentiality. It also included contact information for the researcher and a statement that participation is voluntary. Forms used by the CSU, Sacramento School of Education were used for both IRBs. All documents regarding consent and IRB consideration complied with federal regulations. The informed consent document also presented a preview of 16 questions that the interviewer would ask to urge participants into discussions based on the research questions listed on page 6.

The researcher used the completed questionnaires to prompt responses in personal interviews that were recorded. Video recordings were selected for the process rather than audio recordings because of the multi-sensory nature of a phenomenological study. The researcher wished to record and reflect on facial expressions, body language, the physical environment of the interview, and any number of nuances that might add insight into the research questions.
**Obtaining data.** Data collection was done in two steps. The first step involved a questionnaire that I use at the beginning of every semester to get to know students in my writing classes (Appendix A). I used it to identify individuals from past classes (after grades had been posted) whose answers indicate they are non-readers and I invited them to participate in the proposed study.

Using a second, more detailed, questionnaire as background, I undertook step two, which was to conduct 20-30 minute interviews individually with the student participants. The interview questions were printed on participants' release forms (Appendix B) as a preview for the participants. These interviews were conducted on the community college campus to attempt to ensure that the students were truly present in the experience they are describing. Participation in the study was voluntary and the participants were drawn from writing courses to reassure students that whatever they told me would not affect their grades in their reading courses and for consistency among the participants. I assumed writing students would be more candid in their responses about their reading experiences since I did not teach reading courses.

The primary data derived from the study was qualitative, although there is some quantitative data that emerged from the findings. The reliability of the data collected was strengthened by conducting the interviews on campus where the participants stand a chance of actually feeling and sensing and making meanings that are reflective of their candid thoughts and feelings. Like all qualitative methods, it relied on the honesty and ethics of both the researcher and the participants as well as the care with which the researcher documented verbal and non-verbal responses. I made an effort in selecting the
volunteers to insure that they were students who would respect the academic nature of the inquiry.

**Data Analysis Strategies**

Because data emerged from the dialogue between the participant and the researcher, the process in itself was subject to examination for reciprocal meanings that were created. In other words, data analysis commenced immediately and shaped data collection in ways unforeseen. Emerging designs based on concurrent collection and analyses are commonplace in qualitative research projects.

Video is more reliable for capturing the whole encounter, since the interview itself became a part of the participant's and the researcher's "lived" experience. We chatted briefly before the video camera was turned on to "warm up" the conversation and minimize the intrusion of the camera's presence as a second inquisitor. Since I planned to have the videos transcribed with accuracy by a court reporter, I took only brief notes during the interviews so as not to distract the respondents. The notes were primarily to remind me to pay attention to particulars of their answers, tone of voice, or body language that might be used to further interpret student's responses. That process allowed me to later make notes that were both evaluative and extensive upon viewing the videos and reading the transcripts.

Threads of similar data established discrete themes as qualitative data. Responses to interview questions were counted and recurrences of similar phrases or experiences noted and examined. The researcher also prepared brief profiles of each participant based on the questionnaire and interviews. Because the researcher is an integral part of the
phenomenology process, the product of the process is a document that is both narrative of
the students’ experiences and reflective of interpretation by the researcher. Nevertheless,
the candid nature of the respondents should provide insight that might be used for
planning and delivery of effective reading courses and the integration of reading
strategies into courses across the curriculum.

**Ethical Issues**

Because inclusion in the study is voluntary, the study posed little risk to
participants. All safeguards were made to preserve the participants’ anonymity. Videos
were transcribed and destroyed after participants checked them for accuracy and upon
completion of this work. They were not used by anyone but the researcher or
disseminated in any other medium. No one viewed the videos except the researcher and
her thesis committee. Participants were allowed to view only their own videos and were
notified that the videos would be destroyed at the completion of the project. All
participants were over age 18. There were no physical consequences of participating in
the study, and students were reassured that there were no consequences for candid or
personal revelations they make as study participants.

**Organization of the Study**

This digital age has created new dynamics in both teaching and learning – with
changes that are rapidly changing the concepts of literacy. This study is significant
because the findings in Chapter Four will illuminate some of the attitudes about reading
that intersect with students' use of computers for educational purposes and for
entertainment. Further, it will attempt to make a link between reading and critical thinking as students' responses are examined for common threads.

The study consists of several stages. In Chapter 2, I will examine aliteracy as a practice among students, reading as a key to critical thinking, reading and college readiness, implications for workplace readiness, and my purpose for choosing phenomenology as a methodology. In Chapter three, I review the methodology for the study, and in Chapter Four, its findings – the interviews and an examination of common threads. Finally, in Chapter Five, I present the results of the interviews and discuss the implications of the findings.

The scope of the research is limited in that only ten students from one college were a part of the study. This thesis relates only to remedial students who have self-identified as non readers; consequently, no comparison is made to students in college level courses or their reading habits.

Beneficiaries of the research are the academic community in general and the Northern California community college Division of Language and Literature, and the students they serve, through the information that might guide future course and instruction design. The students who participated may benefit through the metacognitive exercise of examining their own experiences, attitudes, and processes.

Data collection occurred in the fall and winter of 2012 and the literature in the following review encompasses thoughts of scholars across the past sixty years of academic inquiry.
CHAPTER TWO
A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Much of the past research focused on deficiencies of college readers has focused on the outcome: how many students must take remedial classes? How likely are they to graduate? What skill level is necessary for the rigors of college-level reading? How we know that college students do not read (Desai, 2012 p.113; Baer, Cook, and Baldi, 2006, p. 10 ). This study attempts to understand non-readers (Graves & Kinsley, 1983, p. 315) at the "lived" level by focusing on the qualitative information that may be gathered through their "eyes." In their own words, why do college students not read?

The literature reviewed is meant to inform the study which seeks to answer the question: are there common experiences and attitudes among college students who can read, but choose not to? Most college students can read, but educators know through experience and observation that most do not read effectively and many do not read at all. An examination of even a few college non-readers led to wide and varied rationales for such behaviors. However, to provide a foundation for developing the study and for interpreting the data that was collected, it is necessary to look at the connection between reading and critical thinking, students’ preparation for reading college texts, data previously collected on non-readers, implications for employment post-graduation, and the research method itself.

We know students do not read. We need to know why they do not read, and we need to know how aliteracy affects their academic success. This review of the literature attempted to answer those questions. In order to determine the scope of the issue and to
ask focused questions of the study participants, it is necessary to develop context by asking the following questions of previous writings on the broad topic of non-readers:

1. Is there a connection between reading and critical thinking?
2. How are students prepared (or not) for the rigors of college level texts?
3. What do we already know about non-reading college students?
4. What reading skills do employers (post-graduation) need from recent college graduates?
5. Is phenomenology an appropriate method for gathering and interpreting data on non-readers?

Together, these questions frame the history and context for looking at the issue of aliteracy among college students and for examining their attitudes toward reading. They help define non-reading as a problem for college students and for their potential success in college. Further, these questions allow for examination of how the habit of non-reading might affect students' employment potential in the future. The question of using phenomenology is necessary to mediate its value as a research method in this particular study, so relevant literature on that topic was reviewed as well. The complexity of the issue underscores the need for a broad, multi-faceted approach to the literature in order to glean information specific to non-readers in an effort to create a tableau against which the individual non-readers who were questioned can be sited.

**Reading and Critical Thinking**

Text is created almost solely to be read – to communicate information. Texts convey information over time and distance, help to create or challenge social norms, with
their messages shaped by their purposes, writers' voices, and their audiences' interaction. Luke and Woods (2009, p. 15) explain that texts have two distinct functions, what texts say and what they do. Word choice and the writing situation may determine what text says, but its meaning is mediated between the writer and the text, and the reader and the text. Thus, the writer and the reader may have different interpretations. “How words and grammar bid to establish relations of power between authors and readers, speakers and addressees, designers and digital text users” addresses what texts do according to Luke and Woods. The relationship among writer, text, and reader creates a space in which the reader as an active participant in making meaning, providing he or she interacts with the text. “Meaning therefore does not reside within the text, but is constantly in movement . . . The meanings attributed to texts are what readers make of them within various contexts” (Hagood, 2002, p. 255). The context of a text includes the reader’s current and past experiences, the author’s current and past experiences, and the many cultural and historical influences that add to the interpretation of the text. Readers “mediate [these] texts differently through their own lived experiences and realities and make sense of them within multiple frameworks of interpretation” (Gounari, 2009, P. 150). Prior knowledge, vocabulary, and the number of exposures to any text can influence a reader's comprehension of text, making each reading of a text discrete – with new meanings or clarifying existing meanings. The concept of thinking critically assumes a broad understanding of text as well as the process of questioning the text – its social and historical context, its place among other texts addressing similar topics, and the writer's purpose. When a reader critically examines a text, he or she may discover both explicit
and implicit meanings. “By `reading between the lines of the message, question(ing) the intents behind them and learn(ing) how to look for alternative ways to be informed/entertained’ (Torres & Mercado, 2006 as cited in Lapp & Fisher, 2010, p. 158),” readers enhance their comprehension of text enabling a stronger understanding of the text for the reader.

From kindergarten to college, students are expected to read and make meaning from the text. Elementary school teachers lean on an old pedagogical principle that students in grades kindergarten through third learn to read, and from that point onward, they read to learn. An examination of reading behaviors among college students must begin with a nod to that principle and acceptance of the premise college reading is for acquiring knowledge. Does that mean that learning is a process of collecting facts and storing them in some little-explored brain space between short-term memory and long-term memory long enough to pass a test or write a paper? Or, does learning occur when the reader is able to pull from long-term memory snippets of related information, analyze, then synthesize it, and finally make new meaning. There are those who would argue that without the ability to manipulate what is read in such a manner, reading is simply decoding graphic impressions on paper and not learning (Cunningham & Stanovich, 1998, p. 9; Weiler, 2005, p. 47).

By 1988 educators posited that the decline among high school and middle schools students in higher-level thinking skills may be explained by a combination of several factors, at least part of the explanation may relate to the nature of reading instruction itself (Burnett & Berg, 1988). Today, many teachers still approach reading as a series of
skills taught in a planned sequence. In this process, the student's comprehension is directed mostly by the textbook, and even by work-book drill or other exercises related to the textbook, and does not necessarily require in-depth response or articulation on the student's part. Teachers may use this process because it may be less time-consuming with large numbers of students who have a wide range of reading levels. Much of the instructional time in the middle school and in the high school is spent on workbook drills or on exercises that emphasize learning the answers and rather than encouraging the student to think critically, to interpret the material that has been read. Burnett and Berg (1988) warned that if the student is unable to interpret the material, his or her comprehension may be very limited. Moreover, standardized testing has been widely recognized as an imperative to "teach to the test," leaving little classroom time for teaching reading skills that promote critical thinking.

