A Rhetoric of Reflection

Edited by

KATHLEEN BLAKE YANCEY

UTAH STATE UNIVERSITY PRESS
Logan

Chapter 3

Reiterative Reflection in the Twenty-First-Century Writing Classroom

An Integrated Approach to Teaching for Transfer

KARA TACZAK AND LIANE ROBERTSON

> When I reflect back, I realize I have everything I need to understand writing better in my other classes. I know that I need to think through certain things, like the audience I'm writing for and the situation for it. I know if I think through all those things first, I can start more easily and my writing will be successful because I'm not just writing blind, I have a purpose and I can sort of see how my assignment should be at the end.
>
> —Terry, interview

As research on writing transfer progresses and as Anne Beaufort suggests, we are increasingly aware of the integral role reflection plays in supporting students' successful transfer across writing sites, such as from one assignment to the next inside a writing course and from one course to another. Scholars such as Jeff Sommers, Dana Driscoll, Anne Beaufort, and Kathleen Blake Yancey, among others, have addressed the importance of developing reflection within the composition classroom (see, e.g., Sommers 2011). Likewise, writing studies scholars interested in transfer (Brent 2012; Dew 2003; Downs and Wardle 2007; Nowacek 2011; Yancey, Robertson, and Taczak 2014) have raised new questions about how composition should be taught and what should be taught as the content of composition. These and other researchers

have identified a critical need to define the kinds of reflection we might incorporate into the teaching of writing so students can successfully transfer writing knowledge and practices across writing contexts.

In recent years, many composition instructors have drawn upon Yancey's (1998) theory of reflection, which identifies three nested types of reflective practice—reflection-in-action, constructive reflection, and reflection-in-presentation[1]—that can be included as a curricular element in writing courses. Yancey argues that reflection, when woven into a curriculum, becomes a "discipline, a habit of mind/spirit/feeling that informs what we do, always tacitly, sometimes explicitly, and that making such understanding explicit is a good" and that when students use reflection, they "learn to know their work, to like it, to critique it, to revise it, to start anew" while they also "invent [writing] identities" (Yancey 1998, 201–2). Moreover, reflection's value to students' writing processes becomes increasingly important when the need to process and apply knowledge is pivotal to a writer's development.

Yancey's definition of reflection in its attention to self-monitoring resembles the advice offered by David Perkins and Gavriel Salomon and by the researchers in *How People Learn*—we must help students become more aware of themselves as learners, which has been shown to increase the potential for transfer (Bransford, Pellegrino, and Donovan 2000b, 67; Perkins and Salomon 1992). *How People Learn* outlines three components of teaching to promote metacognition, which are similar to Yancey's three nested types of reflection: "instruction and practice with strategies that enable students to monitor their understanding; provision, initially by a teacher, of an expert model of metacognitive processes; and a social setting that enables joint negotiation for understanding" (67). These components help lead students to develop "sophisticated writing strategies . . . [by] identify[ing] goals, generat[ing] new ideas, improv[ing] and elaborat[ing] existing ideas, and striv[ing] for idea cohesion" (67).

The type of reflection theorized by [Yancey (1998)](#) and the researchers of *How People Learn* ([Bransford, Pellegrino, and Donovan 2000a](#), [2000b](#)) thus includes a focus on monitoring each writing context and supporting students' development of agency as they begin developing expertise by providing them with a robust understanding of their identity as writers.[2] In addition, promotion of reflective activities within the composition classroom creates an opportunity for students to theorize about their writing and identify themselves as writers who create knowledge. Reflection encourages students to put what they are learning into practice while also serving as a way to set goals and move forward in their writing ability.

However, we argue that a very specific type of rhetorical reflection helps develop the capacity for transfer: a practice that serves as process and product; theory and practice; and before-the-fact activity, during-the-fact activity, and after-the-fact activity. This type of reflection includes reflecting both inwardly—through the act of *thinking* about writing practice—and outwardly—through the act of *writing* about those writing practices. Thinking about writing gets at the *why* of a writer's rhetorical choices, which allows for deeper reflection on the act of writing than reflecting only on the *what* of a writer's actions. Likewise, when reflection is practiced as only an after-the-fact activity or as merely looking backward on what has been written, the writer focuses primarily on *what has been written*. As Lennie [Irvin (2004)](#) has suggested, more robust reflection begins with the invention or planning stages of writing and continues during the writing itself, in addition to involving a looking back after the writing is completed, or at each completed draft. It is this kind of recursive reflection, taught in intentional and systematic ways and designed so students become active reflective writing practitioners continually developing their own learning about effective rhetorical practices, that we discuss here. In this chapter, we outline a specific type of reflective framework, aimed at the deeper reflection described above that we want students to achieve, designed as part of the content for a course that explicitly

encourages transfer as its goal (referred to as the Teaching for Transfer or TFT course). We first define the reflective framework developed for the TFT course and then demonstrate its integration into new contexts. Evidencing our findings with studies conducted at our respective universities, we argue that a reflective framework is most effective when integrated into a very specific kind of first-year writing course, one featuring writing as content with the intended goal of transfer.

