

RECONCEPTUALIZING THE WRITING CLASSROOM: AUTOETHNOGRAPHY
AS A CURRICULAR FRAMEWORK IN SECONDARY EDUCATION

by

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this work to every student writer who I have worked with over the years. Your difficulties and successes lie at the very heart of this work.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviation	Description
AE	Autoethnography
SAT	Scholastic Assessment Test
STAAR	State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness
TEKS	Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills
PBL	Project-Based Learning
GPA	Grade Point Average
HOT	Higher Order Thinking
WPA	Writing Program Administrators
AP	Advanced Placement
IB	International Baccalaureate
IRB	Institutional Review Board

I. INTRODUCTION

Imagine a writing environment where high school students can develop an understanding of their own identity, act with internal motivation on the direction of their own learning process, feel a sense of purpose with their writing, move towards being an active member of relevant discussions within culture, as well as challenge themselves to meet the academic expectations of college writing. While many may see that vision as representative of the current goals of the public educational system, I have yet to see the current curriculum accomplish those goals with consistent success. I should know. I taught English at the high school level for fifteen years at a highly ranked high school campus, and I saw more challenges with student writing than successes.

Overview of Secondary Curricular Practices

The characteristically blunt student responses to writing prompts in my high school classes over the years consist of “This is boring” (*What is the relevance?*); “I don’t know what to write about” (*How do I make meaningful connections and observations?*); “I’m not a good writer” (*My grades reflect my ability and dictate my confidence*); “Is this for a grade?” (*Am I accountable? Will I have to think about this again?*). In my fifteen years of teaching sophomores to seniors, I have realized that the overall responses to these writing prompts are not isolated occurrences created by the typical disgruntled teenagers but are created by a deeper systemic problem in pedagogical practices that have been shaped by administrative policies, curricular standards and assessments, and a vague understanding of well-researched current composition theories. Those important factors inhibit successful, intrinsically motivated writers.

Much of our failure to encourage well-rounded successful writers stem from the nationwide curricular focus on standards, created by the implementation of No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 into the classroom in 2002 (Duignan and Nolen). Students were expected to produce writing within shortened writing processes with a heavy emphasis on assessment writing products for the standardized state test, SATs, and Advanced Placement[®] exams. I saw students become anxious, wearied, and disconnected from the process of writing as they churned out writing products that did not contribute to a larger purpose. Students were disengaged with their writing because they could no longer see the relevance of the writing products, except for the goal of meeting standards for graduation and acceptance into college. One memory extracted from my early days of teaching exemplifies the effect of testing on student writers.

For many years, I assigned my students short, timed narratives for practice on the standardized assessments. The results were tepid at best. One prompt stands out among the others based on the responses I received from students. The prompt was "Write about a time you had to make a difficult choice." I witnessed the usual sighs as I wrote the prompt on the board, but one student who was an exceptionally thoughtful, if not outspoken, student asked the perfectly reasonable question, "Why are we doing this? This test only matters to the school rankings-- not me personally." I did not have an appropriately insightful reply at the time; however, that unanswered question did not impede him from responding to the prompt in an unorthodox way. He wrote about how he made the choice to write the essay instead of laying his head down and taking a nap, and then proceeded to lay out his untethered tirade about the meaninglessness of the exercise and the

insignificance of this type of writing. He ended the essay with the poignant conclusion that his paper would contribute to the filling of the school dumpster and would never be read again. Instead of being upset, I understood this disillusioned child and how uninspired many students were in my class but was not sure how to change the situation.

This one moment reflects hundreds of similar experiences through the years. The prompts and the expectations of writing had nothing to do with authentic learning or authentic¹ writing processes.

Three years into teaching, I had a brief experience in professional development that offered an opportunity to make change. Early in 2006, many districts in Texas began proposing and training educators like myself to create and incorporate project-based curriculum integrating fields of study, such as pairing writing and the social sciences, to bring authentic purpose and relevance to the curriculum; however the adoption of the STAAR Assessments and TEKS in Texas delayed the implementation of project-based learning (PBL) in the general education curriculum, at least in our district. We were abruptly dismissed from PBL training to focus on the new standards.

Interestingly, with the implementation of the STAAR, the change in writing skill level from the previous state assessment was exponentially more aggressive in expected growth for students in the writing component than any other discipline, and consequently, all departments, including athletics were required to incorporate writing components into their curriculum. The English department staff was required to provide professional

¹ The term *authentic* in this case refers to writing that is student-directed in topic, is developed with academic discipline, and has relevance to the student beyond the classroom.

development to teachers in other disciplines on how to write appropriately for their discipline. The purpose was to help students improve their writing skill for the state assessment, but it was clear to all of the English teachers that this was a misstep, as the state assessment had its own “genre,” the assessment genre. Students were required to write a twenty-six lined essay, which was allotted about an hour for the writing process. The prompts were vague, such as “write about why friendship is important,” but the strict length did not allow for any meaningful development of ideas. Trying to teach students how to respond to these prompts, as well as train teachers in other disciplines to encourage the writing process, was a daunting task, and a clear indicator that other disciplines had specific writing expectations that were different from those expected in the language arts. Interestingly, this was my first exposure to the idea that composition was its own field, not a writing prep course for other fields. We were relieved that other disciplines were accepting some responsibility in improving student writing (even if in the language and style of their own discipline), but the overall responsibility to develop strong writers remained squarely on the shoulders of the English Department.

To complicate matters further, the goal to meet benchmark standards that focused on the new genre-based state curriculum forced educators to truncate the writing process for each writing assignment in order to meet the numerous and varied standards, skills, and techniques used in those genres. The expectation was for us to assign a different writing genre (such as analysis, argumentation, narrative, and research genres) each six weeks grading period. These genres were not only taught independently of each other, but the genre prompts were thematically unrelated to other writing assignments within the school year. Instead, we tried to create thematic connections between the reading

assignments (such as a novel study or poetry unit) and writing expectations (such as an analysis essay) to meet each six weeks benchmark requirements. To connect these genres into a project-based writing assignment over the course of the year was nearly impossible, as district benchmarks dictated the focus for each grading period, and each grading period led to different goals. The consequence was an inadequate writing process, as when one writing assignment was completed, rarely if ever did students return to the assignment to complete the cognitive process of reflection or response to own's own thinking. In a sense, the writing product no longer had relevancy beyond its contribution to the overall grade for that grading period. Internal motivation in this writing scenario suffered. As internal motivation is key to success in writing (Williams 2), this writing scenario rapidly decreased the internal motivation of students to learn, as they struggled with confidence and ability in writing, since the ideas they developed in their writing held only a temporary significance in the learning process. Students also struggled with their own identity as writers and learners, failing to see the personal relevance in addressing limited scope or text-based response prompts, like the student who saw his paper as dumpster material. One example of a limited scope prompt for an argumentative unit would be, "Write an essay taking a position on why school lunches should or should not be regulated by the government." While this prompt seems to be "student centered" for high school students as many consume school lunches, this prompt limits the students writing scope to an issue they might or might not feel passionate about or that even affects their lives. The prompt does not offer the ability for the writing to be "student collaborative," which would allow students to "make meaning from work over which they feel a sense of control and purpose" (Williams 78). In addition, student voices

are not an asset to the bigger conversations within culture, as they are rarely allowed to explore beyond the curricular scope given to them, and their ideas are not shared with an audience beyond the classroom or teacher. These limited prompts have no immediate relevancy to the student writer, and only serve as a tool to assess reading and comprehension, which is certainly an important aspect of reading and language curriculum, but does not serve to directly improve certain composition or writing proficiencies needed for post-secondary education.

Mimicking their assessment-based academic culture, students often care about their grades and GPA's instead of thoughtful explorations or reflections on their own thinking processes or the consequences of that thinking within a rhetorical community. After fifteen years as a high school English teacher, I saw the whole of writing curriculum as product-focused, not student-focused, regardless of the terminology used in curricular texts, which only teaches students how to respond to an assessment prompt instead of how to be deep critical thinkers and writers. Grading standards, rigid requirements for marking periods, ineffective organization of the writing process, and highly prescriptive, assessment-focused curriculum compounded the loss. In fact, little of what happens in high school writing classrooms reflect current composition theory research and pedagogy.

Within the field of composition theory and pedagogy, many scholars and educators have begun to challenge the standard practice of academic writing originally intended to prepare students for writing in other fields. Composition experts demand that writing is its own professional field with its own standards and processes, not a "how-to" in writing for other disciplines, as each has its own dynamic standards and practices.

Many educators at the two and four-year colleges are changing the structure of genre-based writing courses². They are often adopting frameworks for the class that are thematically driven, focusing on the development of ongoing, interrelated writing topics to provide a more realistic act of reflection to the writing and thinking process, offer opportunities to develop a refined writing identity, and promote effectiveness in writing to build a solid writing foundation. All of these goals help to build student confidence and processes that can be carried over into multiple fields of study. Secondary teachers need to respond to these changes by addressing the more serious issues that plague current high school students—the basic development of identity, agency, and metacognitive processes in writing before they enter the college writing classroom, as well as the opportunity to be relevant and valued members within a discourse community beyond the educational environment. Secondary education wants to prepare students for college writing, so they try to mimic the effort to address field-related genres similar to college writing classes, but they have been slow to address the changes that are occurring at that level. As recently as two years ago, even the dual credit teachers at my high school were teaching first-year college writing by genre only. Not only are they mistakenly following an outdated approach, curriculum creators are missing the fact that most high school students are truly emerging writers and need educators to help them develop basic thresholds, such as identity and agency, to improve their writing.

² Genre-based writing courses refers to those that are set up to address specific genres such as an argument to teach specific features, modes and styles within those genres without an authentic rhetorical framework, assuming that those genres have a universal structure that can be applied to any rhetorical situation or discourse community.

Writing thresholds³ are not the only consideration to improve emerging writers and thinkers. Authenticity in curricular frameworks is also needed. Pedagogical theories in other disciplines have much to offer for composition studies and the development of writing frameworks. The National Council for the Social Studies argues that students need “learning experiences that engender students’ curiosity for exploring complex social questions,” as well as “ask important questions, seek information, validate conflicting sources of evidence, and create reasoned, evidence-based decisions that consider ethics and justice” (Kohlmeier et al. 1). While writing is its own field with its own purposes and practices, the writer will take those purposes and practices to contribute to other fields of study. I attended a professional development session several years ago in secondary education that sought to show the connections of learning goals between disciplines. The English department was paired with the social studies department to demonstrate the interrelated goals for each department. The leader of the session handed out slips of paper with individual state standards or TEKS from both English and social studies. We had to collaborate and decide which of the standards belonged to each of the fields. The take-away from that exercise was that the standards were mostly the same. It was clear that we should be working together as departments to create curriculum that complemented each other. The connections to the fields of composition studies and the social sciences implies that if students are going to be relevant members of a specific discourse community and

³The term *threshold* is used by composition scholars to refer to conceptual ideas that are not core concepts of the discipline but rather ways of seeing and understanding things differently by making connections across sites and ideas that were previously unconnected, such as moving from a definition of “discourse community” to a more complex understanding that knowledge is socially constructed within these groups through specific uses of language; these thresholds are difficult, liminal, and transformative moments of understanding (Adler-Kassner ix-x).

of society in general, they need to think and write with an awareness of cultural significance, conduct cultural research, and consider cultural implications. This means that the writing curriculum must include inquiry, research, reflection, and the ability to synthesize individual and cultural meaning for students to be thoughtful and empowered member of society. This connection to other disciplines offered relevance and authenticity to the writing purpose.

When I left teaching to go back to graduate school, I wanted answers about how to improve my writing classroom and move outside the classroom into professional development by helping other teachers resolve those issues. Through reflection on my own experiences as a teacher and research into the pedagogical concepts and composition theories, I began to consider possible frameworks based on a unique genre, as well as a method of writing, autoethnography, as a potential solution to the problems in the secondary writing classroom.