**College Readiness**

Academics wring their hands and look backwards. College professors ask, “what are they teaching in high school?” High school teachers ask the same of middle school curricula and instructors. Middle school teachers wonder why elementary students are promoted without being taught to read effectively. At the other end of a linear education, employers are puzzled about those who manage to graduate from college. Why do their new employees not read thoroughly, write effectively, or think critically. The answer may be as simple as this: many students who can read elect not to. An examination of that phenomenon is addressed within the literature on non-readers and is at the heart of a series of student interviews reported herein. What we can do is see where reading
practices among young people break down, how habits of becoming non-readers are formed, and the consequences students face upon entering college, and eventually, the workplace.

Tinto (1987.) noted that community college students were often less prepared for the rigors of college-level academics than traditional college freshmen at a university. He explained that the community college students were more likely to be influenced by external forces like family, community, or employment than the four-year students. Community college students were more likely to live at home and work part-time while they were attending college. He also found higher departure rates at community colleges because of the demands of college-level works.

More recently, Tinto (2008) likened open enrollment at community colleges to a revolving door in his study of the changes in demographics and enrollment in the 20 years after his previous work. Arguing that underprepared students were over-represented by minority and low income students, he challenged two-year colleges to develop support programs to help close the achievement gap.

While providing a gateway to higher education, the open door policies of community colleges have created the need for developmental education. (Kolajo 2004; Shults, 2000) acknowledged that community colleges are the largest provider of developmental education. Over 90 percent of community colleges offered developmental education in reading, writing, and math for students who were not prepared for college-level work.
Reading strategies sufficient for performing college-level work among all of America's students is an issue, with significant number of first year students entering college falling short of essential skills (Pugh, 2000). Moreover, statistics from The National Survey of America’s College Students (2006) indicate merely 38% of graduates from 2-year institutions and 40% of graduates from 4-year institutions perform at the “proficient” level in reading expository prose and typical business documents (Baer, Cook, & Baldi, 2006). Between 1992 and 2003, the literacy levels of college graduates fell by 11 points in prose and by 14 points as reported by the United States Department of Education. Those numbers are predictive of a national problem: approximately 45% of adult American residents read below the basic level of proficiency (Murphy, 2006). Such low levels of reading proficiency mean that individuals have difficulty completing such forms as they might encounter with the department of motor vehicles or with reading directions for taking medicine.

It comes as no surprise that literacy skills are also tied to grade point averages among the nation's college students, with students receiving A's and B’s having measurably higher levels of reading proficiency than C or D students (Baer, Cook, & Baldi 2006). In an effort to identify specific weaknesses in college and university readers, Savage and Wolfforth (2007) explored the correlation between decoding, listening comprehension, reading comprehension, vocabulary, rapid automatized naming and phonological processing variables. They demonstrated that phonological awareness was a strong correlate of word reading and spelling, particularly of the accuracy measures consistent with other studies of adults. They suggest the scope of reading problems
among such students is broad and that poor readers will likely benefit from differentiated
supports depending on independent needs in the domains of word recognition fluency and
accuracy as well as in more global listening comprehension abilities.

Community Colleges, especially, make an effort to bridge those domains. It is
only necessary to look at a community college or university catalog and see the number
of remedial reading courses that are offered to know that students come to college
without sufficient reading skills to succeed in their academic work. Yet, the practice of
reading (and composition) skill instruction most often being isolated in English and
Second Language Departments has come under scrutiny. Often instruction is further
divided into sub-units within those programs segmenting the faculty who teach remedial
courses from faculty who teach transfer-level courses (Boroch, Fillpot, Hope, Johnstone,
Mery, and Serban, 2007). These researchers posit that it is the responsibility of all
community college faculty, in all disciplines, at all levels to support reading and critical
thinking processes. Jordan and Schoenbach (2003) add that if college administrators
decide to focus on literacy, instructional leaders need to expect that attention to reading
and literacy will be imbedded in subject area instruction.

The level and load of college level reading brings to mind a number assumptions.
Based on casual observations and anecdotal evidence, there is a widely held assumption
that frequent exposure to print has a positive effect on academic success and helps
promote general accomplishments in life. Mol and Bus attempted to synthesize scientific
evidence supporting such assumptions in their break-through work: "To Read or Not to
Read: A Meta-Analysis of Print Exposure from Infancy to Early Adulthood" (2011).
Their findings are consistent with the widely-held theory that reading development starts before formal instruction and continues throughout life.

Exposure to books provide a meaningful context for learning to read, by stimulating reading comprehension, offering substantial advantages for oral language growth, and enabling readers to store specific word form knowledge and become better spellers. Further, the researchers suggest that college and university students who read for pleasure may also be more successful academically.

Mol and Bus explain the relation between print exposure and reading components as reciprocal -- as the intensity of print exposure also depends on students’ reading proficiency. Print exposure becomes more important for reading components with growing age, in particular for oral language and word recognition. They tell us that children who have developed a reading routine will acquire increasingly more word meanings and word forms from books, which further facilitates their reading development and their willingness to read.

Moreover, such a spiral also implies that readers who lag behind in comprehension or technical reading and spelling skills are especially at risk of developing serious reading problems because they are less inclined to read during leisure time (Stanovich, 1986 as cited in Mol & Bus). With less print exposure, low ability readers are unlikely to improve their reading and spelling skills to the same extent as their peers who
do choose to read. Mos and Bus cite the Matthew effect\textsuperscript{1} suggesting that with less print exposure, the reading gap widens and becomes ever more forceful. They warn that preventing such a downward spiral for poor readers may be among the major challenges of contemporary reading research. Mol and Bus (2011, p. 294) advise "we must find ways to motivate these students and their parents to read more as a leisure time activity. In this respect one of our most promising findings is that poor readers’ basic reading skills profit most from reading books in their leisure time."

The Boroch, Fillpot, Hope, Johnstone, Mery, and Serban, report (2007) equivocates where it addresses the responsibility of the K-12 system, instead, calling on the community colleges step up its basic skills courses calling them \textit{developmental} rather than \textit{remedial}. Yet, dismal statistics indicate that students leave high school in vast numbers without basic skills required for college success. A Northern California community college, an urban community college with a diverse student population offers a snapshot for the country as a whole. Its Basic Skills Report (2012) indicates that more than 75 percent of incoming students must take reading courses. That statistic is

\footnote{1 The \textit{Matthew effect} in education was described by Keith Stanovich based on the Matthew effect in sociology. It derives its name from a passage (Matthew 25:29) in the New Testament: "For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath." Stanovich used the term to describe a phenomenon that has been observed in research on how new readers acquire the skills to read: early success in acquiring reading skills usually leads to later successes in reading as the learner grows, while failing to learn to read before the third or fourth year of schooling may be indicative of lifelong problems in learning new skills.}
especially troubling in light of a report for the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (Conley, 2007) on college readiness that indicates that only 17 percent of students who must take a remedial reading class receive a bachelor's degree or higher (National Center for Education, 2004, as cited in Conley, 2007). Clearly, those who graduate from high school without adequate skills for lower-division undergraduate studies suffer life-long consequences. Moreover, tests used to measure high school student's academic skills fail to accurately gage teenagers' readiness for college-level work (Cavanagh, 2003)

As a partial remedy, Conley (2007) suggests that high schools implement end-of-course exams that would provide "fine-grained information" regarding student readiness for college rather than relying on exit exams and statistics reported by college entrance exam organizations. He also addresses measurements of academic behaviors that mediate students' professed versus actual behaviors, and favors contextual skills and awareness measurements that challenge students' perceptions of their readiness and the rigors of college academics. However, simply measuring skills is not a remedy; high schools must initiate reading programs that work. Surveying best practices in reading instruction for adolescent readers, Fisher (2008) claims that the most important thing at a struggling reader needs is a teacher who understands reading instruction and who can explain the cognitive moves that he or she makes to make meaning from the texts. Fisher also cites three typical approaches that have significant drawbacks:

1. reward programs, such as Accelerated Reader and Book It, may encourage struggling readers in the short term but will have little long-term effect and may
well reduce students' interests in independent reading (Biggers, 2001; Flora & Flora, 1999 as cited in Fisher);

2. isolated skills instruction—whether it be in phonics, vocabulary, or comprehension—will likely have little impact on students' reading more and reading better (Ivey Et Baker, 2004 as cited in Fisher); and,

3. computer programs can provide struggling readers with application and practice opportunities, but they cannot replace a skilled teacher (Fisher Et Ivey, 2006 as cited in Fisher). The teacher employs the strategic use of prompts, cues, and questions to get the students to do the work, whereas computers provide independent practice.

Instead, Fisher (2008) insists that reading instruction in high schools establish a "task value" orientation, wherein students see worth in the task that they are attempting. He recommends avoiding watered-down versions of curriculum in favor of instruction that is rich in content to stimulate sophisticated thinking in adolescents, claiming such instruction will result in higher degrees of motivation.

Seven principles for enhancing adolescent reading skills were identified by the International Reading Association's Adolescent Literacy Commission according to Guth (2001, as cited by Miguelph, 2009); all had to do with building student interest in the material and focused on building reading communities and assessment. Miguelph (2009) suggests that word reading may be more effective for helping struggling middle school readers: making letter-sound correspondences, reading words as a whole, and reading words fluently. His survey of literature across the 20 years prior to his report
led to the conclusion that "implementing explicit, systematic, basic reading skill
instruction methods or programs to teach a multitude of basic reading skills, such as
phonics,
sight words, oral reading fluency, and comprehension, when they encounter adolescents
who have limited basic reading skills."

Clearly, the intention to turn out literate students who are prepared for college-
level reading tasks is present across the K-12 spectrum in American education.
Thousands of studies, reports of best practices, pilot projects, intervention plans, and
documents proclaiming goals and over-arching principles exist to guide educators. Yet,
the problem persists. Far too many students enter college with insufficient skills for
reading, comprehending, and synthesizing required texts. Insufficient reading skills
coupled with the trend toward aliteracy among college students compound the issues of
students' ability to think critically and to meet the needs of a 21st century labor pool.

**Examination of Non-Readers (Aliterates)**

In 2009, college students spent 12 hours per day engaged with some type of
media according to a report for Alloy Media Marketing, which claims to control the top
ranked and largest media and advertising network of youth targeted websites
(marketingcharts.com, 2009). That statistic is practically prehistoric in the current day of
digital notepads, ultrabooks, smart phones, and the almost compulsory use Facebook as a
collegiate staple for socializing and information gathering. One must wonder when
students have time for family obligations, jobs, social activities, or academic pursuits. Of
course, college professors do not need statistics to recognize the impact that technology
has had on the amount of reading students do. Like many trends in academia, we do not rely on researchers to tell us what we see in our classrooms. In high schools and in colleges, it seems that every year fewer students read assigned texts. Along with this trend, however, there has been little research to explain why students choose not to read.

