

# **The Role of Rhetorical Reflection in the Activity of Writing**

Dissertation Proposal

Texas Tech University, Program in Technical Communication and Rhetoric

L. Lennie Irvin  
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Dissertation Committee  
Dr. Rich Rice, Chair  
Dr. Rebecca Rickly  
Dr. Fred Kemp

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## Chapter 1: An Inquiry into Rhetorical Reflection

### The “Open Question” of Reflection

Two students in a Freshman Composition class are deep in the process of writing an essay for class. These students, Geraldine and Lisa, have brainstormed on their topic, written a first draft, and submitted it for peer response. The next step is to revise their draft, but before they begin, their teacher asks them to write a “reflection,” using the prompt below as the topic:

What do you think about your draft right now? Where do you see it needs work?

What is OK for now? What are you particularly struggling with in this paper? What ideas for dealing with these problems do you have? What will your special goals be for revising this paper?

Since the 1970s, guiding students through the “writing process” has been the fundamental activity of Composition pedagogy. In particular, the introduction of invention or “pre-writing” activities and Writing Workshop’s heavy reliance on peer group response transformed the way writing was taught and learned. But between-the-draft reflections, like the one above, are practically unknown and unused by writing teachers. The question is, should they? Should reflection be as prominent a part of writing pedagogy as invention and peer response?

These two students, Geraldine and Lisa, sit down to write their reflection. A look at what they write will reveal some of the questions and uncertainties surrounding these kinds of reflective activities:

#### Geraldine’s Reflection

Peer responses were very insightful. I will attempt to develop the story a little more

#### Lisa’s Reflection

I feel my draft needs more. Don't know what yet, but need to add something. I think I need to add to the NOW

and maybe add a few more shenanigans.

section. Maybe show what I am doing with my kids as they are growing up. The beginning is ok for now. If i come with more I will add it. I am struggling with the examples. I think i need a couple more examples of THEN and NOW. I will come up with some. To help me, I will do what i always do, just ponder and what ever comes to mind, i will jot the ideas down. Maybe ask my hubby for some input too. And my kids also. My goal for this paper is to get across that I am a much happier being than I used to be. I would like to share my experiences with others too. It might help someone else.

Geraldine's response is superficial and short. She provides little detail, and chooses not to pursue in writing any particular difficulties she is having with the essay or avenues for improving it other than to "develop the story a little more." It is not clear if this reflective activity had any value for helping her complete her essay or learn to become a better writer. Lisa's reflection, in contrast, is much deeper. She starts by expressing her feelings of difficulty with the essay, and though she only has what Sondra Perl would call a "felt sense" of this difficulty, we can see as she continues to write that the location of this difficulty is gradually defined. One section of the paper (the NOW side) is lacking. We see her also problem-solve not only what she needs to do ("show what I'm doing with my kids as they are growing up") but also how she will go about working on this problem in her paper (she will "ponder" and do some listing to generate ideas for examples she could use). The prompt even got her to think rhetorically in terms of her purpose toward her audience. Did this "thinking on the page" help the writer either revise this particular piece or learn more about writing strategies and how to apply them? Were problems better understood and strategies for solving these problems better conceived by doing the prompted reflection than if the reflection were not done?

How come this reflection seemed so productive for one student and so unproductive for the other? Does it matter that in the case of Lisa she did not fulfill the goals she set for revision in the next draft?

Linda Flower states that the value of teacher-prompted reflection in a writing classroom is an "open question." Speaking about the same kind of teacher-prompted reflection just illustrated, Flower states: "But consider the harder case when intentional, strategic reflection forms part of the content and the writing of a course. Then reflection as a literate practice, chosen in place of other practices, needs to be accountable" (*The Construction* 224). She questions what sort of knowledge this kind of strategic reflection generates and whether reflection is a luxury whose uncertain benefits do not justify the time and effort required (228, 229). This same "open question" about reflection was expressed by Dr. Susan Lang, Writing Program Administrator at Texas Tech University (TTU), during a Spring 2007 research study I conducted into the role of reflection within the Freshman Composition program at TTU. Speaking about "Writing Reviews," the TTU Composition program's name for reflections done between drafts, Lang voiced her doubts about their place in the TTU writing curriculum: "We assume a lot about reviews and critiques—I'd like some validation that we are putting students' time to good use" (Irvin "Report on Perceptions" 22). As the director of a writing program, she doubts the worth of this kind of reflection in the curriculum. For her, like Flower, reflection needs to be accountable--she needs answers to the open question of reflection to justify its place in the curriculum.

### **Why Seeking Answers to the "Open Question" of Reflection are Significant for Rhetoric and Composition**

Inquiring more deeply into the nature of reflection, I believe, has fundamental importance for the teaching of writing, whether the context of instruction is Freshman Composition or

Technical Communication. However, this importance is based upon key assumptions about the nature of learning and the nature of writing that need to be made explicit. Our bedrock goal as instructors is to teach students how to write. But how do we understand the ways in which our teaching is promoting learning? What do we understand the activity of writing to be and to involve? The following section will describe these assumptions about learning and writing and the important role reflection plays in each.

The first key assumption underlying this dissertation inquiry concerns an understanding about one important way in which learning happens in the writing classroom. In fact, my interest in how reflection related to learning in my own classroom initiated this larger inquiry, so it is fitting to provide a summary of how my thinking has evolved and focused more and more on reflection.

The genesis for my interest in reflection came from my attempts to become a better teacher of writing within the context of the computer classroom in the mid-1990s. At the time, I sought to enact the pedagogy espoused by the creators and users of the Daedalus Integrated Writing Environment (the software I used at the time in the computer classroom) which put a high value on student-to-student communication through the computer network. What came to be called “network theory” incorporated Bakhtinian notions of how meaning is formed in social contexts through dialogue (referred to as “dialogism”) and social constructivist notions of collaborative learning articulated by Kenneth Bruffee. Belief and learning, according to Bruffee, are negotiated and socially agreed upon through collaborative activity. Neither of these ideas about learning and knowledge depends upon an electronic context; however, the computer networked environment supercharged the dynamics of learning through these new more powerful means to communicate, share text and work together.

As I inquired into how to manage and promote learning within the “shared discourse of the networked computer classroom,” I began to detect a pattern in how I believed learning was

happening. Looking at my own practice, and in particular at [a model writing cycle presented by Dr. Fred Kemp](#), I saw that learning as a social and individual construction was happening through the extension of this shared discourse—in a sense, keeping the conversation going and moving into deeper, more meaningful discourse. I saw that this extension of the shared discourse happened via a repeated sequence of “invention, reflection, and reinvention” (Irvin “Shared Discourse”). My use of these terms came from a quote in Paolo Freire’s essay “The Banking Concept of Education”:  
“Knowledge emerges only through invention and reinvention, through the restless impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry men pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other” (213).  
As I studied the activities in Kemp’s essay cycle, I repeatedly saw students share writing; observe, discuss, and reflect upon that writing; and then make another attempt at the original task (either formulating something new or revising something old). I saw constant “invention” and constant revision or “reinvention,” constant formulating of thinking in text and constant reformulating of those ideas into new or extended text.

I became intrigued by the central role that reflection seemed to play in this dynamic of learning. Below is a diagram of this dynamic:

Invention >> << REFLECTION >> << Re-Invention

This sequence repeats as each re-invention is potentially subject to more reflection that leads to a new re-invention. Sherry Swain in her version of what she calls John Dewey’s “learning triad” expresses this learning dynamic in another way: “the most effective student learning is based on a three-pronged approach: doing, observing the doing, and reflecting on the observation.” In the writing classroom, this means students write, students read and respond to each other’s writing, and then they reflect upon what they have observed and done—multiple times through a writing cycle. Reflection, then, is a significant concern for writing teachers because it performs a central, mediating role for shaping learning and action. It was this realization about the nature of learning and

reflection's key role in deepening it that has sustained my long interest in the subject, and why I believe it is important to the field of Rhetoric and Composition.

The insights into the relationship between reflection and learning I gained from my classroom experience have been reinforced and elaborated by the thinking of Jennifer Moon in her book *Reflection in Learning & Professional Development*. She details the role of reflection for learning in her “map of learning.” In this model of the learning process, she presents learning as occurring in stages as the learner takes in new information and experience.