My research was guided by the following overarching questions:

- What is the underlying nature of the issues, perceptions, attitudes, and difficulties that hinder student writers, especially at the secondary level?
- What does current composition theory, pedagogical theory and cognitive research say about the needs of emerging writers and approaches to these needs? Do current curricular practices address these needs?
- What pedagogical frameworks might address the needs of emerging writers?

- As one of the many possible frameworks, what does autoethnography offer and how might it be merged with secondary curriculum standards and guidelines?

This thesis is supported by scholarly research into these questions, as well as academic analyses of current theories and practices, explained or highlighted through personal experiences in the writing classroom. Since I will not be using empirical data related to the use of autoethnography in the classroom, as I am not currently in the classroom to implement autoethnography as a curricular framework, I will be using my own personal experiences with autoethnography to support the efficacy of autoethnography (alternately referred to as AE going forward) as a viable tool to successfully meet the needs of writers. I will also provide a rationale to support the feasibility for the implementation of autoethnography as a curricular framework for writing studies in secondary education.

The thesis will be organized as such:

In the first chapter, I introduced the general challenges in secondary writing classrooms, along with my research plan for a curriculum framework based on autoethnography. In my second chapter, I will provide a brief literature review of composition theories, pedagogical theories, and cognitive research that should influence writing curriculum for emerging writers in secondary education. In the third chapter, I will give an academic explanation of autoethnography, and its unique characteristics as a method and genre and the connections to the social sciences, as well as offer my personal experience in writing an autoethnography. In the fourth chapter, I will explain how and where autoethnography fits into the current secondary curriculum, and how it will meet the established needs of

emerging writers in secondary education. I will provide solutions to curricular concerns in the current secondary classroom that were addressed in chapter one and address special concerns and additional benefits in the practical application of autoethnography as a framework for writing curriculum. I conclude my thesis in chapter five by exploring what can be learned through autoethnography and the implications for real-world use, as well as a call to action for educators and administrators for professional development in learning about autoethnography. Within these chapters, I hope to provide a compelling, research-based case for the future of autoethnography in writing studies within the secondary writing classroom.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, I survey contemporary composition theories and pedagogies, discussing what they suggest about how writing develops, what impacts writing development, and what pedagogical approaches have been offered to help writers develop their writing abilities. First, I will explain specific writing thresholds and theories in composition, as well as what the theories tell us about how writing develops and what specific thresholds foster meaningful metacognitive processes among developing young writers. Successful teachers “must choose a blend of pedagogies they believe will meet the needs of their particular students within their particular contexts,” and my next focus will be to provide relevant aspects of process and authentic pedagogies and how they affect writing (Tate et al. 7). I examined two particular theories that have a direct link to the issues with secondary writing classrooms, *process pedagogy*, which drives the structure and timeline within a writing curriculum, and *authentic pedagogy*, which informs the content and purpose of that curriculum. I will sketch the transition from current traditional approaches to process theories of writing that take process as a given but expand on the requirements and scope within curriculum and how pedagogical approaches create relevance and motivation in emerging writers.

Composition Thresholds and Cognitive Research

As discussed in the introduction, thresholds are those connections across sites and ideas that were previously unconnected, like a milestone of understanding that must be mastered to be a successful writer. Several of these thresholds are specifically necessary for emerging writers, as they develop the core of understanding about the act of writing itself. Three specific thresholds are essential to developing curriculum and building

meaningful success for emerging writers: 1) an understanding that writing is a social and knowledge-making activity; 2) that students need to develop agency in their writing experiences for accountability and motivation; and 3) that identity as a writer plays a key role in knowledge-making. Bazerman notes that “the concept that writing expresses and shares meaning is fundamental to participating in writing” in that “we can articulate and communicate [knowledge]...through the medium of written words” (Adler-Kassner 21). Not only is there a speaker and audience, implying the social nature of the communication, but through the activity of writing, writers, in an attempt to make sense of the words, construct meaning with what they already know to make thoughts clearer and sharable to others. The act of writing is rhetorical in that it has a speaker, audience, and message. When emerging writers learn to internalize the rhetorical roles of all three parts of this rhetorical triangle, students can learn to create and recreate meaning effectively in increasingly diverse mediums and audiences (33). An understanding of this threshold is important to emerging writers because it encourages a meta-cognitive awareness of the meaningfulness and application of written communication.

In addition to learning the social and rhetorical nature of writing itself, emerging writers also need to develop agency. In *Keywords to Writing Studies*, Steven Accardi defines agency as “the ability or capacity to act” and adds that the use of agency “connotes a force or power that can be owned or managed” (Heilker 1). Bronwyn Williams, in *Literacy Practices and Perceptions of Agency*, further clarifies agency in writing studies as “the ability to respond with confidence and skill to a given writing or reading assignment” (3) Williams further defines agency as “the perception, drawn from experiences and dispositions, that the individual can, in a social context, act, make a

decision, and make meaning” (9). In order to achieve *agency* in these contexts, students must insist on 1) the power to dictate the course of the writing; 2) a personal connection to the writing focus; and 3) the ability to perceive success in the process. To fulfill each of these requirements, writing instructors need to allow students to explore their own experiences that are relevant to them, choose the cultural connections to guide their inquiry, research and writing focus, and have the opportunity to reflect meaningfully on their thinking and writing progress for the sake of learning writing as a branch of learning and not simply as a tool.

Agency is also intricately connected to accountability. A large consensus of professional educators has established that classrooms should create an environment that promotes a student’s active and accountable position in their learning processes (Mameli et al. 41). Basically, for students to be accountable, we must allow students real control of the writing environment. In a quantitative study of student agency, researchers Reeve and Tseng concluded that in addition to the affective, behavioral, and cognitive dimensions of student engagement, the curriculum must also include an *agentic* dimension to promote a student’s motivation and responsibility in learning (257). This dimension is defined in a later article as the process in which students proactively try to create, enhance, and personalize the conditions and circumstances under which they learn. This educational framework, called Self-Determination Theory, is especially important to composition studies as it dictates a curriculum that focuses on the needs of the individual writer whose development must be the priority in the classroom (Reeve 153). For students to have intrinsic motivation, engagement and academic achievement in the writing classroom, they need to feel encouraged to act freely and independently, feel competent and engaged

in successful experiences, and feel connected in a warm and supportive relational climate (Mameli et al. 43). Specifically to writing and composition, they must have agency in the form of *power* to freely choose their writing topics, to experience and monitor success within the process of writing, and to have the support of their teachers and workshop partners to be successful. Support within the writing classroom ties into the concept of writing as a social activity in that writers, consciously or unconsciously, are addressing an audience, whether the audience is oneself or others. Even when writing alone, countless others' ideas and experiences influence a writer's perspective (Williams 17). The support for a writer's craft comes not just from prescriptive writing lessons, but from experiences and ideas shared within the discourse community of the classroom. Support in the classroom comes readily from discussions among classmates and teachers and is an invaluable source of understanding, not only about audience, but about variety of perspectives that contribute to a writer's purpose, understanding, and accountability to a community.

In addition, recent work in composition studies points to the important role that student identity plays in writing development. Development of identity is another important threshold that needs to be fostered in the secondary writing classroom. The *self* is a concept suggesting that we have an “overarching idea about who we are—physically, emotionally, socially, spiritually, and in terms of any other aspect that make up who we are (Ackerman Sec.1 Par. 1). More specifically, self is a “multi-dimensional construct that refers to an individual's perception of self ...formed through experiences gained in the environment and through interaction with others” (Gasa et al. 2335); therefore, self-theory implies that the individual self is formed in response to others—to the world

around us through relationships and culture. At the secondary level, students are actively developing this concept of self into an identity that influences how they respond to the world. At this stage of development, adolescence, students are consumed by egocentricity, as most secondary educators believe, but they are more importantly starting to develop the ability to “demonstrate greater introspection or thinking about one’s own thoughts and feelings” (Lally and Valentine-French 227). This unique stage of cognitive development needs curricular opportunities that allow students to explore the inner self, as well as question their perceptions in relation to the world around them.

The concept of *identity*, or how students see their role in communities in which they engage, can dictate the level of power a student has over the learning process (Adler-Kassner 50-51). If they identify as marginalized in the educational community, they may have trouble developing agency in their own writing, especially when writing purposes are developed by others. But the implications on identity based on having minimal power in the writing purpose can be more than a hindrance to agency. A student’s literate identity, created and shaped by teacher and administrative goals, can constrain their agency, both socially and intrinsically, affecting motivation and psychological/ emotional well-being (Williams 4-5). Identity has a “central role in issues of power and ideology...[and] the difference between oppression and opportunity in a given [social] context results from how our identity is performed by us and interpreted by others” (8); therefore, when student agency is not actively promoted, then the curriculum is oppressive to the development of the identity of emerging writers. This is not to say that students do not need guidance and instruction on writing moves, style and mechanics, but those should be given to improve craft, not to dictate writing direction.

If writing is a way of knowing, as a method to finding answers, then we need to allow emerging writers to guide their own inquiry of the world and themselves. Only then will they begin to feel ownership of their own learning, which is especially important when entering college where expectations of intrinsic motivation and accountability will be put to the test. In giving the students the power and sovereignty over the direction of their learning, we could alleviate the social biases (partialities) or discriminations that often plague the classroom environment. For instance, a student who performs in a way that “does not fit comfortably within the dominant culture’s narrative” may feel “misunderstood, devalued, ignored, even threatened” (Williams 8). If the direction of learning can incorporate everyone’s narrative as a valid source of inquiry and discussion, students can nurture a complex identity that considers multiple narratives that influence them.

The concepts of writing as a social and rhetorical activity, agency as a means to accountability and motivation, and the development of a complex identity all serve to create an understanding of the relationships and complexities of written communication between self and others. Several composition and educational pedagogies offer a framework and educational purpose that is compatible with meeting these thresholds.

Process Pedagogy as a Theoretical Framework

The concepts developed in process pedagogy were originally an intentional break from *current-traditional* paradigm of composition instruction, which is defined by Dr. Chris M. Anson as an emphasis on the written product rather than the composing process, characterized by formulaic notions of arrangement (modes), an inflated concern with usage and style, and no discussion of drafting and revision (Tate et al. 215). He argues

that this paradigm only seeks to improve the text, not the writer, is teacher-centered (as the prompts are prescriptive and tailored for assessment), and the writing process allows for thinking and then writing, instead of writing as a mode or method of learning.

Donald Murray, in “Teaching Writing as a Process, Not a Product,” questions this current-traditional paradigm, insisting that teachers should move away from teaching a product, but instead teach a process that is more student-centered (Villanueva 3). In addition, the process should be “an exploration of what we know and what we feel about what we know through language” (4). When students engage in the prewriting, writing and rewriting stages, teachers should not be focused on the product or grading, but whether the student is participating in a “search for truth” (4). The focus for writing should also ideally not be driven by writing formats and prescribed modes recreated by modeled texts but should be driven by content (ideas) and purpose. While modeling and setting expectations are not detrimental in themselves, this type of prescribed process allows a student to survive academically by imitating texts and repeating ideas to check the boxes for standards instead of creating writing that demonstrates individual metacognitive learning. In essence, process pedagogy is “the process of discovery through language” and not simply a step-by step activity in writing (Tate et al. 216). In addition, the writing process should surpass the writing product in both importance and practice. According to Janet Emig, “writing as a process-and-product possesses a cluster of attributes that corresponds uniquely to certain powerful learning strategies,” especially analysis and synthesis of ideas (Villanueva 7). She does not exclude the importance of the writing product but recognizes that it must include a well-developed process that allows for learning. The act of writing as a mode of learning is important in the success of

writers, and success is determined by their ability to see the progress and transformation of their own thinking-- to reflect on what is already written to move the writing and learning forward. As a student learns and can successfully evaluate his or her ideas, the more confidence the student has in his or her writing, which directly promotes agency, as discussed in the earlier section. The writing process is an act of metacognitive learning, but only if reflection is inherently built into the curriculum.

