

REFLECTION'S ROLE IN TRANSFER: AN ANALYSIS OF THRESHOLD
CONCEPTS IN STUDENT REFLECTIONS

by

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I. INTRODUCTION

In Fall 2016, I joined the ongoing research study, “Using Threshold Concepts in the Major: Longitudinal Study of SEU Students’ Writing, Research, and Information Literacy Practices,” of Moriah McCracken and Brittney Johnson of St. Edward’s University to examine students’ reflective writing in relation to shared threshold concepts between first-year writing and information literacy. We presented preliminary findings at the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) in March 2017. Since this was an existing and ongoing project, I was able to step in and examine specifically—almost exclusively—reflection. While I was initially interested in only reflection, I got the opportunity to explore reflection in relation to threshold concepts in writing. McCracken and Johnson’s study focused on the threshold concepts shared between information literacy and writing studies, and, as stated above, I focused on how reflection provides a means of assessment for students’ understanding of these shared concepts. To do this, I examined two students’ written reflections and interviews (conducted by McCracken) that focus on their experiences with the threshold concepts in writing covered in their first-year writing course.

Johnson and McCracken’s longitudinal research study explores the co-teaching of shared threshold concepts between two disciplines: writing studies and information literacy. Through a series of writing assignments and integrated information literacy (IL) sessions, this course was explicitly teaching for transfer. The integration of the IL sessions across the semester meant that students were reading and preparing for the sessions as a part of their “writing” course; the coupling of these sessions with the writing curriculum arguably presented a controlled process of transfer in which the research study aimed to examine students relying on the complementary threshold concepts throughout their writing processes—a cross pollination of concepts and ideas.

Throughout my research process, however, I noticed students latched onto specific concepts that they expressed as being fundamental to their writing process, and they expressed their understanding of such concepts differently than other students. Students valued certain concepts over others in order to best serve their specific purposes within and beyond the writing classroom. Reflective assignments may be commonly assigned, yet, I believe reflection's full potential is seldom realized—not because instructors are ignorant in how to utilize reflections, but instead because reflection is complex, and students may not readily understand the benefit of taking such assignments seriously. When used as an essential part of an instructor's pedagogy, reflections can provide instructors with more than just something to assess. I understand reflection to work in three distinct ways:

- (1) by offering a key assessment measure that reveals where students are in their understanding of course content (almost a sort of glimpse at students' liminality);
- (2) by demonstrating students' implicit or internal processes of grappling, thinking, and conceptualizing; and
- (3) by providing students' explicit or articulated understanding of concepts.

I have chosen to use the threshold concepts as a sort of common ground and lens of inquiry because the student reflections are all centered around the learning they did in a particular course designed around specific concepts at the chosen research site. The specific threshold concepts provide a set of traceable concepts that are used in both the students' first-year writing course and library research sessions. In viewing student assignments through the concepts discussed and embedded in their required reflections, I can examine the ways that students are grappling with threshold concepts as they work to understand and apply those

concepts. Then, to take this a step further, I listened to year-out interviews in which students talk about their writing process in other courses to see if they continue to retain, employ, and transfer the same writing processes and concepts at the end of their second-semester writing course.

The purpose of this study is to examine the value of reflective writing in relation to students' knowledge-making processes. More specifically, this research investigates students' written reflections regarding their writing and research development/processes to inform how the process of reflection ultimately works (or doesn't) with the transfer of threshold concepts. I focus primarily on written reflections because they present the ways students think through the writing process. Reflection provides students the opportunity to walk themselves and their audience (typically instructors) through their thought processes—or at least their thinking at the time—which can reveal how well students understand certain concepts. Reflective assignments typically have students address specific rhetorical questions such as: Who is my audience? What is my purpose? This study aims to pinpoint a relationship between student reflections and their understanding of threshold concepts in writing.

Through reflection, students are attempting to make meaning of their education. While the concept of reflection has been around for hundreds of years, it has recently resurfaced surrounding the conversation of teaching for transfer (TFI) pedagogy within the field of composition. Though many instructors use reflective activities, reflection is difficult to examine since it is an internal process that is not easily articulated. What's more, reflections were not and are not typically centered around specific concepts. The central problem, then, is not whether reflection is an effective educational tool but whether it is presented and fostered in effective ways. Much of the scholarship on reflection and transfer

has focused on aspects of students' abilities to transfer rhetorical skills. While threshold concepts in writing are rhetorical at their core, they are presented differently than rhetorical elements because these concepts aim to provide a more tangible scaffolding for students coming into the academic community. While Kathleen Blake Yancey, Kara Taczak, and Liane Robertson examine the co-teaching of rhetorical elements and reflection, I want to look at the co-teaching of threshold concepts and reflection. We have seen through the work of these scholars and others that reflection can be an excellent tool to foster students' education when implemented effectively. Reflection can help both students and instructors see what concepts the student is struggling with and how or why those concepts might be troublesome. Reflection can be useless if it is not taken seriously or the reflective assignment is not asking students to critically engage with the content. Threshold concepts are concepts about writing that many scholars argue help shape students' understanding of writing. These concepts may be ones that students are already familiar with, even if they do not know them as such, making these concepts overlapping or harmonious with the more common rhetorical concepts traditionally taught in composition courses. By examining these concepts in student reflections and interviews, I hope to get a closer look at the relationship between reflection and threshold concepts. I view reflection and metacognition as a crucial aspect of education. I want to gain a deeper understanding of how students and instructors might best utilize reflection.

When starting this project, I was most interested in how we go about tracing specific knowledge within student reflections, as outlined above. Student reflections are often assessed without a specific method or approach for determining what student reflections show us or what we might do with such knowledge. Because of this observation, I began with these questions:

- (1) How do we go about examining student reflections for specific concepts, in this case threshold concepts?
- (2) What might a more critical approach to student reflections look like?
- (3) What is the significance of references to specific concepts in student reflections, and why might references to those concepts differ from student to student?
- (4) What are the research and pedagogical implications of a deeper understanding of the occurrences and significance of specific concepts in student reflections?

At the heart of this project is my curiosity about how we go about learning from student reflections. That is, how do we refine our understanding of what student reflections tell us and how do we approach student reflections in order to learn something new?