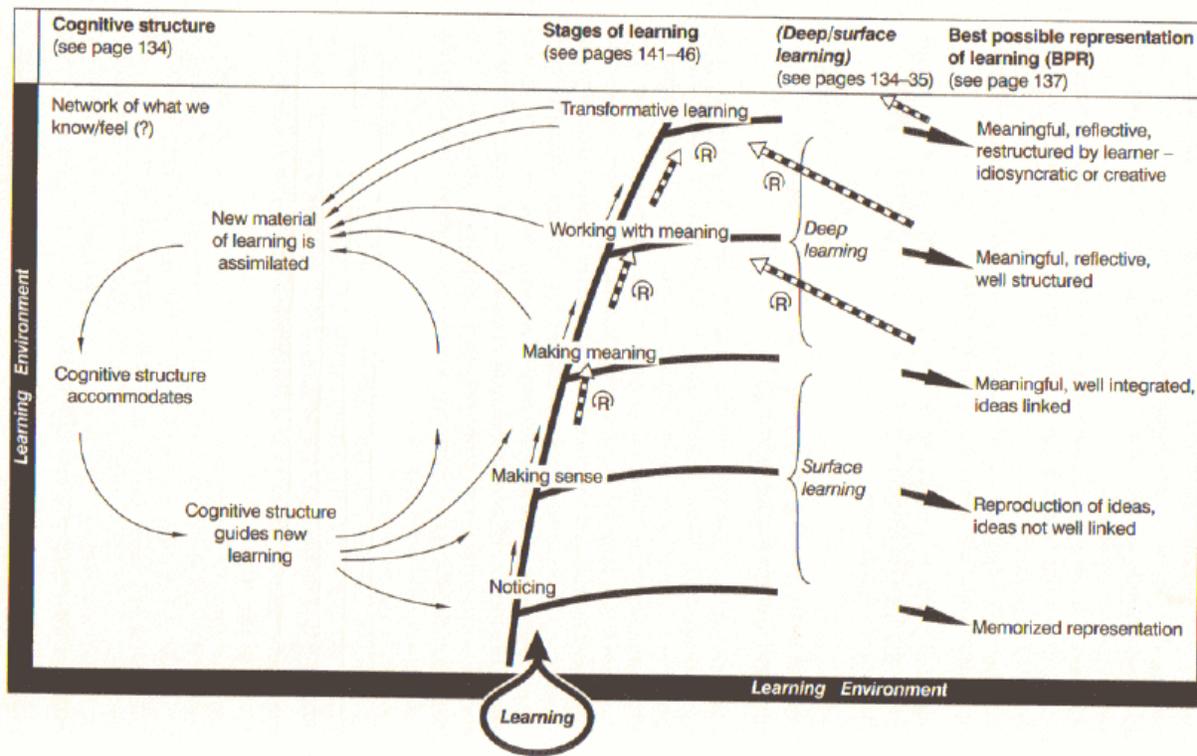


Figure 1. A map of learning and the representation of learning (138)

The learner moves from surface learning to deeper learning by progressing up the stages of learning from Noticing, to Making sense, to Making meaning, to Working with meaning, and finally to the highest level of learning—Transformative learning. Moon uses the metaphor of constructing a jigsaw puzzle to describe the movement from surface to deep learning. At first, we simply notice the

pieces. As we put pieces together, we begin to make sense and the picture of the puzzle begins to take shape. The circled Rs next to the up-pointing arrows represent where reflection facilitates what Moon calls the “upgrading” of learning. Using an example of a student learning from taking notes in class, Moon discusses how the deepening of learning can occur in various ways, but the common factor is the reflective act of processing the learning in some form: “[Students’] opportunities, then, for deeper processing of the learning rest in latter processes, such as re-reading or discussing the notes or doing revision for examinations” (149). This means of upgrading learning, she acknowledges, resembles David Kolb’s experiential learning cycle which positions “reflective observation” in a significant role for learning from experience.

To summarize the discussion on reflection and learning up to this point, I think what is significant is that my own simplistic model of reflection based on classroom observation finds a fuller, more detailed expression in Moon’s “Map of learning.” The dynamic of “invention-reflection-reinvention” is the same process by which Moon sees learners progress up the stages of learning.

But why, then, is reflection significant for the field of Composition/Rhetoric? What kind of learning does it help facilitate in the writing classroom? I believe reflection has a key role in promoting three kinds of learning: 1) it helps guide more effective practice for student writers within particular writing situations; 2) it serves as a way for students to derive what Kathleen Yancey calls “prototypical models” that they can transfer to new communication contexts (50); and 3) it helps develop students' rhetorical sensitivity and practical judgment and their ability to flexibly and appropriately apply what they know in different situations (what I will eventually call their “reflective practice”). When we ask what a student learns in a writing class, what “knowledge” they carry with them into the next class or the next writing context they face, I believe all three of the roles of reflection are interlinked as we help students generalize productively from their learning experience.

This inquiry into the role of reflection within the activity of writing, then, is valuable to writing teachers because reflection plays an important part in learning.

We now turn to the second assumption underlying this project—the nature of writing. The open question of reflection becomes crucial to the field of Rhetoric/Composition when writing is conceived of as a highly rhetorical, situated activity. The discussion that follows will elaborate on this definition of writing and reveal the significant place of reflection in this activity.

The grammatical form of the word “writing” as a gerund contains the paradox in what it means to write: “writing” operates as both a noun and a verb. Observe this sentence: I am writing this discussion about writing. Classical rhetoricians discussed this paradox of writing at length as the debate between viewing rhetoric as a subject (or science) and viewing rhetoric as an art (or faculty). As a subject, writing involves knowledge of and control of the sign system of language—referred to in writing rubrics as grammar and mechanics (things like spelling, word form, punctuation, capitalization). In addition, writing as a subject involves what we might call the formulated conventions of discourse. The most conventional form of writing in Composition is the enduring five paragraph essay, or at least the concept of the thesis-support essay structure built around the unified paragraph invented by Alexander Bain in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century (Halasek 146-154). As an art, writing means acknowledging the full complexity of the writing act as well as the flexible and appropriate application of the “rules” of writing as a subject within particular writing situations. The best metaphor that describes the act of writing is the notion of “rhetorical stance” which maps the complex process of finding, defining, checking, and altering all the various elements of the writing situation: what we mean vs. what we say, the situation, the occasion, the constraints of the particular task (or task schema), the materiality of writing and the process of production, genre, audience, and purpose (Bereiter and Scarmadalia, Bitzer, Kinneavy, Flower and Hayes, Bawarshi, Ede and

Lundsford). Helen Foster's map of “networked subjectivity” provides a richer, more compelling conceptual model of all the complexities writers face when they write:

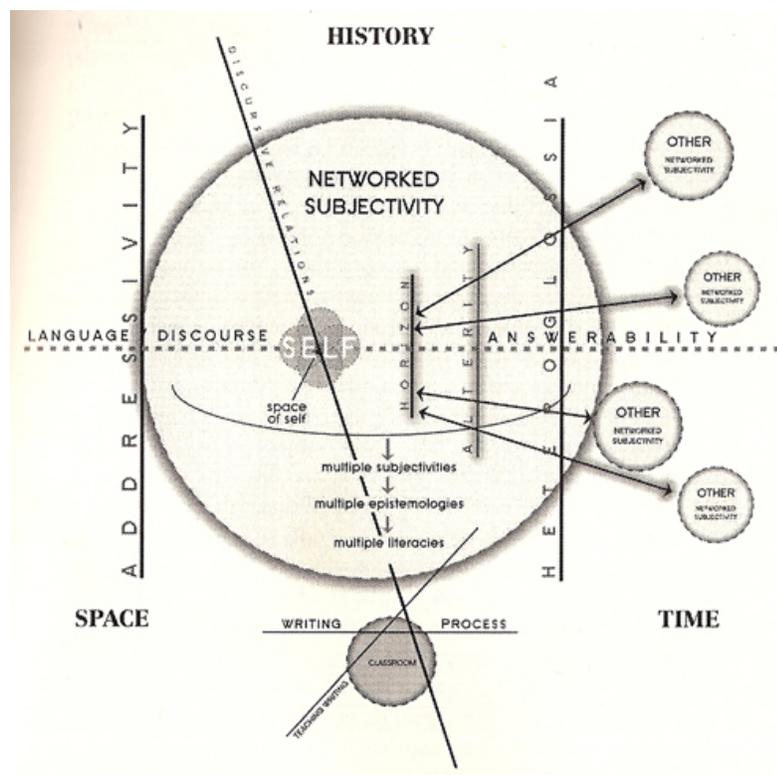


Figure 2: Networked Subjectivity (Foster 113)

As Foster states, “The map attempts to indicate that multiple subjectivities, epistemologies, and literacies are part and parcel of networked subjectivity; the subject and its relation to the networked world, including the classroom and the practices of teaching writing, is shot through and through with discursive relations” (114). Flower and Hayes' 1981 model of the writing process (as well as Hayes' 1996 revision of that model) are two other models of the elements of the writing act. Each of these models of the activity of writing indicate that the act of writing involves a complex managing of multiple factors and constraints.

