Postsecondary Literacy: Coherence in Theory, Terminology, and Teacher Preparation

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The effectiveness of developmental programs in transitioning students to upper level classes is a crucial part of access to higher education.

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ABSTRACT: *Postsecondary literacy instruction—the teaching of basic writing and transitional, or developmental, reading in community colleges and 4-year colleges—is an important and growing field, but also one still developing in key areas. In this article, we discuss three of these areas within which postsecondary literacy instruction can continue to develop. Specifically, we discuss current issues in theory, terminology, and teacher preparation within the field. We also explore specific suggestions for increasing coherence and consider focal points for further inquiry in each area.*

Like emergent literacy or adolescent literacy, postsecondary literacy carries with it a connotation of the level or age of students being served as well as a certain type of literacy instruction needed on the part of those students. Relative to emergent literacy or adolescent literacy, however, postsecondary literacy is still developing as a field in some important ways. That is not to say that there is not a dedicated cohort of professionals who teach at this level (including the two authors of this article, before getting into the teacher-preparation side of the business). Nor is there a lack of a rich history of instruction in the field; postsecondary literacy instruction has a 100-plus year foundation of being a part of many students' college experiences (Casazza, 1999; Stahl & King, 2009; Wyatt, 2003). Rather, where postsecondary literacy instruction will continue to develop as a unified field is from increased coherence in areas that include theory, terminology, and teacher preparation. The goal of this article is to begin—and in some cases, continue—an examination of current issues related to those three areas, with a view toward laying the groundwork for more comprehensive discussions about establishing coherence across these areas within the field of postsecondary literacy. At the end of each section we include a synopsis of the key points in a bulleted format for further discussion on these issues.

Our purpose for discussing three major aspects of literacy instruction within one article warrants mention. Although each of these aspects is deserving of separate, focused treatment, we have made a deliberate decision to include discussions of all three in a single article because of the interconnectedness of these aspects. We view these aspects as part of a holistic discussion that is best begun with an approach that, at least implicitly, is imbued with an understanding of the interrelatedness of the topics. That is, discussing theory without mention of language is unwise; discussing teacher preparation without discussing theory is counterproductive, and so on. So as much as our purpose is one of furthering coherence in each of these areas, our purpose also includes furthering discussions of the interdependence between each aspect within the field as a whole. We begin with some general information about postsecondary literacy instruction to set the stage for the three areas of discussion that follow.

The Prevalence and Variability of Transitional, or Developmental, Literacy Coursework

Courses typically referred to as developmental, including reading, writing, and study strategies, are prevalent in higher education, being offered in 99% of 2-year institutions and 75% of 4-year institutions (Boser & Burd, 2009). Similarly, there is an increasing prevalence of incoming and returning college students who have demonstrated difficulty with reading at a postsecondary level for purposes common to college courses. For example, the ACT college entrance test indicated that only about half of incoming college students were prepared for the reading requirements of a typical first-year college course (ACT, 2006; Associated Press, 2006).

This prevalence is important because "given the large numbers of students involved, many of whom are minority, low-income or disadvantaged" (Jenkins & Boswell, 2002, p. 1), the effectiveness of developmental programs in transitioning students to upper level classes is a crucial part of access to higher education. Unfortunately, historically, more than a quarter of the students who begin developmental coursework do not successfully complete it (Wirt, Choy, Rooney, Provasnik, Sen, & Tobin, 2004), a troubling statistic that suggests that continued critical reflection on instructional practice is needed.

Although professionals in the field of post-secondary literacy as a whole understand that there is a lack of instructional effectiveness if theoretically sound best practices are not put to use (Boylan & Saxon, 1999), there is a great deal of variability in the effectiveness of instructional approaches within the field (Jenkins & Boswell, 2002). One specific problem is that reading and writing courses in postsecondary contexts continue to be reduced to a skills-only or basic-grammar-based approach which assumes a deficiency at the most basic "skills" level without acknowledging students' unfamiliarity with academic discourse practices (Bartholomae, 1985). In addition, postsecondary literacy instruction is characterized by a relative lack of formal teacher education (Carnegie Foundation, 2008; Stahl, Simpson, & Hayes, 1992). In short, critical inquiry into the state of postsecondary literacy instruction, including teacher preparation, is imperative, especially if the field is to continue to move toward coherence as a body of professionals. In the next section, we initiate this critical inquiry by examining the need for coherence in theory development within postsecondary literacy.