Redefining Reflection Within the Writing Process

Reflection as part the writing process has changed over the last half-century. The current-traditional linear writing model considers reflection as the “pauses and rescanning” that occur during the writing event, indicating growth of consciousness, but current composition theory sees reflection as a post process or a “means of going beyond the text to include a sense of the ongoing conversations that text enters into” (Yancy 4-5). Students need the opportunity to continue the conversation, a dialectical, that “put[s] multiple perspectives into play with each other to produce insight” (6). Reflection then becomes a “*looking forward* to goals we might obtain, as well as *casting backwards* to see where we have been” (6). This metacognitive act is the key to creating critical thinkers and critical writers.

The current linear process does not meet the criteria for true writing processes if opportunities for ongoing reflection are not built into the curriculum and responses to those reflections are not expected of writing students. Two aspects of metacognitive process that are necessary for learning is the ability to reflect on one’s own thinking in one’s writing and the synthesis of new discoveries into that writing. Reflection as defined in composition studies is a “mode of inquiry: a deliberate way of systematically recalling

writing experiences to reframe the current writing situation” (Adler-Kassner 78). This implies that a response must be made based on reflections and not merely for its own sake. The writing process allows for real reflection if it remains unbroken, and writers can build on existing written products and venture into new directions of inquiry and research, offering students an authentic learning experience.

Authentic Pedagogy and Connections to the Writing Purpose

The idea of authentic learning as a pedagogical framework in educational studies has developed over the last twenty-five years and offers some compelling arguments for change in the writing classroom. In response to low academic standards that lack intellectual quality, Dr. Fred M. Newman and others argue that students need to “actively construct meaning grounded in their own experience rather than simply absorbing and reproducing knowledge transmitted from subject-matter fields” (Newmann et al. 280). Authentic pedagogy is further defined as a learning construct that “challenges students to engage in disciplined inquiry to construct knowledge that is used to produce work that has value beyond school” as well as encourage higher order thinking (HOT)” (Kohlmeier et al.1). The construct explicitly calls for learning to be grounded in personal experience and disciplined inquiry, and to hold value beyond school.

This framework holds promise for writing instruction as it can influence writing topics, expand on research methodologies, and refine the writing process into meaningful work for high school students. Even though authentic instruction is typically observed in the social studies discipline, its implementation has also been observed in language arts/writing classes at the primary level (grade 4) and holds promise in the secondary writing classroom based on basic principles and findings.

Associates under Newmann recently published a peer-reviewed qualitative study in May of 2020 on the application of authentic instruction as a three-year scaffolded professional development cycle for teachers. The findings from the implementation of authentic learning strategies offer hope and a parallel model for the instruction in a secondary writing classroom. The teachers in the study were taught a constructivist epistemology that “provide[s] four clear criteria: knowledge is actively developed, understanding is adaptive within specific learning contexts, the understanding generated is specific to the learner in that context, and learning is developed biologically and socially” (Kohlmeier et al. 19). The activities resulted in the conclusion that “history is an argument created by studying multiple sources and perspectives” as well as a “constructed understanding based on evidence that is continually open to critique and interpretation” (19). The curriculum exposed students to more complex presentations of history, as well as opportunities to interpret and reflect on primary sources.

One criteria of the constructivist epistemology, that learning is developed biologically and socially, deserves closer attention by writing instructors. In this experiment by Newmann’s associates, students were expected to draw collaboratively upon the ideas of others, including their own, a concept supported by the composition threshold that writing is a social and rhetorical activity (Kohlmeier et al. 281; Adler-Kassner 17). Students’ personal experience offers a primary source that can be shared and compared with other student’s experience *as part of inquiry*. Teachers often present well-researched and topic driven sources to respond to during class discussions, but the personal experience of the writer as a source can lead to relevancy and empowerment for the students.

One compelling insight into the use of personal experience from one of the teachers in the study involved the risk of allowing students to guide their own learning. Many teachers struggle with giving students the power to direct discussion based on legitimate fear of students going off-topic, not digging deeply enough into discussions, and not respecting the seriousness or professional nature of classroom discussion. More specifically, one teacher was afraid of discussing emotionally charged topics such as racial injustice and discrimination, but she was surprised to discover that when she allowed more student voice and refrained from guiding student discussion among their peers, a surprising consequence unfolded. She witnessed that her distance encouraged empathetic and respectful attitudes from the students toward the issues (Kohlmeier et al. 23). This brings me to the point that students can and should be given more leeway and respect to address topics within culture that offer relevancy and opportunity to engage personally (specific to the learner) through individual effort and group collaboration. These shared personal experiences are a relevant and significant source of knowledge that can guide the teachers into targeted lessons and provide students a starting point for further individual research.

While student-guided discussion as a source is one change in instructional practices discussed in the research, the overall findings of the study are encouraging as far as the implementation of authentic pedagogy, resulting in positive responses and outcomes. The written testimonies of teachers in the study, similar to the one above, indicates a more student-centered, student-driven classroom that supports authentic learning. Those practices can serve the writing classroom positively, as well.

On the topic of student freedom in the classroom, another study by Chris Park addresses learning journals, which should be a part of the reflective writing process. The research classroom required individualized written responses that could be about the readings, group discussions, lessons and observations written after each class, and students were given deliberate freedom over choice of content, format, style and approach (188). While there were a few negative reactions to these learning journals, mainly that students were forced to “think too much,” overall, the journals made them “more self-aware of how they learn and enhance[d] the overall learning experience (Park 196). While this study does not specifically reference authentic pedagogy, its instructional practice, along with student-led discussions, supports Newman’s three criteria for authentic instruction: construction of knowledge, disciplined inquiry, and value beyond school. A closer look at these three criteria, as well as how they can apply to the secondary writing classroom, is needed for clarity.

1. Construction of Knowledge—Rather than reproducing meaning or knowledge, students must construct or produce *new* knowledge. Under the conventional and assessment-based writing curriculum, students are asked to reproduce meaning with writing prompts that guide students to respond to information already “produced and codified” (Newmann et al. 283). For instance, students are often given recommended readings (i.e. topical articles and writing models) and direct instruction on the purpose, format and specific moves that must be present in the writing product. Students are then asked to imitate stylistic moves or to respond to other’s ideas analytically to demonstrate understanding of presented knowledge. Students are assessed for understanding and writing standards, but the knowledge

gained does not go beyond the given texts. With authentic instruction, high school writing students should instead *construct or produce* knowledge by expanding their own understanding through activities such as collecting documents and objects (data collection), creating meaningful ideas through group discussions (collaboration), examining multiple perspectives (scholarly research), and drawing conclusions through thoughtful reflections to create new knowledge (synthesis and creation). This implies that construction of knowledge is guided through student-led inquiry instead of teacher direction, as well as student-directed writing reflections. This does not imply that lessons on writing skills cannot be offered or assessed, but that those lessons do not form the core of construction of knowledge.

2. Disciplined Inquiry—Disciplined inquiry must include a prior knowledge base, an in-depth understanding of that knowledge, and elaborated communication (Newmann et al. 283-284). Ideas must be created by a synthesis of previous knowledge and new ideas. The best way to explain disciplined inquiry is to illustrate the implementation of it. Within the field of writing, for instance, the topic of knowledge can start right where the student is—in personal experience through a written narrative. High school students are not typically part of a disciplined academic community with a deep and varied knowledge background. The knowledge they have gained to any degree of expertise is found within their own lives. Student may start the process of disciplined inquiry through self-exploration and personal narratives, which can even include their experience with writing throughout their academic career. A student can reveal important cultural

topics and special interests through the varied experiences they express through writing about themselves. From those topics, formal research into the prior knowledge base can expand the student's depth of understanding and give students multiple perspectives to allow for critique and questioning of their own original ideas. But the key to meeting the writing standards in secondary education through disciplined inquiry is the elaborated communication in which students both "conduct their work and ...express their conclusions" (Newmann et al. 284). During the construction of knowledge, students must use language (verbal, symbolic and visual) to express the "qualifications, nuances, elaborations, details and analogues [of knowledge] into expositions, narratives, explanations, justifications and dialogue" (284). These language constructions are especially pertinent to meeting secondary writing curriculum standards because these expressions of language can translate into the various genres and modes of writing products required, such as research papers, personal narratives, analysis, argumentation, and transcriptions of dialogue respectively. Symbolic and visual language can also be incorporated into presentations and nonverbal expressions such as artwork and other forms of symbolic expression to enhance the standard curriculum, especially to meet literary and digital communication requirements.

3. Value Beyond School—Learning for the sake of fulfilling requirements in academia is not enough to create authentic learning. Newmann argues that "authentic achievements [must] have aesthetic, utilitarian or personal value apart from documenting the competence of the learner" and must "communicate ideas, produce a product or have an impact on others beyond demonstrating that they are

competent” (Newmann et al. 284). This extension beyond assessment is weak or lacking altogether in current secondary writing classrooms, especially as student achievement rarely extends beyond the borders of the academic environment.

Those achievements should help find “solutions to real-life problems” to “ensure intellectual quality” (284); therefore, the curriculum must be designed in a way to identify, explore and find solutions to problems that relate to the individual student, as well as to meet the requirements for assessment of student achievement. Potential expression of value beyond school could manifest into intangibles like self-realization, academic confidence and social awareness, as well as tangible products and actions like cumulative portfolios, student publications, and activism.

A reflective process curriculum, like the suggested reflective process model, combined with an authentic learning framework, provides a learning environment that gives students the ability to see the progress and transformation of their own thinking. Aside from the major writing products, learning journals and reflective writings can be an effective source to assess that learning progress. Changes in writing curriculum that incorporate a reflective process pedagogy and authentic construction of knowledge can result in the successful creation of elaborated communication that goes beyond the classroom, improved self and cultural consciousness, and increased awareness of one’s progress and learning, which may improve students overall response to writing.

Controversies and Clarifications of the Role of Genre

Many university English departments have been making changes to their first-year writing courses, adopting frameworks written by leaders in the academic fields of

composition and rhetoric, writing across curriculum and English education. In the recently updated official statement written by The Council of Writing Program Administrators (WPA), the leaders set the standards for all first-year writing courses, which there is an implicit call for college writing courses to be focused on “habits of mind” in writing processes and composing practices, which serve as a foundation for writing in other fields, not as a course to teach specific field-related genres (“Framework” 1). The WPA also issued an outcomes statement in 2014 that encourages faculty in other disciplines to have students take what they learned in introductory writing courses and to build on that knowledge to move their writing abilities “into new settings where expected outcomes will expand, multiply and diverge” (“WPA”). These leaders in the field of writing are effectively standing their ground that writing is its own field of study, and that other disciplines should take some of the educational responsibility for teaching their own specific field-related writing standards and formats, allowing writing teachers to implement best writing practices and standards within their own discipline. Genre is writing that employs “familiar discursive moves in accordance to reader expectations, institutional norms, market forces and other social influences, but if instructors teach writing by routinely forcing the habitual use of formal elements by which we recognize genres without a specific rhetorical context and response to “a series of socially mediated actions,” then students do not learn to recognize and adapt to the ever-changing rhetorical landscape within their own disciplinary studies” (Adler-Kassner 39, 40). First-year writing instructors are not experts in the ever-changing language and modes of other disciplines and their writing expectations. Students cannot write outside of genre, but to create a curriculum based on teaching a student several specific genres that reflect the

values of specific disciplinary discourse communities is a dubious goal. Instead, composition educators are using composition methods that help students understand the rhetorical nature and process of writing, allowing a fully developed writing process that incorporates post-process reflection and revision, and offering students writing opportunities that allow them to recognize and understand multiple rhetorical contexts and their rhetorical natures (audience, purpose, etc.).

A shift is currently in progress, as I have witnessed several student teachers and lecturers at Texas State University who teach first-year writing adopt a thematically driven, project-based writing curriculum where the genre is mediated by the content and purpose. This idea that genre is connected by content and purpose suggests that genre is a writing tool for learning in which “different kinds of writing activity lead students to focus on different information,” and as a consequence, “discipline and genre specific applications...[should be] useful to foster discipline specific learning and thought development” (Bazerman et al. 284). This implies that whatever genre is practiced in the field of writing studies, especially when addressing the needs of emerging writers, should foster specific learning and thought development related to writing thresholds and not the goals of other disciplines. This does not negate connections to other disciplines (as in project-based learning), but each discipline should offer genres that support learning goals of that discipline, regardless of the ideas and concepts that interweave between the disciplines.