When we ask what sort of “writing” we should teach in a writing class and what knowledge students should learn, I believe we need to teach not just what Linda Flower calls “limited literacy” but “literate acts” (*Construction* 1-35). Limited literacy narrows the range of the writing situation and

privileges rules, correctness, and formal (or surface) features of writing. It teaches writing as a subject. In Flower's call for teaching "literate acts," we see the exact complaints classical rhetoricians had against those teachers of rhetoric who would reduce rhetoric to a science and a form of *techné*. Isocrates in "Against the Sophists" complains that the sophists taught oratory as if they were teaching the alphabet: "But I marvel when I observe these men setting themselves up as instruments of youth who cannot see that they are applying the analogy of an art [science] with hard and fast rules to a creative process" (73). Similarly Aristotle states, "But the more we try to make either dialectic or rhetoric not, what they really are, practical faculties, but sciences, the more we shall inadvertently be destroying their true nature" (187). When critics like Sharon Crowley and Kathleen Welch condemn "composition" and "current-traditional" practice as teaching such a narrow form of writing as to become "anti-writing" (Crowley 149) and when post-process critics like Kent, Petraglia, Olson, Coulter, and Dobrin (and others) critique writing process pedagogy as teaching a Theory of Writing that is reductive, false, and even unethical, we hear the same critiques made by classical rhetoricians and in the call Flower makes for teaching "literate acts" rather than "limited literacy."

But what are "literate acts" and the practical faculty they employ? A literate act as Flower defines it "is an individual constructive act that does not merely invoke or participate in a literate practice but embeds such practice and conventions within a personally meaningful, goal-directed use of literacy" (*Construction* 18). She identifies literacy as a move within a "discourse practice" and claims writers through these moves engage "in a transaction with text that is guided (more or less) by a flexible social script for how such things are normally done" (20). Contrary to post-process scholars who would claim that the activity of writing is totally indeterminate and interpretive and would thus "let go the curriculum" claiming writing is unteachable (Kastman 99, 118), Flower states that "becoming literate depends upon knowledge of social conventions ... and learning distinctive ways of thinking grounded in the social purpose of the practice" (22, 23). It also involves problem-

solving: “By problem-solving, I mean the intellectual moves that allow people to construct meaning—to interpret the situation; to organize, select, and connect information; to draw inferences, set goals, get the gist, respond to prior texts, draw on past experience, imagine options, and carry on intentions” (24). Ann Berthoff makes a similar point when she claims writing as a form of making meaning is not just a verbal behavior (skill) but an *activity* that “involves the writer in making choices all along the way” (22). Flower's emphasis on literate acts interweaving knowledge of conventions as well as situated cognition complements the point Anis Bawashi makes in his 2003 book on the role of genre and invention in writing: “By encouraging student writers to recognize beginnings as genred positions of articulation, and by teaching students how to inquire into these positions, we enable them to locate themselves more critically and effectively as writers within these beginnings” (170). Writers must determine and negotiate their stance within these formal and conventional constraints. Thus, we have the creative tension implicit in the nature of writing as being both a subject and an activity; as being a genred act of articulation and an individual act of meaning-making; and as being a body of general concepts, theories, and rules and the flexible application of those general theories in particular contexts. The “knowledge” we must teach as writing teachers is how to critically understand and manage this creative tension implicit in what it means to engage in writing as a literate act.

Reflection, then, as a pedagogical activity employed within this conception of writing, is a strategic activity that helps writers engage in and problem-solve within literate acts. It calls on writers to flexibly apply their knowledge about writing within a particular situation—to apply their knowledge of the subject of writing artfully within a specific context. This cognitive flexibility resembles the classical notion of *phronesis*, or the application of practical wisdom and judgment in uncertain or “indeterminate zones or practice” (Schon *Educating* 6). Reflection as a form of

“practical wisdom” within specific context guides effective action and fosters a flexible capacity that can be applied in other writing situations.

The significance of this form of reflection (what I will define shortly as “rhetorical reflection”) to recent perspectives on pedagogy in Rhetoric and Composition can be seen in recent calls by scholars and teachers to shift the focus of what we teach in Freshman Composition from a narrow “proficiency” in academic writing to a broader “rhetorical sensitivity” that can serve student writers in all instances of writing (Halasek).

The following scholars’ views attest to this movement in Composition/Rhetoric. Donald Bartholomae, a chief proponent of teaching academic writing, imagines a composition that teaches a deeper form of criticism than our current practice: “we can imagine that the goal of writing instruction might be to teach an act of criticism that would enable a writer to interrogate his or her own text in relationship to the problems of writing and the problems of disciplinary knowledge. . . . as something to be learned in practice, perhaps learned at the point of practice” (17). Joseph Petraglia believes the goal of writing instruction should be the “turn away from developing rhetorical skills and toward development of rhetorical sensibilities” (62). Summing up ideas from Roderick Hart and Don Burks in the field of speech communication, Petraglia states: “the ideal rhetorical training will have at its core the development of *sensitivity* to the rhetorical possibilities available to students and will provide some guidance as to how they may determine to select among those possibilities” (62). Anis Bawarshi, speaking about the importance of genre in writing, states a similar belief for what our goals should be in 21<sup>st</sup> century writing classrooms: “The rhetorical art of adaptation or repositioning should become central to our teaching of writing, especially our teaching of invention, which would then become the art of analyzing genres and positioning oneself within them” (156). Finally, Wardle, based upon her research into transfer, advocates for this same kind of focus for Freshman Composition: “*meta-awareness about writing language, and rhetorical strategies* in FYC

may be the most important ability our courses can cultivate” (qtd. in Anson 124). Founded upon this notion of writing as highly rhetorical and situated, reflection is one teaching activity we can engage students in that will help them develop this rhetorical sensitivity and practice the art of adapting and repositioning—that is, the art of rhetorical practice.

The preceding section has established two assumptions that underlie this project and point to its significance for the field of Composition/Rhetoric and Technical Communication. The first assumption concerns the role reflection has for deepening learning. Through reflective acts of processing knowledge and experience, learners are led to deepen their understanding and improve their action. For the writing classroom, that means reflection contributes to the learning students construct about the act of writing as well as their ability to revise and improve specific pieces of writing. The second assumption upon which this inquiry is based has to do with how writing is conceived. When writing is defined as a highly rhetorical and situated activity, then reflection serves an important function of helping writers to be flexible and adaptive in their practice. As Linda Flower states, reflection is an “effortful, interpretive, and fallible but strategic process” that seeks to achieve these two important goals (*The Construction* 268).

### **Locating the Focus of Inquiry: What is The Nature of “Rhetorical Reflection”?**

Reflection is a nebulous term with many possible meanings. In the following discussion, I define the particular type of reflection I will focus on in this project—“rhetorical reflection”—and outline its relevant links to rhetoric and invention.

Jennifer Moon bridges the cross-disciplinary meanings of reflection and offers a unifying definition for the word. She notes reflection has been a term used by the fields of professional development, education, psychology, philosophy, sociology, and we might add composition and rhetoric. She bemoans the imprecise vocabulary surrounding the word: “the following words can

apparently be synonymous with reflection--reasoning, thinking, reviewing, problem solving, inquiry, reflective judgment, reflective thinking, critical reflection, reflective practice" (Moon viii). Even a word like "critical thinking" can be hard to distinguish at times from reflection. Her definition of reflection is useful because it will help guide the focus of this inquiry:

reflection is a mental process with purpose and/or outcome. It is applied in situations where material is ill-structured or uncertain in that it has no obvious solutions, a mental process that seems to be related to thinking and to learning. It is suggested that the apparent differences in reflection are not due to different types of reflection--in other words, to differences in the process itself, but to the differences in the way that it is used, applied or guided. (5)

What distinguishes different kinds of reflection is not the process or nature of the reflective thinking, but the "framework" or purpose to which it is used: "it is the framework of intention and any guidance toward fulfillment of that intention that is significant in distinguishing one act of reflection from another" (15). Within the field of writing instruction, two main frameworks have been used: Curricular Reflection and Rhetorical Reflection.

One good way of understanding the differences in these two major frameworks of reflection in Composition and Rhetoric is to chart them upon the "Three Poles of Reflection":

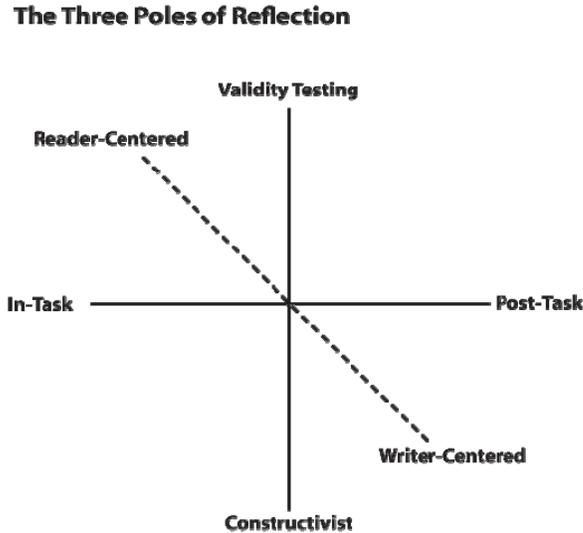


Figure 3: The Three Poles of Reflection

These different "poles" are not opposites but refer to dominant tendencies of each framework. Likewise, these poles don't preclude that each tendency might be concurrently happening; however, they offer a useful taxonomy for understanding these two different kinds of reflection. One pole expresses the factor of time and whether a particular reflection occurs after the fact or while the activity is still on-going. The second pole expresses the dominant type of pedagogical intention behind the reflection—whether it is meant to promote the construction of learning or whether it is meant to promote problem-solving and effective action through validity testing. The third pole concerns the audience for the act of reflection and whether it is written predominantly for the purposes of the writer or the purposes of the reader (or teacher/evaluator). This pole follows Linda Flower's notions of writer-based and reader-based prose ("Writer-Based Prose").