Theory

Several scholars have already identified solid reasons for the need for theory development in postsecondary contexts that may be useful here (e.g., Collins & Bruch, 2000). Casazza (2003), for example, has acknowledged that a crucial gap in the field is "a theoretical framework that can inform educators about the learners' different understandings of what knowledge is and also how they approach the task of learning" (p. 183). Similarly, Chung and Brothen (2001) provide a reminder of a fundamental principle of education when they report Hunter Boylan's comment: "Some research suggests that if a course is explicitly informed by a theory—*any theory* [emphasis in original] (p. 40)—then students tend to be more successful". Although few would advocate for "any theory," it certainly is likely that the focused reflection and dialogue surrounding most theoretical issues can serve to tie together aspects of practice in a way that an atheoretical discussion does not.

As educators and professionals in postsecondary literacy contexts continue to move toward presenting themselves as a unified field, theoretical coherence is essential and must be at the heart of practice. Although we do not attempt to lay out a theoretical foundation for an entire field in this single article, we do propose general directions the field might take toward furthering coherence in postsecondary literacy theory.

A comprehensive theory of postsecondary literacy must center on the students who are enrolled in these classes. No matter what the educational level, one common aspect of teaching is that educators have no control over students' out-of-class backgrounds and previous experiences. Higbee (2009) and many others have noted that postsecondary literacy courses include a diverse population of students. Such diversity creates a twofold responsibility for educators: one, to create an environment and structure that do not assume particular prior experiences in order to create successful learning outcomes for students, and two, to ensure that learners' cultural and social backgrounds are represented in the curriculum (Bohr, 2003). Perspectives that consider the social, cognitive, and affective aspects of learning are essential.

We would caution against any perspective that positions literacy as a set of decontextualized skills; such a perspective usually involves a broad epistemological assumption that the

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knowledge needed for students to negotiate the transition to academic modes of literacy is somehow "provided" to students in their first year of required college-level reading and writing classes (Tinberg, 1997) through the development of basic skills. The model of learning underlying such widely assumed outcomes is characteristic of a transmission view of knowledge and learning, a basic-skills approach, or more generally as what Street (1984) has described as an "autonomous model of literacy." One potentially hazardous implication of such autonomous or basic-skills models is that postsecondary literacy transitions are assumed to be standardized and linear, which much research has already disputed (e.g., Sternglass, 1997).

Instead, a theoretical framework that foregrounds sociocultural models of literacy is more appropriately adopted since "the literacy practices of academic disciplines can be viewed as varied social practices associated with different communities" (Lea & Street, 2006, p. 368). Sociocultural models view literacies as multiple, complex, dynamic social practices embedded in specific purposes, which Street (1993) has conceptualized as a continuum of contextualized processes and which Dressman, Wilder, and Connor (2005) have noted allows literacies to

be defined as "a set of historically, economically, and environmentally responsive practices that vary in accordance with a reader's subjectivity as a gendered, ethnic, economic user of language" (p. 11). Additionally useful, and related to this perspective, is a situated cognition perspective in which knowledge is constructed in direct response to the context and culture of learning (Brown, Collins, & Duguid, 1989). Academic literacies, like all literacies, must be understood within the specific context in which they are embedded.