Conclusions on the Literature and Findings

The composition and educational theories concerning what is best practice for emerging writers is certainly more expansive than what was outlined in this chapter, but

fundamental ideas of essential thresholds, process writing and post-process reflection, genre's connection to learning goals, and authentic learning practices address concepts and solutions to the unique challenges and opportunities for success in emerging writers.

III. INTRODUCTION TO AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

In *Self+Culture+Writing: Autoethnography for/as Writing Studies*, editors Rebecca Jackson and Jackie Grutsch McKinney succinctly define autoethnography as “an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze personal experience in order to understand cultural experience”(7). As a research methodology, autoethnography is rooted in the social sciences, like authentic pedagogy, but stemmed from critiques of ethnography’s traditional-objectivist approach to studying and reporting on other cultures. Proponents of AE argues that “knowledge about the social and human world cannot exist independent of the knower; that we cannot know or tell anything without (in some way) being involved and implicated in the knowing and the telling” (Douglas and Carless 84).

When writing ethnographies as a disciplinary genre, scholars were concerned with “how the ‘facts’ and ‘truths’ scientists ‘found’ [in the field] were inextricably tied to the vocabularies and paradigms the scientists used to represent them (Ellis et al. 274). Essentially, Ellis and her colleagues argue that researchers could not separate their own ideologies and perspectives when writing about other cultures, as those ideologies and perspectives were intricately woven into how researchers reported on their subjects and how they interpreted their findings in those clinical observations (274). Autoethnography, which “proffered stories instead of theories” was seen as a positive research avenue that would “produce meaningful, accessible, and evocative research grounded in personal experience” (274). The researcher could have a research methodology and genre that acknowledged and even benefitted from the insertion of the researcher. Arthur P. Bochner and Carolyn Ellis originated the autoethnography as an ethnographic alternative,

which “emphasizes subjectivity, self-reflexivity, emotionality, dialogue, and the goal of connecting social sciences to humanities through storytelling” (Bochner 156). This narrative form of inquiry was offered as a method to translate “knowing” into “telling” to find “meaning” (157).

The three aspects of this methodology, described in Heewon Chang’s *Autoethnography as Method*, both connect and distinguish itself from other forms of qualitative research. AE is similar to ethnography as it is a process and product of systematic data collection, and is an analysis and interpretation of data for cultural understanding through scholarly reports, but differs from ethnography in that it is performed through self and personal explorations in the context of society/culture (Chang 48-49). AE seeks to explore themes and experiences in one’s own life, which creates a research focus directing the exploration of cultural perspectives and influences; however, autoethnography is distinct from similar forms or genres. For instance, personal experience pieces, the personal narrative, offer only the participant’s perspective without confirmation of objectivity using other sources, and its purpose is self-reflective. Traditional ethnography documents the observations of the subjects with the observer (researcher) noticeably absent with the purpose of reporting qualitative data. Postmodern ethnography situates the observer into the data, which is a recognition of the essentially subjective nature of reality, but it serves the same purpose as traditional ethnography (45). Autoethnography is unique in that it is both personal and research based. AE partakes of aspects of each of these genres to some extent, and its purpose serves to report qualitative data and examine personal experiences, but it allows the subject (self) to examine those personal experiences within cultural contexts through scholarly

research. The final combination is an artful merging of those two into a third, unique product that synthesizes the personal and scholarly data to create an informed (research-based) narrative.

Autoethnography as a Product and Process

The genre of AE as a final product can be written using many stylistic forms. According to Chang, who has written the most inclusive, comprehensive, hands-on instructional text on autoethnography to date, groups these stylistic forms into four main different writing styles: (1) *descriptive-realistic*, using imagery that is accurate and detached “with minimal character judgement and evaluation,” often from an objective third person perspective to represent an individual experience in culture; (2) *confessional-emotive*, exposing the vulnerable and personal “confusion, problems and dilemmas” of one’s life in order to explore the relationship with self and culture; (3) *analytical-interpretive*, in which data is collected, and interpretations are presented in analytical discourse; and (4) *imaginative-creative*, which blurs the line between fiction and nonfiction as the product that is “channeled through a variety of genres” like poetry, fiction and drama (Chang 143-148). Even though there are four main styles of the autoethnography genre, many times writers can develop their own style by combining these forms together. As I will discuss later, the choice in writing styles and potential for personalizing one’s AE can offer a flexibility that can be tailored to the content and audience.

Autoethnography is not just a study of self alone as “culture is a web of self and others,” but it is important to choose how much and to what degree the self will be researched and presented in an AE (Chang 65). The investigation of self can come from

three directions: 1) investigating self as a main character and others as supporting actors; 2) investigating self and others as co-participants or co-informants in a study, similar to narrative inquiry; or 3) investigating others as the primary focus, but the research focus is informed by personal experience (65). The third option is not considered autoethnographic by many experts in the field because it does not explicitly include “self” and is much more like portraiture⁴, but that option is valuable, as it allows writers to choose a level of personal involvement with appropriate boundaries and can still offer enlightenment into one’s own life.

Regardless of the purpose, the research methodology or process for writing an autoethnography must be carefully planned, with strategies in developing a research purpose; narrowing of a research topic; collecting data about self and culture; managing, analyzing and interpreting data; and finally how the information will be presented (Chang 61). The planning is often a difficult task because the writing and cognitive process is never linear or sequential since new information can constantly alter the focus of research, which is evident in my own experience with autoethnography.

Finding My Own Story Within Culture

All aspects of the autoethnographic methodology teach real-world knowledge academically and personally, which can be difficult to articulate without illustration. In an effort to demonstrate how autoethnography addresses the aspects of identity, agency,

⁴ Portraiture is a method of social science inquiry distinctive in its blending of art (aesthetic narrative) and science (research). Its purpose shares cultural connections with AE, but it distinctly documents and interprets the nuances and voices of the subject (not self, but another) with “disciplined skepticism and critique” of a researcher (Lawrence-Lightfoot 11).

metacognitive learning, as well as authentic learning, real-world application, and a theoretically sound writing process, I will describe my own experience in writing my autoethnography in graduate school.

In my first semester, I took a course exclusively on autoethnography, and while we studied the specifics of the methodology/genre, read and analyzed multiple examples of AE, the greatest learning occurred when we were required to write our own autoethnography. As a writing teacher, I assumed that I was a good writer. I was able to quickly write model texts for my students based on the rubrics and standards, while engaging in many topics supported by years of experience and that I thought were relevant. I felt authority as a writer when I identified as a teacher, but as a student, that authority dwindled as I was over twenty years removed from that official role in the classroom. Most of my writings were impersonal (assignments and lessons) or objectively evaluating and synthesizing texts and information for academic purposes. When I was asked to write about myself within culture, I was initially paralyzed, but the methodology of autoethnography quickly softened my anxieties, and what eventually occurred was a renaissance in my understanding of a more authentic writing process—one that offers an organic vehicle for genuine personal growth as a writer. The methodology revealed the value of reflection, how a writer's identity is developed, as well as offered the freedom and power of agency that I had not developed in my many years in education. I could easily trace my metacognitive thinking throughout the project, while I gained a deeper understanding of myself, the connections to my perspectives and experiences, and the effect of cultural influences in a meaningful and insightful way.

The first objective in writing my autoethnography was to find three self/culture intersections that created enough interest to be the focus of research. We had the freedom to choose the topic of our own design. My professor offered important questions and invention strategies to guide the exploration of our topics, as well as the level of personal interest, professional significance, manageability and ethical standards. The assignment was entirely student-centered and allowed me to establish personal relevance to my writing. For each intersection, I had to dig deep into my memories, examine the thoughts and emotions associated with a specific memory, and give a brief narrative of that moment. I could have chosen topics that related to my experiences as a teacher, wife, mother, etc., but at that moment in my life, I was inevitably drawn to topics related to some personal questions that haunted me. I had no awareness that this direction would eventually dictate a mostly evocative style of writing for my final autoethnography. The requirement of writing a few brief narratives of assorted memories offered little struggle for me as a writer, as I was fluent in modeling personal narratives for my students, but the challenge intensified when I was required to place those memories into the larger cultural narrative.

One of my intersections explored two separate moments of sexual harassment and assault and the responses of individuals when I shared or reported the incidents. Each of the incidents fell within specific cultural communities: college and sports. When I addressed those moments in the larger cultural narrative, I developed the burning question, “Is sexual harassment an individual problem or a cultural problem?” This led to brainstorming, revising, and finalizing the following series of questions:

- Is harassment of women performed to maintain or secure male dominance?
- Do males (or females) who witness and disagree with harassment feel they should influence behavioral change in others?
- What are the motivating factors in harassment or assault of any marginalized group or individual?
- Why are targets of harassment prone to question their own actions?
- Why does fear of retaliation of the perpetrator deter our actions to report the offense? What does this say about justice in these circumstances?
- Is sexual harassment or assault ingrained or codified in our culture, whether in general or in specific rhetorical communities, or is sexual harassment/assault a reflection of an individual's character or system of beliefs?
- How can I examine the issue of sexual harassment objectively and without prejudice when I have unresolved feelings about my own experience?

The self/cultural intersection was an effective invention strategy in the writing process, as I approached topics such as cultural dominance, marginalization, moral influences, and fear of cultural backlash—all topics that could lead into different directions of research. I reflected on those written moments, recognizing that my recorded memories, experiences and perspectives were very narrow within the bigger

picture. As I explored the answer to these questions through primary data and scholarly research, I would develop a more well-rounded understanding of those events: why they occurred, what my role was in those moments, why I and others participants reacted in a specific way, how cultural beliefs and norms of a rhetorical community contributed to the acceptance or indifference of sexual harassment or assault, and how those aspects of understanding would change my writing throughout the many stages of the process.

The collaborative process among my classmates that followed the intersection exercise involved sharing one of our intersections with the whole group. This was a frightful experience for most and required in-depth discussion about mutual respect and understanding of classmates and their experiences. As an educator, I understood this careful cultivation of trust and respect in the classroom, but the technical lessons discussed in the graduate class about proper responses to others' contributions, confidentiality, and the necessity of courageously contributing for our own growth allowed me, through the lens of a student, to reflect on my practices as a teacher. This real-world learning opportunity gave me a new respect for my own students who have difficulties with vulnerability and insecurity in sharing publicly. The variety of topics that my classmates explored and shared in class was inspirational and spoke to how no two people have the same life experience, but we have similar driving questions about the effects of cultural norms, beliefs and practices on our personal lives such as, "How does society accept my (religious, political, etc.) beliefs?", and "What changes in norms are occurring that will affect me?"

The next step in the process was writing our critical narrative, which required more than telling a story; it required me to translate cultural knowledge into personal

meaning and back again. I entered a new territory in my writing experience. I recognized the problems my students faced when asked to take a cognitive leap that stretched their thinking and knowledge. It was at this moment, students often lose courage, confidence and opt to adopt others' perspectives in culture instead of developing their own. At this moment, I knew I would have to struggle to find my own perspective. After days of contemplation without writing a word, I realized the answer to my own story was lying in the darkness of my own unresolved feelings about my response to sexual harassment, as well as the feelings of others with whom I shared the experiences. Why was I silent for so long? When I finally reported the incidents, why did the authorities sweep the incidents under the rug? Why didn't I push the matter? These questions revealed the crux of the problem that drove the reflective process and research into my past.

The word "silence" kept resurfacing in my reflections, and I began to write down incidents of my childhood where I learned to "be quiet." A torrent of experiences came to the surface that signaled my own lack of courage and confidence in speaking up, and the writing flowed out onto the screen. A required four-page narrative easily became seven pages. I wrote about my traditional upbringing filled with discipline and teachings about proper female roles, including the expectation to be quiet, not just with sound, but with opinions, grievances and especially concerning feelings and emotions. I wrote about my experiences of sharing injustices or traumatic moments with family members, and sometimes I would just not speak at all. For instance, at an incredibly young age, I fell into a basement onto a concrete floor and split my head open. After an emergency room visit and a quiet ride home, I was terrified to express a need for comfort, and I suffered quietly with headaches and a debilitating fear of heights. While the headaches passed, the

physical scars and fear of heights stayed with me. As I wrote the experience in my critical narrative, I questioned why I did not verbalize my obvious needs at such a young age, especially as I recalled my own daughters' unabashed ability to verbalize her needs. What was different in our situations?