The trend has been identified by academics since the 1960s—“reluctant readers” (Chambers, 1969), “illiterate literates” (Huck, 1973), “aliterates” (Boorstin, 1984; “nonreaders” (Smith, 1988), “literate non-readers” (Nell, 1988), and the saddest sounding of all, "elective illiterates" Graves & Kinsley" (1983). Smith says of this population who can read but choose not to, that they represent one of the “great tragedies of contemporary education” (1988). William Baroody (1984), a White House official and President of the American Enterprise Institute bemoans what he predicted as a two-tiered society:

Aliteracy reflects a change in cultural values and a loss of skills, both of which threaten the processes of a free and democratic society. Literacy . . . knits people together, giving them a common culture . . . and provides people with the intellectual tools used to question, challenge, understand, disagree, and arrive at consensus. In short, it allows people to participate in an exchange of ideas. A democratic nation is weakened when fewer and fewer citizens can participate in such an exchange. Aliteracy leads inexorably to a two-tiered society: the knowledgeable elite and the masses. It makes a common culture illusory or impossible; it erodes the basis for effective decision making and participation in the democratic process. (p. ix as quoted in Beers, 2)
In 1978 Mikulecky observed that in the United States, “reading habits and attitudes seem to deteriorate with each successive year,” offering to as evidence a 1969 Gallup Poll sampling that suggested that 58 percent of adult Americans claimed to have “never read, never finished a book.”

Beer's 2011 study of middle school readers identified aliterates as being "extremely unmotivated," as students who not only have negative thoughts about reading and readers, but surround themselves with peers with similar attitudes. They describe reading as "boring," and do not see action or form images when they read. She listed common actions (or lack of action) among the students she interviewed.

1. Not enjoy reading.
2. Not read at this time
3. Not make time to read.
4. Approach most reading events, especially those at school and perhaps those at home, with an efferent stance, but have read and can read with an aesthetic stance.
5. Define reading as a skill, as “saying words, looking at sentences, answering questions for the teacher.”
6. See the purpose of reading as strictly functional.
7. Not identify themselves as readers and not wish to be identified as readers.
8. Speak negatively about students who do enjoy reading.
9. Not plan to read in the future.
Many of those reporting for Goodwin's survey of college students (1996) pointed to the necessity to work in order to afford their educations as consuming most of their time outside of class. This, along with sports, clubs, and other campus activities left little discretionary time, and that time was not used for reading. English courses, for instance, offer fare that would, outside of college, be considered reading solely for pleasure. Albert Garcia (2004), Sacramento City College Language and Literature Division Dean, coaxes reluctant readers with readings relevant to the lives of the college's diverse population in his textbook Digging In: Literature for Developing Writers. The readings in the book — short stories, poems and essays — are advertised as “accessible for students who are still developing their reading skills” (Garcia, 2004). Garcia tells students, “We should approach a poem, short story or essay as a work of art to enjoy. The author wants it that way,” yet few students see reading anything in college as pleasurable (Salter & Brook, 2007).

Sullivan (2002) says that students rarely get to experience the pleasure of reading. An author and library specialist, he asserts that college courses that focus on writing solely as a “skill” are key contributors to the aliteracy problem. Moreover, "Reading education focuses entirely on teaching students the mechanics of reading, but they are rarely taught more than those basic skills. He claims that reading instruction should share a great deal of the blame for turning adolescents away from reading. Sullivan also asserts that central to the trend toward aliteracy are state accountability policies emphasizing standardized testing, leaving little time for reading that stimulates thinking or reading for pleasure.
The issue of aliteracy and students' attitudes toward reading is not limited to the United States where we recognize our students as being tech savvy, with access to the gadgets that provide any kind, any amount of information on demand. The problem spans the globe. In Nigeria, a nation that takes pride in its vigorous national literacy agenda, teachers report that their students prefer "watching and listening," and find reading and writing "boring and difficult" (Olufowobi & Makinde, 2011). The researchers attribute the trend to the increase in technology, wherein the prospect of spending leisure time or even creating time to plough through books does not seem as easy as it did in the past. They also name the causes of aliteracy to "fatigue, defects, nature of environment [illiteracy as part of the culture], tight schedule, academic state and laziness." Olufowobi and Makinde cite studies that reveal secondary school students do not have interest in reading because of their negative attitudes, lack of motivation and the influence of home videos and computer games.

Angela Weiler, Senior Librarian at Syracuse University and frequently published library science scholar says, "Indeed, educators recognized years ago that only a very small percentage of the general population prefer to learn by reading, and that small percentage, not surprisingly, is comprised mainly of people who are professionally affiliated with education and libraries (2004). She cites the “Control Theory” of behavior developed by William Glasser². The theory states that, rather than being a

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² William Glasser, M.D. (born May 11, 1925) is an American psychiatrist and the developer of reality therapy and choice theory. His ideas focus on personal choice, personal responsibility and personal transformation. Glasser is also notable for applying his theories to broader social issues, such as education, the improvement of schools, teaching, management, and marriage.
response to outside stimulus, behavior is determined by what a person wants or needs at any given time, and any given behavior is an attempt to address basic human needs (as cited in Weiler, 2004). Applying that theory to students' reading habits, she reasons that if the desired behavior addresses students' needs, the students will respond. If students appear to be unmotivated to perform, it is because the rules, assignments, etc., are viewed by them as irrelevant to their “basic human needs.” Weiler goes on to suggest that Glasser has shown that a majority of students recognize when the work they are doing is irrelevant “busy work,” even if they perform well because of incentives and even when the teacher uses praise as an incentive, concluding that many students will reject such empty work altogether.

While the literature is rich with descriptions of non-readers, it is thin where there is need for information on college students – their reading compliance, their motivations, their expectations. What does exist demonstrates that students mostly scan assigned reading, looking for answers to test questions (Marcus, 2000, Sappington, Kinsey, & Munsayac, 2002), Mokhtari, Reichard, & Gardner, (2009). A survey of psychology students at two universities (Sikorski, Rich, Saville, Buskist, Drogan and Davis, 2001 as cited Sappington, Kinsey, & Munsayac, 2002) revealed that between 9 percent and 69 percent of students did not have the text for their own introductory courses. At one of the universities, of those who possessed the required text, 78 percent of the students reported that they had read it "sparingly" or not at all. At the other university the rate was 82 percent. Eleven years after the Sikorski et al. survey, we live in an academic world of higher cost text books, increased need for college-level remedial reading classes, and
more frequent use of technology. That begs the question: what would the reading compliance rate be today?

**Implications for Workforce Readiness**

Workforce development is essential to the economy of any nation and in the United States, an adequately educated workforce is at risk. Of the 47 million new jobs we expect to create over the next decade, a third will require at least a bachelor’s degree and an additional 30 percent will require a community-college degree or formal skills certification (Walshok, 2002). Another startling statistic offered by Walshok is the percentage of the population with college degrees by age group: the United States is first in 60-year-olds and older who are college graduates, but seventeenth in the under-30 category.

The Public Policy Institute of California predicts that if current trends persist, in 2025 – only twelve years from now – California will have one million fewer college graduates than it needs. Only 35 percent of working-age adults will have a college degree in an economy that would otherwise require degrees of 41 percent of its workers (Johnson & Sengupta, 2009). It is easy to see how the number of potential college graduates dwindle. The California Community College Chancellor's Office (cited in Johnson & Sengupta, 2009) report that 55 percent of all California State University baccalaureates and 28 percent of all University of California baccalaureates awarded in 2007 began college as community college students. However, only about 10 to 12 percent of a cohort, or entering class, of community college students transfer to a four-year college or university (Sengupta and Jepsen, 2006 as cited in Johnson & Sengupta,
The California Community Colleges comprise the largest higher education system in the nation, serving 2.6 million students, with 70-80 percent assessing into basic skills courses like reading or math (CCCCO.2012). With only 17 percent of those who must take remedial reading classes graduating with a four-year degree (National Center for Education, 2004 as cited in Conley, 2007), it is clear to see how lack of reading skills has a direct impact on the workforce. But, that does not tell the whole story. Those who do manage to graduate, and find jobs face evaluation by their employers.

If one were to look at the expectations of employers for college graduates, the prospects of well-paying careers, rationally, is calamitous for those with some college, high school diplomas, and high school drop-outs. Employers rating basic skills found in college graduates name reading comprehension as essential – 87.9 percent in a survey of employers for the business think tank Partnership for 21st Century Skills (Casner-Lotto, & Barrington, 2006). Another important consideration from the same study is a ranking of skills, both basic and applied. Of the top five skills most frequently rated as essential among college graduates are four applied skills – professionalism/work ethic, teamwork/collaboration, oral communication, and critical thinking/problem solving. The only basic skill named in the top five is reading comprehension. Academics would argue that good oral communication skills and critical thinking grow out of frequent, broad, and fluent reading practices. The same employers ranked the skills of recently hired college graduates on a deficient/adequate/excellent scale. In reading comprehension, only 25.9 percent of recent hires were ranked as excellent; 69 percent were adequate; 5.1 were
deficient (Casner-Lotto, & Barrington, 2006). For most academics who urge their students to strive for excellence, adequate might as well be dismal.

**Why Phenomenology**

Phenomenological research provides unique insight into how a common experience (phenomenon) affects individuals. It is a kind of research that allows the researcher to compare and contrast both participants' and her own reactions to such experiences. There being very little insight into the experience of being a college alliterate, the narrative story inquiry seems appropriate to develop an understanding of human experiences through the accounts and anecdotes of the participants. The qualitative nature of phenomenology allows a rich understanding of the participants lived experiences. It does not introduce treatments or manipulate variables; rather, it allows meaning to emerge from the participants. It is qualitative research that uses observation and interaction with the participants as the data collection method.

As a qualitative research method in education phenomenology seeks to avoid "constructing a predetermined set of fixed procedures, the techniques and concepts that would rule-govern the research project (van Manen, 1990). Van Manen suggests that there is an interaction of six research activities within phenomenological research in the human sciences:

1. turning to a phenomenon which seriously interests us and commits us to the world;
2. investigating experience as we live it rather than as we conceptualize it;
3. reflecting on the essential themes which characterize the phenomenon;
4. describing the phenomenon through the art of writing and rewriting;
5. manipulating a strong and oriented pedagogical relation to the phenomenon;
   and,
6. balancing the research context by considering parts and whole.

These six activities seem to fit both the researcher and the population chosen for the study, in that the participants, by definition, have limited lexicons and expand their schema through the coaxing of the researcher by acquiring new word choices to describe their experience by the very act of responding to the researcher. The personal narratives of the participants provide them with new insights into their own experience, fulfilling one of the goals of the projects stated in the introduction: to benefit them through the metacognitive exercise of examining their own attitudes, and processes.