We would also stress the importance of including an understanding of identity in postsecondary literacy educational contexts. Students' academic goals are not met through a linear process of mastering basic skills; the multifaceted purposes for reading in different academic contexts, and when and how to use which standard writing conventions, vary depending on the given discourse-community context (McCarthy, 1987). Recognizing these contexts and being able to navigate them involves sophisticated matters of socialization and acculturation, as much an identity issue as a language issue. Gee (1996) has argued that what is important is "saying *(writing)-doing-being-valuing-believing combinations* [emphasis in original]" (p. 127), combinations he terms "Discourses (with a capital D)" (p. vii). Gee's point, of course, is that literacy-learning involves much more than memorization of specific, isolated skills, though language-related skills such as grammar are certainly embedded in this process.

Viewed through Gee's (2001) lens, a primary Discourse "is the ways with words, objects, and deeds that are associated with his primary sense of self formed in and through his (most certainly class-based) primary socialization within the family (or other culturally relevant primary socializing group)" (p. 723); school-based modes of communicating and knowing become a secondary Discourse. The difference between a student's primary Discourse and the secondary Discourse of the academy may cause conflict and obstacles to learning. What are often difficulties attributed to "cognitive deficits" on the part of the students may in fact be more accurately described as a mismatch between Discourses.

The concept of "mismatch" is one that should prove useful to attempts at theoretical constructions of postsecondary literacy contexts, especially in terms of the general mismatch between students' primary and secondary Discourses. Rogers (2004) has discussed the issue of students' Discourses either aligning with or conflicting with the institution's goals, and Lundell and Collins (2001) have pointed out that conflicts between students' primary and second-

ary Discourses can greatly affect their success. Dressman, Wilder, and Connor (2005) argue that literacy difficulties are a "result of alienation from and/or resistance to the literate discourses of school settings" (pp. 8-9). To be successful in higher education, students must learn to negotiate the literacy practices of various discourse communities. Such awareness lends itself to metacognitive, self-reflective thinking that is needed to navigate academic literacies, and, as Bartholomae (1985) has argued, students are forced to "invent the university." Given this understanding of what successfully navigating a postsecondary academic literacy context entails, Lundell and Collins' (2001) conclusion that "the new Discourse of higher education must be organized and made available to latecomers in ways that will not promote conflict with their primary and other extant Discourses" (p. 15) is important and appropriate.

Toward Coherence in Theory: A Synopsis

What follows is a synopsis of the key points from this section in a bulleted format that we view as focal points for further discussion:

- Theory must proceed from an understanding of the participants in, and the context of, literacy instruction at the postsecondary level.

- An understanding of identity, and the potential difficulties caused by a mismatch of primary and secondary Discourses (Gee, 2001), is an important aspect of theory at this level.

- Any theoretical perspective that positions literacy as merely and exclusively a set of decontextualized skills should be understood as ultimately being theoretically unsupported and pedagogically ineffective.

- Our recommendation for theoretical bases of postsecondary literacy instruction include sociocultural and situated cognitive perspectives that view literacies as complex, dynamic social practices embedded in specific purposes in response to the specific contexts and culture of learning.

Terminology

Peirce (1932) speaks to the reasons behind the need for precise language: "Those reasons would embrace, in the first place, the consideration that the woof and warp of all thought and all research is symbols; so that it is wrong to say that good language is *important* [emphasis in original] to good thought, merely; for it is of the essence of it" (p. 129). Issues of terminology may be at the heart of any inquiry into a field, but the inconsistent use of terminology in postsecondary literacy deserves special attention. In a field such as postsecondary literacy—one that is rightly focused on language—educators must be more attentive to the terms they use and the conceptualizations those terms represent or suggest. Despite periodic attempts to include the vocabulary of issues germane to postsecondary literacy in glossaries, in explicit vocabulary sections of other publications, and on professional listservs, there still exist widespread discrepancies in how literacy and literacy-learners are described within the field and—especially—from outside the field. In this section, we aim to build upon existing discussions by acknowledging some of the discrepancies that persist and then making specific usage recommendations.