Another memory I shared occurred in middle school. I tried to speak out against my parents' strict rules about socializing. I was rarely allowed to have friends visit our home, to go over to other people's homes, or to talk on the phone for more than a few minutes. My interactions with other girls my age were severely limited outside of school, and I did not understand the reason for the restrictions. When I spoke out to my parents about how deeply this affected my normal social development (mostly with tears of frustration at the unfairness of it all), I was sent to my room without another word. The event became a catalyst for outspoken rebellion in my early teens, which never ended well for me.

Several other events surrounding restrictions and silencing made it into the draft, but one difficult memory in my critical narrative involved a much more traumatic event. At the age of fifteen, I was sexually assaulted by a college student. When I reached out immediately to a family member, I was told that I misunderstood what happened and that I was reacting with guilt for being promiscuous. Out of shame and fear, I did not tell anyone else but a sympathetic friend and a crisis counselor until I was in my twenties. This was a serious blow to my ability to speak up, as the callous response was devastating. As I went through many more instances of silencing in my critical narrative, I could easily see how things unfolded in my personal and professional life each time I spoke up--even in my experience with the sexual harassment at work. I started to notice a

pattern in reactions to speaking up, which included being disregarded, reprimanded, rejected and bullied. I kept asking the question “why?” in the back of my head as I started research into the cultural influences in my family, cultural influences in certain communities, and overall cultural attitudes about women. Writing the critical narrative forced me to reflect on my own behaviors, as well as the motivating factors for others’ behavior within certain communities, including the family, the rhetorical communities of education and sports.

At this point in the development of my autoethnography, I had traction in the focal direction of my paper, as well as specific topics to research. The next step in the AE methodology involved secondary research, followed by primary research. I believe the order of these assignments may have been a conscious decision by my professor to provide a break from personal exploration and research by allowing us to move into the objective, academic space for understanding on the topics we uncovered in our critical narrative. In addition, the secondary research forced us to contextualize events into historical or socio-cultural themes. We were to assemble at least eight significant secondary sources that helped us understand the larger cultural context related to the topics revealed in our narratives. Those sources were then grouped into three categories that helped us to write a synthesis paper explaining the significance of each category and how the selected sources fit within and between the categories.

The readings I collected, which included over 20 articles, allowed me to whittle down the significantly useful sources that I could place into three specific categories:

- *father/daughter relationships* and how they influence psychology, behaviors, communication styles and self-perception of adult daughters

- *sexism* and how it affects parenting styles and gender relations in specific rhetorical communities like sports and the family
- *cultural silencing* of women in response to sexual misconduct and violence

This exercise, while tedious and labor-intensive, resulted in reflection about the connections between the personal events and behaviors in my life with the issues highlighted in each of the categories, all of which were certainly influenced by cultural norms and beliefs. For instance, Christian beliefs and a traditional patriarchal paradigm in both of my family lineages affected how my parents raised me and my brother. I concluded in my synthesis essay that the issues of silencing of women stem from deeply established sexist beliefs that are codified, contributing to specific female communication behaviors that maintain this silencing, but I also recognized that these beliefs were changing in my family. I saw my experience validated by the various scholarly studies, which gave me a sense of relief that I was not alone. I had a sense of outrage that so many aspects of our culture continue to oppress women's voices into the 21st century, but also saw hope in the changes that allow women's voices to be heard.

This exploration of secondary sources was intended to provide context into the "physical, political and historical" context of my experience, which had evolved into a multi-perspective cultural study, but the next stage of my autoethnography involved collecting primary research, or what Chang calls "external data," which is the primary source of the writer's past and present (103). This move steered me back to the personal. This back and forth between focusing on the self and culture forces a metacognitive process that results in new knowledge about myself and helps provide a connection with

other's interpretation of culture. In the collection of external data, I was required to interview significant persons in my life connected to my narrative, collect textual artifacts written by me or about me, collect visual artifacts like photographs, personal videos or artwork, as well as other artifacts like souvenirs and keepsakes. All this data was to help me contextualize the topics in my narrative and provide the contextual *evidence* of "lived experience" (Chang 103).

My phone interview with my father included two 30-minute sessions of questions and answers carefully planned to solicit information about parenting, cultural influences, individual perspectives and reflections. I will not discuss specifics here, but I was able to glean information about his parents' beliefs and behaviors that influenced his and his sisters' upbringing, his specific perspectives on gender roles, his own experiences with raising children of both genders, his understanding of cultural expectations and biblical influences on gender roles, as well as his own changing attitudes over the course of his life. Perhaps it was the formality of the exercise or careful planning that led the discussion into a space where we could discuss specific details, but that interview led to the most insightful, meaningful conversations I have ever had with my father. And the nature of our conversations since the interviews have continued to draw us closer to each other. My father now understands more of the difficulties I have faced in my silence and encourages open and honest communications from me with kindness and understanding.

We were only required to collect two pieces of primary data, and the length of my interviews sufficed for that requirement, but I could have pulled diary entries and notes from my childhood showing the shift in my response to the world, which started as long detailed entries then changed to short, impersonal entries, and finally no entries. Those

physical artifacts would provide clear evidence of my life events and how they led to my silence. Interestingly, after the course in autoethnography was completed, I took a research methods course and was able to continue the research into my family's cultural history further, this time exploring my mother's side of the family with interviews with both my mother and maternal aunt, as well as their cousin, who is the family historian. The wealth of knowledge collected from those interviews further informed my understanding on the cultural silencing of women, and might lead to further changes in my autoethnography, if not for academic purposes, then for personal enlightenment for myself and my daughter.

Collecting secondary and primary/external data was especially important in the revision of my critical narrative in several ways. I was compelled to change some of the details as they were clarified through my father's memory, especially concerning timelines and others' reactions, which I must have forgotten, skewed in the chaos of my emotions, or simply misremembered. These changes made my narratives more accurate, fair and detailed.

I could add important conclusions in my autoethnography that I could not see in the moment but could see with more clarity and understanding with the research I conducted. I could also provide scholarly background information and commentary on specific topics for the audience who may make faulty assumptions based on their own biases about the cause and nature of the events presented in my AE. For instance, when I told my female coworker friend about the harassment, she did not downplay the seriousness of the event privately, but she did encourage me to bury it and move on with my life. When I finally reported the event to the proper authorities, she abruptly ended

our friendship. While my audience may assume she was not a loyal or supportive friend, the behavior, according to an article in *Women's Studies International Forum*, is typical based on cultural narratives that express 1) females put themselves in the position to be harassed or assaulted, 2) associating with a “disgraced woman” brings shame upon herself, 3) harassment is a private matter and involving others puts them in a difficult position, and 4) others do not want to speak out for fear of backlash (Nurka 46-47). My female friend acted (or did not act) in my defense because she recognized how these narratives might affect her, or she prescribed to these narratives herself. Through research, I understood her reactions and was able to find understanding and closure surrounding the loss of the friendship. Surprisingly, it also gave me a sense of empowerment that I had not been totally silenced by these cultural narratives and had acted appropriately towards justice, a revelation that I explored in my autoethnography.

One other revision I was able to make involved the tone of the narrative. The original narrative was often melodramatic, naïve and held a distinct level of victimization. While I had not originally intended to have that tone, I recognized that the tone might devalue my message—the importance of empowering oneself through language, which I had developed over the course of my research. I was able to change the original language to reflect the new intended message. Not only did I reflect and respond to the knowledge learned and created, but I could also respond with stylistic writing choices that reflected that new knowledge.

The final step in the autoethnographic methodology was to draft a critically responsive autoethnography that demonstrated a thorough analysis of the data and research collected; gathering of new data to finalize the development of ideas; and

finalizing organizations strategies, stylistic choices, and tone/voice. The latter included making decisions on the style of AE that best suited the message, purpose, and voice of the author. I chose to combine two styles together: emotive and analytical. I wanted the personal experience to evoke emotions and empathy, as well as provide research, data and observations to offer understanding into the human behaviors and interactions within our culture that surround the silencing of women. I wanted to expose this real cultural movement, how it is propagated, as well as provide my own response to silencing. The synthesis of many aspects of my story into a final autoethnography included combining the collection of scholarly research and external data and my lived experience, both historically and during the process, resulting in a relevant, authentic construction of knowledge based on disciplined inquiry that held personal value for me beyond the academic process. I developed a deeper understanding of some of the questions that I originally raised in the inquiry process, namely on whether sexual harassment is a cultural problem or an individual one. Through the process of writing my AE and continuing the research in other classes, I concluded that the problem is both cultural and individual, based on the beliefs and conscience of the offender.

Autoethnography and Educational Goals

By answering the initial questions that led me to my final topic for my autoethnography, silencing of women, I was able to more fully understand my own identity as a write—one individual who desired understanding, justice, and to be heard. I became an agent in my own education and quest for knowledge, and I was able to see the progress of my own learning. Through reflection, I gained personal insight into the metacognitive processes that led to an enlightened perspective of self and culture, but I

also created an example of how writing about writing can offer useful insights into the development of a writer's identity, in this case, my own identity as a female with a voice. I realize that I am not only a product of cultural influences, but that I am also an agent and contributor to the cultural script—all lessons that emerging writers should be given the opportunity to learn.

For clarity, here are the important writing and research objectives and requirements the autoethnography project fulfilled:

- **Writing as a social and rhetorical activity**—encourages a meta-cognitive awareness of the meaningfulness and application of written communication as influenced by and contributing to specific rhetorical communities and culture, creating a connection between self and culture
- **Development of agency to develop motivation and accountability**—establishes power to dictate the course of writing, create a personal connection to the writing focus and feel competent and engaged in successful writing experiences and cognitive growth
- **Strong development of identity**—offers a complex examination of the self within many cultural intersections and establishes growth in perspective and understanding through objective and subjective research
- **Promotion of metacognitive awareness**— develops an understanding of the natural progression of thought by reflecting on current knowledge, refining and exploring the validity of strongly held perspectives through research and reflection

- **A genre that supports a full and well-developed writing process**—combines personal narrative, analysis, and qualitative research, which forces a rhetorical awareness of the writer’s responsibility and connection to the writing process, a thorough examination of the ideas through consistent reflection, and an awareness of multiple audiences
- **Construction of new knowledge**—moves from defining current personal perspectives and ideas, to learning academic and cultural perspectives and ideas, and then creating new perspectives and ideas, as well as guide the direction of further inquiry through critical reflection
- **A method of disciplined inquiry**—offers multiple layers and directed methodology of research that practices collection of data, methods of interpreting data, as well as processes for concluding on the data
- **Value beyond school**—promotes learning relevant and connected to personal growth, which occurs beyond the value of academic success through self-realization, academic confidence and social awareness

I had to draw upon and learn from each of these objectives and expectations to complete this project. If this particular research (and writing) methodology/genre offers clear benefits to so many aspects of writing and cognitive growth, particularly the objectives identified as necessary in writing studies by experts in the field, then autoethnography might be especially useful for high school students, as well.

IV. AUTOETHNOGRAPHY AS A WRITING CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK IN SECONDARY EDUCATION

In chapter one, I identified the issues that students face in high school writing classroom and speculated about the efficacy of a critical personal curriculum. Chapter two reviewed the relevant bodies of literature that address writing thresholds and pedagogies that promote reflective writing processes, authentic learning and the specific purposes and goals unique to writing studies. Chapter three discussed the AE writing process as explained by established experts on autoethnography, as well as a personal account to reveal the benefits of the methodology like inherent reflective practices and metacognitive growth. In this chapter, I will discuss how autoethnography is a suitable framework that encourages the development of abilities writing experts have identified, as well as what high schools have identified as important. In addition, I will address specific issues in curriculum within the Texas education system, standards, and guidelines; special issues with adolescents within that system; and suggest how autoethnography as a framework can resolve some of those issues. Since the current curriculum in secondary education poses unique challenges in planning and implementing theoretically sound writing practices, especially when preparing students for effective writing practices in college or the workplace, it is important to examine how autoethnography poses a solution to these challenges.