Creswell (2007) advises those engaged in phenomenological studies to examine commonalities for emergent themes. While the population is small in this study, each participant has self-identified as a non-reader. It is the themes – the common threads – that those seeking to become educated but who avoid reading share that is of interest.
CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Only 25 percent of community college students in California arrive with sufficient basic skills in reading, writing, and mathematics to succeed in college-level courses (CCCO, 2009). Students who require remedial reading courses are at especially high risk of dropout or failure (National Center for Education, 2004 as cited in Conley, 2007). Coupled with the risk of being a remedial reader is the phenomenon of being a non-reader, an aliterate, an individual who can read but who elects not to.

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand the lived experiences of self-identified aliterates. Developing an understanding of their reading experiences and attitudes might illuminate common patterns or motivations for not reading. Such an examination might also lead to insight into students' own meaning of and regard for literacy. Together, consideration of these factors might lead to pedagogy that encourages reading, or perhaps embraces new forms of literacy for a digital age.

This chapter provides an overview of the research design, the rationale for the survey and interviews, and a brief profile of the participants, the data collection process and, an analysis of the data. Chapter 4, Findings, will provide more thorough profiles of the participants and common themes that arose in the interviews and the reading assessments.

Research Design

The research design for this examination of community college remedial readers was primarily qualitative phenomenological using a brief questionnaire to set up a
narrative inquiry story method to increase understanding of the participants experiences through a dialogue with the researcher. As described by Moustakas (1994), phenomenological research is an investigation of how a particular experience, or phenomenon, affected an individual. Moustakas recommends general, open-ended questions that provide the participants the opportunity to explain what they experienced and how their experiences affect them. In the instance of this study, the researcher used broad questions constructed to provoke thought in the participants about why they do not read and how reading (or more specifically, not reading) affected their academic lives.

However, to provide more extensive insight into the experience of alliterate community college students, this study has used a three-stage approach. A summary of the literature on aliteracy and associated considerations is the first stage to be presented herein. The goals of the literature are examinee the extent to which aliteracy is considered a problem in academia and the consequences non-readers may face in the broader world.

Using the insight of several of the scholars whose work was reviewed, I conducted a brief survey among remedial writing students to identify students who were non-readers by not only asking if they read, but also what they read. I eliminated those who said they do not read all of their textbook assignments, but who read magazines or other reading for pleasure. The third stage was to interview ten students who self-identified as non readers.

**Rationale for Survey and Interviews**

The choice of methodology for this study was guided by the principle that the participants own experiences are best expressed in their own words. Through the use of
an initial questionnaire (Appendix A) and broad, open-ended questions (Appendix B) the study was designed to elicit answers that would stimulate a conversation between the researcher and the participant. The purpose of the interview questions was to get participants to expand their thoughts on their reading habits, attitudes, and motivations. Van Manen suggests that human science is best achieved through examination of "mind, thoughts, consciousness, values, feelings, emotions, actions, and purposes" (1990). The interview questions offered the opportunity for participants to examine their own perceptions in such a vein. Through the use of open-ended interview questions, participants provided information that could not have been gathered on a questionnaire and provided valuable clues through the execution of their answers – body language, tone of voice, facial expressions, pauses.

The Participants

The participants in this study were ten remedial readers from a remedial writing class. Seidman (2006) recommended purposeful selection when examining a phenomenon to make certain that the student participants met the criteria for inclusion in the study. He recommended a participant population of 5-25 participants. Using an initial questionnaire in two developmental writing courses at a Northern California community college, I invited those who identified themselves as non-readers to participate in the study that included a longer questionnaire, two basic reading assessments, and 20-30 minute video interviews. The initial questions were contained eight questions that asked students to assess their skills and engagement in reading and writing for their college courses. The questions are provided in Table 1 below.
Table 1: Initial Questionnaire

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Do you like to write? yes / no?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Do you consider yourself a strong writer? \textit{Strong 5 4 3 2 1 Weak}</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Do you consider yourself a strong reader? \textit{Strong 5 4 3 2 1 Weak}</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Do you read books or magazines not associated with your college courses: yes/no?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Do you read all of the assigned material for your college courses? yes / no?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>How many hours per week do you read for your college courses: _________?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Do you like to read? yes / no?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Do you read for pleasure or entertainment? Circle all that apply. books magazines online browsing comics/manga?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The questionnaire is one that I use on the first day of all of my writing classes to get to know my students, give them a chance to self-assess, and to bring up any issues that concern them. It is my observation, in my writing classes, that students generally claim to be better readers than writers. Few say they like to write. The back of the questionnaire is space for a brief diagnostic essay that I use as a benchmark for students’ skills at the beginning of the semester (Appendix A). The questions about reading usually provide some insight into students study habits and help inform my guidance to writing students. For the purpose of this study, the questions about reading helped identify likely participants.

Questions number one and two were not considered in the selection of those invited to participate. Based on qualified assumptions that students over-estimate their academic engagement (Koriat, 2005, Macan, Shahani, Dipboye, & Phillips, 1990),
students who answered "no" to questions three and four, and provided low estimates for question five were invited to interview. Ten of the sixteen individuals invited to participate in the study actually kept appointments and were interviewed. They ranged in age from 19-54 years and represented diverse ethnic and cultural groups.

The participants were all enrolled in remedial reading course during the semester they were enrolled in the remedial writing classes from which the pool of eligible participants was drawn. The courses and entry competencies are listed below in Table 2. Although Reading 10 lists fourth grade skills as entry level for the course, it is the placement for any student not placing at Reading 11 or above.

Table 2: Study-Site College - Remedial Reading Courses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course #</th>
<th>Course Title</th>
<th>Entry level reading passages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reading 10</td>
<td>Basic Reading Skill Development</td>
<td>approximately the 4th grade level using the Fry Readability formula*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading 11</td>
<td>Reading Skill Development</td>
<td>7th grade level on a standardized test</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading 110</td>
<td>Comprehension Strategies and Vocabulary Development for College</td>
<td>approximately the 9th grade level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading 310</td>
<td>Critical Reading as Critical Thinking</td>
<td>10th grade reading material; vocabulary 11-12th grade</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The Fry readability formula (or Fry readability graph) is a readability metric for English texts, developed by Edward Fry. The grade reading level (or reading difficulty level) is calculated by the average number of sentences (y-axis) and syllables (x-axis) per hundred words. These averages are plotted onto a specific graph; the intersection of the average number of sentences and the average number of syllables determines the reading level of the content. The formula and graph are often used to provide a common standard by which the readability of documents can be measured.

At the college where the study was conducted, a requirement for an associate's degree is completion of Reading 310 or ESL Reading 340 (not listed on the table above) with a grade of "C" or better, or a score on the Accuplacer® assessment demonstrating
reading competency. Students must start their reading classes at the assessed level or lower and must earn a grade of "C" or better to progress to the next level. Reading 110 is a prerequisite for many general education courses and courses for major areas of study.

Data Collection

The first step in data collection was to identify the participants and the location of the study. The college was chosen for its urban location, diverse student population, and its large reading program. The researcher obtained permission to conduct the study from the School of Education at California State University, Sacramento, where the project originated and from the Planning, Research and Institutional Effectiveness Office at a Northern California community college where the participants were students and the data was collected. The students selected for the study were enrolled in my own remedial writing courses and in remedial reading courses at that college. The criterion for selection for the study is outlined in the previous section. Each participant was contacted in person or by email and invited to join the study. Appointments were set with the first 10 students to accept the invitation. The assessments and the interviews were conducted in the same session with each student. The interviews were video recorded and then transcribed.

Creswell (2007) recommended in-depth interviews as the basis for a phenomenological study. The interviews were preceded by a questionnaire that the participants filled out, answering questions of a general nature about their attitudes toward reading. Their answers became the basis for the interviews. Participants also participated in two brief reading assessments to provide some quantitative data that
would later be examined for correlation with the interviews. The questionnaire was attached to a "Consent to Participate in Research" (Appendix B) document that informed participants of the research procedure, risks and benefits of participating, confidentiality of the data, and contact information for the researcher. The consent form began with general census data and previewed the interview questions that asked open-ended question like "how did you learn to read," and "how would you describe yourself as a reader." Participants’ answers to the question allowed the researcher to develop how, when, and why questions to further probe for attitudes and behaviors. For instance the "how did you learn to read" questions elicited narratives about participants' early educations and their attitudes toward such practices as skill building instruction and print material associated with early schooling.

The reading assessment tools were designed for adults: The Davidson-Bruce Word Meaning Test (U.S. Dept. of Education) and the Quick Adult Reading Inventory (QARI) (Chall, Roswell, Curtis, et al., 2003). Both were oral tests. The first measured the participants' expressive vocabulary and were administered from level (grade) 11/12 to level 6. The QARI tested for vocabulary mastery level from grade 10 to grade 5.

All of the interviews took place at a Northern California community college at various locations on campus that afforded privacy and low or no background noise such as open classrooms, library study rooms, and closed labs. The video recorded interviews averaged 20-30 minutes. Field notes were made to document participants' comments, but the researcher took minimum notes, primarily for the purpose of calling her attention to particular answers or body language when she later viewed the videos or read the
transcripts. Participants were encouraged to watch the videos and provide commentary immediately following the interview. The researcher offered each participant the opportunity to view the video again and to review the transcript to verify accuracy and trustworthiness (Creswell, 2007). None of the participants elected to do so.

**Construction of the Interview Questions**

The purpose of the interview was to examine students perceptions of their reading habits, their reading histories, and motivations for reading or not reading. Creswell (2007) suggests that in grounded theory the questions may be directed toward generating a theory, as in the exploration of a phenomenon. The initial interview questions were adapted from a questionnaire designed by Raelyn Agustin Joyce for her 1991 dissertation, Toward a Definition of Aliteracy. All questions were designed to provide a fuller picture of students' attitudes by allowing the interviewer to probe their responses with further questions. Creswell (2007) supports the idea that as the interview develops, factors will emerge that may influence the outcome of the initial focus of the study and allow exploration of the phenomenon in great detail. Further, he advises that such questions might provide a cause-and-effect type of thinking in the participants that could lead to inclusion of quantitative data in addition to the "open and emerging" stance of qualitative research.

**Mitigating Factors**

The fact that the students self identified for the study would seem to strengthen the reliability of the data, since respondents in surveys that ask for self-reports tend to provide information that reflects well on them. However, the presence of an interviewer
who is known to the students might lead respondents to give answers that he or she thinks
the interviewer might be looking for. The length of the video interviews, the design of
open-ended questions, the ability to probe respondents' answers, and the relaxed
conversational tone of the interviews had the potential for mitigating stilted answers. The
in-depth nature of the video interview helped provide clues on how respondents' answers
might be interpreted.

Data Analysis

Two reading assessment tools were used to augment the demographic data the
participants provided on the initial students' get-to-know you questionnaire (Appendix A)
and on the survey questionnaire that was printed on the back of the "Consent to
Participate in Research" form (Appendix B). Before each participant reviewed the survey
questions, students completed brief reading assessments by providing oral answers when
prompted by the researcher. First was the Word Reading Test (WRT), from the Quick
Adult Reading Inventory (QARI) (Chall, Roswell, Curtis, & Strucker, 2003) which is
designed to determine a student's highest word reading level expressed as a grade level,
grades 1 through 10. Next was the Davidson-Bruce Word Meaning Test (Davidson &
Bruce, 2002), an assessment of expressive vocabulary, also indicative of grade level
reading skills that reflect students' ability to comprehend connotative meanings, scored
from grade 1 to grade 12.