Since at least the late 1960s, a wide variety of terminology has shown up in works focused on postsecondary literacy. For example, Wortham (1967) uses *remedial, developmental, basic*, and

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others before condensing them all into *remedial*; Ahrendt (1975) uses *marginal, high-risk, remedial, developmental,* and *inadequately prepared*; and Cross (1976) discusses her term *new students* while drawing on distinctions between *remedial* and *developmental* described by Roueche and Wheeler (1973). Several researchers have also explicitly discussed the fact that there is such a wide variety of terms; for example, in an article in this journal, Sherrie Nist (1984) directly addressed the confusion of the terms *developmental* and *remedial*, and John Roueche's work (Roueche & Kirk, 1973; Roueche & Roueche, 1999) has been particularly useful in this area. Even today, these issues continue to confront postsecondary literacy professionals. And because our interest is in how these terms are used presently in the field, we will focus most of our attention on current usage and draw primarily from works within the last several years.

The limitations of short, formalized definitions of culturally loaded terms—regardless of the field—can be problematic. In addition, some of the differences between major terms in a particular glossary may be so subtle to those outside the immediate discipline that the risk is that the distinction between the terms is lost altogether. For example, in the useful article titled "A Glossary of Developmental Education and Learning Assistance Terms" (Arendale, 2007), the first definitions of the terms *underprepared* and *developmental* (p. 13 and p. 19) are exactly the same, and the second definitions of each term differ in the addition of only one word (underlined in the following quotation). Whereas the second definition of *underprepared* is "a student who, while meeting college admissions requirements, is not yet fully prepared to succeed in one or more college-level courses" (p. 13), the second definition of developmental is "a student who, while meeting college admissions requirements, is not yet fully prepared to succeed in one or more *introductory* [emphasis added] college-level courses" (p. 19). Thus, the difference between *underprepared* and *developmental* in this glossary comes down to the absence or presence of a single word, and this distinction will most likely be lost on those not fully versed in the nuances of the field.

Rather than work from official glossaries, our preference is to focus on how terms are currently used, *in situ*, in the professional literature, whether provided as an explicit definition or implicitly through contrast with other terms or usage in general. A sampling of the definitions of the terms previously introduced follows.

Common Terms

Remedial. Remedial education has traditionally suggested a focus on students' cognitive deficits as learners (Arendale, 2005); Casazza (1999) describes *remedial* as stemming from a medical model frame (as does Higbee, 2009):

> [Remedial] is the most common term across educational levels used to describe student weaknesses or deficiencies. It implies a "fixing" or "correction" of a deficit. For this reason, it is often associated with a medical model where a diagnosis is made, a prescription is given, and a subsequent evaluation is conducted to see if the "patient," or student, has been brought up to speed. (Casazza, 1999, para. 24)

Many educators would agree that "at best, the term *remedial student* is offensive; at worst, it is destructive and insulting" (Roueche & Roueche, 1999, p. 17). Interestingly, this is also the term that the U.S. Department of Education seems to prefer (e.g., official reports like *Remedial Education at Degree-Granting Postsecondary Institutions in Fall 2000* [National Center for Education Statistics, 2003]).

Developmental. The term *developmental* has focused on a wide spectrum of student attributes and aspects; as Higbee (2009) states, "the term 'developmental education' was coined

to reflect the influence of student development theory and to consider the development of 'the whole student'" (p. 67). Similarly, the National Association for Developmental Education defines developmental education as promoting "the cognitive and affective growth of all post-secondary learners, at all levels of the learning continuum" (2008, para. 1). This is the term perhaps most often contrasted with *remedial* and most educators agree that it is comparatively a more useful description of postsecondary literacy contexts in general.

Underprepared. Whereas *remedial* is often construed to assign agency—or blame—to students for their lack of scholastic success, *underprepared* places that blame on the students' previous school or schooling experiences. The term is not used consistently, however, even within the same source. For example, Dzubak (2007) describes underprepared students as students "whose 'college readiness skills' do not adequately prepare them for the rigors of college study and learning" (para. 4), but in a subsequent section of the article the definition is restated to include a "deficit in reading" (para. 31), which links the term directly to a deficit model usually associated with the term *remedial,* not *underprepared.* Similarly, as an example of how the term is used outside of the field in a broad sense, Astin (1998) implicitly equates remediation with underpreparedness when he writes that "no problem strikes me as being more important than the education of the so-called underprepared or 'remedial' student" (para. 3). Nevertheless, terminology like *underprepared,* which takes the onus off the student for difficulties experienced in educational contexts, has been a positive step forward for the field.