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In this chapter, I explore the relevant scholarship related to reflection, threshold concepts, and aspects of reiteration. I include the key players, so to speak, who are known as leading scholars in the specific areas, although leading figures in reiteration are more difficult to identify. While I have employed reiteration throughout my research, I have had to adapt the concept of reiteration somewhat to fit this project in the context of composition studies. My intention is to provide enough background for my readers so that they understand where I am coming from when I discuss these concepts and their meaning within rhetoric and composition. I will start by discussing each concept more broadly before getting more specific and focusing on some of the ways the concepts have been applied. Though my review of the literature is by no means exhaustive, it should provide readers enough information to serve as a foundation for my project.

Reflection

Reflection is an activity in which individuals attempt to articulate how they view certain phenomena or concepts and how this understanding takes shape. As Donald Schon puts it, “[t]hrough reflection, [students] can surface and criticize the tacit understandings that have grown up around the repetitive experiences of a specialized practice, and can make sense of the situations of uncertainty or uniqueness” (6). Schon’s work has informed much of the current direction scholars have taken the concept of reflection. For example, Yancey’s work with reflection stems from Schon, which can easily be seen in her definition of reflection and the distinctions she makes between various types of reflection. More specifically, Schon explicitly discusses reflection-in-action, which is one type of reflection Yancey discusses. In *Reflection in the Writing Classroom*, Yancey describes reflection overall “as a mode of *behavior* indicative of *growth of consciousness*” (Reflection 4). Yancey goes on to describe

three distinct types of reflection: reflection-in-action, constructive reflection, and reflection-in-presentation. Yancey defines these three types of reflection as:

- (1) *Reflection-in-action*, the process of reviewing and projecting and revising, which takes place within a composing event, and the associated texts;
- (2) *Constructive reflection*, the process of developing a cumulative, multi-selved, multi-voiced identity, which takes place between and among composing events, and the associated texts;
- (3) *Reflection-in-presentation*, the process of articulating the relationships between and among the multiple variables of writing and the writer in a specific context for a specific audience, and the associated texts. (13)

Understanding these forms of reflection is imperative as my study will attempt to account for reflection in multiple forms. Students are not necessarily taught to focus on one of these types, meaning that student reflections could shift among these three forms. Consequently, it is logical to start by looking for moments in which students articulate some growth of consciousness.

Though reflection seems like an inherent or natural process to human thought and understanding, it is imperative to consider Yancey's point about the separation of reflection and metacognition. As Yancey explains, scholars and researchers should view "the first, metacognition, as thinking about thinking associated with planning, self-monitoring, and self-regulation; the second, reflection, as oriented to self-assessment activity occurring at the end of a learning cycle, though capable of promoting a new one" (*Rhetoric* 6). So, metacognition is the more internal process involving a critical look at cognitive processes,

while reflection is the more articulated version of this process. In examining these definitions, metacognition seems to be the more natural process that may even be subconscious, whereas reflection is a process that can be fostered to understand the self or at least promote successful learning. For my purposes, I took this distinction between metacognition and reflection a step further to influence how I am considering reflection as an intentional process of assessment that influences or promotes action. This definition closely resembles Paulo Freire's *praxis*, which he defines, in short, as the combination of reflection and action. However, Kenneth Burke furthers Freire's notion by exploring the self as audience, which can be fostered through pedagogy and is overtly rhetorical. Burke explains that "[e]ducation must be thought of as a *technique of preparatory withdrawal*, the institutionalizing of an attitude that one should be able to *recover at crucial moments*, all along the subsequent way," which puts the "internal rhetoric" ahead of rhetoric in the sense that students should learn to think critically (or reflect) before they communicate (273). Or, simply put: think before you speak.

For reflection to make any difference, however, Freire argues that it must take the form of *praxis* as reflection and action. To paraphrase Freire, without action, reflection simply becomes verbalism; without reflection, action becomes activism (68). When applying this notion to modern understandings of reflection, it is easy to see how reflective assignments can fall short and accomplish almost nothing if students are not led to any sort of action. Students must walk the walk and talk the talk, so to speak. Yancey's position that reflection is "indicative of *growth of consciousness*" relies on this connection between reflection and action (*praxis*) in order to yield any success (*Reflection* 4). For Yancey, when reflection leads to some sort of action, it is truly effective reflection. When employing reflective practices in the classroom, the goal is to guide students toward learning or improving, which

is why Yancey's position relies on the connection between reflection and action. Yancey and Freire are but two examples of scholars who stress the importance of this relationship between reflection and action. They arrive at their conclusions from extremely different approaches, which suggests that there is at least some importance attributed to the relationship between reflection and action. All of this is to say that there are certain aspects surrounding reflection that many scholars can agree on. However, the larger problems and concerns exist within the pedagogical implications of reflection.

Reflection, particularly in writing courses, is not a new concept. In fact, reflection has been a key concept in rhetorical scholarship for the past 25 years. In current composition studies scholarship, the idea of reflection as rhetoric, or internalized rhetoric, is not part of the discussion. Instead, rhetorical reflection is the common topic. Rhetorical reflection refers to reflecting upon rhetorical elements, and essentially improving students' rhetorical proficiencies by building on past experiences with rhetorical situations, typically in relation to written communication, though oral reflection has been discussed. In viewing reflection this way, it simply becomes a tool used to hone the skills of rhetoricians. I argue, however, in light of the work done by certain theorists—such as Burke and Hume—that reflection is much more. Hume and Burke present reflection in such ways that provide evidence that reflection is, in fact, rhetorical in and of itself. Burke makes the strongest clearest of these arguments. While Hume touches on reflection and explains how there are legitimate and illegitimate forms of such, this is only a small section of some of his work, which focuses more on how human understanding is shaped, created, and/or argued—pointing more at metacognition since it is not an active process but a passive one. Burke focuses on the idea of self as audience and, more specifically, the rhetorical notes that exist within and around internal rhetoric and the importance of such practice. To Burke, the concept of reflection is

more of a rhetorical tool that can be used to help individuals understand the world and also to combat certain weaknesses or downfalls. Jessica Enoch suggests that Burke's "theory and practice adds a *rhetorical* nuance to critical reflection" (272). While Enoch discusses how Burke situates reflection as rhetorical, I want to discuss how this is another way of viewing reflection and what this means for how we currently view reflection.