The Interconnectivity of Reflection and Transfer: A Reiterative Reflective Framework

> The transfer of knowledge is a powerful thing. It shapes our daily lives . . . [and] continue[s] to influence our development.
>
> —Maggie, "Theory of Writing"

The Teaching for Transfer curriculum was codesigned and developed for two individual research projects at a large Research I university in the Southeast.[3] Following the research findings of Perkins and Salomon (1992) that suggest we be explicit in teaching for transfer, our TFT course was developed with a primary objective: to teach students to develop as writers so they might be able to transfer knowledge and practices to other academic writing situations. From existing research in transfer (most notably the Writing about Writing approach and Anne Beaufort's conceptual writing model), we theorized that the content of such a course must focus on and be informed by writing. We translated that theory to the TFT curriculum in three representative elements, which make up the content of the course: (1) key rhetorical terms, (2) reflection, and (3) students' articulation of a theory of writing. All three of these representative elements comprise the integrated approach to the course content; none of the three alone can achieve transfer the way all three are able to accomplish it as an interconnected trio.

The key rhetorical terms are concepts about writing introduced and reiterated throughout the course, within and across multiple assignments. There are eight key terms[4] that emerged from our

research as the most important for students to understand in writing across contexts: *rhetorical situation* (within which the concept of exigence is also discussed), *genre*, *audience*, *reflection*, *purpose*, *knowledge*, *discourse community*, and *context*. One of these key terms—*reflection*—is foundational both as a concept and a practice and is included in the course at different, deliberate points in three ways: (1) in readings about reflection, (2) in reflective assignments, and (3) through reflective activities. In these three ways, studying reflection as a key rhetorical concept while also practicing reflection, students create a reflective framework from which they develop their theory of writing—in the best-case scenario, integrating conceptions about writing they bring with them that are revised and developed further throughout the TFT course, enabling them to repurpose what they have learned in FYC for use in the various writing situations they will encounter in the future. Our use of *theory* here aligns with the definition by Downs and Robertson (2015) as "a systematic narrative of lived experience and observed phenomena that both accounts for (makes sense of) past experience and makes predictions about future experience" (110–11), which captures the way students in the TFT course understand their agency in developing their own theory of writing.

Reflection is a central and reiterative practice of the TFT course as well as a key rhetorical concept, and as such it creates the framework for transfer to occur. The ways that reflection is used throughout the course are defined through the use of the three reflective components:

- Reflective theory: students learn *about* reflection, in part, through readings in reflective theory.
- Reflective assignments: students are asked to put into practice their understanding of key terms taught in the course, and these reflective assignments are designed as integral parts of the major assignments.

- Reflective activities: students are asked to look backward, look inward, look forward, and look outward as they engage in reflection to develop their writing knowledge.

Reflection is designed as a 360-degree, reiterative approach to give students a series of opportunities to make decisions and create some understanding of their writing as a means of engaging in reflective practice in a four-part schema: (1) *look backward* to recall previous knowledge, which could include prior writing experiences, different reading assignments, and past knowledge about writing; (2) *look inward* to review the current writing situation they are working in; (3) *look forward* to project how their current knowledge about writing connects to other possible academic writing situations; and (4) *look outward* to theorize how the role of their current identities as reflective writing practitioners connects to larger academic writing situations.[5] The three reflective components are woven into the TFT course with these four ways of practicing reflection, helping students synthesize what they have learned about writing in the course. This approach allows them to theorize about their own writing overall, and it allows them to evolve not just as writers but also as thinkers *about* writing.

Reflection is a significant part of the content of the TFT course because it is so integral to the conceptual understanding about writing students are developing. Students do more than merely practice reflection about the writing they do; they engage in reflection during and outside of each class in the three contexts described above: in reflective assignments, in reflective activities, and through reflective theory. For example, reflection is frequently discussed as both a concept and a practice, it is practiced in the classroom as students engage in various reflective activities, and often it is implemented as homework to reinforce a key concept the class is learning. Reflection is the conceptual webbing students use to connect content; it is discussed and practiced in multiple ways during every class meeting. As we detail

below, the reflective framework must be this deliberate and this systematic because this type of reflection is what fosters transfer. In other words, reflection matters, but its specific type and its primary role matter even more.

The content of the TFT course differs from other curricular models aimed at transfer because it centers on these interlocking pedagogical principles—key terms, reflection, and a theory of writing—specifically within the reflective frame. The theory of writing, because it is practiced reiteratively throughout the course and thus underscores the connection between opportunities for reflection, enables deliberate discussion of transfer as the primary learning goal for the course. This explicitly conveyed goal of transfer gives students the opportunity to understand that the knowledge they are gaining in the course can and should be adapted for other writing sites, but also allows them to create a conceptual model they can use *in* those other sites. Because they are using reflection to *look forward* to other writing situations, they are able to conceptualize what they might bring to the potential writing contexts that lie ahead. At the same time, the conceptual framework allows them to bring their prior knowledge to bear (as they use reflection to *look backward*) and to understand rhetorical choices from a previous context as potentially useful, or not, for a current one. Once students understand transfer as the goal and realize they can use reflection to determine conceptually what they might want to transfer, they begin to anticipate opportunities for transfer and start to expect to transfer from one situation to the next. In other words, they are motivated to transfer by a greater understanding of transfer.

The Reiterative Reflective Framework: Successes and Challenges

Since the original studies reported on in *Writing across Contexts* ([Yancey, Robertson, and Taczak 2014](#)) were completed, we've conducted additional research at two new institutions and revised the TFT course for their different student populations. The new institutions

featured different writing-program goals, curricula, student demographics, and challenges, all of which have allowed us to adapt or "transfer" the TFT course design to new contexts. In addition, we have focused on particular elements of the TFT course to see whether some of its reflective framework can work as a stand-alone component within a themed-based course, arguably one of the most common content types in first-year composition courses taught across the country. What follows is the account of two case studies and their findings: one in which the reflective framework was used in a Teaching for Transfer course and compared to a first-year composition course with alternate content, and one in which the reflective framework was used in a course themed around the rhetoric of oil and water. The results of these studies indicate two important findings about reflection in teaching for transfer: (1) reflection practiced reiteratively, conceptually, and in developing a theory of writing can foster transfer, and (2) reflection helps students develop a framework for transferring their knowledge and practices about writing to new situations.