While WRT measures word recognition level for planning decoding instruction, it
was useful for this study to determine at what level the participants could read the words
without consideration of comprehension. The participant was handed a list of words and
asked to read the words on the page aloud. Words counted as incorrect included 1) mispronunciations or substitutions, 2) wrong stress on a word (e.g. *emphasis* for *emphasis*), 3) taking more than four seconds to pronounce a word, 4) stopping on a word for more than four seconds, and 5) changing a response from correct to incorrect. Using the Davidson-Bruce word meaning tests, the researcher asked the study participant to tell what a word means and scored his responses as correct or incorrect. When the participant defined at least four out of five words at a given grade equivalent correctly, he or she is said to have mastered that level of vocabulary. For instance, the grade 6 level words were *surrender, occupation, decline, consume*, and *dismal*. Grade 10 level words were *dispute, agitate, initiate, audible*, and *prominent*.

Scoring of assessments was performed by the researcher according to the instructions in the text packets. The data gathered from those assessments were recorded and plotted for grade level reading skill as well as counted for frequency of specific errors. The assessments were scored for each participant and are described along with each participants' census data in Chapter 4. The data is also reviewed for commonalities among the scores and for specific patterns of error.

While these assessment tools were not meant to provide definitive reading levels for the participants, the data gathered helped to provide richer profiles of the participants. The data gathered from the assessments also provided a process of "validation" which Creswell (2007) recommended to ensure the quality and accuracy in the narrative data. The participants also provided demographic data and information on their academic backgrounds.
The researcher used the demographic data the students provided to ask general questions about their lives, probing for details about their families, work, and other responsibilities if the participants seemed receptive. For the interviews, 16 questions were used to stimulate discussion of the participants' experiences and attitudes. The questions were designed to cause the participants to consider how they learned to read and factors that affect their attitudes from that point forward. The questions are listed below.

1. List three words that describe how you feel about reading.
2. In your opinion and experience, what are the characteristics of a “good” reader?
3. What do you do when you are reading and come to a word that you don’t know?
4. If you don’t understand what you read, what do you do?
5. What do you do to help you remember what you read?
6. When and how did you learn to read?
7. What do you find challenging or difficult about reading?
8. What grade were you in when you stopped doing all of the assigned reading?
9. What percentage of assigned reading would you estimate that you do? Please be candid.
10. How many hours a week would you estimate that you spend reading for your courses?
11. Do you read anything for pleasure or entertainment? If so, what do you read?
12. What do you do well as a reader?
13. How do you feel about reading in general?
14. What do you believe about reading in college?

15. What experiences led you to develop your attitude toward and feelings about reading?

16. How would you describe yourself as a reader?

After the first three interviews were conducted, a list of key words that expressed various attitudes about reading displayed by the participants during the videos was constructed. Words such as boring or bored, dull, understand, remember, forget, time, hard, interest or interesting, grade, concentrate or concentration, and reader. These words or forms of the words occurred in the first interviews and so were selected as the likely "common threads" that would express similar ideas in the rest of the interviews. At the completion of the interviews, a simple MS Word program word search of the transcripts was used as a discourse analysis tool to discover repeated themes and frequency of words students used to describe their emotions, attitudes, and experienced. All reports herein use pseudonyms to maintain the anonymity of the participants.

The Role of the Researcher

While Embree, et al (2001, p.7) provide that phenomenological research is often driven by the researcher's own experience or observations, Moustakas (1994) and Creswell (2007) advise that the purpose such research was to explore the experiences of the participants without interference from the researcher's experiences or biases. Nevertheless, Creswell (2007) calls the researcher an integral instrument in a qualitative study. Yet, it is important to the integrity of the study that the researcher not lose objectivity while still remaining an active participant in the students' narratives.
Interpretation of the data was, of course, filtered through the experiential lenses of the researcher, a community college adjunct professor with 13 years of experience teaching writing from the most basic to advanced levels taught at her college.

Working with the lowest level writers has made me keenly aware of the remedial reading conundrum in community college. What are the components of aliteracy? Do they not read because they cannot, or is it they cannot read because they choose not to? The students participating in the study began college with a disadvantage that many will not overcome (Pugh, 2000). Students in remedial courses are at high risk for failure or dropping out of college out of frustration (Conley, 2007). As their teacher I am keenly aware of my stake in their success or failure.

As the researcher it was impossible to remain completely unbiased within the structure of mostly unscripted interviews. What follows in the findings in Chapter 4 is an attempt to strip away my own preconceived notions about non-readers and provide both glimpses of students’ unaltered experiences and attitudes and to identify common experiences revealed in the interviews that might lead to a set of explanations for non-reading behaviors.

**Chapter Summary**

Chapter 3 presented the design of the study and the procedures for implementing it. Provided in Chapter 4 is the analysis of the findings. Those findings are contextualized profiles of the participants which include qualitative data extracted from responses to demographic questions and video interviews. Chapter 5 includes a summary of the study, conclusions, and recommendations for practices.
CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the experience of community college students who have declared that they do not read and their attitudes toward the reading they are assigned in their college courses. This chapter will consist of two parts. The first is brief profiles of ten students built from information they provided on their initial questionnaires, their consent form, results from the assessments preformed at the time of the interviews, and brief answers from the video interviews. The second part is a comparison – the search for commonality among the non-readers who participated.

The first part of the data will show a broad range of ages, economic status, cultures and ethnicities, experiences, and personal interests among the participants. Ages range from 18-year-old first time college students who are just a few months past high school graduation to a 53-year-old student with a GED. Some are supported by their families, other support families. With the exception of the 53-year-old, all say they are in college to get a better job, to secure their futures. The second part of data analysis indicates four strong factors (expressed at categories on Table 4) that affect participants choosing not to read: boredom/disinterest, reading comprehension, retention of the material, and time factors, along with minor commonalities among the student participants. It is the interactive nature of phenomenological research that allowed for interpretations by the researcher and development of thematic categories into which participants' responses were placed. These themes were generated from the analysis of
the video interviews, a careful examination of participants’ own words, their body language, facial expressions, and intonations. While all students may not have chosen the same words to express their ideas, their meanings frequently correspond to one another. The researcher labeled the themes accordingly. For instance, no participant vocalized "retention of the material"; rather, they spoke of not being able to remember what they read. All of the students who participated in the study named at least two of the common factors except for one student who named only time as a factor in his failure to read for his college courses.

**Profiles of Participants**

The students who participated in this study were enrolled in the college's lowest level developmental writing course in the fall, 2012. They all are enrolled in a remedial reading class or will be required to take at least one class as a prerequisite for many of the college level general education courses the school offers. A brief description of the reading courses is listed on table 1, below, as a guide to the courses noted in the profiles that follow. Each student assessed himself or herself for reading skills on the initial questionnaire using the Likert scale below in Table 1, although that self-assessment has nothing to do with the reading course placement for students. The college where the study was connected uses Accuplacer®3, a product of Educational Testing Services, for course placement. The college's range of remedial reading courses is reported in Table 2 on page 49.

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3 The Reading Comprehension test, an untimed computerized test comprised of 20 questions, measures students' ability to understand what they read, to identify main ideas and to make inferences. You need to distinguish between direct statements and secondary or supporting ideas. The results of the assessment are used by academic advisors and counselors to place students into a college reading course that meets their skill levels.
Each profile is followed by a "researcher's note," my own observations and deliberations made after having spent a semester with the study participants in a remedial English writing course. It seems likely that some of issues addressed in the writing course are variations, or symptomatic, of problems they have reading (Salvatori, 1983, p. 660; Brozo & Simpson, 1995).

Table 3, below, provides a guide to students' self assessments, which are reported in the profiles.

Table 3: Self-assessment Scale

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Self-assessment Scale:</th>
<th>Strong 5</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>Weak</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do you consider yourself a strong reader?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Student: Diana

Demographic Information: Diana is an 18-year-old Latina high school graduate who is bilingual. Her parents speak Spanish at home. She has completed one semester of college including the college's third level reading course, Reading 110. On the college's placement test, she assessed into Reading 110, a mid-level remedial course, and was enrolled in it at the time of the interview.

Reading self-assessment: Diana placed herself at 2 on the Likert scale.

Vocabulary/reading assessment: Word Meaning Test, grade 9-10; QARI, grade 9

Diana's performance on the assessment in the study is consistent with her initial placement for college reading courses.

Interview briefs: Diana said she finds reading challenging when she comes to words she does not know but she re-reads to try to guess the meaning. She reported
doing about 70 percent of the assigned reading, but reads for less than 3 hours per week for her college courses. She said she does not like to read and avoids it if possible. She described herself as not being a good reader and usually had to read things like history texts twice. She said that she stopped reading most of her assignments in the 10th grade, but recognizes she will have to read more in college.

Researcher's note: Diana passed the writing course with a grade of "C." Her writing was marked with frequent sentence boundary errors. She struggled to write a clear thesis statement and although she understood the concept of topic sentences, her paragraphs often lacked coherence.

Student: Boyce

Demographic Information: Boyce is an 32-year-old white male who earned a GED in order to join the military. He has completed one semester of college and has nine units. On the college's placement test, he assessed into Reading 11, one of the lower remedial courses offered by the college.

Reading self-assessment: Boyce placed himself at 2 on the Likert scale.

Vocabulary/reading assessment: Word Meaning Test, grade 8; QARI, grade 8

Boyce's performance on the assessment in the study is consistent with his initial placement in Reading 11.

Interview briefs: Boyce is an Army veteran who served two tours in Afghanistan. He has a wife and two children. He is pleased with the opportunity to go to college which he said he thought he would not have after dropping out of high school. He said does not like to read and thinks he reads about 50 percent of his assigned college reading,
about 4 hours per week. He has declared a Criminal Justice major and does not think he should have to take general education classes (like English writing or history) because they have "nothing to do with my major." He thinks his dislike for reading grew out of being required to read aloud in class as a child. He called himself a good student until the 7th grade.

Researcher's note: Boyce passed the writing course with a grade of "B." His writing was perhaps the most improved in the entire class. He began the semester with paragraphs that sounded more like a list than components of a coherent paragraph. He quickly learned the pattern of topic sentence, background information, evidence, and analysis. However, his syntax was often awkward and word choice imprecise.

Student: Clark

Demographic Information: Clark is an 18-year-old male Asian-American with a high school diploma. He speaks Chinese and uses it to communicate with his parents and grandparents. His first semester in college was fall, 2012. On the college's placement test, he assessed into and was taking Reading 310, the highest level remedial course offered by the college at the time of the interview.