Enoch argues that Burke emphasizes how reflection should be employed in rhetorical situations, specifically in "moments of aggressive argumentation" (273). Reflection, then, for Burke is coupled with rhetoric in that it can, or at least should, exist within or alongside all rhetoric. I do not disagree with Enoch, but I would argue that Burke emphasizes reflection in *all* rhetorical situations, not just those of "aggressive argumentation." Enoch focuses on Burke's pedagogy of "critical reflection" in relation to war, which was relevant to Burke because he wrote "Linguistic Approaches to the Problems of Education" during the time of the Cold War. But, within Burke's *A Rhetoric of Motives*, he does not emphasize the idea of combating moments of aggression with reflection. Instead he stresses the idea of self as audience:

A man can be his own audience, insofar as he, even in his secret thoughts, cultivates certain ideas or images for the effect he hopes they may have upon him; he is here what Mead would call "an 'I' addressing its 'me'"; and in this respect he is being rhetorical quite as though he were using pleasant imagery to influence an outside audience rather than the one within (Burke 1335).

Here, Burke suggests that even in our "secret thoughts" we innately use rhetoric in that we convince ourselves in the same way(s) that we convince an outside audience. This notion is

why I find that Burke's view of self as audience (or critical reflection) extends beyond the moments of aggression that Enoch focuses on. When using reflection, we use language to convince ourselves why certain decisions are the better choice for ourselves; also, when convincing others, we must convince ourselves of what rhetoric will be most effective. This suggests that reflection exists within all rhetoric, and that rhetoric exists within all reflection. More specifically, while engaging in rhetoric, we internalize any message being delivered to, or by, us. Inversely, we also use rhetoric while internalizing said message to determine its validity. While this may seem more like metacognition than reflection, I posit Burke's idea that we internally cling to "certain ideas or images for the effect [we hope] they may have upon [us]" (Burke 1335). This thought process, no matter how subconscious we may think, is actually conscious in that we could, through fostered reflection, understand our own thought processes and maybe even challenge our own beliefs and values should we see fit.

Looking at Burke's idea of the self as audience, it seems obvious why reflection is, in current pedagogy, a concept utilized to help students learn. Though gaining knowledge is highly admirable to most, the idea of pursuing education must be an internal decision, despite all of its possible outside influences. To be clear, Burke explores the idea that decision-making is a process of internal rhetoric. Not in the sense that we sit and fight with ourselves over every decision—though I have definitely done that—instead, we must be convinced before taking action. Regardless how small or large our action is, we promote a thought process in which we believe that our decision is most fitting. For example, and to validate my tying of reflection to education, if we see a reason or payoff, for learning, there is more incentive to take education seriously (I am of course not referring merely to monetary payoffs). Despite societally imposed beliefs and values about education, we all have a somewhat selfish aspect to us in that we will only truly be convinced if our own beliefs and

values appreciate education's potential. Also, for these reasons, current composition studies—mostly in relation to first-year writing—emphasize the importance behind the concept of transfer because it attempts to persuade students that such writing skills are important to their education overall. Though this is only one example, and one about education, I have found that persuading myself can sometimes be a difficult task.

Yet, pedagogically speaking, other complications arise when employing reflection within the classroom. For example, Taczak situates reflection as “a mode of inquiry: a deliberate way of systematically recalling writing experiences to reframe the current writing situation” (78). Taczak lays out five common issues that may complicate reflection:

- (1) writers believe reflection needs to happen after the fact rather than seeing it as a critical, rhetorical act within process;
- (2) writers assume reflection happens naturally and without prompting;
- (3) writers think reflection *only* means considering how they *feel* about their writing;
- (4) some writers may never have been asked to reflect on their writing and thus may simply not think of doing so;
- (5) some writers may not be developmentally ready to reflect. (79)

Taczak also supports the idea that reflection is a crucial element for successful transfer and understanding of threshold concepts because it can be used as a tool for writers to understand the rhetorical situation; even if they do not know what they need to know, they know what to look for. This idea closely resembles Yancey's concepts of “*growth of consciousness*,” which means that reflection is collectively viewed as a precious tool to promote education. Freire recognized years ago that “reflection—true reflection—leads to action”

(48). If reflection is agreed to be a valuable tool in education among scholars, how can we see it making a difference in students' writing performance?

Threshold Concepts

Since my study examines student reflections written in the context of a course using threshold concepts (TCs) of writing, Linda Adler-Kassner and Elizabeth Wardle's collection, *Naming What We Know: Threshold Concepts of Writing Studies*, provides much of the framework for my study.

Adler-Kassner and Wardle organize their project into two parts: "(1) identifying threshold concepts, in this case thirty-seven of them, providing a core for the field in terms of what we know; and (2) outlining how they can be helpful in various writing-focused and writing-related contexts" (Yancey, "Coming To Terms" xviii). *Naming What We Know* aims to define what we know and, therefore, teach in composition studies. It is a collection of "shared beliefs" about the field of composition put together to present not only how writing is an object of study but also the key concepts of writing that make it so complicated to teach and to learn. This isn't to say that these threshold concepts are set in stone. The aim of Adler-Kassner and Wardle's project, instead, is to continue the discussion of how composition scholars view writing and to help codify core tenets in the field.

Naming What We Know introduces threshold concepts as a method of reframing how students, teachers, and scholars communicate about writing studies. Jan Meyer and Ray Land define a threshold concept as "a portal, opening up a new and previously inaccessible way of thinking about something. It represents a transformed way of understanding, or interpreting, or viewing something without which the learner cannot progress" (3). Adler-Kassner and Wardle's edited collection outlines thirty-seven threshold concepts in writing studies that,

using Meyer and Land’s language, *transform* student and teacher understanding of how writing functions in irrevocable and *previously inaccessible* ways.

Because threshold concepts in this collection are defined by scholar-practitioners in composition studies, students are taught to view writing as a field of study as well. The point, then, is to teach students how to approach various writing situations—hence the rhetorical aspects of threshold concepts—an approach which suggests that writing courses can prepare students to write across multiple contexts. When students begin to grapple with threshold concepts, they begin to view writing as a rhetorical activity in which all writing has specific purposes that vary from situation to situation. The idea that students learn how to approach varied writing situations suggests that an understanding of threshold concepts in writing fosters the transferability of writing skills across contexts. For example, Kevin Roozen suggests that viewing writing as rhetorical highlights the importance of understanding “the needs of an audience, what the audience knows and does not know, why the audience members might need certain kinds of information, what the audience finds persuasive (or not), and so on” (18). When first-year writing courses focus on threshold concepts, students may be asked to examine their writing process—the why, how, and what they are trying to accomplish with a particular artifact.

