Over the years, much of the scholarship and pedagogy concerning composition studies has been focused on the composition/literature binary, resulting in the disappearance of reading pedagogy in the composition classroom. Pedagogical methods being explored and utilized by first year/freshman writing instructors often takes the interrelation of reading and writing for granted. The assumption that students will enter college already knowing, or quickly learning, how to adequately read and process a wide variety of texts in a multitude of contexts underlies such pedagogy.

In Chasing Literacy, Daniel Keller challenges this notion and attempts to bridge the gap between composition and reading while examining new literacies and providing instructors and scholars a scaffold for a more holistic pedagogy. First, he seeks to situate reading in the discipline of composition studies. His scholarship then goes on to identify and define four significant features of contemporary literacy. Through these discussions, Keller ultimately argues for the clear inclusion of a comprehensive reading pedagogy.

In Chasing Literacy, Keller works to accomplish
these objectives by drawing on Deborah Brandt’s (1995) work on the “accumulation” of literacies, which consists of the ‘piling up’ of old and new literacy materials and expectations as well as the ‘spreading out’ of literacy’s influence on more parts of our lives” (p. 5). His scholarship uses this idea to work against the notion that newer, faster rhetorics—such as Twitter, Facebook, and fan fiction sites—and ways of reading are neither inherently bad nor irrelevant in academia. He achieves his goals through his smart, thorough examinations of the various rhetorics of different types of literacies and of the lives of contemporary high school/college students.

The foundation for the main argument of Chasing Literacy is firmly laid in the second chapter of the book, “Perceptions of Literacy”, which focuses on the reading and writing practices of students today and on the role educators have in shaping what literature (and literacies) students view as being valuable and important. In this section, Keller examines the cultural existence of many fast rhetorics: social media, blogs, websites, etc. as he argues that “speed has become a defining feature of contemporary literacy” (p. 69). This discussion is important because, throughout his research, he found that students were hesitant to label anything internet-based (such as news sites) or anything considered popular (i.e. best-selling fiction) as good or valuable. In fact, students often dismissed such reading and seemed embarrassed to admit they participated in it or, on the other hand, were proud to say they did not. He determined that this bias often stemmed from the types of reading on which teachers placed value: i.e. novels are assigned reading and blogs are not. Keller is quick to point out, though, that all reading has value according to context and should not be so readily dismissed. The points concerning the value and necessity of making room for all literacy types made in this section pave the way for his discussion concerning the near requirement for students to have the ability to “communicate across a range of technologies,” furthering the argument that “a responsible pedagogy may involve teaching a range of rhetorical speeds” (p. 96). His contention remains that the world around us moves quickly and values speed, so we should prepare students to not only fit into that environment but to succeed in it.

By examining the reading habits and literacies of a group of students during their senior years in high school and freshman years in college, Keller highlights the ways
contemporary students are navigating reading, writing, rhetoric, and learning. While the points made concerning the need for/value of varying rhetorical speeds and the need for the marriage of reading and writing in the composition classroom are good, those concerning the actual creation and implementation of such a pedagogy leave something to be desired. In his examination of the inequality of access to technology and its resources, Keller makes valid points, but he fails to offer practical help for those who find themselves in such a position. Readers are given only the note that “pursuing the latest technology or new media practice may not be the most pedagogically sound decision given a teacher’s available resources” (p. 158), and are not provided any direction toward how to help their students effectively engage these ever-changing, necessary, fast rhetorics. The points made in the recurring discussion concerning acceleration and the need to include faster forms of reading and processing in the composition classroom come across as vague with regard to strategies and implementation. Though the basis of the book is a call for including reading pedagogy, the most direction provided is to not include more readings, but to have students reread material using different strategies and for different purposes, as the author believes in “repeated, reinforced experiences that support connection, practice, and metacognition” (p. 159). Although Keller’s discussion concerning how reading can benefit the classroom is valuable, it lacks practical direction or clear starting points for engaging the types of learning he proposes.

Throughout *Chasing Literacy*, Keller brings readers back to the four significant features of contemporary literacy: accumulation and curricular choices, literacy perceptions, speeds of rhetoric, and speeds of reading. Through an examination of these features with regard to contemporary students, Keller successfully makes his argument. A strong analysis of the ways students interact with social media makes it clear that students are constantly identifying audience, analyzing content, and making rhetorical choices. They are doing much of what composition instructors expect of them, but they are doing it in a new and rapidly changing environment. Overall, readers of the book are provided a good look at the bigger picture of how contemporary readers and writers continue, and will continue, to change, shape, and accelerate literacy.

*Chasing Literacy* attempts to convince readers that incorporating reading pedagogy into the composition
classroom is not only helpful but also necessary for student success in and out of academic environments. The variety of scholarship and field research utilized provides ample evidence and solid support for this call to remember the intrinsic link between reading and writing. Daniel Keller succeeds in his attempt to make a case for the renewal of the intentional teaching of reading within composition courses and in initiating a conversation in composition studies that is long overdue.

References


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