Teaching for Transfer: Content and the Reflective Framework

> I used to think good writing was just interesting to the reader and correct in grammar. Now I think good writing always achieves a specific goal and gives its audience something they need.
>
> —Christina, interview

In our previous research, results suggested that the effect of FYC content on transfer was significant; transfer to new contexts was more successful for those who had experienced content about writing in their FYC classroom—not only the *doing* of writing but the *study* of writing—such as the Teaching for Transfer (TFT) course provides.[6] In this research, students who had experienced non-writing-focused content in the FYC classroom experienced more difficulty in transferring

knowledge and practice from that classroom to the new contexts in which they were writing just one semester afterward. Reported here are the results so far of a subsequent study, which compares the FYC content used across different sections of FYC and investigates the use of the reflective framework in those classes.

The context for this study is a racially and ethnically diverse public comprehensive four-year university in the northeast, with an undergraduate student population of approximately ten thousand, a large proportion of whom are first-generation college students and of whom roughly 50 percent graduate, often doing so within six years. Most students at this institution report spending more than twenty hours per week in the workforce, and many work a full forty hours per week because of financial need. Of utmost concern to these students is that their courses be applicable to their career choices or have future value outside of an academic context. The first-year composition program at this institution features one required course, focusing on analytical or expressive writing (for which content varies widely), and an additional course focusing on literature as the content about which writing is assigned. All students must complete the first course in the sequence with a grade of C or higher in order to pass. Writing courses are taught primarily by full-time non-tenure-track or part-time adjunct faculty.

This study, which took place from the fall semester of 2012 through the summer of 2013, included participants from two sections of the second term of FYC, one a TFT course design and one course section featuring literature as content. A total of nine participants completed the study, five from the TFT course and four from the literature-based course. The TFT course featured a reiterative reflective framework (including the three reflective components outlined above), featured sequenced major assignments, and culminated in a final theory-of-writing reflection essay in which students were required to write about the reflective knowledge and practices they had been developing all

semester. The writing-about-literature course incorporated extensive reflection on assignments and writing strategies throughout the course and included an end-of-semester reflection essay.

There were several similarities between the previous content-comparison study (2009–2010) and this study, one of which was the use of reflection in FYC sections as a writing strategy. All sections in both studies used reflection as an invention technique to brainstorm ideas for assignments or ideas for revising assignments, and participants indicated both an awareness of how to use reflection as a tool for both brainstorming and revision and an appreciation of the value of reflection in revising writing to create a more polished draft. However, students in the TFT courses using a reflective framework also came to understand reflection as a concept and a practice, as a mechanism for developing knowledge rather than simply a tool for developing a process. While the literature-based composition students found reflection useful for brainstorming about *what* to write or understanding *what* they had written that might be revised, the TFT students learned to practice reflection as a means of understanding not only what to write or what to revise, but also *why* a revision was a rhetorical choice they were making and *how* they might approach a writing situation appropriately. For example, when prompted to discuss how he might approach a future writing assignment, Matt[7] reported, in his final reflection assignment, that "reflecting on my writing this semester has taught me that I can kind of reflect the other way to think about what to write before I actually start, so that way I can just start out stronger with more of a plan." Matt articulated that he understood he could *look forward* (one of the four ways of practicing reflection he learned in the course) to the writing tasks he will encounter in new contexts. He went beyond that articulation, however, when he later described how he approached writing for his psychology course:

> We had to write on one of the categories from class and we could choose whichever one we wanted. I really like abnormal

psych so I chose that. We had to find other sources too, so I had to do some research. So I went to the [online] databases from the library like we did in [FYC] class and started researching stuff. Then it all came back to me, you know, how we figured out what we wanted to focus on for our research paper by writing about the ideas we found when we researched the topic. So I did that . . . I wrote myself a note about what I wanted to find out and came up with a question and turned it into a thesis eventually.

In this interview, Matt discussed reflection as an invention technique, one in which he used writing to himself to think through his approach to the research topic. He recalled (in *looking backward* at his learning about reflection) the reflection process learned in the TFT course, and he used that process as invention, to determine his topic (what to write about), but also his approach (how to write it within the rhetorical situation), to the writing assignment in the new context of his psychology course. However, he went beyond using reflection as a process, as he articulated during the same interview:

And then I thought about my topic, which was Borderline Personality Disorder, and who would care about it, and . . . I kind of felt like I knew how to write this even before I started, like I had an idea of how to make it happen. Anyway, the professor didn't really give us an audience so I thought about, obviously, him, but also any students who might have the disorder or their family members do or whoever. . . . So I had my audience and my purpose and then the genre was just essay. . . . And also the context, which was the other part I always think about for writing—this was just the class and the professor, but I also thought about all these people who take psych meds and how doctors just prescribe them and we don't know if people really need them all, and it's just the drug companies, you know, selling their pills, so I thought about that too, for context.