Since *Naming What We Know* is still a relatively young project, it is not yet known how these thirty-seven threshold concepts are best transferred. The purpose of integrating them into a first-year writing course, however, is based upon the expectation that TCs may provide students with knowledge that helps them in any and all writing contexts. More specifically, it is thought that “teaching students about concepts of writing will help foster transfer” (Robertson et al.). Thus, *Naming What We Know* provides a collection of what

concepts are seen as crucial by scholars in composition studies, especially for helping foster transfer.

Doug Downs and Liane Robertson challenge the definition of first-year composition (FYC) using TCs. The idea behind employing TCs within a FYC course is to shape student perceptions of and about writing so that they begin “learning to study writing and using writing as a means for facilitating that study” (Downs and Robertson 113). Downs and Robertson discuss TCs in relation to FYC in their chapter found in *Naming What We Know*. In “Threshold Concepts in First-Year Composition,” Downs and Robertson explain two main goals of FYC, or at least what they argue should be the two main goals:

- (1) for students to examine and ideally reconsider prior knowledge about writing in light of new experiences and knowledge offered by their FYC course(s), and
- (2) for the course itself to serve as a general education course, teaching transferable knowledge of and about writing so that what is taught and learned can be adapted to new contexts of writing. This mission is incredibly challenging given the nature of writing as a radically contextual and situated activity, one that varies dramatically from instance to instance and site to site. (105)

In order to accomplish these goals, Downs and Robertson organize what they find as the most relevant TCs within four categories. These categories include, “human interaction (rhetoric); textuality; epistemology (ways of knowing and the nature of knowledge); and writing process” (107). Within each of these categories, Downs and Robertson include and unpack specific TCs. They explain how many, if not all, of the TCs are inextricably connected in one way or another, meaning that some sort of coherent approach must be

used to couple these concepts within any context. This idea resembles how a key-terms approach, like that used in TFT pedagogies, presents concepts such as genre and audience that are relatable in many ways, but instructors choose how to situate and relate these and any concepts within the context of the course.

Reiteration

When learning new concepts, we do not typically think of the relationship between the knowledge and our understanding of the language being used to portray said knowledge. Within the context of higher education, the relationship between language and knowledge is much more apparent since students are entering a scholarly community that requires specific uses of language. David Bartholomae suggests that “students have to appropriate (or be appropriated by) a specialized discourse” in order to “invent the university by assembling and mimicking its language” (4, 5). In other words, students must learn the language of academia in order to participate within the conversations surrounding the knowledge of any given discipline. Through students’ written assignments, I have noticed something all *language* learners have in common: the reiteration (repetition or parroting) of concepts, thoughts, structures, words, etc. seems crucial in grappling and establishing the language skills necessary to gain and share knowledge. Because of this observation, I use the terms reiteration, repetition, and parroting; therefore, I provide definitions of all three terms below, and, though these terms might be strongly related, I find each more appropriate for particular contexts. While these terms are inextricably related, I delineate the terms’ differences within the context of writing studies as such:

parroting is most appropriate when students are mirroring back the exact language used within the classroom;

repetition is the recurring, maybe slightly adapted, use of language to express thought and knowledge—which can be found within both parroting and reiteration; **reiteration** suggests a more tacit understanding of the given knowledge or concepts through a more nuanced, personalized language.

To illustrate the relationship between these terms, I have designed a visual model to represent how I situate these terms, which I include below within my analysis section.

I want to point out that I view everyone as a language learner regardless of native background since language use depends on context and must constantly be adapted. I especially want to clarify this point because of reiteration's place within the fields of linguistics and language studies. I view language as mediating thought and knowledge; learning, therefore, is affected by an individual's understanding of the language used to articulate knowledge. While this may seem cyclical, or elementary, I simply want to highlight the strong relationship between knowledge and language because this relationship has been foundational for considering reiteration. To draw upon examples outside of writing studies I have looked to art and music. Both of these areas provide clear illustrations of how repetition (or reiteration) is commonplace when learning and honing skills. What's more, while art and music arguably require a certain level of proficiency in the "language" used to explain and share the concepts found in both crafts, I only use these as examples to show how repetition is foundational and explicit within many practices, pedagogies, and learning approaches. I have found reiterative elements within student writing, but, for whatever reason, writing studies has not focused much on the idea of reiteration or repetition as useful for the teaching of writing. Writers, and teachers of writing, will most likely agree that the more you write, the better you will get.

Why is repetition or reiteration a more common tool within other fields? What makes writing so unique that parroting, repetition, and reiteration are viewed as overly simplistic? This is not to say that students of writing should be taught only prescriptive, generalizable skills, but they should be given the time to wrestle with terms, concepts, styles, and genres so that they can fail, try again, and ultimately hone their skills. Musical performance, for example, is a skill that requires incredible patience in order to view seemingly mindless repetition as beneficial. Musicians must constantly look at parroting, repetition, and reiteration as their friend. Any art form requires some sort of repetition before an artist goes on to create something new and unique; arguably, there are still elements of repetition when an artist creates something new. Performance scholar Eirini Kartsaki references Gilles Deleuze to highlight an interesting distinction of repetition:

Deleuze identifies two different types of repetition: the first type is a mechanical, 'naked' or 'bare' repetition, or a repetition of the same, which simply reproduces its original. The second type includes difference; it is a dynamic repetition, evolving through time. (4)

Deleuze's two forms of repetition suggest the existence of a useful element within both forms. Yet, why not call these distinct forms of repetition something different? Maybe, parroting, repetition, and reiteration could work; this would suggest more of a process of reiteration. The idea that certain fields (such as art and music as mentioned above) utilize concepts of repetition is an observable phenomenon that has proven to work. This is not to say that students (or writers) should simply sit down and repeatedly practice writing in the same way that a pianist would sit down and repetitively practice piano. Instead, I situate the

idea of repetition in a more conceptual sense. Sure, when honing a skill, mindless repetition can be useful, but this is a separate idea. The physical aspects of learning to play the piano or painting with watercolors might benefit if an artist is to repeat a melody over and over, or paint the same scene in watercolors 100 times, but what is more important is the conceptual repetition of the theory behind such knowledge.