Misprepared. This term may be thought of as a "tweaking" of the term *underprepared* in that it moves away from an over/under (or good/bad) dichotomy and instead acknowledges that successful high school students can still struggle in college due to the difference in goals of the two institutions. Johnson and Carpenter (2000) describe the issue: "Students today may be 'misprepared,' earning high grades in high school from courses that do not prepare them for college. Even if students take college preparatory courses, grade inflation and lack of rigor may lead them to think they are prepared when they are not" (p. 325).

At-risk. Notorious for some educators because of its predictive uses and misuses (e.g., assigning students to certain academic tracks at the outset of their academic career), *at-risk* is usually used to label students who fit certain criteria and/or score at a certain level on standard-

ized tests as being in danger of not performing up to standards in college (or other educational levels, as this term's usage is widespread). Chamblee (1998) notes that this term has been used interchangeably with *underprepared* (e.g., "Many of these students, often referred to as underprepared or at risk, have experienced limited success in high school" [p. 532]), but Johnson and Carpenter (2000) set the terms in opposition to each other: "Rather than underprepared, many students are now called at *risk* [emphasis in original], a broader, more descriptive term" (p. 325).

Transitional. Use of this term is relatively new and focuses on the changes—both in terms of identity and ability to navigate new kinds of texts—that take place when the learner moves from one academic context (like high school) to another (like college). The emphasis is on what the student needs to know about the new academic environment and how to navigate that new environment, instead of focusing on the

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student's deficits or previous educational experiences (Sanchez & Paulson, 2008). Transitions can involve changes in literacy conceptualizations, awareness of the relationship of different types of literacies to the student's academic and other contexts, and increased proficiency in navigating and negotiating literacies for different purposes.

Usage Issues

Compounding the variety of ways these terms are defined and used is the relative frequency with which they are also made to appear synonymous in the professional literature, as in the previous example of how *underprepared* has been linked to *remedial*; this is also evident in U.S. Department of Education official publications that use both terms (U.S. Department of Education Institute of Education Sciences, n.d.). Similarly, Cohen and Brawer (2008) note that *remedial, developmental, compensatory,* and *basic skills* have been used interchangeably in some literature; thus, convolution of terms is widespread and not limited to one or two specific terms.

Perhaps more importantly, there seems to be an impression outside the field that terms other than *remedial* are simply euphemisms. To this end, Phipps (1998) draws attention to

the problem that "what the general public refers to as remedial education is often defined as 'developmental education' by professionals and practitioners in the academic community" (p. 1). For example, the South Carolina Commission on Higher Education, (n.d.) equates *remedial* with *developmental* in an "AKA" fashion when discussing "requirements for remedial (also known as 'developmental') education programs in public higher education" (para. 1). Likewise, Calcagno and Long (2008) explicitly eschew differences in these terms in their recent report and use the terms *remediation*, *college prep*, and *developmental education* interchangeably.

The lack of coherence is obvious: within the field some draw large distinctions among terms, some draw subtle distinctions among terms, and some claim interchangeability among terms. Outside of the field, some terms are viewed as euphemisms for a single term that is perceived to have fallen out of favor. In many cases, terms are used either idiosyncratically or simply inconsistently. Our main purpose here is to raise these issues with an eye toward initiating further discussion, and, to this end, we offer two recommendations: a suggestion for a general term and a suggestion for usage.