Matt demonstrated his use of the reflective framework he learned in the TFT course as a conceptual model for approaching the writing situation for his psychology assignment. Specifically, he mentioned four of the key terms from the TFT course—*audience*, *genre*, *context*, and *purpose*—as he reflected on this writing assignment, using them as cornerstones to his conceptual framework as he reflected about his writing. As he reported, in his writing approach for the psychology course, he *looked back* at his previous knowledge about writing, *looked inward* to review his current writing situation, *looked forward* to determine how to use his knowledge in the new writing situation, and *looked outward* (albeit prompted somewhat by his participation in the study) to consider himself as a writer in a situation in which writing itself was not specifically coached or directed, as it was in the writing classroom. Through reflection, Matt was able to approach the writing situation, understand his role as the writer in the specific context of the assignment, develop a conceptual map for completing the writing task, and consider the implications for his writing on an audience other than the professor assigning it. His after-the-fact reflection during this study revealed that he used his conceptual framework about writing developed in the TFT course and the four-part schema or ways of reflecting to understand the rhetorical choices he was faced with in the writing situation of the psychology course.

Jennifer also articulated her use of the reflective framework she learned in the TFT course when she was interviewed at the end of the second semester of the study.

> I always do the same thing now for all my writing, like we learned in [FYC] class about reflection and how it helps you know what to do. I just pretend I have to tell [the FYC professor] what I'm thinking of doing and hit all the important points, like audience and everything. I write it sometimes, actually just write what I'm planning to do like it's a discussion post [prompted in-class

reflection assignment] and that way I can tell myself what I should do, like, how to write it.

Jennifer's simplified description indicated an internalized approach to writing based on a reflective framework. She was able not only to consider reflection as a concept she was now using beyond her FYC class, but also to comprehend it as a practice she engaged in to help herself understand what a given writing situation needed.

Other study participants who had not taken the TFT course did not demonstrate the use of reflection as did Matt and Jennifer—as a reflective framework. Their experience with reflection in the literature-based course evolved as an after-the-fact writing exercise for each assignment and focused on the writing process primarily. Taylor, a participant from this section, recalled the reflection she did in the course.

We did reflection a lot in that class. We had to write a two-page reflection to go with every one of the essays, and then we had a big reflection essay at the end where we had to write about the whole course and the writing we did. . . . It was mostly about what we did in each draft, and how we progressed through the drafts to get to the end, and if the peer editing was helpful, and things like that. Except for the final reflection, that was more about the writing style you had worked out over the semester and what you could remember thinking about for every assignment.

Taylor's recollection focuses on the process of writing, its role in multiple drafting within assignments and as a culminating piece to the semester. When asked about reflection as a tool for thinking about current writing, Taylor reported, "It's not something I really think about, I mean, I just do the assignment, whatever is asked, and I make sure I get all the details so I know what is expected and I do okay." Taylor's use of reflection did extend to her current writing in one way. "Oh, yeah, I do use reflection if I'm doing revision on something, when I

have time. I will go over the assignment and think about what I should change and what might sound better. So then I'm reflecting on it, yeah." She reported that she did not use reflection before beginning to write and not as a means of *looking backward*. "I don't really use writing from that course because those stories and [literary] terms are not useful in other classes. I mean, I guess I learned that I can do better if I revise and make sure to look over my essay, so I use that, yeah."

Taylor articulated on each occasion, as did the other study participants from her class, that there was value taken away from the FYC course in terms of understanding writing as a process—a kind of transfer that FYC in many programs has supported well (see chapter 1 in *Writing across Contexts* [Yancey, Robertson, and Taczak 2014] for a summary of this research)—which coincides with the reflection practiced in the literature-based course: it consisted of process memos students equated primarily with revision. The reflection prompts for this course asked students to focus on the writing situation they were in currently, even as they were reflecting on a finished product. However, the final reflection assignment in this course asked students to go beyond the current writing situation to reflect back on the writing they had done over the entire semester, and participants expanded their reflection to include multiple assignments in these final essays. The reflection assignment, however, only asked students to look backward: it did not ask them to *look forward* or to think about how they might use reflection in other writing situations. Students in this course practiced reflection only to *look inward* at the current writing situation, to understand only what they had done (not what they thought while doing it) within the multiple drafts, peer review, and revision processes of the assignment, and to write about it.

In their interviews, participants from the literature-based course indicated that they viewed writing as a practice rather than as both a practice and a subject of study (Adler-Kassner and Wardle 2015), and the literature they experienced as the content of their FYC course was

what they perceived as the most important part of the course to take away. The reflection they practiced in the course, though, focused on their own writing rather than on the perceived course content. Perhaps not surprisingly, participants from this course in each interview often seemed to prefer offering interpretations about the literature they had studied in the course in some way, either to discuss a favorite piece of reading or to demonstrate knowledge of a literary term, even in responding to questions about writing. Later in the study, after the FYC course had been completed for some time, participants (none of whom were enrolled in an English course at the time) recalled less about the literature studied and had to be prompted to recall assignments, perhaps because the reflection in the course had been truncated to focus only on current process.

Study participants from the TFT course needed fewer prompts to recall the content of their FYC course later in the study and remembered the reflection from the course as content *and* practice, with some, like Matt and Jennifer, needing no prompting to articulate their use of reflection as a writing tool. Participants from this course saw value in reflection as a means of connecting writing situations and of assessing a situation and analyzing the writing required in order to approach it successfully; in other words, reflection was the vehicle by which they repurposed knowledge from their past writing situations to be used in a new situation. These participants understood reflection in terms of Yancey's (1998) "reflection-in-presentation" as an articulation of the relationships between writing contexts. They were also able to transfer their knowledge about writing between contexts because they had learned to develop a conceptual framework of writing knowledge (Beaufort 2007), comprised of key rhetorical terms and powered by reflection as both theory and practice. The reflective framework was evident in Juan's interview response:

Yes, I use reflection in this course [history]. I always have to think through my assignment before I start and then while I'm writing it to make sure I don't get off track. I can get really repetitive if I don't organize and then I reflect as I go to make sure I'm thinking about the audience and purpose as I'm writing, and whatever else I learned from the last assignment so I do better on the one I'm writing now. Actually, I never really paid attention to comments on my work before [FYC] class, but now I look for what the professor wrote or I read my paper over after it has a grade to see what I can learn from that, and how I can be a better writer from that.