Reading self-assessment: Clark placed himself at 4 on the Likert scale.

Vocabulary/reading assessment: Word Meaning Test, grade 7/8; QARI, grade 7/8

Clark's performance on the assessment in the study is inconsistent with his initial placement in Reading 310.

Interview briefs: Clark described a good reader as one who understands what he or she reads. He said he has a good memory and remembers what he reads, but he does
not always understand what he reads. He reported reading 90 percent of the assigned reading for his classes, but he reads only two hours per week.

Researcher's note: Clark passed his writing course with a grade of "C." His paragraph and essay development were good, but his writing was marked with awkward syntax and patterns of ESL errors.

Student: Damone

Demographic Information: Damone is an 20-year-old African American male with a high school diploma. Fall, 2012 was his first semester in college. On the college's placement test, he assessed into Reading 11, one of the lower remedial courses offered by the college and was enrolled at the time of the interview.

Reading self-assessment: Damone placed himself at 3 on the Likert scale.

Vocabulary/reading assessment: Word Meaning Test, grade 7; QARI, grade 7

Damone's performance on the assessment in the study is consistent with his initial placement in Reading 11.

Interview briefs: Damone is a student athlete who lives at home with his single mother and two younger sisters. He says he does not like to read, but feels obligated to set a good example for his younger siblings. His complaint is that there is too much reading assigned and the reading is often too hard. He reported that he goes to all of his classes all of the time but does only about 30 percent of the reading. He said that there is not enough time to do all the reading, so he only reads the "interesting" parts. When questioned about which were the interesting parts, he could name only the book he had read for English Writing 51, the novel, *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-time Indian*. 
Researcher's note: Damone received a "D" in English Writing 51 which means he must repeat the course to earn at least a "C" to move on to the next level of writing. His essays were underdeveloped and marked by frequent sentence level errors. To his credit, he did engage in lively discussion about the novel, which reflected his commentary in the reading journal he kept.

Student: Eilish

Demographic Information: Eilish is a 18-year-old white female with a high school diploma. Fall, 2012, was her first semester in college. On the college's placement test, she assessed into Reading 10, the lowest level remedial course offered and was enrolled at the time of the interview.

Reading self-assessment: On the Likert scale, Eilish rated herself as a 2.

Vocabulary/reading assessment: Word Meaning Test, grade 6; QARI, grade 7

Eilish's performance on the assessment in the study is consistent with her initial placement in Reading 10.

Interview briefs: Eilish believed herself to be a poor reader and she said she does not like to read. She does not have a computer at home and rarely uses the Internet. She said that she does about 75 percent of her assigned college reading and reads for about two hours a week. She does not read magazines, but "looks at the pictures," if she notices someone interesting it.

Researcher's note: Eilish barely passed the writing course with a "C." Her writing is very controlled – short simple sentences with bland verbs and minimal development of ideas. Her use of transitional words or phrases is limited. Her grammar is generally
acceptable. Efforts to get Elish to write more developed essays by analyzing the reading texts and making connections to them were painful. Her body language suggested that questioning her about her ideas related to the texts was like an assault. Each time we spoke about her essays, she would draw back as if to place a barrier between us.

**Student: Roy**

Demographic Information: Roy is a 53 year old African American male who recently earned a GED and has completed college units 18 units in two semesters. On the college's placement test, he assessed into Reading 110, a mid-level remedial course and was enrolled at the time of the interview.

Reading self-assessment: On the Likert scale, Roy rated himself as a 4.

Vocabulary/reading assessment: Word Meaning Test, grade 8; QARI, grade 9

Roy's performance on the assessment in the study is consistent with her initial placement for college reading courses.

Interview briefs: Roy reported that he did not learn to read well until he was in high school, but thought that having to read was one of the reasons he did not graduate. He said that he stopped reading his assignments in the 9th grade. He said most reading is boring but that he likes to read "good" books. Roy could not name a genre he preferred. He did name Louis L'amour as his favorite author. He said that he reads about 75 percent of what is assigned, and that he reads about six hours a week for his classes.

Researcher's note: Roy earned the only "A" in the writing class. His maturity and life experience added insightful content to the development of his essays. He was surprised to learn that in academia we do not simply write a stream of consciousness that
might represent all we know about a topic. He quickly learned the patterns for various writing modes and was able to apply them to his own writing. His writing continued to be marked with imprecise word choices and occasional grammatical errors.

Student: Gurpreet

Demographic Information: Gurpreet is a 24-year-old female immigrant from India with a high school diploma from her home country. She has been taking college classes for two years and has completed 16 units. She claims Hindi and English both as first languages. On the college's placement test, she assessed into Reading 11, one of the lower level remedial course offered and was enrolled at the time of the interview.

Reading self-assessment: On the Likert scale, Gurpreet rated herself as a 2.

Vocabulary/reading assessment: Word Meaning Test, grade 6; QARI, grade 9

Gurpreet's performance on the assessment in the study is mixed with the word-meaning test indicating a lower level than her initial placement in Reading 11.

Interview briefs: Gurpreet was the only student in the study who claimed in the interview that she liked to read. She said that she especially likes to read to her young daughter. She admitted that she does not understand much of what she reads, particularly reprinted articles that instructors provide. Gurpreet said that she had developed a strategy for test-taking. She reviews the texts with special attention to headings, bold text, and the first and last sentences in paragraphs. She said that she also tries to find a study partner. Time is an important factor for her; she said that she cannot read until the household is quiet in the evenings and that she thinks she does 60-70 percent of the assigned reading—about five hours per week.
Researcher's note: Gurpreet earned a "C" in the writing course. Although she claims not to be an English learner, her writing is touched with an "accent" that is not American English. She makes non-standard word choices and spellings, and uses clauses and phrases that sound either awkward or stilted, but are technically correct. Rhetorically, she cannot seem to break out of cultural patterns she learned in her earlier education and develop a linear essay with a strong thesis, support, and conclusion.

**Student: Hannah**

Demographic Information: Hannah is a 18-year-old white female with a high school diploma. She has completed 12 college units. On the college's placement test, she assessed into Reading 310, the highest level remedial course offered and was enrolled at the time of the interview.

Reading self-assessment: On the Likert scale, Hannah rated herself as a 4.

Vocabulary/reading assessment: Word Meaning Test, grade 8; QARI, grade 10

Hannah's performance on the assessment in the study is mixed with the word-meaning test indicating a lower level than her initial placement in Reading 310.

Interview briefs: When asked if she likes to read, Hannah shrugged her shoulders and said, "it's so boring." "I have to have my music or the TV on when I read." She said that she reads "at least half" of the reading assigned for her classes. As for the time she spends reading, she claimed "at least half an hour every day." Finding time for reading is an issue for her because she works part-time in daycare. She also said she had to have time to help her boyfriend with his homework.
Researcher's note: Hannah's writing was competent and expressive. She earned a "C" in her English writing course; her excessive absences and frequent tardies cost her a "B." She had to be reminded almost daily that texting was not allowed in class, but she took the reprimands good naturedly.

Student: Miguel

Demographic Information: Miguel is an 18-year-old Latino male with a high school diploma. He has been in college for two semesters and has completed 13 units. His GPA is 2.5. He reports that although he speaks Spanish, his family speaks mostly English at home. On the college's placement test, he assessed into Reading 110, a mid-level remedial course and was enrolled at the time of the interview.

Reading self-assessment: On the Likert scale, Miguel rated himself as a 3.

Vocabulary/reading assessment: Word Meaning Test, grade 7; QARI, grade 9

Miguel's performance on the assessment in the study is mixed with the word meaning test indicating a lower level than his initial placement in Reading 110.

Interview briefs: Miguel was candid. He does not like to read. He reported reading only 0-20 percent of his assignments and reads for less than one-half hour per week. His strategy for keeping up is summarizing and analyzing what people talk about in class "to understand what is going on." He reports occasionally reading something on his phone like a sports article and calls everything else "boring."

Researcher's note: Miguel earned a "C" in the writing course. His essays were underdeveloped and suffered from overgeneralization. Working with him, one-on-one, I
observed that he struggled with summarizing texts, making inferences for which there was no support in the text.

Student: Katy

Demographic Information: Katy is a 19-year-old white female with a high school diploma. Fall, 2012, was her first semester in college. On the college's placement test, she assessed into Reading 310, the highest level remedial course offered and was enrolled at the time of the interview.

Reading self-assessment: On the Likert scale, Katy rated herself as a 2.

Vocabulary/reading assessment: Word Meaning Test: grade 8, QARI, grade 10

Katy's performance on the assessment in the study is mixed with the word-meaning test indicating a lower level than her initial placement in Reading 310.

Interview briefs: Katy reported having an early onset of "senioritis" and quit reading for her high school classes after the 10th grade. She said that she read about 30-40 percent of the assigned material for her college classes and reads three to four hours a week. She said she believed that when reading for college, "you must do all of it or it won't help you on the test if you skim it." She said that in high school, she learned to look for context clues for word meanings and to re-read if she did not understand something. She was specific – she would read the sentence before and the one after the sentence she did not understand.

Researcher's note: Katy earned a "D" in the writing class. She would have earned an "F," except that it is my policy not to fail students who complete the semester. Since a "C" is required to progress to the next level of writing, she will have to repeat the course.
She stopped writing halfway through her final exam and left the classroom. Her writing is almost incomprehensible. It is marked by frequent sentence level errors including those of sentence boundaries, grammar, word form, and spelling errors. She truncates words and her handwriting looks wild and uncontrolled. Given her reading level and the quality and depth of her engagement in class, I suspect a learning disability, but I am not qualified to diagnose those. I was surprised that she kept the appointment for the interview, and she seemed relieved that I referred her to a counselor suggesting that she ask for testing for a learning disability.

**Discourse Analysis of Interviews**

A simple discourse analysis was performed to examine the participants' interviews for recurring themes, or common threads. After the first viewing of the videos, I made a list of the themes I heard most often that participants used to explain why they do not do all of the assigned reading for their college class. The four most common themes were

1. reading is boring;
2. I do not understand what I read;
3. I cannot remember what I have read; and
4. I do not have enough time to read.

None of these findings were a surprise. As educators, we have all heard these as excuses for not doing the readings that were assigned. The interviews from which these themes were drawn offer insight to the attitudes of the individual participants. Moreover, because of the frequency of such responses, even within such a small sampling, it is
possible to make the following assertions: students read what interests them; "I do not understand" and "I do not remember" both having to do with comprehension, correlate with vocabulary development; and time is a significant factor for most community college students.

To discover the recurring themes from which I drew those assertions, I used three separate word searches to examine transcripts of the interviews. I searched for the most common expressions: bor* for boring, boredom, bored; under* for understand, and time for time. I kept track of each participant who used one of those words or word forms in the context of the themes listed above. Then, I reviewed each video again to listen to the participants' words and intonations and to assess non-verbal clues like facial expressions and body language, looking for other ways they might have expressed the named themes.