Whether in a Freshman Composition class or a Technical Writing class, when most writing teachers think of "reflection," they typically are thinking of what I call "Curricular Reflection." In order to define Rhetorical Reflection more precisely, it is important to distinguish it from this other framework for reflection. Reflection as a widely-used term and pedagogical practice emerged in Composition Studies in the late 1980s and early 1990s, concurrent with two trends in the discipline:

the growth of portfolios as an alternative means to evaluate writing and an increased interest in writing as a form of constructing learning and “making meaning” (epitomized best by the work of Ann Berthoff). Portfolios seemed the natural extension for a writing pedagogy based upon the writing workshop model. Kathleen Blake Yancey's 1992 *Portfolios in the Writing Classroom: An Introduction* marks the portfolio trend more than any single text. Portfolios contain a reflective “letter” or statement from students, and many teachers began to see that for students to reflect effectively upon their writing and learning experience at the end of a course they need to reflect throughout the course. The exigencies of assessment, then, brought reflection into the middle of writing process pedagogy as a kind of backward filling in of a gap. Yancey, again, was the most prominent theorist in this regard with her 1998 *Reflection in the Writing Classroom*. In this text, she outlines the theory and practice of incorporating reflection course-wide by describing three types of reflection: reflection-in-action, constructivist reflection, and reflection-in-presentation.

The distinguishing factor about Curricular Reflection is its constructivist purpose—that is, its goal is to get students to form and shape their own knowledge and come to their own conclusions. Although it certainly involves the validation of knowledge, it contrasts with the pole of validity testing because it is not premised upon a problem or perplexity felt within an ill-structured or uncertain situation. Its goal is more about understanding and interpretation than problem-solving or action. Because of this constructivist framework, Curricular Reflection also tends to be a post-task activity—a Draft Letter accompanying a final draft, a mid-term constructive reflection on what has been learned so far, or a portfolio letter accompanying an end-of-semester portfolio. Its purpose is to look back at experience and make sense of it; it seeks generalizations for broader application and transfer of knowledge rather than particulars within specific contexts.

Another characteristic of Curricular Reflection is its orientation toward reader-based rather than writer-based prose. The key factor differentiating these two poles of reflection is whether the

primary purpose behind the reflection is for teacher assessment and evaluation or for student learning. Ideally, these two purposes cohabit and amplify each other (what Yancey refers to as *bothand*), but the focus on reflection in the field of Composition and Rhetoric has been dominated by portfolio evaluation and the place of reflection within that evaluative context. The most extreme case of teacher-centered Curricular Reflection is what Yancey calls "reflection-in-presentation." The prime example of this kind of reflection is the portfolio letter that comes at the end of the semester or even at graduation (post-task) for evaluation purposes. The high stakes of the grade shape this form of reflection. The audience for the reflection is very self-consciously the teacher, and the purpose is to demonstrate knowledge and skill. Yancey describes this type of Curricular Reflection as a tool for assessment,

Reflection is thought to enhance the *validity* of the assessment—that is, the likelihood that the assessment will measure what it purports to measure—precisely because it *requires* that students narrate, analyze, and evaluate their own learning and their own texts and thus *connects the assessment to their own learning*. (Yancey *Reflection* 146)

As Richard Haswell notes, these kinds of student self-evaluations “both measure and allow learning” (98). It asks students to demonstrate their learning even as they construct it. Reflection offers a powerful tool for expanding the possibilities for how teachers evaluate and for the kind of learning that students might do during an assessment situation. In a more closed learning context where criteria for evaluation are strictly defined and where specific learning objectives or knowledge is measured, portfolio letters become another testing situation to see if students have the "right" answer. The test also becomes concerned with not only demonstrating knowledge but demonstrating the capacity to reflect (Yancey *Reflection* 147). In a more open learning context where the criteria for evaluation are more constructivist in nature, students are allowed to discuss what they think is relevant and generate their own insights in their own language.

With the contrasting "framework" of Curricular Reflection described, we now turn our attention to the nature of Rhetorical Reflection. Rhetorical Reflection, as I define it, represents a teacher-prompted activity that occurs within the activity or writing for the purpose of validity testing or problem-solving. Following Linda Flower's paradigm of writer-based/reader-based prose, rhetorical reflection is written for the writer's own purposes and with herself in mind as audience. Rhetorical Reflection is founded upon principles of reflection established by John Dewey and experiential learning from David Kolb. Central to this form of reflection are two key elements:

- a task, or what Jack Mezirow calls a "line of action," that the learner is engaged in doing (14).  
This line of action represents a context of an evolving cycle or process
- the awareness of a problem or perplexity in the face of an uncertain situation within a task

Charting this type of reflection on the Three Poles of Reflection, Rhetorical Reflection is oriented toward the in-task, writer-centered, and validity testing poles.

Typically, these acts of reflection come between the drafts, after peer feedback, and before revision begins. This chart of the "Writing Feedback Loop" illustrates the pedagogical location of Rhetorical Reflection within a teacher-guided sequence of the writing process:

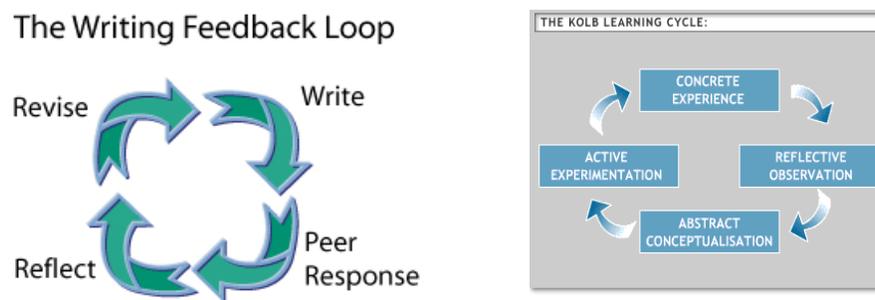


Figure 4: The Writing Feedback Loop and Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle

This sequencing of the writing process follows David Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle closely, where "reflective observation" on experience leads to "abstract conceptualization" that leads to "active experimentation" in another (and presumably improved) attempt at the experience, which then leads to a repeat of the cycle. This "looping" describes the multi-draft sequence of the writing-

feedback loop and the significant role peer response and rhetorical reflection have in helping students formulate critical perspective and insight into their own text and process so as to assist them in revising and completing the writing assignment more successfully.

Rhetorical Reflection as an "in-task" activity fits well with what Donald Schon and Yancey call "reflection-in-action." Because Rhetorical Reflection is so linked to a task or experience, it has strong connections to David Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle. Both Jennifer Moon and Jack Mezirow link Kolb's cycle to John Dewey's own belief that reflection must be followed by action or experiment to test what is arrived at through reflection (what Dewey called the "hypothetical-deduction model") (Mezirow 101). Dewey sees reflection as goal-driven and defines it as, "Active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and the further conclusions to which it tends" (9). This "careful consideration" for Dewey, though, is triggered by uncertainty and the need to solve a problem within this task: "crucial for him [Dewey] is the initiation of reflective thinking in a state of doubt or uncertainty or difficulty. It is the need to solve the 'perplexity' that guides the process" (Moon 12). Mezirow believes that this sense of perplexity is necessary for reflection, and he calls it the "pre-reflective phase." For Mezirow, the application of reflection to this perplexity centers around validity testing and problem-solving:

Reflection involves validity testing, which can be an integral element in taking thoughtful action... . Reflective learning involves assessment or reassessment of assumptions. Reflective learning becomes transformational whenever assumptions or premises are found to be distorting, inauthentic, or otherwise invalid. (6)

This "careful consideration" of assumptions and beliefs done "in-task" represents a deep form of self-assessment that can help students identify problems and lead to solutions or realignments to

better complete the task. Schon, in particular, frames this sort of reflection within the context of action:

Reflection-in-action has a critical function, questioning the assumptional structure of knowing-in-action. We think critically about the thinking that got us into this fix or this opportunity; and we may, in the process, restructure strategies of action, understanding or phenomena, or ways of framing problems. (Schon *Educating* 28)

Yancey calls this kind of reflection a form of "re-understanding" and locates it within a single writing event and the composing of that text (24, 26).

Another key determinant distinguishing Rhetorical Reflection is its orientation toward the writer or learner's needs more than the needs of the teacher and an evaluation context. Work done by King and Kitchner on reflective judgment, Habermas on emancipation, Barnett on reflection as a tool for evaluation and critique, as well as Van Manen, all see reflection as a tool applied to a task whose main benefit is for the individual (Moon 13-17). This type of reflection generates knowledge and awareness for the writer's own uses, rather than for the purpose of demonstrating that knowledge to an audience.