Juan articulated his use of reflection as a way of making sense of previous writing he had completed and using that understanding to think about new writing situations (looking backward, forward, outward, and inward*)* and demonstrated his understanding of reflection as more than a practice when he suggested its role in his evolution as a writer. Juan's use of the reflective framework provided him with the mechanism to transfer writing knowledge between situations.

It's also worth noting that in this study, some participants did not understand the reflective framework or were not open to learning the new way of thinking about writing required by the reflective framework (see also Driscoll and Wells 2012; Robertson, Taczak, and Yancey 2012), and some participants did not transfer between contexts effectively, regardless of institutional context or of FYC content experienced. However, what the study supports is that students have the potential to transfer writing knowledge when they experience FYC content designed for transfer, including a reflective framework that focuses on what they are writing, on why they are making choices in their writing, and on how they are using reflection to understand what they think about writing when they do so in various contexts.

The Reflective Framework Featured inside a Themed Course

As a writer, I would say my identity can be described as reflection-based, creative, witty, and always including tid-bits of my own opinion and voice.

—Abby, exit survey

The second study focusing on the reflective framework took up the question of how this framework might support transfer when operating inside a theme-based FYC course—but without the course's two other curricular components: key terms and students' theory of writing. More specifically, the goal of the study was twofold: (1) to see whether or not reflection could foster the transfer of knowledge and practices about writing on its own, independent of the other two curricular parts of the TFT course and (2) to see what type of language students used to understand writing if key terms were not part of the course. The research was conducted at a private liberal arts institution with a stand-alone writing program, which includes a two-sequence first-year composition requirement students are not allowed to test out of (typically, students can use AP, IB, or dual-enrollment to opt out of the first course in the sequence, but not the second). The first course centers on argumentation and different rhetorical situations while the second is focused on types of research associated with different research paradigms. The writing program states that these courses will

teach strategies for writing to well-educated readers in diverse academic and nonacademic situations. Students learn rhetorical principles, the analysis and use of readings and source materials, and techniques for generating, revising, and editing texts for specific situations. They also learn to present and justify positions and to produce researched writing in various scholarly traditions, including textual/interpretive (the analysis of texts or artifacts such as images or events), qualitative (the analysis of observations or interviews) or quantitative (the analysis of data from surveys or other empirical studies). (University of Denver Writing Program 2014)

So long as the program goals are met, the instructors are encouraged to teach each course in ways that speak to teaching strengths; several faculty members choose a theme-based design. The instructors engage in pedagogical and professional development through a variety of meetings and workshops throughout the year and participate in year-long teaching partnerships as ways to enhance and improve their classroom strategies and techniques. In short, the writing program, which thrives on learning more about the teaching of writing, provides a likely site of inquiry to investigate whether the reflective framework operating inside another curriculum can support the successful transfer of knowledge and practices from first-year composition to other writing contexts.

To study the reflective framework inside a themed-based course, one instructor from the writing program, Adilyn, agreed to teach the first composition course in the two-year sequence using the reflective framework alongside her theme, the rhetoric of oil and water. Aligning itself with program goals, Adilyn's course "emphasize[d] rhetorical situation and the rhetorical appeals and [the idea that] the way that we learn about rhetorical situation and rhetorical appeals is through perspectives around oil and water in contemporary society" and included as assignments a rhetorical analysis of perspectives about oil and water and a project outlining the need for critical change on campus in sustainable practices. For her three sections of this course, Adilyn also incorporated the reflective framework throughout, assigning students readings in reflective theory (e.g., students read chapter 1 from Yancey's book *Reflection in the Writing Classroom*), having them participate in reflective activities (e.g., students discussed *reflection* as a term important for their writing processes), and asking them to write reflective assignments (e.g., students attempted to respond to the four-part schema of looking forward, backward, inward, and outward).

Out of her three classes of fifteen, nine participants agreed to the study. They were interviewed three times over thirty weeks: at the beginning of the quarter in which they enrolled in the first-year composition course; at the beginning of the following quarter in which all were in enrolled in the second sequence course; and the end of that second quarter. Participants also completed an exit survey ten weeks after their final interview, and Adilyn was interviewed both before the classes began, to discuss how she would incorporate the reflective framework into her already designed course, and after the classes were completed.

Before using the reflective framework, Adilyn believed she used reflection "a lot":

I always have them reflect on their papers before they turn them in . . . so I know what they are thinking about their paper so I can see how far off our interpretation of their work is. So I have them fill out a rubric—a self-assessment—so if they give themselves all 'excellents,' and I see some disconnect, then I know to shape my comments accordingly. And then the portfolio, which is something I've always done since grad school.

This response suggests two things: (1) Adilyn views reflection, self-assessment, and rubric as the same thing and (2) she has a fairly typical understanding of how and where to use reflection inside a first-year composition course. Adilyn believed reflection was already integrated into her classroom, but as the term progressed, her approach became more explicit, as she observed in the postcourse interview: "I've never been as explicit [about reflection] as I was this quarter." Adilyn was also very surprised at the students' reactions to reading reflective theory, as she believed they would resist it.

I wasn't sure how they were going to react to Yancey's paper because they aren't necessarily the audience for it, and they aren't compositionists, so I wasn't sure how they would do with it—there's a lot of comp theory packed into not a lot of pages.