A tabulation of the common themes listed by participant, the recurrence of the themes, and assessment scores related to vocabulary development are provided on the following page.

Table 3: Common Themes
Chapter Four introduced the participants in the study and provided demographic data and selected findings from each interview to create a profile that included relevant background information about their lives and explained each participant's most basic
attitudes toward reading. Chapter Five, which includes extended summaries of the major findings in the study, in the students' own words and interpretive assertions by the researcher, will also provide conclusions drawn by synthesizing the background literature, the researcher's observations, and data from the study. Recommendations include areas for future study and practices that may be implemented now to mitigate students' negative attitudes toward reading, help them learn content from their college courses, and provide them with richer, more fulfilling reading experiences.
CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary of Major Findings

What follows are generalizations of the findings for the research questions listed in Chapter One. The summaries are illustrated with passages from the interview transcripts.

1. Why do students choose not to read?

Students named four major reasons they do not read: reading is boring; they do not understand what they read; they do not remember what they read, and they do not have enough time to read.

Participants Roy and Katy expanded on their statements about the reading for their classes being boring.

Katy: I read what I like. I read the Twilight series twice and I read all of the Harry Potter books when I was younger. Well, you know, everyone was reading them and it was something to talk about. I read most of the book for your class *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-time Indian*. It was interesting, but I really didn't start reading it until the first quiz. [...] The textbooks are hard and not very interesting, especially my history book.

Roy: I used to read a lot. I like mysteries and westerns, but now with all the reading [for college courses], I just don't feel like it any more. I want to learn everything. I've started now and I know there is more. I just want
to learn more and more. I know I should read more. Now I'm setting an example for my kids. If I can do it, they can. I guess if I'm a role model I should read. Sometimes it's just hard to concentrate so I give up, specially if it's not my favorite class.

In spite of their responses that reading is boring, both Roy and Katy expressed enthusiasm for reading what they like to read. They were able to name characters from their favorite books and provide brief plot summaries indicating that they recalled what they read. Both were among the participants who scored on the high end of the reading assessments (word recognition and vocabulary), demonstrating ninth and tenth grade skills.

Four of the participants reported that they neither understood much of what they read or remembered what they read. Clark and Elish had the lowest scores on the reading assessments.

Elish: I've never liked reading. In high school I didn't read anything. We were supposed to read *Holes* but I watched the movie. It was pretty funny. I like magazines but mostly the ones with pictures. You can hear about famous people and see what they wear or their wedding.

Asked specifically about her college textbooks:

Elish: I try reading them but it's not very interesting. Then I can't remember what I read. Sometimes I try reading it again but if I forget, I stop. Why bother? Most teachers give you a study guide or go over questions in class.
Elish may be a typical case of over-reporting the time she spends reading. She was taking 12 units at the time of the study including my English writing course. The reading for that class alone was probably close to ninety minutes per week, yet she reported doing about 75 percent of the assigned reading for all of her courses in about two hours per week. Also, given her scores at six and seventh grade levels on the reading assessments and her placement in Reading 10, it is likely that her textbooks are challenging. Judging from her writing – short sentences, simple vocabulary, frequent misuse of words or word forms (e.g. *then* for *than*), and especially underdeveloped ideas – she may not recall what she read because she does not understand what she read.

Clark also reported not understanding what he reads. Like Elish, he reports reading only two hours per week, but says he reads 90 percent of what is assigned. Speaking about his Reading 310 class, Clark was concerned about his grade.

Clark: I got "A"s and "B"s in high school, but I didn't have to read much. You just went to class and turned everything in. In 310 I had to read, but it's a lot. If I don't read it or understand it, I do the exercises when the teacher goes over them in class. I don't think I'll get a good grade. I had to read your book [for English writing class], too. But, it's easier. I can read the chapters just before class, then I remember it when I get in my group. I like writing but not reading. In writing, I can just say what I know. In reading, it seems like I have to know everything on the tests.

Clark's ESL errors in his writing and low scores on the vocabulary and word recognition assessments suggest that vocabulary is a significant part of his
comprehension problems. He says when he encounters a word he does not know, he skips them, hoping to understand meanings from the context. Asked if he thought that practice interfered with his understanding of the content, he shrugged, tilted his head, and raised his eyebrows in a quizzical gesture.

Time was named as a factor in the amount of reading students do for their classes by five of the study participants. Hannah explained: "I read slow, so if it's boring, I don't finish it." I asked her if she ever read without background noise from music or the television and she said, "I can't concentrate without it." I suggested that the background noise might be distracting and that it might account for her slow reading, but she dismissed the idea: "my reading teacher told us to read where it is quiet, but I just can't."

Boyce was the only participant that indicated time as the only factor in his failure to do the reading for his classes. When asked specifically what he meant, he pointed to his responsibilities to his family and his nighttime work hours. He was adamant about his not liking to read.

Boyce: I read manuals for my job in the Army [military police]. I have all this experience and thought it would be easy to get a prison guard job. But, the jobs aren't there. My counselor told me I would have a better chance with a degree. But, I don't like all the crap they make you take to graduate. I don't know if I can make it because I don't have time to read all that stuff. Pardon me, Professor Myers, but I don't give a f**k about some kid who didn't want to be an Indian [a reference to the novel read in my writing course]. How's it gonna help me?
Hannah claimed to be a good reader and Boyce did not, but clearly, they had different concepts about how time affects their attitudes about reading. All of the students reporting time as a factor in their failure to read for their college classes also reported having family obligations, and commitments to jobs or sports.

2. What is it like to be a remedial reading student in a community college? (What is the nature of the experience?)

Students report frustration at having to take reading classes, even though they do not consider themselves good readers. Diana and Boyce completed their first reading classes in the semester the study was conducted.

Diana: I like my reading class. I mean it's okay. My teacher is nice but I couldn’t take anything but reading and writing this semester because I work and have a daughter. I wanted to take biology so I can get into the nursing program, but I have to take reading first. Next semester I have to take 310 and 101 [reading and writing, respectively] before I can take any of my real classes. I didn't expect it to take so long.

Boyce: I feel like I'm wasting my time. I can't take my CJ [criminal justice] classes until I take another reading class. Cops write reports, so I know why I'm taking writing classes. But reading? Who ever heard of going to college to learn to read? It's just busy-work, like making vocabulary cards. I don't think it helps.

Students in the study report struggling in their other classes. The volume of reading required in college courses comes as a surprise to many.
Roy: It's not that I can't read, just sometimes it's hard to remember everything. When I read my history book I have to slow way down. We learned "look-backs" and "context clues" but that makes me slower. Then I think about something else like getting gas or my phone, then I have to start over. It makes it hard to read everything. You know, this is something I just gotta do. I don't want to stop here cuz I didn't get to learn when I was young. I was into, you know, other stuff. Not good stuff. So if it [reading class] helps me read other books, that's okay.

Damone: You didn't have so many books in high school. Now I have more books for one class. I have three books for my reading class. It's too much for every class. I try to study between classes because after practice I'm beat. If I did it all I couldn't remember what I read, so I read before tests. Questioner: Do you read all of every chapter assigned before tests? No, I try to start all the chapters, but mostly I don't finish.

3. How do non-reading students cope with day-to-day course work at the community college (not just remedial but other courses)?

Students develop strategies for getting by when they do not read. Miguel admits he reads very little. For some classes, he does not read at all. His strategy is to talk to other students and ask them about the reading.

Miguel: I can talk in class like I know what I'm talking about. Usually I get enough of it to pass the test. It's easy if you listen to the others talk, then I just say what someone else said but I say it different.
Gurpreet: I go to the writing center. They help me read there. My tutor explains what it says when I have questions. She explains words I don’t know.

Katy: When I can, I listen to the book [an audio book] instead of reading it. If I make notes, I can remember what I listened to. If I don’t make notes, I can’t. If I have to read it, I highlight headings. In high school we learned to read first and last sentences.

4. How do these students feel about their progress as learners?

Students had mixed feelings about their academic progress. Some measured it by the courses they completed or the grades they received. Damone and Roy both commented on what they had learned.

Damone: My mom told me to go to college or get out. Tough love, huh? But it's been okay. I'm learning stuff. I didn't think I was good at math, but I think I'll get a "B." Your class is hard and reading is hard. Mr. Hanson is funny so I understand what he is telling us. Yes, I think I read better now. Professor Hanson makes us write sentences for new words – ten every week. Sometimes I forget but most of the time I turn them in. You're not funny but you explain. And, I liked learning about the Indians in, where was it? I might read another book like that even if I couldn't finish it.

Elish: I think I will have to take reading again. She didn't give me good grades on my tests. It's too much to remember. I have to use all those words in sentences but she didn't like them [the sentences]. Questioner: do you think those vocabulary words will make reading easier while you are in college? I donno.
Like I said, I don't like reading. *Questioner: what are some of the skills you learned in your reading class?* She tells us to re-read.

5. What expectations do these students hold for their academic futures?

Some are still exploring higher education and others have focused goals. When asked why they were in college all said to get a better job and to learn more. Roy, the older student is the only one who expressed a love of learning.

Roy: I really didn't take school seriously when I was a kid. I'm 53 years old. I grew up when, you know, where is was kind of like easy to do what you wanted to do. I wasn't really responsible at all. I don't know if it had anything to do with my life style or the way I was brought up. I remember at 18 I could barely write a letter, could barely read a book. And as time went on my kids they would ask me questions, I would say, "ask your mom." It wasn't because I didn't want to help them, it was because I didn't know how to help them.

I was in a situation that I had to go to adult school. There was some guys there and I asked them how long they had been there and they said, "three years, five years." And I said, "three years, a GED class?!" I said, 'that's long enough to get a degree in something," and I knew right then I had to do something. So it took me like maybe 90 days to get the GED and that wasn't enough. The GED was just the start of it, just to learn more, to know more, to be able to do more and every day for me since then has been like a new chapter, a new world for me, a whole new world. You gotta really be focused on what you – you really got to be trying to retain what you read because you are doing it for something else. It's the
first part of another job. It's like my English class. You have to read to be able to
do something else – to do the second part. A person has to be focused to retain it
and pay attention to it. You really have to take time. *(Roy was asked when he
discovered the need to focus to be able to apply what he read for his course work.)*

*His reply was "recently in English class and reading class."* My reading and
writing classes are important to me. It's sending me to another level. When you
asked me to volunteer for this (interview), a year ago I wouldn't have done it
because I didn't have no confidence.

Several of the participants have declared majors and expressed concern about the
remedial courses they must take before they can progress toward their career goals.

Boyce, the Army veteran who is hoping for a career as a prison guard, was the most
strident. His major is Administration of Justice (AJ) and he is seeking an Associate's
degree.