Although all reflection contains elements of *looking back*, *looking here*, and *looking forward*, Rhetorical Reflection and Curricular Reflection are distinguished by the contrasting frameworks or purposes that guide them. To summarize our description of this project's focus of inquiry up to this point, Rhetorical Reflection contrasts from Curricular Reflection because it is done in-task rather than post-task, the intention behind the reflective activity is more for problem-solving and validity testing than constructivist learning, and Rhetorical Reflection is written mainly for the writer's own uses and purposes rather than as a way to demonstrate anything toward an audience which quite often is evaluative. Curricular Reflection, then, has the predominant purpose of promoting learning, while Rhetorical Reflection is chiefly characterized by judgment.

But why call this framework for reflection "rhetorical?" An examination of Donald's Schon's thinking on "reflective practice" reveals further features of "Rhetorical Reflection" and why this kind of reflection can be closely connected to rhetoric and invention and deserve the name "rhetorical." Kathleen Blake Yancey and Joel English are two of the most prominent scholars in Composition who have directly brought Schon's ideas into the field of Composition. Yancey in her book *Reflection in the Writing Classroom* introduces Schon's concepts by describing his views on knowledge: "In explaining his epistemology, Schon begins by distinguishing between two kinds of knowing: that of the technical realm and that of the non-technical realm. The world of technical rationality, Schon says, allows for a knowing by way of causal inference that is controlled. ... The second world is ... where causal inference is a judgment call, no matter how well informed" (12-13). Within Schon's two competing views of epistemology, we see the same competing views about truth and rhetoric's role that go back to the sophists. Furthermore, through Schon's conception of "reflective practice," we can make direct connections to "rhetorical practice."

In Schon's 1983 *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action*, he describes the crisis in professional practice as a mismatch between then current methods for guiding practice and real life practice situations. He labels the culprit as "the model of Technical Rationality": "According to the model of Technical Rationality ... professional activity consists in instrumental problem solving made rigorous by the application of scientific theory and technique" (21). He characterizes this technical rationality later as the "application of scientific theory and technique to the instrumental problems of practice" (30). The crisis Schon identifies is that this technical rationality does not always work in the messy, real world which involves "complexity, uncertainty, instability, uniqueness, and value conflict" (18). He labels these situations as "indeterminate zones of practice" (*Educating* 6-7). His entire thesis surrounding "reflection-in-action" and "reflection-on-action" is about applying a different kind of thinking to these indeterminate zones of practice.

Within Schon's two conflicting models of knowledge guiding practice we see the ancient conflict between philosophy and rhetoric. Stanley Fish summarizes this conflict in his essay "Rhetoric" by bringing up Richard Lanham's distinction between *homo seriosus* and *homo rhetoricus*: "In the philosopher's vision of the world, rhetoric (and representation in general) is merely the (disposable) form by which a prior and substantial content is conveyed; but in the world of *homo rhetoricus* rhetoric is both form and content, the manner or presentation and what is presented" (1616). When truth is already known either through logic, religion, or science, rhetoric is reduced to "mere rhetoric" and becomes a matter of arrangement and style only, leaving invention out of rhetoric's purview. In contrast, Isocrates and Aristotle define the realm of rhetoric as being exactly the indeterminate zones of practice that Schon discusses. For Aristotle, the art of rhetoric deals with things that "belong to no definite science"(1354a), "the probable" or those things that "may be one way or another" (1357a). Distinguishing the contingent from the necessary or the impossible, Aristotle determines the subject matter of the contingent to be "perishable circumstances, incomplete knowledge, and fallible human action" (Farrell *Norms* 78).

Schon's complaint against the model of Technical Rationality also mirrors the debate classical rhetoricians had between whether the practice of rhetoric was a science or an art (which aligns with the debate discussed earlier between seeing writing as a subject or as an art). We see this same conflict in recent times in post-process thinkers who complain that writing process pedagogy and views of writing have become a form of technical rationality. Is rhetoric and composition a science where rhetorical practice is guided by "scientific" rules and generalizable truths that can be applied in any situation? In this case, rhetorical practice becomes a matter of *techne*. Schon's clear links to the classical view of rhetoric can be seen in his view of reflective practice as involving "artistry": "It is rather through the non-technical process of framing the problematic situation that we may organize and clarify both the ends to be achieved and the possible means of achieving

them” (*The Reflective Practitioner* 41). If rhetoric is as John Poulakos defines it is “the art which seeks to capture in opportune moments that which is appropriate and attempts to suggest that which is possible,” (26) rhetorical practice “enacts the norms of propriety collaboratively with interested collective others” (Farrell “Practicing” 91). This rhetorical practice, like Schon's view of reflective practice as artistry, aims “to practice judgment (to enact *krisis*) where certain sorts of problematic materials are concerned (Farrell “Practicing” 81). The classical term for this practical judgment (or wisdom) is *phronesis* which Farrell refers to as the “practical ideal of the appropriate” (81). *Phronesis*, Steve Schwarze points out, is crucial to the practice of rhetoric: “the relationship of *phronesis* and rhetoric emphasizes how rhetor, text, and audience are brought together in the enactment of practical wisdom” (“The role of display in *phronesis*”). As Kathleen Yancey states after a summary of Schon's views on reflection, “reflection is *rhetorical*” (*Reflection* 12).

Rhetorical Reflection, then, relates to invention because as a form of *phronesis* it seeks to discover what is appropriate within uncertain and particular situations. Invention as Janice Lauer defines it concerns “strategic acts that provide the discourses with direction, multiple ideas, subject matter, arguments, insights or probable judgments, and understanding of the rhetorical situation” (2). “Rhetorical reflection” is just such a “strategic act” that extends the concerns of invention throughout the activity of writing, helping writers achieve an appropriate and effective rhetorical stance. This quest for the appropriate in writing has been referred to by Wayne Booth as “rhetorical stance”:

[Rhetorical stance is] a stance which depends on discovering and maintaining in any writing situation a proper balance among the three elements that are at work in any communicative effort: the available arguments about the subject itself, the interests and peculiarities of the audience, and the voice, the implied character, of the speaker.

I should like to suggest that it is this balance, this rhetorical stance, difficult as it is to

describe, that is our main goal as teachers of rhetoric. (141)

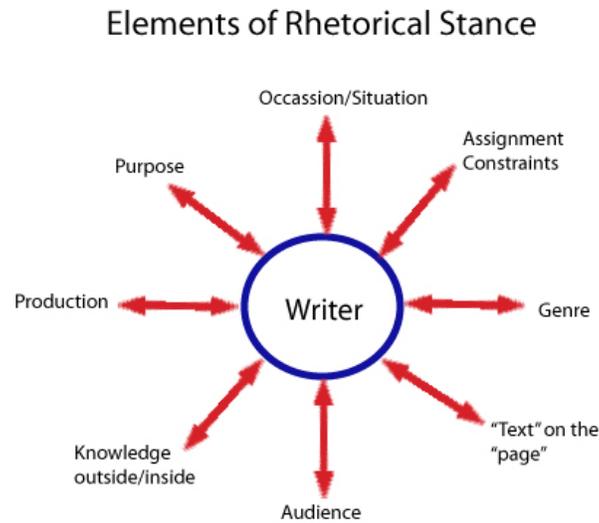


Figure 5: Elements of Rhetorical Stance

As Richard Young, Alton Becker and Kenneth Pike state in *Rhetoric: Discovery and Change*, “invention involves a process of orientation rather than origination” (qtd. in Bawarshi 6). Rhetorical stance is a conceptual metaphor that communicates the spatial sense of orienting toward and aligning the various elements and complexity of the writing situation (or we might say the writing ecology).

If we presume that writing is epistemic and a form of inquiry (Odell 1980, Hillocks 1982), then the concerns of invention persist throughout the writing process, not just the “pre-writing” phase of composing. Rhetorical Reflection, as a teacher-prompted activity, like invention is a heuristic activity designed to guide a student writers' inquiry into establishing their rhetorical stance. If we see the activity of writing as a goal-directed, problem-solving activity as Flowers and Hayes do, then rhetorical reflection is a discursive space where student writers can define and seek (invent) solutions to problems and felt difficulties they encounter within their process of drafting a paper. Rhetorical Reflection, then, is where students can engage in what Dewey defined as “reflective thinking” and practice the phronetic art of rhetoric.

## **A Summary of the Research Problem and Declaration of the Research Question**

As we return to the “open question” surrounding reflective activities like Rhetorical Reflection, I want to consider again Geraldine and Lisa who we met in the opening of this chapter. Each student was asked to write a “Writer’s Review” to reflect upon where they were in writing their paper and what they needed to do to revise and improve it. Geraldine, as you recall, hardly wrote anything. The activity was obviously of little worth to her. However, Lisa delved more deeply into evaluating her paper and its problems. She identifies a number of strategies and goals for improving her paper and appears to be problem-solving on the page. This reflection appears to have lived up to the assumptions we have about reflection’s value and purpose. Yet, as I mentioned, this student was unable to live up to her intentions in the next draft.