General term. Professionals involved in postsecondary literacy instruction should choose to use a term that does not construe blame on students or their previous institutions for what are perceived by some as shortcomings. Since the reasons for challenges in navigating academic literacies are varied, using a term that assumes a cognitive shortcoming on the part of the student is simply unacceptable. Our preference for a term is one that can apply to the learner as well as to the learning situation and does not imbue either with a negative connotation. The advantages of avoiding a negative connotation are obvious. Wyatt (2003) has commented on the difference in enrollment based on Harvard's choice of course titles; registration for a reading course experienced a dramatic uptick once the course name was changed to omit the word *remedial*. *Transitional* works well in this regard, since students can transition *from* any educational context *to* any educational context (e.g., not just from precollege coursework to college-level coursework); moreover, the term gets at transitions of discursive awareness and use within educational environments.

Usage. An unfortunate reality of the terminology of the field is that there seem to be many more ways to modify the *learner* than the type of learning situation; that is, it seems more common to use terms that position the learner, instead of the learning context, in certain ways.

It is important to choose a usage structure that does not always result in renaming the learner but still allows for accurate identification of the type and level of literacy instruction. Here, we follow the guidelines of both the American Psychological Association (APA, 2009) and Arendale (2007) by putting the person first when using a descriptor. Thus, instead of "a developmental student," Arendale (2007) suggests using a structure like "a student with developmental issues in college algebra" (p. 19). Though this structure still attributes "issues" to the student, it is a step in the right direction as it moves away from imposing a generalized label on the "type" of student. Building on this general approach, we would propose that educators adopt a usage that would be even more specific to the context in which it is used. Continuing with the "developmental student" example, we would phrase this as "a student placed into a developmental reading course." This leaves the student unmodified, while being very specific about what the learning context is (placement into a specific course).

Toward Coherence in Terminology: A Synopsis

Just as with the "Theory" section, we end this section with a synopsis of main points from our discussion related to terminology:

- Although different terms may provide different denotative distinctions, the connotations of each term must be taken into account as well. For example, if *developmental* can be used in place of *remedial*, then it should; if *at risk* connotes an assignment of blame on a student's identity, then it should not be used.

- Educators in the field must endeavor to help those outside the field understand that terminology has real and important meanings, and distinctions and terms used within the field are not simply euphemisms for *remedial*.

- Educators in the field must be careful to select terminology that indicates the precise meaning: *underprepared* versus *misprepared*, for example. For a general term for concepts in the postsecondary literacy field, we recommend the term *transitional* for its denotative accuracy and its connotative acceptability.

- We strongly suggest that usage of terms is "person-first"—(i.e., modifies not the person but the context of his or her learning environment): for example, "a student placed into a transitional reading and writing course."

Teacher Preparation

Just as there is a direct link between terminology and theory—words reflect and are shaped by beliefs—there is also a link between theory and practice. As commonly understood theoretical bases for postsecondary literacy issues are identified and developed, the field should experience more theory-driven pedagogy. However, the development of firmer theoretical foundations for pedagogy alone is not enough: Such foundations must be accessible to and applied by practitioners in college classrooms in order to result in improvements to postsecondary literacy instruction. A more unified, structured approach to teacher preparation would address this need and could also result in greater instructional effectiveness across the field. In this section, we discuss the need for coherence in teacher preparation in postsecondary literacy contexts.

Given the widespread attitude traditionally held by higher education (and society in gen-

> *Some form of coherence for teacher preparation and certification is needed at the postsecondary level.*

eral) toward developmental education as having merely a service function, and the low status afforded these courses in many institutions, it may come as no surprise that training requirements for instructors of these courses historically have not been of a high standard or widespread. The effect was, as Ahrendt (1975) noted, "a severe lack of trained, competent reading personnel available for the community college" (p. 24). This is not to say that training programs for postsecondary literacy instructors did not exist; for example, graduate courses were reported as early as the mid-1960s (Maxwell, 1966) and early 1970s (May, 1971). Nevertheless, a consensus in the field from this period (Maxwell, 1969) through the mid-1980s (e.g., Brozo & Stahl, 1985; Simpson, 1983) concluded that "considering the extensive body of literature relating to college reading in general, remarkably little has been written about the training of specialists for college reading programs" (Eanet, 1983, p. 30). The issue of a lack of teacher preparation in the field continues to the present day (e.g., Collins & Bruch, 2000; Stahl, Simpson, & Hayes, 1992; see also Lundell, 2000), with most institutions requiring minimal graduate-level work in literacy, teaching experience, or knowledge of the field's rich history (Stahl, 2000) in order to be qualified to teach reading or writing in a community college or university academic assistance program.