The Landscape of Student Needs in Secondary Education

When creating a writing curriculum that addresses authenticity in learning and the thresholds of emerging writers, the audience is important to consider. Teenagers often enter the classroom having tackled challenges outside of school, such as the

responsibilities of part-time jobs, volunteer work, sports or clubs, or the varying relationships and environmental circumstances inside and outside the home. These students already have a taste of freedom to some degree in how they approach and manage different aspects of their lives, and giving them freedom to direct their learning in the classroom (with some guidance and encouragement) promotes intrinsic motivation to write. To approach writing as a series of skill sets that do not connect to those challenges that they face in the outside world is cheating them out of authentic learning. As educators, we must acknowledge and incorporate those challenges, responsibilities and relationships into the classroom curriculum and planning. Autoethnography forces the curriculum to be developed from a top-down approach, starting with posing bigger questions and working down into the skills (as dictated by educational standards), instead of the bottom-up approach that creates lessons intended to focus on writing skills and standards with hopes of attempting to achieve relevancy in the work. Dana Laur, who works with districts nationally to transform best educational practices for 21st-century learning, best sums up this perspective when she states, “it is our responsibility to create and co-develop with [students] a classroom ecosystem that is relevant to their lives, while enhancing their essential skills and solidifying their understanding of complex content” (4). She advocates relevancy—authentic learning that provides a vehicle in which to improve skills. Relevancy can be established with a top-down approach in the high school classroom by starting with inquiry into the personal and societal issues students encounter, and then only approaching the skills to advance the inquiry. High school students are prepared to tackle challenges in the writing classroom if we adopt this top-down approach to learning. In addition, many restrictive practices in secondary education

need to be addressed and resolved, including rigid requirements for marking periods, grading requirements, product-focused learning, truncated writing processes, and assessment-driven curriculum. I will show that to frame a course using autoethnography, which offers an extended writing project that can be broken down into stages for assessment but does not break an authentic writing process, will provide an authentic learning opportunity to meet the varied needs of emerging writers.

How Curriculum Frameworks Affect the Writing Process

In the current secondary classroom, the learning process is stunted by the linear writing progression promoted by process models such as the current-traditional one still used fifty years after Donald Murray called for change. The following model demonstrates the typical writing process currently used in most high school classrooms:

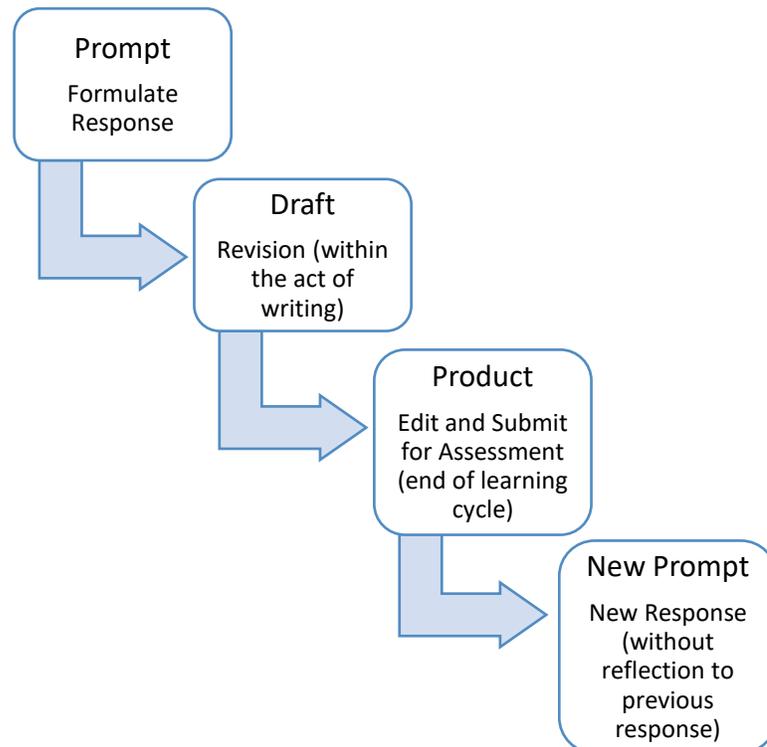


Figure 1. The Writing Process in Current-Traditional Curriculum

In this model, once a student submits a writing product, a grade is recorded for that grading period. A new product (and genre) is assigned and becomes the focus for the next grading period. Frequent grading periods dictate the time frame of each writing event, from invention to publication, and students see grades as the marker of the stop and start of the learning cycle. In a way, students are discouraged from reflecting on their own thinking, since once the grade is given, students move on to the next writing assignment, often unrelated to the previous one, without thinking on the implications and consequences of their thinking. In my teaching experience, I rarely had a student approach me to reflect on their written ideas after a paper was graded. The act of sincere reflection is often sidestepped for an explanation or justification for a given grade. The current-traditional approaches to writing are clearly unsuitable for developing an opportunity for post-process reflection, as students must move on to the next writing prompt without the chance to respond and further develop their ideas. Many teachers try to artificially insert reflective practices into the process, but these practices usually consist of charts that track the progress of writing markers such as grammar, conventions, and stylistic moves, or a brief personal response reflecting on what the student has learned during the process. Charting individual writer markers is not post-process reflection, and while the reflection essay is a start, the students are not re-engaging with the writing in any meaningful way after the reflection essay is written.

Using the idea that post-process reflection of a piece of writing needs to be followed by a re-engaging action that approaches the ideas, I created an example of how this reflective writing process and successive writings might look as a year-long writing project:

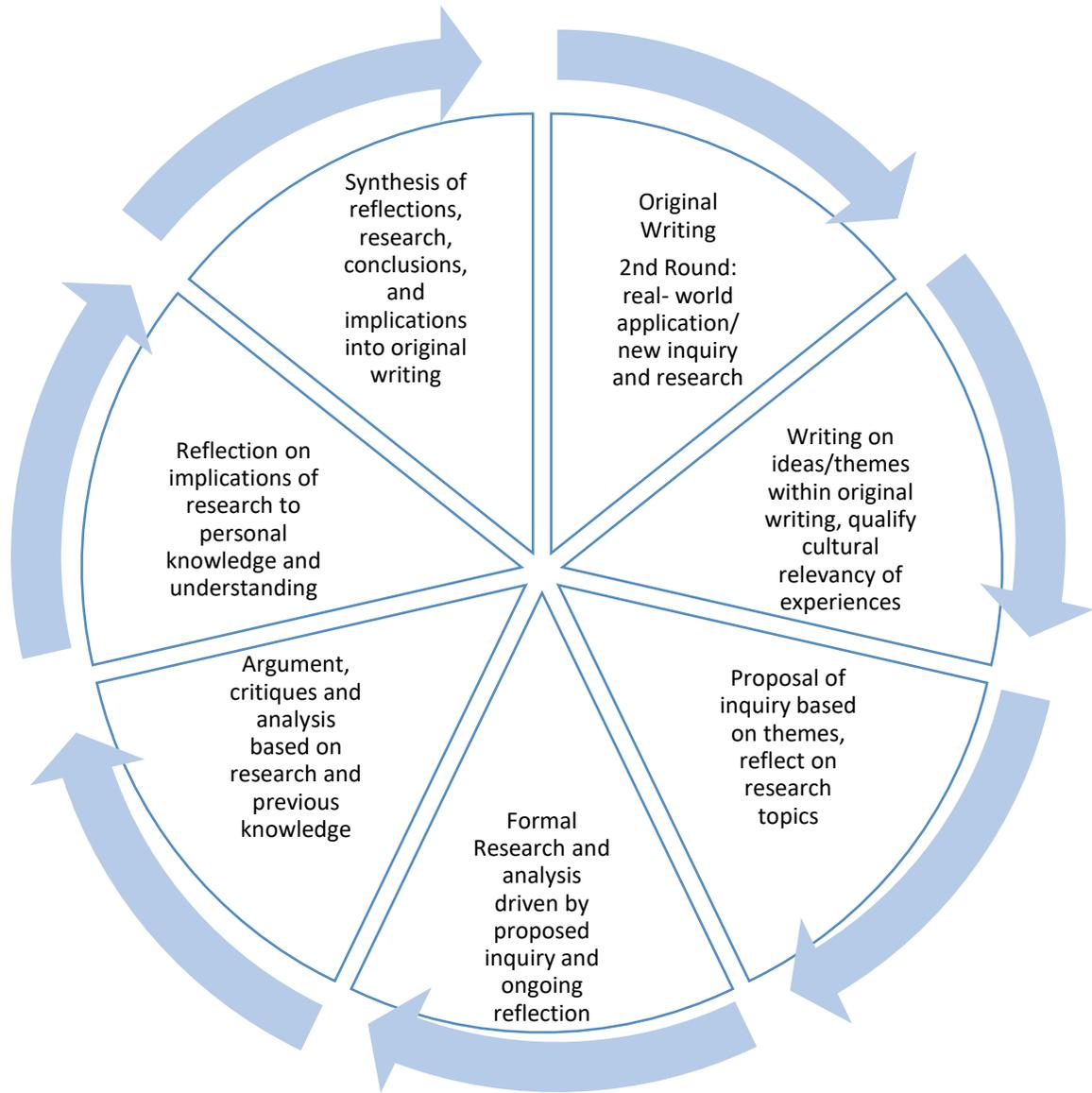


Figure 2. Example of a Reflective Writing Process Model (Using Autoethnography)

In this proposed model, each writing product becomes part of an ongoing writing process instead of being an arbitrary stopping point in the learning cycle. Reflection is built into the curriculum by allowing students to explore and question their own thinking through multiple approaches to topics and moving into new perspectives and understandings of those topics with each writing target. This process can potentially accommodate several genre-based products with specific moves if required and assessed

by state standards and curriculum guidelines. Metacognitively, this model allows the student the ability to reflect on one's own thinking processes, as well as synthesize complex concepts and evaluate the value of new discoveries against previous assumptions and ideas. This model also allows the writing process to remain unbroken as writers build on existing written products and venture into new directions of inquiry and research, offering students an authentic learning experience.

The Place for Autoethnography in Texas Public Schools

Autoethnography could be offered as an independent study course, but it is valuable to explore where else this course would logistically fit in secondary education. We should explore the possibilities of teaching autoethnography as a framework in the AP seminar and research courses, which are specifically designed for independent study. The College Board offers this project-based independent study program called AP Capstone™ to compete with the International Baccalaureate® (IB) program. Both programs are organized by independent contractors to public education and have similar serious drawbacks as an AE avenue. Focusing on AP Capstone™, this program requires students to take four additional AP® courses in various disciplines with the two Capstone courses: seminar and research. These two courses are not focused on any specific subject, like writing, but follows a pedagogical framework that appears to be similar to the autoethnographic methodology: 1) questioning and exploration, 2) understanding and analyzing, 3) evaluating based on multiple perspectives, 4) synthesizing ideas, and 5) transforming knowledge (“AP” 8). The AP® seminar and research courses do not require a link to other AP® courses, but rather acknowledge potential links to other courses, including AP® English Language and Composition, which falls within the

cultural, social, artistic and philosophical studies (AP 10). Unfortunately, the seminar and research courses are part of a larger program to count toward college credit, and these “independent study” Capstone courses require a level of academic commitment to other AP® courses that many high school students may not be willing to make if they have other commitments and responsibilities beyond the classroom. In addition, AP Capstone™ and similar programs do not specifically address student writers and the needed thresholds for college writing. While students can decide their academic focus in the seminar and research courses, an autoethnographic curriculum does not fit neatly within the AP program, but could be an option for students based on individual interests. Without a clear avenue for the autoethnographic methodology in AP Capstone™, I want to focus on autoethnography as a course within the state curriculum.