I define conceptual repetition as a more mindful repetition and employment of learned concepts in order to solidify and instill such knowledge so that it becomes ingrained, unconscious—somewhat of a threshold concept. Learning to play or paint in a certain style is the bigger picture, and, ultimately, the goal of such conceptual repetition. Nancy Sommers discusses a similar idea surrounding student revision. She states that “students are aware of lexical repetition, but not conceptual repetition,” and students actually suffer from not being able to see the bigger picture (382). If repetition (or reiteration) is viewed as a process that is beneficial on many levels, language learners can begin to recognize this process and use it to their advantage on various levels. Such recognition would also be helpful for teachers.

Within the field of linguistics, reiteration is a more common term because of its relationship to lexical cohesion and coherence. This idea basically refers to how language learners construct their sentences in a *new* language and express thoughts, ideas, or concepts that they are learning about. Reiteration is defined by Olga Dontcheva-Navratilova “as a cohesive link achieved by repetition of the same lexical item and by the use of synonyms, paraphrases, opposites and lexical items with a more general and a more specific meaning” (qtd. in Hublova 73). While this definition is much more complex than my delineation above, linguists suggest a relationship between reiteration and repetition in a similar way. Gabriela Hublova discusses Sanna-Kaisa Tanskanen’s categories of reiteration, and, instead of separating reiteration from repetition, she explains that repetition is actually a category of

reiteration—a lower or inferior type of reiteration even. The table below presents

Tanskanen’s categories:

Reiteration category	Description
1 simple repetition (SR)	item is repeated either in an identical form or with no other than a simple grammatical change (e.g. singular – plural, present tense – past tense)
2 complex repetition (CR)	item is repeated in an identical form but serves a different grammatical function, or an item is repeated in a non-identical form but shares a lexical morpheme
3 substitution (SU)	use of substitution items, such as pronouns, one, do and so
4 equivalence (E)	item is repeated in a form of synonym, paraphrase or word which has the same meaning but comes from a different word class
5 generalisation (G)	relation between an item and a more general item
6 specification (SP)	relation between an item and a more specific item
7 co-specification (C-SP)	relation between two items which have a common general item
8 contrast (CT)	relation between an item and another item which has an opposite meaning

Figure 1: Tanskanen’s Model (2006) qtd. in Hublova 77

While my definitions of the terms parroting, repetition, and reiteration are more simplistic, I have based them off Tanskanen’s model above. I have only three terms because I am discussing these terms in the context of writing studies; I leave the complexities of studying language to the linguists. However, my definitions can be seen within the model above.

I have situated parroting as students mirroring back the exact language used within the classroom, which is drawn from category 1 above: “simple repetition.” Next, my definition of repetition is the recurring, maybe slightly adapted, use of language to express

thought and knowledge, which closely relates to category 2: “complex repetition.” Finally, reiteration is defined as a more tacit understanding of the given knowledge or concepts through a more nuanced, personalized language, which I argue includes elements included in categories 3-8. This is the most complex of my definitions. Though Tanskanen focuses on linguistic features, separating reiteration seems a useful tool when examining student progress in learning a new language. This notion could be applied to many different fields, such as composition studies, so that all learners can start with “simple repetition” or parroting in order to move toward a deeper understanding. Hublova goes on to say that the “decline in the use of simple repetition may be indicative of students’ increased awareness of the other types of reiteration” (86). This suggests that by actually using parroting or repetition as a starting place, students can begin to see how to grow from there because they will more explicitly understand what they are doing wrong. Again, even though this is within the context of language studies and linguistics, there seem to be many lessons about reiteration which could prove useful in various disciplines.

Writing instructors only have one way of determining whether or not students are gaining knowledge through their course, and that is in the students’ use of written and oral language. Students must begin by grappling with the knowledge they gain in courses, so it makes sense that students parrot the language used within the classroom. Yet, why is this sometimes recognized as a problem? If students never go beyond “simple repetition” there may be an issue, however, parroting or “simple repetition” seems like a good place for students to start when being introduced to new concepts. We all do it; there’s really no denying that. Thus, parroting and repetition should be embraced as moments that educators can start a conversation with students. Learning is a process, and it is imperative to consider that it takes time for students to articulate knowledge. Building on my definition of

reiteration, I find it useful to include that reiteration is a sort of necessary, cognitive process that includes parroting, repetition, and all of the terms included above in Tanskanen's model. More specifically, while examining student reflections, the student's language use surrounding the course content is what led me to the concept of reiteration. I noticed the students started out by *parroting* these concepts in almost the exact same language their instructor presented them. Then, their language use became more complex and nuanced as seen in Tanskanen's model above.

Using the literature and concepts discussed above, I developed a way to analyze the data I have collected over the past year. While I rely much on specific scholars such as Yancey, Wardle, and Tanskanen, I have combined certain theories to come up with my own model for analyzing the data since I have not found scholarship that explains how to analyze student reflections in such a way. My intention is to provide the relevant scholarship that influenced my direction for this scholarship. The work referenced above is that of the scholars who most influenced my thinking.

III. METHODOLOGY

Reflective Writing

As stated above, student written reflections will be the primary form of data for this study since they are student-driven artifacts. Even though I will be interpreting the reflections and conducting textual analysis, I am less likely to miss crucial aspects due to poor transcription or distraction as could be the case with interviews and observations. Another reason that these textual analyses are my main focus is the fact that student reflections are one of the only ways for writing instructors to know what students did and why. Because I am participating in a longitudinal study, student reflections are one of two ways I “see” what students were thinking during their course two years ago. The other is through interview transcripts. I am analyzing several pieces of reflective writing produced over the course of the semester. These reflective assignments were written in conjunction with their major writing projects throughout the semester.

I started my analysis by doing a holistic reading of three reflective assignments completed by every student in McCracken’s 1301 course. However, I ended up focusing on two students in particular because they participated throughout McCracken and Johnson’s longitudinal study. These two students completed eight reflective assignments over the year in their 1301 and 1302 courses. Once I narrowed down and focused my data, I read through all the two students’ assignments completed in both courses. After these initial readings, I began to organize the reflective assignments by student, starting with their earliest reflection and ending with their last, going through them in the order they completed them. Once the data was a bit more organized, and I had basic understanding of the course, I went through each student’s reflections identifying and coding for patterns in their language use and “parroting” of classroom terminology. I looked specifically for references to their writing

and threshold concepts (e.g., struggles, strengths, observations, etc.). I contextualized student reflections with their writing assignments simply to get an idea of what they are writing about in the course.