Although some progress has been made in this area, the parallel inexperience of both students and teachers in postsecondary literacy contexts continues to be identified as a serious issue: "Students are not the only ones underprepared for the challenges presented by this scenario. Campuses, too, are underprepared, and on several levels. Most faculty teaching developmental courses have no particular training for the role" (Calcagno & Long, 2008, p. 5). In general, the field is challenged by a situation in which the type, quality, and amount of training required of those who provide college literacy instruction does not adequately reflect the needs of students who are already in the midst of such a crucial transition. In fact, often the requirements for teaching postsecondary literacy courses in a community college consist of submitting transcripts that demonstrate a certain number of graduate credits in literacy, English, or a related area, with no requirements for specialized training with diverse groups of students and no expectation for experience working with nonstandard and non-native English speakers. Because students placed into postsecondary literacy courses bring with them widely diverse linguistic, conceptual, social, and cultural backgrounds (Boylan, 1999), as well as far-ranging literacy experiences, educators in postsecondary literacy courses need to be sufficiently prepared to meet the needs of these students. However, the currently accepted employment requirements do not reflect sufficient teacher preparation.

Broaching the subject of the need for an increase in teacher preparation has the potential to be mistaken for a call for top-down accountability of teachers. That is not our intention, nor do we think that a constructive goal. Instead, we are observing that where colleagues teaching in K-12 levels may be overmanaged, instructors teaching postsecondary literacy courses are at the opposite end of the spectrum. Some form of coherence for teacher preparation and certification is needed at the postsecondary level.

In the 1970s and 1980s there were several descriptions of the type of knowledge and skill base a postsecondary literacy instructor should have. The 1971 *Yearbook of the National Reading Conference* (Schick & May, 1971) alone had numerous articles explicitly delineating requirements for instructors, as did other books (e.g., Ahrendt, 1975) and journal articles (e.g., Simpson, 1983). Brozo and Stahl's (1985) article reviewed and summarized such work to date, culminating in a checklist of standards for in-

structors based on the authors' review of the literature. Of primary importance, teachers of first-year college students need to be experts in literacy and specialists in academic modes of literacy. Instructors should be well-versed in reading and writing theories, and they also need an understanding of the various literacies (types, purposes, conditions, etc.) that students must navigate in academia (Simpson, 2003; Simpson, Stahl, & Francis, 2004). Shanahan and Shanahan (2008) argue that "as students move through school, reading and writing instruction should become increasingly disciplinary, reinforcing and supporting student performance with the kinds of texts and interpretive standards that are needed in the various disciplines or subjects" (p. 57). Decades earlier, Carter and McGinnis (1971) made a similar, general point that postsecondary literacy instructor preparation should include undergraduate coursework in areas like psychology, sociology, and history so instructions would be versed in the discursive contexts of those disciplines.

In recent years there has been a renewed interest in graduate-level certificate and degree programs designed specifically for preparation of future college literacy instructors. Although programs that focus on developmental education in general have historically had a firm foundation in some institutions, an interest in postsecondary literacy has made itself known both in program and course titles and descriptions that specifically target literacy instruction preparation at the postsecondary level in other universities. These opportunities for specialization and professionalization are crucial, and we are hopeful that the benefits of such programs will be felt by students in the near future.