But in general, I think they liked it and they found it enjoyable and understand it. . . . I was kind of anticipating more pushback, but no, they found it very useful. I felt there would be resistance from the reading mostly because I was thinking about how I would react if I was a freshman, I wouldn't have known what they were talking about, and it came so early in the quarter and I wasn't sure how they would respond to it. But I felt like based on class discussion after it, many of them expressed that it was a useful way for them to think about their writing process.

The biggest change Adilyn observed concerned student engagement and their being able to see what Adilyn called "the bigger picture":

In general, [the students] seemed much more excited about the peer review process than in the past. Another thing on the portfolio reflections, one thing they talked a lot about was how they appreciated the sequencing, which was [managed through] a discussion board which had them brainstorming [and] then a journal where they had a brainstorming and then their project, and they saw the sequencing and how it built, which is nothing new when I have designed my class, but I've had some confusion before, and I think this time with the reflection it helped them see the bigger picture.

In explaining her experience with the course with the reflective framework, Adilyn didn't note any major differences between her "normal" course and this version apart from a reduction in student "confusion." Nor did she report any difference in grades or in the ways in which the students learned. Perhaps most important, Adilyn didn't notice whether the students engaged in the reflective moves of looking backward, inward, forward, or outward. Students seemed to write about engaging in "similar" reflective practices in other courses, Adilyn said, so even though she didn't emphasize transfer, she believed that the implicit idea of transfer was apparent enough to support a

student's ability to transfer knowledge and practices from her writing course to other writing contexts. Overall, Adilyn thought that the addition of the reflective framework was helpful and that she would definitely use one of the readings on reflective theory in her future writing classes because she "felt like, based on class discussion after it, many of them expressed that it was a useful way for them to think about their writing process."

One of the obstacles preventing transfer is students' inability to abstract what is taught in one course and repurpose it for another. While Adilyn *believed* the participants were able to transfer knowledge from her course to other writing situations, it became clear throughout the interview process that participants weren't able to articulate explicitly what they had learned in the course and thus what they might be transferring. For example, when participants were asked to "define writing," most were unable to put a definition to it: as one participant stated, "Wow, that's a hard answer. It's a very open question. I don't know. Define writing . . . I don't know. It could be used to . . . as kind of a way of expression through texts. It's kind of hard to define writing in a sentence." Another participant linked a definition of writing to assignments—"I guess writing has always been an assignment for me"—while another, stating, "I think of things like books, paragraphs, sentences, words," conceptualized writing in terms of component parts.

Moreover, these responses were not unusual: none of the participants was able to define writing specifically, which also suggests that the course didn't support students in developing a vocabulary about writing they could use when they entered a new writing context beyond that class. Instead, students tended to rely on previous knowledge, gained prior to Adilyn's class, to guide their writing practices. For example, one participant noted that she didn't think about key terms before writing; instead, she "mostly [thought] about the body like the intro and conclusion because [she] freaked out about

them." Another said he thought about "background . . . [being] concise and getting to the point without adding too much fluff," while another stated, "I don't really . . . I just kind of just write now. I mean there are very few times where I'll outline my writing; I don't remember doing it at all this year, I just remember doing it when we had to in high school." Another student, like one of the students from the *Writing across Contexts* study ([Yancey, Robertson, and Taczak 2014](#)), cited *research* as the key term: "Hmm. I have no idea. So, I guess with writing and research I'd throw in [the term] research . . . preparation? I don't know." These responses suggest, as the *Writing across Contexts* study indicates, that if students are not provided in college with specific writing terms to define writing, they revert to high-school experiences for a vocabulary.

Interestingly, the participants in this study were able to look *backward*, but they were not critically aware of how a reflective framework could help them move *forward* or even of how they could look *inward* or *outward*. When the participants were asked to describe their writing processes, three noted they did not think about anything before writing. For example, one participant said, "I don't think of anything specifically but I engulf myself within the prompt; I think about outside sources, what the teacher wants, which is a big part, and organize myself, which would be my biggest thing." Or as another said, "Key terms? I don't really think of key terms, I just kind of do it." Throughout the series of interviews, including the exit survey, the participants were unable to generate a list of key terms, and the ones they did identify were not well defined.

In addition, even though reflection was purposefully and intentionally integrated into Adilyn's course, by their second interview,[8] the nine participants struggled to explain reflection as a part of their writing processes. As one participant explained, "I could definitely improve on [reflection] for sure. Do you mean reflection after the fact, like when I'm done? Definitely after the fact, but I think it's hard to

think in the process to know if I've used reflection or not. Probably not as much as after writing something." Another participant understood reflection not as part of writing but rather as a possible part of an assignment: "Depending on what the assignment is, um, I mean, it depends just whenever the assignment asked me to do a reflection, but if it's an analytical paper then I won't do it. Maybe like a story or something is where I'd use reflection or I don't know." Thus, even shortly after the course, the participants suggested that the reflective framework didn't take hold.

At the end of the study, participants were asked to complete an exit survey focused on their experience transferring writing knowledge and practice. One question asked specifically, "What have you transferred from [the writing course] to other writing situations?"[9] The answers, like earlier answers, ranged widely and focused on component parts, including a rhetorical strategy, "how to use transitional sentences"; part of a writing process, "the process of drafting"; and rhetorical concepts, "how to utilize ethos, pathos, and logos." One participant, Martin, was more explicit in stating what he transferred: "Simply put, I believe that utilizing my believed 3 key terms of writing [perspective, argument, audience] are all I really need moving forward. I think that it is always important to keep in mind who you are writing for and depending on the type of writing, explicating your stance on the topic at hand." However, Martin may not have learned these terms in the writing course since there the terms were merely "solidified": "I wouldn't necessarily say I learned anything new during my tenure [in the course] but rather, many ideas I learned in class were solidified." By the end of the study, one term after the conclusion of the writing course, it was clear that reflection had not become a part of the participants' writing practices and processes; students struggled to define reflection, to put writing into concrete terms, and to identify as writers. As one participant, Emily, wrote in her exit survey, "I'm not quite sure that I have a 'writing identity' yet. I guess overall I would say that I write best about ideas that I am passionate about, such as the

environment. I don't believe that I have my own 'style' yet, but hopefully I will develop one in the years to come."