Offering autoethnography as a replacement to a credited core English course is limited, as the core class replaced cannot be STAAR assessed. The course would have to provide a clear argument that the curriculum would address state standards for that course in a formal review presented to the local district and TEA for approval. The only available core course that potentially meets these requirements is English IV, the standardized course taught the senior year, and some standards may present problems when connecting to the standards and goals of autoethnography.

The state standards present a potential roadblock for the implementation of autoethnography as an alternative to English IV, but to be fair, the updated state standards have more flexibility that could allow for an AE curriculum. Starting with the 2020-2021 school year, the legislators in Texas have changed the genre-based curriculum standards format and replaced it with a format that reflects the domains of communication and

metacognitive processes. They start with expressions of the domains (listening, speaking, reading, writing and thinking), and then specify strands (language skills, comprehension, response, multiple genres, author's purpose and craft, composition, inquiry and research) within those domains. They further define the specific standards under those strands. For instance, Chapter 110.36.EnglishIV, a specific standard, reads, "formulate sound arguments and present using elements of classical speeches such as introduction, first and second transitions, body, conclusion, the art of persuasion, rhetorical devices, employing eye contact, speaking rate such as pauses for effect, volume, enunciation, purposeful gestures, and conventions of language to communicate ideas effectively" ("19"). These detailed standards are written to include both spoken and written expressions of language, as well as specific skills and moves. It is possible that those standards can be assessed in a year-long writing project; however, the level of specificity of these standards expressed in these general domains and strands can become burdensome if a curricular framework must be detailed enough in its defense to meet those standards. In addition, lessons and units would become extremely prescriptive to ensure these standards are expressed in the classroom, which would diminish or outright eliminate student agency and student-directed study. The domains are clearly the roles we enact in communication, and writing is the most complicated form of communication, as it requires the prior understanding and mastery of the other three forms (listening, speaking and reading). If writing becomes the most difficult domain to master, then the goal of the curriculum should be set to the domain with the highest expectations, while the other domains are supporting aspects of the curriculum. A specifically *writing-focused* curriculum may be a difficult case to

support when presenting the AE course to state and district entities for approval, especially given the emphasis on domains in the newly written standards.

Finally, while the new standards offer a more flexible interpretation of how the standards can be approached, the complexity of expression of these skills still warrant a prescriptive curriculum and the same prescriptive writing standards as in the past, as curricula are forever bound to the bureaucracy and accountability practices in public education. If teaching autoethnography as a replacement for a standard core class (namely English I-IV), it will take a compromise between the curricular requirements and the classroom syllabus, but this is counter-intuitive to the purpose of the AE methodology, as the goal is to require the student to direct the course of learning through writing, research, and reflection. Autoethnography is a writing course, and to teach a course explicitly as autoethnography, teachers would need to start with the top-down approach and fold in the specific TEKS or standards, which would be difficult to organize without explicit freedom from district timelines and benchmarks. With these issues, would this course even be possible as a high school course?

The Texas Education Agency has developed a specific course of Independent Study in English (Chapter 110.46) that allows for a flexible curriculum with a few specific requirements, coincidentally easily aligned with the autoethnographic methodology (“19”). This independent study course in writing would count as an elective toward high school graduation in the Distinguished Achievement Program, but students would also need to take the four credited core English courses or similar equivalents in AP or dual credit. This independent study course in English requires that a student focus on a particular author or genre (AE is a genre as well as methodology), complete written

compositions enacting a full writing process on a regular basis, and present a research product at the end of the course (“19”). The course can be for a full year and must adhere to grading standards like other courses.

To address the issue of grading deadlines assigned by the district, it is important to understand that each six weeks (or nine weeks) should have assessed writing products; therefore, autoethnography needs specific writing tasks and associated products that both provide for grading deadlines and will continually build on the final assessment product—a completed autoethnography. The following proposed writing process model offers a timeline and methodology that is needed to promote the overall process of writing an autoethnography, as well as propose products that will meet assessment requirements for a year-long academic schedule (each six weeks is indicated):

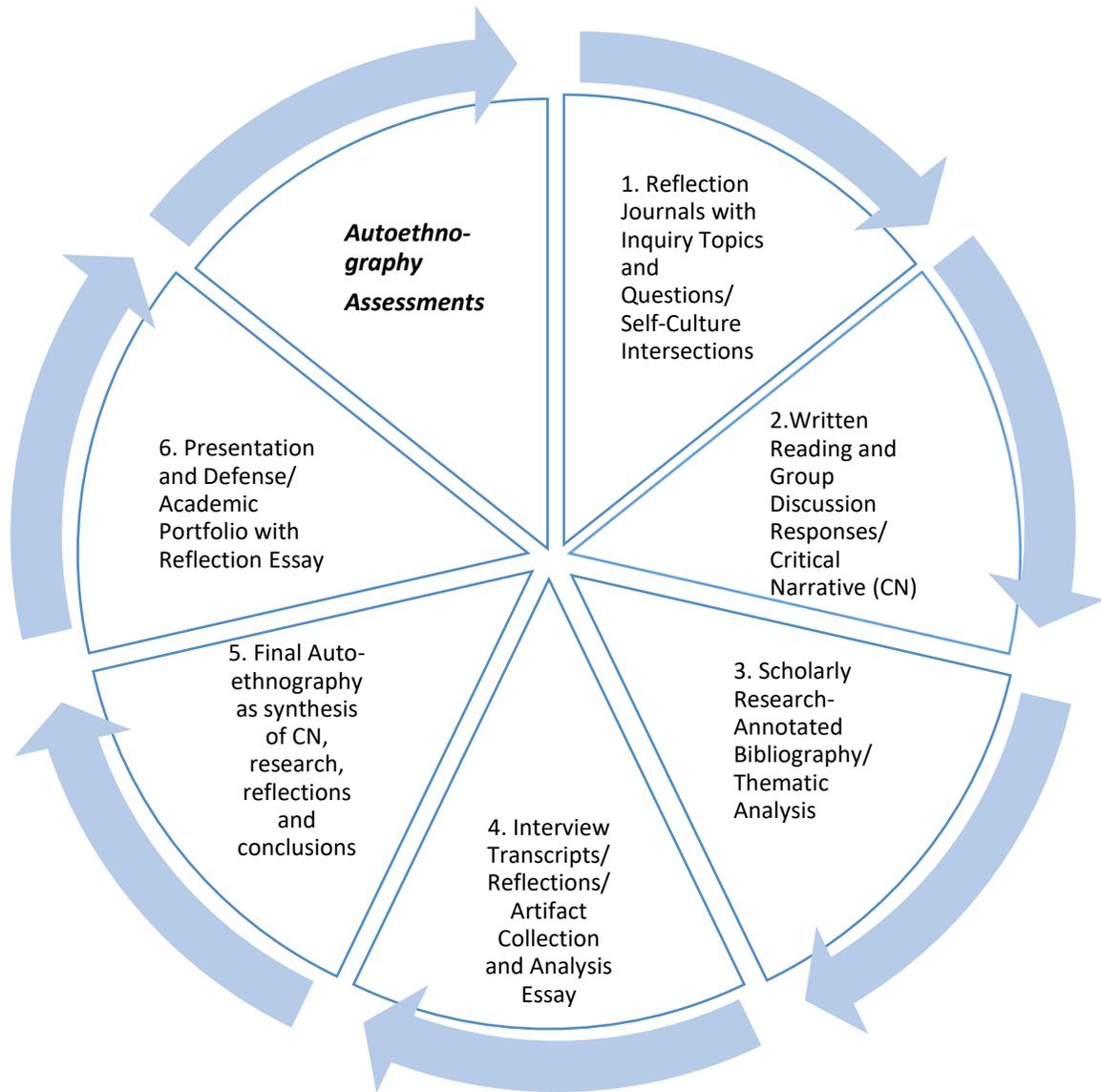


Figure 3. Proposed Autoethnographic Writing Process Model with Major Assessment Products

In this model, each major assessment is linked to the previous writing task, making each assignment another step within the writing process, with proper post-process reflections built into the curriculum. Not only do the varied writing tasks offer several opportunities to address specific moves and formats in writing, but the assignments allow for the exploration of multiple perspectives and formalities in writing. While the writing

tasks are prescriptive in the requirements, the students still have agency in the research direction and topic choice.

Autoethnography Topics for High School Students

Several important factors should be considered in guiding the student's choice of topic for autoethnography. At the secondary level, ethical considerations are of highest importance because secondary educators and administrators are bound to educational mandates concerning ethical and legal circumstances to protect individuals. This not only includes the confidentiality and protection of a minor, but also the confidentiality of others that may become the focus of research.

Privacy is a legitimate concern for parents and family members of a student, whose identities and circumstances may be transparent to a broader audience through the student's written text if shared inside or outside the academic environment. Even though secondary education does not require a formal review process (IRB) of "informed consent" of research subjects, a "code of confidentiality" must be handled seriously; therefore, all efforts and practices that protect the privacy of others should be addressed throughout the writing process (Chang 68). This may include some restrictions on personal research shared in groups, as well as published writings (such as the final AE, presentations or publication within the community). In addition to protecting privacy, considerations of abuse and teacher responsibilities of reporting abuse need to be addressed. If a student chooses an area of research that stems from personal experiences of abuse, several steps need to be addressed administratively and in terms of the classroom. Any disclosure or suspicion of abuse should be reported immediately to a school counselor, who must work closely with the authorities, parents and the teacher in

handling the matter. In these cases, other options in addressing autoethnographic research should be suggested to the student. For instance, a student can be guided to select a topic unrelated to the abuse. If a student insists on exploring sensitive matters, the topic must be under close supervision and have the approval of the teacher, administrators, counselors and parents.

Even though abuse is a special circumstance that has specific legal considerations that need to be addressed, approaching difficult subjects should not necessarily be discouraged among students. A sensitive and responsible approach to the discussion of difficult subjects (like bullying) requires a nurturing environment that provides an empathetic approach and guided practices between teachers and students. In an autoethnography about teaching autoethnography as an undergraduate course, Berry and Hodges recount their experiences with creating such an environment that continuously builds on the concepts of vulnerability, reflexivity, and empathy (63). Even though this autoethnography course was taught at the college level, important insights from those students who have been given the opportunity to examine those difficult subjects should be noted. One student's end-of-course evaluation of the autoethnography course speaks to the value of addressing difficult subjects within an empathetic environment:

This course was difficult, in a fulfilling way. It challenged me to create order out of chaos in my writing and face sensitive emotional experiences head on. Most importantly, the course gave me a safe place to practice reflective writing, which I have never done.

You have provided a nurturing and loving environment that allows for students to feel comfortable to tackle vulnerable topics. How you got a class of people who

were different ages, nationalities, cultural backgrounds, and belief systems to open up and share their vulnerabilities and insecurities is beyond me (Berry 59).

This positive response to the powerful effects of an established, nurturing environment for students to tackle sensitive topics should direct teachers not to limit those topics for students. For secondary teachers who want to create a warm and supportive relational climate for students who want to research difficult subjects, Berry and Hodges' autoethnographic essay provides several insightful and useful approaches to creating this type of classroom. One approach included the introduction of key concepts like vulnerability, reflexivity, empathy, and identity, engaging students to make personal links to each one (63-65). He also offered his personal experiences to relate to one of these concepts, identity, to show how he dealt with other's expectations of how his body should look, explaining how "people negotiate identities within diverse contexts" (67). In another classroom strategy, he assigned the students to read his autoethnographic article called "The American Dental Dream" that served as a model for AE, as well as to provide an opening to honest discussions about minor bodily insecurities. He shared his fixation with his imperfect teeth and the societal expectations of bodily perfection, which led to an empathetic class discussion and the opportunity for students to share their own experiences with bodily imperfections (63-73). Another strategy included private conferences with each student about proposed topics and the considerations and directions for research, asking them to talk "honestly and deeply about themselves," moving beyond the emotions for a more objective approach to research and writing (73-74). His anecdotes of those classroom experiences offer examples of how such discussions can be directed to create a thoughtful and empathetic classroom. Additional

guidance other than introducing key concepts, guided discussions, modeling, and conferencing is needed to address the social and emotional maturity of high school students. The classroom would need to be engineered as a safe rhetorical and emotional space for discussions, based especially on specific expectations of privacy and respect, with contracts and pledges from each student that acknowledge academic and disciplinary consequences written and agreed upon by the whole class. With certain classroom practices, empathetic, respectful classroom environments are possible to allow for honest approaches to personal and cultural issues.