In order for postsecondary literacy to continue developing as a field of professionals, such focused emphases on postsecondary teaching as a profession are imperative. To achieve such a goal, we offer the following as the major recommendations: collectively, professionals must insist on working toward increasing the credential requirements for new and developing postsecondary literacy teachers. At first glance this may seem to be a charge directed toward administrators, but we believe that any meaningful change to the current teacher-training problems needs to be initiated from within the field by the scholars and professionals who know this problem to have a major impact on the success of both programs and students. For example, those working in teacher education must ensure that graduate courses on postsecondary literacy education continue to be offered and that they become more visible to current and prospective college teachers. In addition, the postsecondary educational community should strive to improve both the initial and ongoing training for those who serve in transitional classrooms. Here again, a possible model exists with K-12 educators, who are providing in-service teacher workshops and school-based invited seminars and lectures.

Toward Coherence in Teacher Preparation: A Synopsis

Below are the two major points from this section that we believe are key to any discussion of teacher preparation related to postsecondary literacy instruction:

- In addition to greater attention paid to the theoretical bases for pedagogical choices, improvements in the quality and quantity of teacher preparation for postsecondary literacy instructors are important.

Pedagogical focus on navigation and negotiation of these literacies should be explicit.

- It is crucial that instructors understand the discipline-specific literacy expectations that their students must navigate at the college level. Pedagogical focus on navigation and negotiation of these literacies should be explicit.

Discussion

One purpose of this article has been to initiate—and on some levels, renew—a conversation, one which focuses on how to move forward as a more coherent field of professionals and scholars. It is incumbent upon researchers, teachers, and teacher-educators to respond to the realities and perspectives of postsecondary literacy contexts. As this article proposes, the development of a unifying, comprehensive theoretical grounding for the field would provide such a cohesive framework and would tie together important aspects of postsecondary literacy education.

Additionally, a commonly agreed-upon set of terminology for the field allows communication with greater specificity and clarity. Given the well-established relationship between thought and language, movement toward terminological clarity is necessary both for issues of theory development and for issues of communication within and outside of the field. Such clarity is especially crucial in core documents like departmental and institutional mission statements that guide departments in their planning and implementation of programs and also act as the public description of the department's perspective and focus for those outside the program or field.

Finally, we feel strongly that some form of commonly accepted methods for teacher preparation and certification—credentialing—is needed at the postsecondary level. Teaching postsecondary literacy is a challenging and rewarding profession, as most in the field will acknowledge. However, at present it is clear that more can and should be done to ensure the success of the field's new and developing teachers, and, therefore, the success of students in transitional literacy courses.

Simpson (1983) noted a "lack of philosophical and pedagogical cohesiveness" (p. 222) in postsecondary literacy instruction. And although theory-pedagogy pairings are a commonly accepted connection (though not always connected where needed), adding terminological precision to the mix is important as well because theoretically grounded pedagogy deserves accurate and responsible articulation at all levels: among colleagues, with students, and to those outside of the field. All three of these areas—theory, terminology, and teacher preparation—must move forward on some level for any one of the areas to advance in any real sense.

Limitations

Directly related to the decision to include discussion of three important areas in a single article are limitations imposed on the amount of breadth allocated to each area. That decision was a deliberate one, made to emphasize the interconnectedness of the three areas, but it also meant that space for fully discussing any one of the areas would be limited. Whereas a full literature review and discussion for each of these three areas would be preferable, considerations of space prohibited that approach and posed limitations on the amount of background material included in this article.

Conclusion

A major purpose of this article is to move toward increased coherence in the postsecondary literacy field, and some areas in need of immediate attention have been outlined: theory, terminology, and teacher preparation. These three aspects of postsecondary literacy should not be considered in isolation. Indeed, what we presented in this paper is a cyclical, recursive, and interconnected process that is found in most dynamic, established fields. Also, the focus on coherence is not intended as an exercise in bureaucratic standardization but as a much-need-

ed movement toward further developing post-secondary literacy as a unified academic field: one with a solid theoretical foundation, a common language with which to articulate a core set of guiding principles, and an evidence-based pedagogy taught by comprehensively prepared literacy educators.

This is an exciting period in the history of postsecondary literacy, with much possibility for change on the horizon. It is hoped that this overview of current issues in postsecondary literacy instruction—and our recommendations for possible directions—will be useful for professionals in the field as change is considered.

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