The “felt difficulty” (illustrated in these two examples) triggering this research inquiry is the ambiguous and problematic nature of rhetorical reflection within the activity of writing. The problem is a pedagogical one: How do we engage students in Rhetorical Reflection that is productive? What do we need to know about what happens when students perform this kind of reflection so that students learn and act more effectively? Linda Flower's questions about reflection remain: we don't know what kind of knowledge this type of strategic reflection generates, and we aren't sure if the activity is significant enough to warrant inclusion in the curriculum (is it just a luxury?) (*The Construction* 228, 229). In short, writing teachers experience uncertainties about the nature and purpose of Rhetorical Reflection and encounter difficulties in using it in the classroom.

The cause of this uncertainty and mixed results for writing teachers using Rhetorical Reflection may have two sources. The first source, I believe, comes from what we might call “the cocoon approach” to reflection. The rich theory surrounding reflection posits an alchemical quality onto the act of reflection for mediating learning, action, and problem-solving in positive ways. This

description of reflection from a workshop on Instructional Design illustrates this transformational nature attributed to reflection:

It is important to engage in the metacognitive process of reflection if you want to change and grow. Metacognition is thinking about thinking. It empowers you to know what you know and know what you don't know. Once you engage in this type of reflection about your own thinking you can be deliberate and focused in your planning. The metacognitive process helps us move toward evaluating what we currently think and move beyond it. ... It is an agent for deliberate and strategic change. ("Topic 7: Reflect on Learning")

Almost like a caterpillar that wraps itself in a cocoon in order to change into a butterfly, this thinking about reflection believes the learner must engage in reflection in order to "change and grow." But little is known about what happens for the student as they reflect. We wrap our students up in the cocoon of reflection and hope that they come out the other side as a butterfly, and when they don't emerge as this beautiful butterfly ready to fly then we question the worth and value of this reflective activity. As teachers we set the framework and the context for this reflective activity from the outside and hope for the best. Perhaps if we had a better idea of what was happening inside the cocoon (so to speak) we would understand better what to do to make reflection more productive for students and what it means when students don't change and grow as a result of reflection.

The second source of the problem surrounding reflection in the writing classroom may be how we have theorized it. Certainly the work of Kathleen Yancey, in particular, has sought to provide a theory of reflection to guide our understanding of what reflection is, what it does, and how to promote it pedagogically. However, a close examination of how our current "theories of reflection" were generated calls these theories into question and may account for the ambiguities about reflection that we experience. Each of our main theorist of reflection in

Composition/Rhetoric (chiefly Flower, Yancey, and Bereiter and Scarmadela) arrived at their theories in two ways: 1) from speculative thinking based upon logical deductions from other theories; or 2) from studying their experience of using reflection in the classroom and interpreting that use based upon other theories or models. Despite the fact that the theories generated from experiences are empirical and "observation-based," the interpretation of this data and the generation of theory is shaped from other theories. It could be that our theories of reflection express truths more connected to the theories shaping their creation than from what is really going on when students reflect. These theories of reflection have not followed a systematic interpretive process that adequately grounds the theory in concrete examples of students' reflective texts. The two sources of the problem regarding reflection, then, connect. We don't know enough of what happens inside the "cocoon" of reflection for students, and what we do think is happening is shaped by theories generated from outside this cocoon. We may be seeing what we want to see is happening (or we hope is happening) inside the cocoon based upon these theories.

We need, then, a better answer to this "open question" of reflection in the classroom to guide our pedagogical use of Rhetorical Reflection. The importance of pursuing this question for our field is summarized in recent calls for emphasizing the teaching of a meta-awareness about writing and the ability to flexibly adapt to meet the contingencies of particular writing situations and genres (Wartle, Bawarshi). The currency of this "open question" surrounding reflection is illustrated by the Freshman Writing Program at Texas Tech's steady removal in recent years of nearly all the reflective writing assignments between drafts from the curriculum. I believe such a removal of rhetorical reflection from the curriculum is a mistake; however, this WPA's decision is understandable. Reflection, as Flower states, needs to be accountable before we can warrant its place in the curriculum. But how do we hold rhetorical reflection accountable? I don't believe testing "Does it work?" will help us find answers to this problem surrounding reflection. The question

surrounding Rhetorical Reflection in the writing classroom should not be “if” it works or “if” it is worth the effort. Rather than question "Does it work?" we need to know “how” it works (or doesn’t work) and “how” it can be designed to be worth the effort. "What does it work well for?" “What is happening when reflection doesn’t seem to work?” and "What needs to be known about how reflection operates for writers negotiating the activity of writing?" We could test reflection's effectiveness, but contingencies and variables surrounding its use in the classroom would always overwhelm the narrow answer that such a test might come up with. Instead, we need to open up the cocoon and look closely at what is happening inside the act of Rhetorical Reflection. We need to examine closely and extensively actual student texts of Rhetorical Reflection without letting other theories pre-determine and shape our understanding of what it happening. Having better answers to these questions may provide a stronger basis for teachers to use this type of reflection productively in their classes.

My goal with this inquiry is to generate a description and understanding of Rhetorical Reflection (a theory) that fits with the actual phenomenon and works in practice when put into use. What this dissertation proposes is to generate a grounded theory of reflection within the activity of writing. No other Composition researcher has used this methodological approach for studying reflection or for generating a theory of reflection. This new theory may provide a richer conceptual understanding of reflection that more closely fits actual examples of reflection found in our classrooms. Likewise, this new theory of reflection may delineate a better conceptual framework of the relations and consequences of various interacting elements in the act of reflection so that teachers may navigate the use of reflection with their students more productively.

The working Research Questions I have for my inquiry is:

What is the nature of Rhetorical Reflection within the activity of writing, and how does it work in relation to the learning and practice of freshman writers?

Can we generate a grounded theory that offers an understanding of rhetorical reflection and how it works that is useful for teachers of writing?

With this grounded theory, we won't "know" if rhetorical reflection works or not; instead, we'll have a better understanding of what rhetorical reflection is and how it works or does not work. This grounded understanding, then, will help guide teachers' practice using Rhetorical Reflection in the classroom and their own ongoing theorizing about it.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review of Rhetorical Reflection

This discussion of the literature review section of this dissertation will only be for the purposes of this proposal a descriptive outline of the literature that will be reviewed (rather than a draft of this chapter). The section in my Pre-dissertation Proposal “Review Some of the Basic Literature Regarding the Problem” presents a fair starting draft of what will go into this section.

My discussion of each scholar and theorist will outline their key ideas about how reflection works, particularly noting their notions of “rhetorical reflection” (though that is my term not theirs). I will note the uses and limits of these notions, particularly uncovering the perhaps suspect way in which these ideas were generated. One hypothesis about Rhetorical Reflection is that our understanding of how reflection works is built upon theories that may shape our conception of reflection in a mistaken way. Below are the titles of the main sections of this literature review:

- Course-wide Reflection: Kathleen Yancey  
Discusses Yancey’s views of reflection as the major theorist of reflection in Composition.
- Donald Schon and the field of “professional practice”  
This section will dig more deeply into Schon’s thinking about reflection in terms or “practice.”
- Reflection and Experiential Learning: Dewey, Kolb, and Boud
- Reflection and Transformational Learning: Mezirow
- Metacognition and the Cognitive Model of Writing: Flower and Hayes, and Bereiter and Scardamalia
- Student Self-Assessments: Beach
- Reflection and Revision: Between the Drafts Practice as Rhetorical Reflection  
Harris, Sommers

\*\*\*Note: I have listed the major “areas” of theorist that I could talk about in relation to my dissertation inquiry. This seems like an awful lot, so I’m not sure at this point how to decide what to include and what to exclude. My thinking is that I will know better AFTER I conduct the major part of my research and have results and begin to generate my findings (theory). At that time I will know better what I should stress in this literature review.\*\*\*

## Chapter 3: Methodology for Researching Rhetorical Reflection

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The following section is a general description of my methodology and research design—not a draft of this section. I have included material that could be considered a beginning stab at a draft for this chapter, but it is very preliminary

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### Outline Goals and Methods of Research for Adding to the Knowledge Regarding the Problem

To answer the “open question” of reflection and gain a better understanding of Rhetorical Reflection as a pedagogical activity, I propose doing a grounded theory analysis of the writing and reflective texts produced by Freshman writers within the First Year Writing Program at Texas Tech. Grounded Theory is defined by Anselm Strauss and Juliet Corbin this way: “[Grounded theory is] theory that was derived from data, systematically gathered and analyzed through the research process. In this method, data collection, analysis, and eventual theory stand in close relationship to one another” (12). As John Creswell goes on to explain about grounded theory, “A key idea is that this theory-development does not come 'off the shelf,' but rather is generated or 'grounded' in data from participants who have experienced the process” (*Qualitative Inquiry* 63). By focusing on data first and using techniques of comparative analysis and theoretical sampling, I will seek to approach an empirical study of reflective texts in a way that has not been done before in Composition Studies. My goal will be to generate a theory of reflection that may fit and work better than our current model.