However, as I began to code and search for such elements, my expectations and coding shifted and evolved. I expected to find evidence that demonstrates the students' liminal understanding of threshold concepts and transfer overall. Though I believe student reflections to be the most revealing form of data, analysis of the reflections somewhat relies on my understanding of their assignments to provide me with the sort of language that is used in the classroom, how the instructor articulates such language, what level of student participation occurs in class, and how well I interpret the students' language.

Interviews

I also met with McCracken at St. Edward's University to discuss concepts such as pedagogy, assignments, reflection, transfer, and threshold concepts. These discussions allowed me to ask McCracken open-ended questions about certain findings, course design, course content, and course assignments, which helped clear up confusion. With an already large amount of data (course reflections and assignments), I was fortunate to have the opportunity to discuss the course with McCracken. I understood that this was part of a large project and kept in mind that no matter how organized or structured my individual component was, I had to remember not to have high expectations for things to go according to plan. In other words, I did as Anne Dyson and Celia Genishi suggest, and just "hang loose" (45). I saw no point in trying to control the research process too much because I wanted to avoid influencing my interpretation of the data. The meetings with McCracken helped me get an idea of how the individuals involved at this institution were approaching

the course content. In these meetings, we listened to and read along with the student interviews that she conducted

After coding the students' written reflections, I met with McCracken again to discuss the course in general and some of the ideas that I gathered from reading her students' work. To start, we discussed how she designed the course and what she expected out of the student reflections. I had to gain a pretty deep understanding of how McCracken designed her FYW course.

The student interviews conducted by McCracken were done the semester following the completion of their 1302 FYW course, which was useful for seeing which threshold concepts the students held on to after the course. The concepts they held on to were those that appeared to most readily transfer to their writing in other courses across various disciplines. The audio recordings of the interviews were done with the permission of the participants, and McCracken asked open-ended questions. While listening to these interviews, I took notes to record moments where I noticed students mentioning threshold concepts, similarly to how I read and coded the reflections. So that I could return to these specific moments, the most important thing was for me to record the time in which the interviewee made a specific comment so that I did not spend too much time transcribing. Mostly, I considered how the participants talked about reflection and concepts of writing overall because I wanted to know what students discuss in relation to threshold concepts, particularly those taught in the course. Most importantly, and to put it simply, these interviews provided me with valuable information about students' relationship with writing and concepts surrounding writing *after* their first-year writing course, as articulated by the students. I expected students to talk about how they have employed threshold concepts beyond the writing classroom. I looked at *how* students reflect (in speech) on threshold

concepts of writing. Because McCracken's questions were open-ended, I did not expect students to focus their answers on threshold concepts in relation to their other courses, but I was curious to see if threshold concepts did come up in the interviews and how the students articulate the ways they use—or don't use—the threshold concepts they learned about in their first-year writing course.

Throughout this research project, I worked collaboratively with McCracken at St. Edward's. This collaboration consisted mostly of discussion between McCracken and me regarding the course content, her pedagogical approach when designing the course, the student's work, and the interviews McCracken conducted with each of these students. Because I was not present during class sessions or interviews, I approached this data through the lens of textual analysis. All I had was course documents and recorded interviews, which I essentially view as documents or texts. I never got to meet these students. I simply had the students' course assignments and got to listen to the interviews with McCracken in her office. Though my exposure to the course content was limited to writing assignments and recorded interviews, I was fortunate in the fact that I could talk with McCracken about the data. Also, I asked questions about the course that only an outsider might ask, as opposed to someone like McCracken who played an active role as the instructor of these courses.

For my analysis I focused mostly on the written reflections that the students wrote surrounding their larger writing assignments. As I discuss above, I did not begin coding for specific concepts. Instead, I looked for aspects that I found interesting within these reflections. After my initial reading, I called upon what I knew of processes involved in textual (or document) analysis. My qualitative research follows an emergent design. John Creswell explains that an emergent design means “that the initial plan for research cannot be tightly prescribed, and some or all phases of the process may change or shift” (186). Though

I conduct what may be considered a textual analysis, in that I read the student texts and listened to the interviews with attention to the appearance of use of key concepts, I consider most of my project to follow the emergent design because I had to constantly shift gears in order to make sense of the data by coming up with a model that borrows from linguistics and composition studies. Because qualitative data is viewed as more subjective than quantitative data, I made sure to triangulate my data sources in order to “build a coherent justification for themes,” and I checked with McCracken to see if my emergent themes made sense to her, the instructor and interviewer (Creswell 201). Mostly, I wanted to make sure that what I was seeing in the data made sense to someone else, and I wanted to test the validity of my findings as well.

In current scholarship surrounding reflection, Yancey takes a similar approach when analyzing student work. She explains sample student reflections in her work in ways that do not take liberties with the data, but, instead, make observations about the data that can be readily observed by her readers. For example, in *A Rhetoric of Reflection*, Yancey provides an excerpt from a student’s reflection, and she unpacks this reflection by saying that “Ralph brings together attending to and doing through writing reflectively, which allows him to articulate what he now knows. He relies on both the specific and the general, toggling between them” (306). Though Yancey is not saying anything definitive about this student’s reflection, she is describing what can be observed. In other words, she is not explaining something that is not there; Yancey walks her readers through this reflection so that she can discuss what such reflective practice could mean. The student reflection, therefore, serves more as a space that Yancey can reference to provide readers a context when trying to understand the theories she is explaining surrounding reflection. I take a similar approach when unpacking my data so that the course concepts in student reflections can easily be

seen. And, more specifically, when I explain theories such as the reiterative model, I use student reflections as examples to show readers exactly what I am discussing.