This study suggests that to facilitate transfer of writing knowledge and practice, the reflective framework cannot function alone in a themed course.[10] More specifically, this study provides two findings about the role of the reflective framework in a theme-based course: (1) when taught as a stand-alone framework, reflection does not aid students in developing a language or vocabulary with which they can frame new writing situations, and (2) when taught within a theme-based course, reflection becomes more of a practice of looking backward, which is not linked to creating new knowledge and does not necessarily prompt students to consider how they might reflect forward regarding either their writing processes or writing practices. What these findings mean, as demonstrated by the participants, is that reflection did help them in a composing moment to think about what they were *doing* with their writing, but it did not encourage them to become critical about what they were learning *about* writing. Thus, as a practice *in doing writing*, reflection had a limited usefulness. Some might argue that this utility is sufficient, but our research suggests that with a fuller curricular model—including key vocabulary, a reflective framework, and students' theory of writing—students *can and do* transfer knowledge and practices about writing to other writing contexts.

Reflection and Transfer as Interlocking: A Conclusion

[The course] made me be able to focus on why I'm writing and how I'm writing better and also gave me a reason to write instead of just kind of blabbing on about stuff.

—Angela, one year after taking the TFT course

What we learned from our research is that there are two approaches to reflection, used in combination, that merit consideration in composition courses hoping to teach for transfer: (1) reflection as a reiterative practice that leads to a theory of writing, and (2) reflection as a framework students can use to approach new writing situations. These approaches represent the concept of reflection as both a theory and a practice, offering writers a means of framing and reframing each writing situation, and a writing activity that helps writers understand the existing frame and reimagine it as a new frame.

As the studies described here demonstrate, students who develop a reflective framework that allows them to understand writing in different contexts are able to reimagine previous writing knowledge that they can adapt to a new situation. Their understanding of how to repurpose previous knowledge is dependent on their ability to conceptualize the current context and what it calls for in terms of writing. This explicit understanding of each context also develops through the use of reflection as a practice, not just an after-the-fact practice, but one that spans the entire context and beyond so that reflection becomes embedded in the invention, arrangement, and delivery of any piece of writing.

This level of reflection also acts as a portal to understanding, or a "threshold concept" ([Meyer and Land 2003](#)) in that it allows a writer to understand writing as something beyond the crafting of words on a page, but also as a representation of a coherent set of ideas. For college writers, whose development as writers is steeped in years of formulaic writing or whose identity as writers is one of regurgitating information in our test-taking educational culture, reflection can open the door to understanding writing as something the writer structures and makes choices about. Reflection helps writers get past the idea of what they're supposed to know and move toward the idea that they can access what they know in ways of their own choosing. In other words, when reflection is treated as a rhetorical practice, reflection acts as a catalyst

for learning not just how to write something, but also for knowing what to write, to whom, and to what end.

As one participant from the TFT course, Charlotte, demonstrated in reflecting about the theory of writing she developed,

My growth in writing over this past quarter is much like the growth of a tree. In elementary and middle school I learned the basic way to form paragraphs and five paragraph essays, which are the roots of my tree. In high school I learned how to write research essays and learned how to use voice in papers, which is the trunk of my writing tree. In college, however, I learned key terms to writing that made my tree blossom. My writing went from basic to extraordinary. . . . Along with good writing come skills like critical thinking, the understanding of how humans use language to interact, and being able to use previous knowledge to your advantage. . . . The unification of my past knowledge about writing with the key terms and writing [situations] I learned this quarter allowed my writing tree to fully blossom.

Charlotte understood reflection as a reiterative practice in which she was able to analyze her previous knowledge about writing and its evolution through her academic experience, culminating in the "blossoming" of her knowledge about writing as conceptual as well as a practice. Through the reflection about her theory of writing, Charlotte articulated the goal of the reflective framework: to theorize about writing, to understand oneself as a writer within a context, and to put into practice previous knowledge appropriate to a new context.

Notes

1. "*Reflection-in-action*, the process of reviewing and projecting and revising, which takes place within a composing event; *constructive reflection*, the process of developing a cumulative, multi-selved, multi-voiced identity, which takes place between and among composing events; and *reflection-in-presentation*, the process of articulating the relationships between and

among the multiple variables of writing and the writer in a specific context for a specific audience" (Yancey 1998, 200). Return to text.

2. As scholars such as Michael Carter and Nancy Sommers and Laura Saltz have shown, the transition from novice to expert is a key move in a student's ability to transfer (Carter 1990; Sommers and Saltz 2004). Return to text.

3. We have published on our course design elsewhere, most notably in our coauthored *Writing across Contexts: Transfer, Composition, and Sites of Writing*, with Kathleen Blake Yancey (2014), and in our coauthored article "Case Study: Teaching for Transfer" (forthcoming). Return to text.