I can think of three reasons why grounded theory is a good approach for this research. First, I have hypothesized that our current theory of reflection may be inadequate and we need a better one. The question then arises—what methodology should we use to generate a new theory? Clearly,

grounded theory specializes in this task and provides good tools to accomplish it. Secondly, as a research methodology grounded theory has focused especially on studying social processes and situations. The activity of writing fits as a good subject for applying such a methodology, given its nature as a social, situated process. The third reason grounded theory works well as a methodology for this study is the large volume of data available for analysis. As a methodology that depends upon a close connection with data, it is imperative that a lot of data be available for analysis. The large amount of data available within the TOPIC database will also provide multiple opportunities for theoretical sampling as well. Lastly, it is worth mentioning that as a kind of experiment it will be interesting to attempt a grounded theory analysis to see what kind of knowledge it will generate since it has never been done before.

My study will be an archival study examining texts within the TOPIC database from the academic year 2004-2006. This data set offers the unique opportunity to study thousands of texts both through textual analysis, but also through datagogic methods of data-mining. Datagogic within Composition Studies refers to the use of databases as a central site where all writing is submitted in a writing course. “Datagogic methods” refers to new methods of researching writing within this new database setting.

According to Glaser and Strauss (1967), this dissertation research would be considered a beginning step in generating theory. They believe the initial establishment of categories and properties are best established by first minimizing differences among the comparison groups (55). My data set of freshman writers of roughly the same age from the same school represents such a “minimized” group. Only after these categories and properties are established within this relatively homogeneous set of groups should the researcher turn to “maximizing” the differences among comparative groups to further refine and develop the theory. This direction toward maximizing differences among comparison groups points to a possible post-dissertation research agenda.

The goal of my research study will be to do this basic work of generating theory within a minimized group (TTU Freshman Composition, TOPIC). Glaser and Strauss state two criteria for the generation of theory. The theory generated must “fit” the situation and “work” when put to use: “By 'fit' we mean that the categories must be readily (not forcibly) applicable to and indicated by the data under study; by 'work' we mean that they must be meaningfully relevant to and be able to explain the behavior under study” (3). There is a possibility I will pursue a second phase of research that will engage in triangulation of the fitness and workability of the theory generated by engaging in Content Analysis of a large sample of student writing from TOPIC as well as strategic data mining within the TOPIC database. However, such a move to generate and test a theory within the same study may be both contrary to the methodology of grounded theory and create a research project that is too large.

The following chart derived from Creswell (2003) will describe my general research design:

Research Approach	Qualitative
Knowledge Claims (epistemological stance)	Constructivist
Strategies of Inquiry (methodologies)	Grounded theory
Methods	Comparative Analysis of texts through coding : open, axial, selective  Additionally, possible Content Analysis and data-mining
Sample/Sampling	Theoretical sampling of various groups of Freshman writers and writing from within the TOPIC database. In theoretical

	<p>sampling, the process of data collection is controlled by the emergence of theory.</p> <p>A second phase of the study to triangulate the discovered theory might entail Content Analysis and data mining</p>
Data Analysis	<p>Close textual analysis of texts will be used following grounded theory's method of comparative analysis.</p> <p>From this comparative analysis, derive a coding instrument for analyzing these reflections by a team of coders. Identify key search parameters for large-scale data mining.</p>

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What follows is material that could serve as a beginning draft of the content that will go into this section. Much of it comes from my qualifying exam. Of course, it will need to be reworked based upon how I actually conduct my research.

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### **Locating My Study in Terms of Open and Closed Systems—Phenomenon of Study**

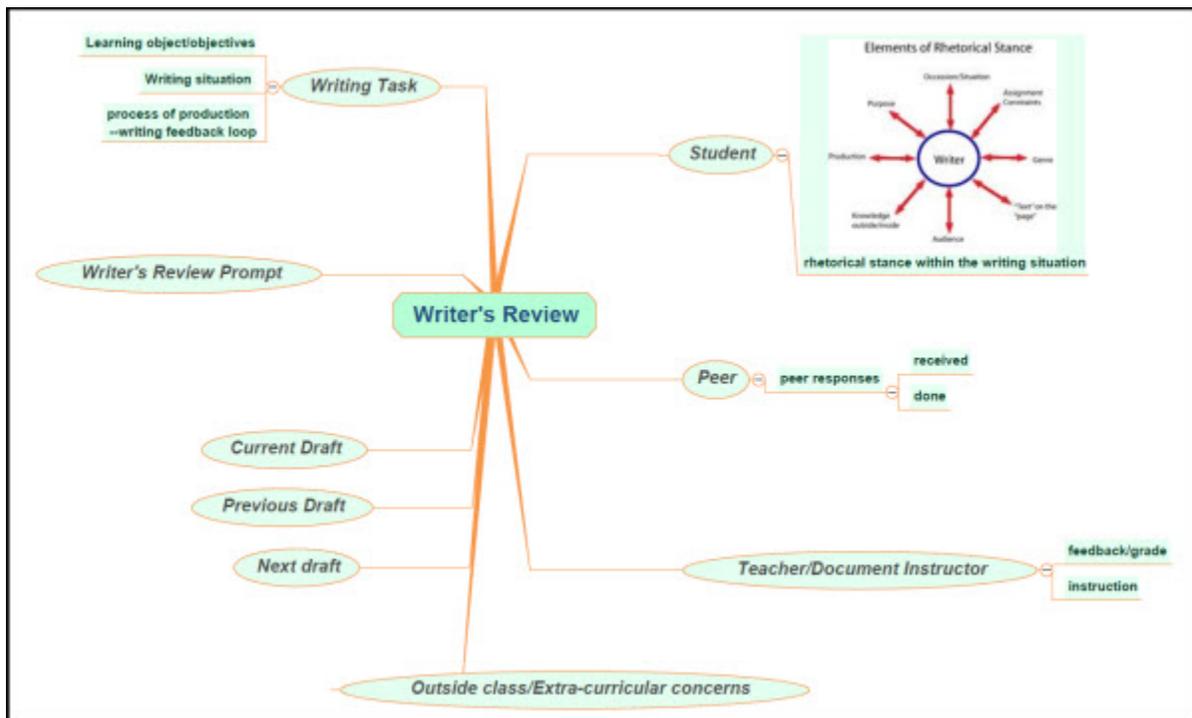
In this section, I will attempt to describe the local subject of my study in terms of it being a closed or open system. I would have to say that the 2004-2006 First Year Writing Program at Texas Tech University (FYWP at TTU) in its curriculum, writing pedagogy, and writing produced by students is both a closed and open system. This discussion will attempt to map out the features of the writing ecology.

Chris Anson and Clay Spinuzzi offer definitions of closed and open systems that I will then apply to the FYWP. As Clay Spinuzzi describes it, open systems create a productive balance between structure and innovation and uses the analogy of a starter reef to describe an open system: “An open system is a centrally designed artifact, of course, but it exists as a nexus for workers' innovations, just as an artificial reef functions as a nexus for a developing underwater ecology” (205). Chris Anson describes the activity of writing as an open system: “In the sense in which activity theorist and genre theorist have described it, writing takes place in an open system: as constantly evolving, contextually mediated, and contextually determined practices, influenced by social and institutional histories, conventions, and expectations” (114). Writing is an open system because its rhetorical context calls on writers to innovate (invent) appropriate solutions to the complex constraints and possibilities within specific writing contexts. Closed systems, as Spinuzzi points out, rigidly try to control work such that innovation is “centrally controlled and fine tuned” (202). The goal of the closed system is to “regulate workers' activities” (204). Spinuzzi's work shows how such closed systems inhibit work since the closed system dictates how workers will meet contingencies by generalizing situations and standardizing ways of meeting situations. Anson describes a closed system in this way: “a closed system is one in which the activities admit little variety, are habituated over long periods of time, and are learned through repeated practice” (115). Anson's overall point in his article is that standardized testing has transformed writing instruction in schools into a closed system with the detrimental effect that “the lack of experience [students are getting] in writing in those larger circles would doom them to adaptive failure” (115).

When we examine the FYWP at TTU 2004-2006, we can see how in many ways it is a closed system which seeks to “regulate workers' activities.” Students are put through a repeated sequence of writing feedback loops to habituate them to learning the practice of writing. Not much choice or innovation is offered to students in their activity of writing. This, I would say, is appropriate for a

freshman course with the goal of teaching novice writers. However, the course also acts as an open system, as a kind of starter reef, because it is designed to enter students into writing situations that call on them to make choices and problem solve within the writing process. It is in the Writer's Reviews (rhetorical reflections) in particular where students are asked to engage in “reflective practice” that we can say students have the opportunity to innovate and invent their own practice as they face the complex task of determining their own rhetorical stance.