Research Site

I have chosen to collect my data from St. Edward's University, which is a small liberal arts university in Austin, Texas. The first-year writing program at St. Edward's emphasizes rhetoric and critical thinking, and the FYW program aims to prepare students for diverse writing situations they will face in both academic and professional settings. I collected data from two first-year writing courses taught by McCracken in Fall 2015 and Spring 2016 (WRIT 1301 and WRIT 1302) that were centered around threshold concepts from *Naming What We Know* and were linked to, or accompanied by, information literacy sessions led by Johnson, the Head of Library Instruction. McCracken and Johnson have been developing the relationship between writing courses and information literacy with hopes to strengthen students' research-based writing skills across their undergraduate education. This partnership aims to elucidate the similarities between the language used by scholars involved with the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) and writing studies. In order to accomplish this, McCracken and Johnson compiled what they believe to be the most relevant threshold concepts shared between their two disciplines, borrowing the language used by the ACRL, which articulated their threshold concepts before the publication of *Naming What We Know*. Students enrolled in McCracken's course focused on two complimentary threshold concepts shared between writing studies and information literacy: Authority as Constructed and Contextual as well as Scholarship as Conversation. The fact that this course focuses on specific threshold concepts creates a narrower range of concepts that might surface in student reflections. For these reasons,

reflection is something that the FYW program at St. Edward’s uses in order to teach students to assess their own work, which makes it an excellent research site for studying reflection. Johnson and McCracken constructed the model below to show how they co-teach the shared threshold concepts within the writing courses:

Using a **Driver** to Teach ACRL + Writing Studies TCs

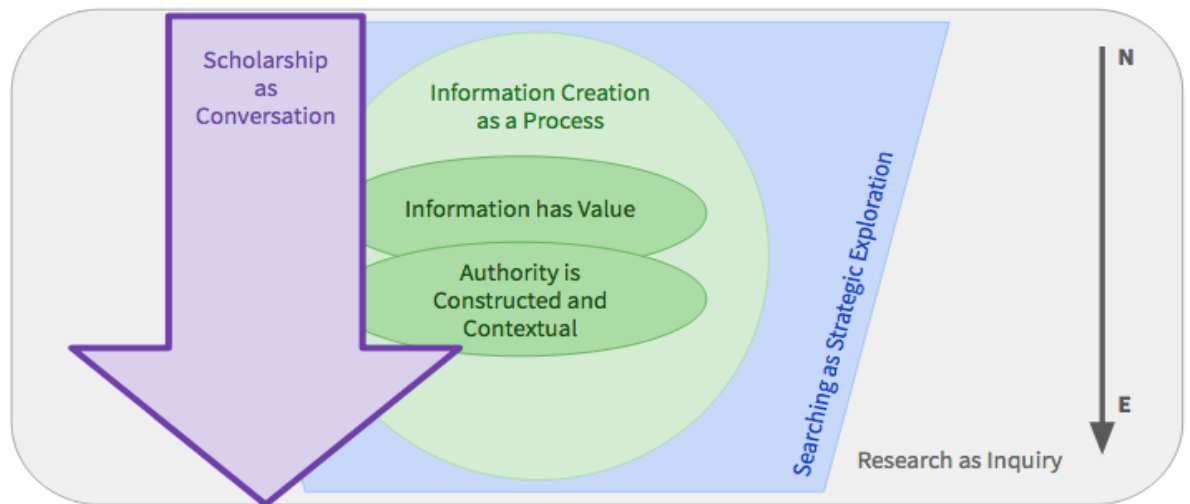


Figure 2: McCracken and Johnson’s Shared Threshold Concepts Model

McCracken and Johnson situate “scholarship as conversation” as the driving concept behind their partnership and explain that this driving concept “can open up the other frames for the students, because the concepts and the other frames can only truly make sense if they have a conceptual shift of their identities as student scholars” (McCracken et al.) For this reason, Scholarship as Conversation was most heavily emphasized in both the FYW course and the information literacy sessions.

There are a few other reasons why I chose this institution specifically. For one thing, I had much support from faculty members who brought me into some of their larger

research projects. This access was attainable because I worked closely with St. Edward's faculty on research for the larger project presented at the Conference on College Composition and Communication in 2017. St. Edward's first-year writing program focuses on rhetoric to prepare students to communicate effectively for various writing situations beyond the university setting. Research on transfer is assisted by the small size of the university, which allows faculty to track student success across the campus. It also provides me with a manageable range of participants. Many FYW professors assign reflective assignments, making FYW perfect for studying reflection at St. Edward's as well as other institutions. Having attended St. Edward's for my undergraduate degree, I am familiar with many faculty members, students, and the general orientation of the campus. However, I was a transfer student and only attended St. Edward's for my last two years; thus, I never had the opportunity to take first-year writing courses at St. Edward's. I did, however, work as a teaching assistant in the FYW program, and as an administrative assistant to the director of FWR, McCracken. Both of these experiences provided me with insight of how this specific program is beneficial to my study.

IV. ANALYSIS/FINDINGS

The student reflections provided evidence of student learning by presenting how they articulate the ways they might transfer the knowledge to other contexts, and, also, where they are in the processing of threshold concepts or the course content in general, such as in relation to key terms, writing processes, etc. I did not expect the interviews to provide me with concrete answers, but I was hoping to see some correlation between the reflective assignments and interviews. More specifically, I am looking for similarities between how students articulate—in both their writing and interviews—what writing skills they have learned and how they might be able to apply them in various situations, and if those skills are related to the threshold concepts covered in the course. While I believe that reflection is a great tool—almost invaluable—for any and all education, I am not sure that students view reflection as such. Also, I am not sure how students perceive their education of threshold concepts in writing; therefore, I relied on the idea that students take reflection seriously so that I can understand how they view threshold concepts. While examining and discussing these student reflections, I endeavored to understand how reflection relates to threshold concepts. I hope that what I pull from this research will influence my own, and hopefully others', pedagogical directions.

I may be able to show a particular relationship between reflection and threshold concepts, not to prove that they work together—we already *know* this. Instead, I simply intend to examine how explicit this relationship is or what direction the relationship could take us. Looking at reflection in practice is the best way to do this. After this project I will be able to continue to dig deeper in the subject of reflection. I will be able to determine where to go from here and what questions are worth exploring within and around reflection. Right now, however, I hope my research will strengthen and further develop the notion that

reflection is crucial in the teaching of threshold concepts. Threshold concepts in writing are valuable, transferable and actionable ideas that we can teach students. The implications of learning how students grapple with threshold concepts can strengthen our understanding of how to better our pedagogical approaches. Ultimately, especially if composition is to be situated as a service discipline and effectively extend beyond the writing classroom, we must focus on *which* writing skills are transferable, *which* are most important and helpful, and *how* we can best provide students with such skills.

For this project, as stated above, I focus on two students from McCracken's English 1301 and 1302 courses, which are the two courses that fulfill the first-year writing requirement. While narrowing my focus on two students is helpful in keeping this project fairly brief, the main reason I focus on just two students is because of their participation in the longitudinal study that continued after the semester and included the year-out interviews with McCracken. These two students remain nameless throughout my project because of a request made during the Institutional Review Board approval process. When discussing specifics, if need be, I will refer to these students as student #1 and student #2. Both students were enrolled in the same section of McCracken's 1301 and 1302 courses, so I want to make it clear that they completed the same assignments and attended the same courses and library sessions.