Boyce: I don't need all these touchy-feely classes. If I could get a job, I wouldn't
have to do this. I have to take all these [reading] classes before I can take classes
I already learned in the Army. Used to be that you didn't need a degree, but the
economy is all screwed up. *Questioner: what value do you see in what you are
learning?* Nothing, but the degree will give me points when I apply at the state
again.

Like Diana, Gurpreet wants to apply for the college's nursing program. It is a
two-year program that also requires general education that is heavily focused on the
sciences. Students must pass English Writing 300 (freshman composition) which has
reading courses as prerequisites and the Test of Essential Academic Skills® (TEAS) which is heavily weighted on reading and writing skills before they may apply to the nursing program.

Gurpreet: I can take Reading 310 and English Writing 300 by next spring so I can apply for nursing then. My tutors help a lot. I will have to go full time in nursing, so two classes a semester until then is fine. My youngest will be in school then. I don't mind taking the reading classes because they will help me pass the TEAS.

Hannah has not picked a major but says she would like to transfer to UC, Santa Barbara. She says that she is in no hurry and that community college gives her time to decide while she finishes transfer requirements.

Hannah: I was in AP English in high school, but they made me take reading and English 51 here. I guess it's okay because they are easy classes. Questioner: but you said you do not like to read, does that mean you do not do the read for easy classes? No, I still don't, but I get by.

Conclusions

Recent literature indicates more than ever, students are entering college in need of remedial reading instruction (Attwell, Lavin, Dominia, & Levey, 2006 & CCCCO. 2010) and that students and professors report that among those who read proficiently most do not read assigned texts (Baier, Hendricks, Warren Gorden, Hendricks & Cochran, 2011). The need for taking remedial courses extends the time students must be enrolled and diminishes the rate of successful completion of a bachelor's degree (Attwell, Lavin, Domina & Levey, 2006, p. 915).
Interviews with the students who participated in this study demonstrates that although they know that their comprehension is poor, few are invested in spending more time doing the assigned reading. One student, Roy, expressed, appreciation for the reading skills he was developing. Another, Boyce, was openly hostile toward the act of reading, and the requirement for college reading courses. The others expressed ambivalence toward the remedial reading classes and none indicated they would do all of the reading required for their courses.

Students who choose not to read miss opportunities for expanding their vocabularies as demonstrated by Cunningham, and Stanovich (1998) who found the "large difference in lexical richness between speech and print [which] are a major source of individual differences in vocabulary development." An endless number of studies have made the correlation between vocabulary and reading comprehension, but the students in this study seem not to make that connection, relying instead on study strategies and instructor provided study guides to help them pass tests.

Moreover, college students who continue to have trouble with comprehension of what they read many be experiencing limitations due to decoding skills (Macaruso & Shankweiler, 2010, p. 454). Ari (2009) also found that wide reading rather than repeated reading improves fluency for struggling college readers, yet our students resist reading altogether. Students in the study do not recognize the importance of the volume of reading they do or their fluency in reading, understanding, and remembering linguistically and cognitively context material.
The inclusion of the brief reading assessments in this study provided an unexpected dimension to the findings and conclusions herein. It is interesting that eight of the ten students interviewed had lower word meaning scores than word recognition scores. While no conclusions can be drawn from those facts alone, it is possible to posit that participant's limited academic vocabulary accounts for their comprehension scores on the college's reading placement tests, and thus their placement in remedial reading courses. The accompany Figures 1 and 2 recap study participants results on word meaning and word recognition assessments and the college's reading placement test.

Figure 1: Assessments
**Recommendations**

Students who are referred to remedial reading classes would benefit from taking those courses early. The students in this study all have fewer than 18 college units, but that represents approximately six courses each may have taken without adequate reading skills. Reading instructors at the college where the study was conducted report that many students put off taking reading classes until they are forced to because of reading proficiency being a prerequisite to other courses. Because participants spoke of problems understanding and remembering what they read, when they read, early intervention with college level reading skill instruction would provide remedial college readers with better academic tools for study in all of their classes.

Students tend to think in black and white terms. They are either bad readers or good readers; they either hate reading or love it. They need to know that their own perceptions may be what is holding them back. For instance, Roy and Katy considered themselves poor readers, yet they are the two students in the study who expressed the
greatest meta-cognition of their reading processes, and they are the ones who told of reading for pleasure. In the course of their semester in a reading class, they learned what they do well, and in the course of their interviews for this study, they began to retract to those initial labels – the ones they gave themselves early in the semester, before they became a part of the study. Our speaking of reading as a skill acquisition process akin to playing a sport or learning to drive could remove the "good" and "bad" labels and provide students with visions of themselves as practiced, competent readers.

We should strive to provide a broad range of reading materials in our all of our classes. We have not discussed the role of technology – television, internet, video games – in displacing reading as a pleasurable activity but students who lack fluency avoid reading and prefer less demanding activities (Ari, 2009). Yet, some of the participants spoke of doing the assigned reading when the material is not boring or when the reading material interests them. If our reading assignments provided lists of alternatives or if students were allowed to select relevant material, it is likely they will read more (Hawkes, 2002 & Holbrook, 1983).

Ten years ago "writing across the curriculum" were the buzz words on college campuses. Today, they should be "reading across the curriculum." Reading and reading for specific disciplines should be taught campus wide, not just in English or reading departments. Lessons on how to read the textbook should occur in every class, not just as general instructions in reading classes. An example is the use of a writing handbook I use in my advanced writing courses. The first thing I do is teach students how to read it. They learn to discern the books organizational patterns, how to use the
index, and the language of the discipline. Too often, we make assumptions about the
skills and experiences students bring to our classes.

Finally, we must work with our colleagues in the high schools. We need to
know more about students’ motivation, experiences, and attitudes about reading
long before they enroll in a community college. Facing a directive more than a
decade ago from the Chancellor of the California State University System (CSU)
to eliminate remedial writing and math from the state’s campuses, the CSU has
worked with the State Board of Education (SBE) and the California Department
of Education (CDE) to develop the Early Assessment Program (EAP). EAP
incorporates the CSU’s placement standards into existing high school standards
tests in English and mathematics. The California Community College system is
also conducting regional pilot studies at Santa Rosa Junior College, Sierra
College, and Antelope Valley College to help improve the understanding and
implementation of the EAP among community colleges and local feeder high
schools (McLean, 2012). While the EAP includes reading items, it addresses
competency, not motivation, attitudes, and experiences of college-bound
readers. Without better information about what shapes students’ perspectives in
high school, and earlier, we can only describe students’ dislike of, and
ambivalence toward, reading and are relegated to using only the limited tools at
hand to promote wider and deeper reading as a source of knowledge and self-
satisfaction in the community colleges.
Appendix A

Initial Questionnaire

English Writing 51, 101, 300, 301, 302

Student Questionnaire

Name__________________________________ Student ID#________________ E-mail address___________________
Phone #_________________________ Years in college___________ Major___________________________

List other College English and Reading Classes Completed
City University of New York, CUNY
City College

List languages you speak in addition to English

Computer Experience

Do you have access to a computer off-campus?______ Can you type?_____ Use e-mail?______

1. Do you like to write? yes / no? ____________

2. Do you consider yourself a strong writer? Strong 5 4 3 2 1 Weak

3. Do you consider yourself a strong reader? Strong 5 4 3 2 1 Weak

4. Do you read books or magazines not associated with your college courses? Yes / no ?

5. Do you read all of the assigned material for your college courses? Yes / no ?

6. How many hours per week do you read for your college courses? ____________

7. Do you like to read? yes / no

8. Do you read for pleasure or entertainment? Books Magazines online browsing comics/ manga

What do you hope to learn from this class?
________________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________

Tell me something you would like me to know about yourself.
________________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________

Turn this page over and write a brief essay.
Write a brief essay about your favorite holiday. Include a thesis, support paragraphs, and a conclusion.
Appendix B

Consent to Participate in Research and Survey Questions

Consent to Participate in Research

Purpose of the Research You are being asked to participate in research which will be conducted by Linda Myers, a student in Teacher Education at California State University, Sacramento (CSUS).

The study will investigate factors related to reading habits and attitudes among college students.

Research Procedure You will be asked to complete a questionnaire asking you to provide some demographic information, and then you will be interviewed about your reading habits and attitudes toward reading. The questions may require about 20-30 minutes of your time. In the video interview, you may be asked to expand upon your answers to the questions listed below. Your answers will be compiled for a case study in which you will not be identified by your real name or any distinct feature or answer that would allow anyone to recognize you. Your answers will not be shared with anyone at Sacramento City College and will not affect any future student/teacher relationship you have with Linda Myers.

Risks Some of the items in the questionnaires may seem personal, but you do not have to answer any question if you do not want to.

Benefits You may gain additional insight into factors that affect success in college, or you may not personally benefit from participating in this research. It is hoped that the results of the study will be beneficial for programs designed to encourage students to succeed in college.

Confidentiality Only first names will be used on the survey and in the interview and you may use something other than your real name if you wish. The videos will be destroyed at the conclusion of this project. Until that time, they will be stored in a secure location. Only the researcher and her CSUS supervisor will view the video. You may view your own video upon request.

Compensation You will not receive any compensation for participating in this study.

Contact Information If you have any questions about this research, you may contact Linda Myers at (916) 393-6277 or by e-mail at Lmyers@csus.edu.

Your participation in this research is voluntary. Your signature below indicates that you agree to participate in the survey and interview portions of this research.

I agree to be interviewed and video recorded. I understand that I do not have to answer any question I do not want to and that I can stop the interview at any time.

Signature_____________________________________ Date__________________

1
Survey Questions: Please answer the questions below in the space provided on this form.

Your first name or alias ____________________________________________

Which reading classes have you taken or plan to take?
[ ] Reading 10  [ ] Reading 11  [ ] Reading 110
[ ] Reading 310  [ ] Reading Lab 55

How old are you? ____________________
High School Diploma _____________
GED ________ Other ______________

Do you speak or read a language other than English? [ ] Yes [ ] No
If yes, what language(s)?
_________________     ___________________     ___________________

How many semesters have you been in college? __________________
Units completed _____________ GPA ______________

Interview Questions
1. List three words that describe how you feel about reading

2. In your opinion and experience, what are the characteristics of a “good” reader?

3. What do you do when you are reading and come to a word that you don’t know?

4. If you do not understand what you read, what do you do?

5. What do you do to help you remember what you read?

6. When and how did you learn to read?

7. What do you find challenging or difficult about reading?

8. What grade were you in when you stopped doing all of the assigned reading?

9. What percentage of assigned reading would you estimate that you do? Please be candid.

10. How many hours a week would you estimate that you spend reading for your courses?

11. Do you read anything for pleasure or entertainment? If so, what do you read?

12. What do you do well as a reader?

13. How do you feel about reading in general?

14. What do you believe about reading in college?

15. What experiences led you to develop your attitude toward and feelings about reading?

16. How would you describe yourself as a reader?
References


Tinto, V. (19878) *Leaving College: Rethinking the Causes and Cures of Student Attrition*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.