The chart below provides a map of the “ecology” surrounding Writer's Reviews as rhetorical reflections within the FYWP at TTU:



According to the Ecological Metaphor for Writing Research, the researcher needs to map this ecology out in three ways:

1. Interdependence—the elements of the activity systematic
2. Feedback—the feedback pathways among the elements of the writing ecosystem

3. Diversity—the affordances that limit or increase the multiplicity of options within the systematic

The above chart does a fairly good job of mapping the different elements within this activity system (interdependence) and providing a start for visualizing the different feedback pathways that feed into writer's reviews. The affordances that limit or increase the options are much harder to map because these affordances may vary by particular writing assignment or by how an individual writer interacts within this activity system. Any one of these various interdependent elements of the ecology surrounding Writing Reviews could influence what the student does in these writing reviews greatly. However, I want to make special note of the importance of the Writing Review Prompt. As Jennifer Moon has noted, what distinguishes different kinds of reflection is not the process or nature of the reflection, but the “framework” or purpose for which it is used: “it is the framework or intention and any guidance toward fulfillment of that intention that is significant in distinguishing one act of reflection from another” (15). The prompt for reflection and how it ties in with the overall writing task and the fulfillment of its goals is in my view the most significant affordance within this system.

### **Sampling: Writer's Reviews as Rhetorical Reflection**

This dissertation inquiry will focus on one particular type of reflective activity used in a writing curriculum. More specifically, I will investigate “Writer’s Reviews” used at Texas Tech University between the years 2004 and 2006. The rationale for this choice will be discussed more in the chapter on methodology, but for now a precise description of these Writer’s Reviews is required to illustrate their qualities as activities that contain the framework of Rhetorical Reflection.

The passage below comes from the 2004 custom textbook for Freshman Composition II. These reflective activities are clearly positioned between drafts, after peer response with the intention of helping students engage in self-assessment and problem-solving. Implicit in this

description if the fact that this writing activity will be for their own benefit—not for the uses of an outside audience:

Just like we ask you to space out your drafts to give you a chance to think about your writing in between writing efforts, the writing review give you a chance to actually write down what it is you are thinking about “in between.” The act of thinking out loud, on paper, or on screen about your writing choices means that the next time you encounter that choice, you will make a better decision **and** you will have a record of what you were thinking that can be used in revising the next draft or beginning the next assignment cycle.

...

The writing review will have a set of prompts to guide you as you think about your previous drafts and the comments you have received on it. Why did you make this choice instead of that one? Wouldn't x be better than y? If you are writing about Federal Airport Security, and reader number one told you to write more about air marshals, you will decide if that is relevant and important to your essay, and decide whether or not you will follow the advice. The writing review is a kind of prompt-driven discussion of your own thinking about your own paper in terms of other people's comments. If you do it well, it makes you think more clearly about what you're trying to express and whether what other people say is helping or not helping. (29)

Notice, also, that Writer's Reviews are prompt-driven, just as invention exercises are, and in that way these reflective activities are heuristic in nature. Through this “guided” exercise, students are made to think and led to decide.

\*\*\*This section incomplete—will include samples of writers review prompts.\*\*\*

## **Description of Methods To Be Used—Method of Study**

The goal of my inquiry is to generate a theory of rhetorical reflection. In order to do this, I will employ the methodology of Grounded Theory with its systematic method of coding and analyzing data. Although a full description of Grounded Theory is beyond the scope of this exam, I want to highlight the basic elements of the ecosystem of grounded theory research and its own feedback system for generating theory.

### Coding: Open, Axial, Selective

Anselm Strauss and Juliet Corbin define coding as “The Analytic process through which data are fractured, conceptualized, and integrated to form theory” (3). Grounded Theory implements a systematic process of coding data to generate theory. Open Coding involves identifying concepts within the data as well as the properties or characteristics of these concepts and their dimensions (101). These concepts are the “building blocks of theory” and come from the data—not previous theory. The concepts form Categories that stand for phenomena. Axial Coding involves “the process of relating categories to their subcategories” and “linking categories at the level of properties and dimensions” (123). As relationships are determined, the researcher identifies structures and processes. Selective Coding involves the “process of integrating and refining theory” (143). In this coding process, the researcher makes repeated passes through the data to emerge at theory.

### Constant Comparative Analysis

The development of concepts occurs through constant comparative analysis with additional data. As Ian Dey summarizes, “Categories (or codes) are to be generated by comparing one incident with another and then by comparing new incidents with emergent categories” (7). The making of

constant comparisons (even allowing as Strauss and Corbin do in their version of Grounded Theory for the interplay of data and theory) is a central, “constitutive” feature of this methodology.

### Theoretical Sampling

Grounded Theory does not require predetermined and controlled sampling as theory verification methodologies do. Instead, the methodology promotes inquiry wherever the inquiry leads in the service of developing theory. As Glazer and Strauss define it, “Theoretical sampling is the process of data collection for generating theory whereby the analyst jointly collects, codes, and analyzes his data and decides what data to collect next and where to find them, in order to develop his theory as it emerges. This process is *controlled* by the emerging theory” (45). The researcher continues to analyze different “slices of data” based upon this theoretical sampling until they reach “saturation” of their categories.

### **Appropriateness of Methods**

As we can see, Grounded Theory is a highly interpretive process that involves a constant dialectic between concrete data and interpretive insights, trying as best it can to harmonize the conceptual theory in development with the specific phenomena of study. It is this quest for harmony in its results that distinguishes Grounded Theory. In the same way that user-centered design with its iterative development process creates better products by trying to make products more useable for users, so the iterative coding process of Grounded Theory through this constant grounding of theory with data enables the development of better theory. Although other methods exist for generating theory (for example by hypothesizing and seeking to reject or confirm this hypothesis either through experimental methods or qualitative methods), Grounded Theory is the most appropriate methodology for generating theory because it is expressly designed for this

purpose and an extensive literature exists to assist researchers in pursuing its methods. In this way, Grounded Theory as my method for pursuing my inquiry harmonizes with my research question and purpose.

Grounded Theory also is an appropriate method specifically for studying writing. Writing as a social phenomena, as a situated activity, and as a process fits as a research subject typically handled by Grounded Theory researchers.

### **Application of These Methods—the Rhetorical Enactment of Study**

To be determined—see research design above.

## **Chapter 4: Findings and Results from Research**

Since the research has yet to be conducted, and I very much desire entering this inquiry without a preconceived idea of what I will find, I am unable to even generalize or predict what might be contained in this section of my dissertation. I can say that I hope to be able to present finding that support the generation of a theory of rhetorical reflection.

## Chapter 5: Implications for the Field of Rhetoric and Composition and Technical Communication

### What Kinds of Knowledge Will Be Produced and How Might It Impact the Field

The “knowledge” my research study will produce will be a theory. But how do we judge a theory? What kind of knowledge does it offer? And how does theory relate to practice?

Glaser and Strauss state two criteria for the generation of theory. The theory generated must “fit” the situation and “work” when put to use: “By 'fit' we mean that the categories must be readily (not forcibly) applicable to and indicated by the data under study; by 'work' we mean that they must be meaningfully relevant to and be able to explain the behavior under study” (3). Put in other words, the theory must be true and able to communicate a meaningful understanding of the system of study. For my study, the theory of rhetorical reflection will provide a meaningful description of what happens when student reflect in this way. It will offer significant dynamics, structures, and processes that seem to be at work among the various elements of the system. But it won't offer a static machine-like model. The theory should offer a way to describe how and why rhetorical reflection works or doesn't work. Most of all, it should offer an entry point and navigation points for teachers to construct their own teaching practice for using rhetorical reflection.

Louise Wetherbee Phelps in the last chapter of her book *Composition As A Human Science* investigates in depth the nature of Theory and its relationship to Practice. She sees a reciprocal, dialectic relationship between Theory and Practice such that each supports the other. Neither does Theory dictate practice, nor does practice ignore Theory as irrelevant: “Theory, disciplined by our own freedom to reflect and to experience, is for composition praxis an enabling fiction” (241). Thus, the knowledge I hope my study creates will be an enabling fiction that assists teachers in inventing their own reflective practice using Rhetorical Reflection in their specific teaching context.

The implications of my theory for Composition Studies can be understood by examining another quote from the same chapter by Phelps: “But teachers do not simply enact Theory, they also offer it to students directly as text, comment, or tool, so that students may appropriate it to organize their discourse practices and learning processes” (234). My theory of rhetorical reflection, I hope, will influence student learning and practice. Composition Studies seeks as its highest goal to cultivate not a mere “literate practice,” but a “rhetorical sensitivity” and meta-awareness within “literate acts” (Flower, Petraglia). Rhetorical Reflection, as a pedagogically strategic activity, aims to foster this reflective practice in our student writers, and that is why this study will have value for the field.

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