In addition to providing the appropriate classroom environment, we need to consider how to develop appropriate autoethnography topics for high school students. Early in my own autoethnographic process, finding a topic to explore was straightforward, but many students do not know where to begin, even in writing about their own experiences. Several options for topics can be suggested for high school students who find it difficult to narrow the topic. Writing about writing, where students explore their own personal writing experiences and how they formed perspectives and habits in their writing can be a profound examination into why writing is difficult and how thresholds hold the keys to success. Another option is for students to examine their family histories and how the cultural influences of their ancestors affect their personal experiences today. Regardless of whether students create topics organically or need a little direction, they will still have opportunities to be their own agents of learning through the process.

Issues with AE as a Genre and Personal Narrative as Base for Academic Writing

Many critics to the personal narrative as an academic genre may not agree with the self-central focus of autoethnography, especially with the curricular focus on college-readiness. While the autoethnographic method starts with a personal narrative, students use self as a springboard to reflect on and analyze cultural and social connections, describe and explain related artifacts, critique sources and provide literary reviews, collect and respond to research and data, and finally synthesize all the information into an autoethnographic essay. AE is not a glorified personal narrative, but a complex multi-genre project.

Skeptics of AE have articulated two issues: (1) its genres (narrative, expository, research and argument) are not exactly reinventing the wheel so why change? and (2) the personal narrative, while interesting, is not academic writing. Donald M. Murray warns about teaching writing by isolated genre, the current practice in secondary education. He states that genre both clarifies and limits—creating a stereotypical form of writing that hinders the writer from experiencing the topic from a different perspective, and within a different genre (378). Chris Anson addresses this inflexibility within genre writing as *habituated practice*; he warns that “the misapplication of habituated practice,” usually in the form of the five-paragraph theme, “[will cause students... [to] fail to meet the expectations of their new rhetorical community”—namely the university (Adler-Kassner 77). In addition, composition scholars agree that reflection is critical for a writer’s development, not just through the process of writing a single piece, but systematically recalling writing experiences to reframe the current (new) writing situation (78). While each AE writing task is separated, they are not isolated genres, but instead building

blocks towards more developed writings that consider audience and situation based on new perspectives. Autoethnography successfully deters habituated writing and constantly forces the writer to self-reflect and respond to different rhetorical situations (whether personal reflection or research methodology or cultural analysis) based on the writing task.

Another argument against the value of the personal narrative in academic writing is that good academic writing must be objective, more specifically taking the *self* out of the writing. The disapproval of placing *self* in writing using first person, personal reflection, opinion or personal experience is often translated into punitive feedback and grades (*Do not use first person!*). This idea coincides with the academic practice of eliminating the writer's personality from scholarly writing, as Helen Sword argues in *Stylish Academic Writing* when discussing the forbidden first person in academic writing that has created awkward academic jargon for years (37). So, how do we express opinion without using "I"? She believes injecting the individual into writing is a personal choice, one that must be made to either show 1) honesty in writing by allowing the fallible writer into the text or 2) to deliberately conceal self to maintain the appearance of objectivity (Sword 41-42). If high school students are developing voice, honesty, identity and agency, and the writings are not necessarily accountable at the university level, then the practice of using first person should not necessarily be the focus of writing standards until the student has mastered those basic writing thresholds. There are plenty of opportunities at the post-secondary level and within the specific disciplines of study for the student to adapt to the principles of objective perspective if necessary. It truly is a matter of establishing thresholds of writing before conforming to disciplinary writing expectations.

Unfortunately, the practice of eliminating writer from the writing also tends to discredit the backbone of writing--identity. One threshold of writing accepted by composition experts is that writing is inherently linked to identity. We must understand that “writers come to develop and perform identities in relation to interests, beliefs and values of the communities they engage with, [and] understanding the possibilities of selfhood in that community” (Adler-Kassner 50). To superficially disengage the concept of self from writing is just not possible, even when hidden by stylistic practices.

Taking these concepts to the high school writing classroom, Bronwyn Clare Lamay in *Personal Narrative, Revised: Writing Love and Agency in the High School Classroom* positions that narrative writing can be valuable for adolescents because it is inherent to the identity work that marks this developmental period. Reflecting on one’s own experiences offers students insight into their identity by examining their beliefs and relationships with others. She also states that high school writing is the first real formal operational thinking that forces students to question and contemplate their own realities and truths (11). This is especially true when narrative is the basis of academic research and cultural connections. The personal narrative in autoethnography is interconnected to writing in other genres, validates the writer and promotes intrinsic motivation to improve one’s writing.

Critics to AE often indicate that the methodology is more like therapy for the writer than academic writing, but AE is not a purging of our burdens. According to an article in the *Forum: Qualitative Social Research* journal, autoethnography’s effects can lead to improved understanding of relationships, reduced prejudices, increased personal responsibility and agency, raised consciousness and promotion of cultural change, and

enhanced voice (Ellis et al. 280). Autoethnography allows writers to choose a level of personal involvement with appropriate boundaries that can still offer enlightenment into one's own life. In addition, I must note that the *self*-aspect of the research process requires a sensitivity to personal boundaries and emotional maturity from teachers and peers, especially with dealing with minors.

One last issue on personal narrative and the autoethnography methodology involves the community aspect of the process. If writings originate with personal experiences, and those experiences are shared within the classroom community through peer reviews and discussion in small groups, how does the teacher facilitate an environment free from judgement, harassment, or suppression of students and their ideas? This question goes to the very heart of the self/culture intersection that requires much preparation and discussion on how to participate respectfully and without prejudice within a rhetorical community such as the classroom. As stated in the study earlier in the chapter, several professors have created environments that promote an enriching environment where all members respect these practices and guidelines, which are integral to the writing process.

Autoethnography can be adapted to the varied product requirements set by the secondary curriculum and standards. Each of the varied writings throughout the academic course should offer perspectives for reflection, information to form one's thinking, and direction for the writing style of the final AE product at the end of the course. Even though genre, as discussed in Chapter Two, should not be the focus of writing studies, the flexibility of autoethnography can currently suit any genre requirements of secondary education, as the writing products can be tailored for assessment. The current changes to

Texas state standards allow the AE writing process to fit into the curricular goals and expectations set by those standards, as well as reflect the objectives of college writing, where the focus on genre-related products has changed to a focus on the writing process. Either way, autoethnography can address both process and product as students can guide their own process and choose their own products and final AE style, providing opportunity for real agency. As a student journals or participates in group discussions, the processing of old and new information can lead to discoveries and interests that inform the direction of the research. This type of process more accurately represents authentic learning and encourages more metacognitive awareness than is currently present in current-traditional writing practices discussed in Chapter Two.

Autoethnography can serve as a framework through a combination of current process theories, authentic learning, and curriculum focused on self and culture to develop identity, agency, and metacognitive and cultural awareness in adolescent writers. These profound benefits of autoethnography warrant serious consideration as a framework, as each of these benefits serve the student personally and academically and fulfills the real-world requirements of authentic learning.

V. CONCLUSION

When we write the words to our ideas down, we give them life. We solidify our thinking in a concrete form, and in that act, we can then question the origins and formulation of our thoughts, challenge the verity and influences that guide our perceptions, compare them to the perceptions of others within our smaller circles and within culture, and respond to those with new insights and passion. And while the act of writing itself is difficult as we must turn the intangible into the tangible, the accomplishment of creating something that we can share with others to be read and reread enables us to become part of that culture which influences us. We become part of the voice that enacts change within ourselves and society. These truths are evident in my personal experience with autoethnography. The ideas presented and the research conducted from experts in the field of writing studies and education, and conclusions that I have drawn from that research presented in this thesis, support that personal experience.

In the previous chapters, I learned about writing thresholds that affect the success of emerging writers. Agency is not just the power to control the direction of one's learning, it is necessary to develop confidence and skill in writing. Agency allows us to explore our ideas and reflect on our learning in a way that empowers and motivates us to continue our writing journey. In that journey, we see the accountability in how we communicate, not to just the audience but to ourselves. We become accountable to our own learning. Writing also affords us the ability to recognize our meaning of self, our identity, both within our minds and how others perceive us, and we gain this construct through our experiences in both our environment and with our interactions with others. The construct is ever-changing, even within the process of writing, through our social

interactions, through sharing our writing, which continues to shape and change our thinking, perceptions and beliefs. We internalize the roles within communication and recognize that writing is a social act from which we create new knowledge as we attempt to construct meaning that we can share with others.

For all of this to happen, we need the ability to not just write the words, we need a process to refine them—a process that affords us the ability to reflect on the ideas we create and the ability to meaningfully re-engage with those words. In order to re-engage, we must be able to acknowledge those who came before us, to explore through research the knowledge that exists, an understanding of that knowledge, and the intricacies of the language used to share that knowledge. This discipline inquiry is essential to placing us squarely within culture. Our learning is not just about the personal gains, but we contribute to the gains in our culture when we share our ideas in writing. We impact others, and this invaluable exchange offers so much more to the writer than just academic acknowledgement. We gain confidence, social awareness and self-realizations.

Autoethnography offers these benefits not just to emerging writers but all writers. There is a place for this methodology and genre beyond post-secondary education. Autoethnography can and should be offered to those emerging writers in the most formative stages before they enter the academy, and the feasibility is real right now in the form of independent study in English; however, the ability to reach all students within the standard high school English classroom can be realized through change in the standards and guidelines of public curriculum and through education of the autoethnography methodology and its benefits to curriculum designers and teachers. The benefits as outlined in this thesis offer an argument for autoethnography at the secondary level, but

publications geared toward the secondary education audience is needed to start that conversation. As the knowledge is shared, the educational culture is changed. That is the power of writing, and autoethnography is the start for that empowerment among our youngest scholars.

Beyond the public education environment, opportunities exist in charter schools and private institutions to create an autoethnographic curriculum framework that can be part of project-based learning across disciplines. Since the AE methodology originates in the social sciences, it offers a sympathetic avenue for cross-curricular projects with the social sciences, especially as it offers a disciplined avenue for collection data and interpreting the connections between students' lives and the cultures in which they live.

Autoethnography, as shown through my personal narratives, scholarly research and application to the secondary classroom, is an effectual solution to implementing sound writing practices and offers a profoundly significant opportunity for positive transformation of the writing classroom. The genre itself allows students to explore their identity and how their experiences intersect within a complex cultural landscape. The methodology encourages self-directed studies, internal motivation towards writing, academic thoroughness, sound research practices, a more productive and cohesive writing process, and an authentic learning experience. The addition of an autoethnography writing course in secondary education opens doors to struggling or emerging writers who need to cross specific writing thresholds to effectively transition to the university environment and its writing requirements. While autoethnography is a departure to the assessment-driven curriculum of public education, it meets the standards for the most current and accepted theories in the field of composition studies, as well as an arguable

endorsement from the social sciences. High school students are becoming more knowledgeable and mindful of their location and roles within the social circles they inhabit, and going through the process of writing an autoethnography empowers them to gain a more realistic and encompassing perspective of those social circles and how they want to respond to or negotiate their roles within those circles.

Autoethnography as a methodology and genre possess substantial theoretical and practical support from professionals within composition studies, but more importantly, deserves to be accepted as a powerful framework for writing studies in secondary education by teachers, administrators and legislators who control the direction of curriculum. This acceptance may be a difficult goal to accomplish in the bureaucratic institution of education, but the dedication of academics who know and understand the benefits of autoethnography and its implications for widespread change in writing curriculum can give our high school students a new avenue to write, to learn and to change the self and the world.

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