4. In the initial design of the TFT course, we included eleven key terms, but in later iterations the eleven were adapted to the eight most important, based on research findings and classroom interaction with students (adding *purpose*, which students were already familiar with and used; deleting *circulation*, *critical analysis*, and *composing* as key terms but retaining them in course discussion as terms of lesser significance; and deleting *exigence* as a key term on its own but integrating it as part of the key term *rhetorical situation*.) Return to text.

5. See also Kara Taczak 2011. Return to text.

6. Details of this study and its results can be found in the Yancey, Robertson, and Taczak's (2014) *Writing across Contexts: Transfer, Composition, and Sites of Writing* (see also Robertson 2011 and Taczak 2011). Return to text.

7. All participant names used in these studies are pseudonyms. Return to text.

8. The second interview occurred during week one of spring quarter, which would have been two weeks after the conclusion of Adilyn's class. Return to text.

9. Since transfer was explicitly discussed in Adilyn's course, transfer was defined for the participants on the exit survey as the ability to take knowledge and practices from one writing situation to another. Return to text.

10. We acknowledge the limitations of the study, one of which is that there were only nine participants from one instructor. Return to text.

References

Adler-Kassner, Linda, and Elizabeth Wardle, eds. 2015. *Naming What We Know: Threshold Concepts in Writing Studies*. Logan: Utah State University Press.

Beaufort, Anne. 2007. *College Writing and Beyond: A New Framework for University Writing Instruction*. Logan: Utah State University Press.

Bransford, John D., James W. Pellegrino, and M. Suzanne Donovan, eds. 2000a. "How Experts Differ from Novices." In *How People Learn: Brain, Mind, Experience, and School: Expanded Edition*, 31–50. Washington, DC: National Academies Press.

Bransford, John D., James W. Pellegrino, and M. Suzanne Donovan. 2000b. Committee on Learning Research and Educational Practice. "Learning and Transfer." In *How People Learn: Brain, Mind, Experience, and School: Expanded Edition*, 51–78. Washington, DC: National Academies Press.

Brent, Doug. 2012. "Crossing Boundaries: Co-op Students Relearning to Write." *College Composition and Communication* 63 (4): 558–92.

Carter, Michael. 1990. "The Idea of Expertise: An Exploration of Cognitive and Social Dimensions of Writing." *College Composition and Communication* 41 (3): 265–86. http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/357655.

Dew, Debra. 2003. "Language Matters: Rhetoric and Writing I as Content Course." *WPA: Writing Program Administration* 26 (3): 87–104.

Downs, Doug, and Liane Robertson. 2015. "Threshold Concepts in First-Year Composition." In *Naming What We Know: Threshold Concepts in Writing Studies*, ed. Linda Adler-Kassner and Elizabeth Wardle, 105–21. Logan: Utah State University Press.

Downs, Douglas, and Elizabeth Wardle. 2007. "Teaching about Writing, Righting Misconceptions: (Re)Envisioning 'First-Year Composition' as 'Introduction to Writing Studies.'" *College Composition and Communication* 58 (4): 552–84.

Driscoll, Dana, and Jennifer Wells. 2012. "Beyond Knowledge and Skills: Writing Transfer and the Role of Student Dispositions in and beyond the Writing Classroom." *Composition Forum* 26 (Fall). http://compositionforum.com/issue/26/beyond-knowledge-skills.php.

Irvin, Lennie. 2004. "Reflection in the Electronic Writing Classroom." *Computers and Composition Online*. http://www2.bgsu.edu/departments/english/cconline/irvin/Introduction.htm.

Meyer, Jan H.F., and Ray Land. 2003. "Threshold Concepts and Troublesome Knowledge: Linkages to Ways of Thinking and Practicing within the Disciplines." Occasional Report 4, Enhancing Teaching-Learning Environments in Undergraduate Courses Project, University of Edinburgh.

Nowacek, Rebecca S. 2011. *Agents of Integration: Understanding Transfer as a Rhetorical Act*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press.

Perkins, David N., and Gavriel Salomon. 1992. "Transfer of Learning." In *International Encyclopedia of Education*, 2–13. 2nd ed. Oxford: Pergamon.

Robertson, Liane. 2011. "The Significance of Course Content in the Transfer of Writing Knowledge from First-Year Composition to Other Academic Writing Contexts." PhD diss., Florida State University.

Robertson, Liane, and Kara Taczak. Forthcoming. "Case Study: Teaching for Transfer." In *Understanding Writing Transfer and Its Implications for Higher Education*, ed. Randy Bass and Jessie Moore. Sterling, VA: Stylus. http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/med/9780199688074.003.0035.

Robertson, Liane, Kara Taczak, and Kathleen Blake Yancey. 2012. "Notes toward a Theory of Prior Knowledge and Its Role in College Composers' Transfer of Knowledge and Practice." *Composition Forum* 26 (Fall). http://compositionforum.com/issue/26/prior-knowledge-transfer.php.

Sommers, Jeff. 2011. "Reflection Revisited: The Class Collage." *Journal of Basic Writing* 30 (11): 99–129.

Sommers, Nancy, and Laura Saltz. 2004. "The Novice as Expert: Writing the Freshman Year." *College Composition and Communication* 56 (1): 124–49. http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/4140684.

Taczak, Kara. 2011. "Connecting the Dots: Does Reflection Foster Transfer?" PhD diss., Florida State University.

University of Denver Writing Program. 2014. http://www.du.edu/writing/features.html.

Yancey, Kathleen Blake. 1998. *Reflection in the Writing Classroom*. Logan: Utah State University Press.

Yancey, Kathleen Blake, Liane Robertson, and Kara Taczak. 2014. *Writing across Contexts: Transfer, Composition, and Sites of Writing*. Logan: Utah State University Press.