I argue that reflection is crucial for promoting the transfer of knowledge, specifically in a writing classroom that uses a threshold concepts framework. Based upon this research, I developed a model of how I view reflection to work toward the promoting or fostering of transfer. Within the reflections, I noticed a relationship between the students' lexical understanding and their conceptual understanding. The first step is for students to understand lexically the terms and language being used in the classroom. Thus, when they

begin grappling with such knowledge, they parrot the language in the classroom almost exactly and do not go much beyond surface level comments. As the concepts and language are repeated in the classroom, and as the students continue to repeat the knowledge as well, they may eventually break through the “portal” that is so commonly referred to in relation to threshold concepts. As students gain more understanding, they begin to have more of a conceptual understanding of the course content. I find reflection as a space to view this progression. The model below helps illustrate this process:

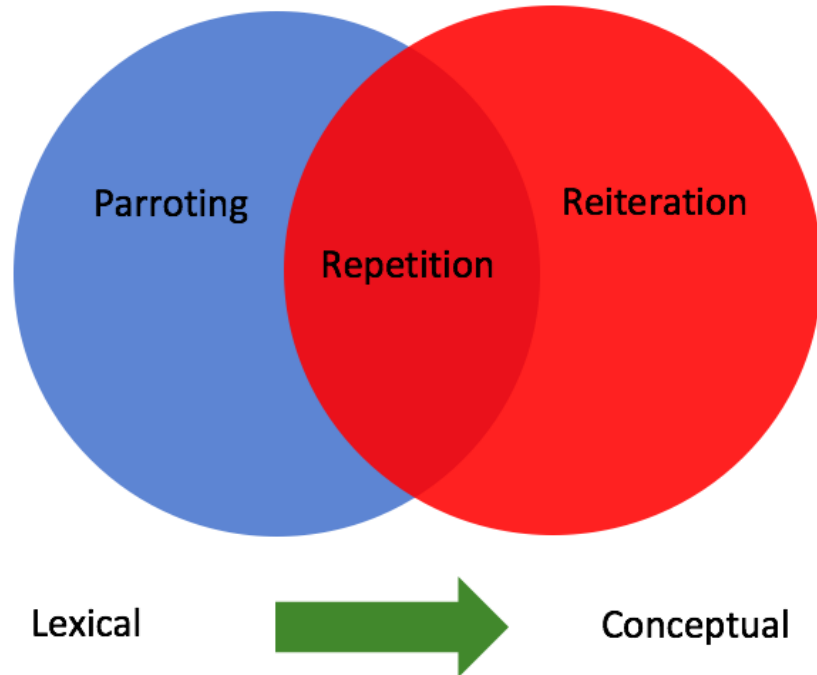


Figure 3: Reiterative Process Model

(Written) Reflections

As I began sorting out my data—the written reflections, writing assignments, and interviews—I realized that I did not know what approach to take. I did not initially know what exactly I was looking for, or even how to code the data. I decided to go through all of

the data without looking for anything specific, just to get a more aerial view and note some things that I found interesting. This approach helped put my project in perspective because I began to notice that the students' reflections were telling me what is important. If I had not taken a step back to look at the data, I feel as though I would have been very limited in my findings because I would have been so focused on only looking for evidence of threshold concepts being discussed. What's more, I would not have been looking at aspects such as the process of reflection and how students' language use changes as the semester progresses and they feel more comfortable with the content. My approach is by no means perfect. I recognize that my approach may have caused me to focus on aspects that do not seem as pertinent to the relationship between threshold concepts and reflection specifically. However, this approach required me to, as mentioned above, let the students' reflections tell me what is important. Because I was examining the relationship between two conceptual aspects (reflection and threshold concepts) of education in writing studies, I did not want to focus too much on one aspect over the other. Also, I want to note the fact that I focused on reflective assignments as opposed to the other course writing assignments.

My initial reading of the reflections was probably the most interesting, if I'm being honest, not only because I learned a lot but because it changed my perception of this project. My initial reading revealed the direction in which I would travel. At first, I was not entirely sure what these student reflections would reveal—and I still do not profess to have a definitive conclusion—but I became interested specifically in how the students' language changed throughout the semester, which I attribute to a shift in their conceptual understanding. The students start by mostly parroting (simple repetition) the language used in the course, but they begin to use more complex forms of repetition as well as reiteration.

After my initial reading, I decided to code for the specific TCs discussed within McCracken's course. While my focus in this project is the relationship between TCs and reflection, I did not limit my coding to only TCs. I couldn't. I had to look at what the students were telling me and what they were discussing because that surrounded, informed, and challenged what *they* knew (or thought they knew) about the concepts. Also, especially as the course progressed, students' language use when explaining or employing these concepts became more complex and less reliant on strictly the language used within the course to explain the concepts. What I began to notice was that the students went through a sort of progression:

- (1) Parroting: they started out by simply working on gaining a lexical understanding of the course content, concepts, and knowledge;
- (2) Reiteration: then, they began to provide explanations of the course content that were more of their own, put in their own words for their specific purposes.

I want to emphasize how I situate repetition in my model above because the repetition of terms and concepts shows up in both parroting and reiteration. For example, it is not uncommon to use the word audience when writing explicitly about audience. Similarly, most writers understandably use the name of the concept or theory when discussing a specific concept or theory. In other words, if I am discussing how I plan to express the influence on my writing of the threshold concept Scholarship as Conversation, I might say, "Through our discussions about Scholarship as Conversation, I now view all writing as engaging with a community of scholars." Below, I provide several excerpts from the two students' reflections in order to show the progression through this *reiterative process*.

The first excerpt below comes from student #1's earliest reflective essay in the 1301 course for Writing Project 1 (WP1):

I noticed that Kantz and Rosenberg seemed to agree upon audience, but at the same time Rosenberg describes gaps when you are not the primary audience that Grant-Davie discusses and uses to define a secondary audience.

I wrote it in this order to show myself how each of the authors talk about audience in order to synthesize their arguments and discover what my definition of audience is. I put audience first in my definitions because I felt as though understanding audience first would help me be able to see how it fits into rhetorical situation and composing better.

Throughout this project, I have really tried to leave behind a previous practice that was ineffective [...] While revising, I tried to look at how the order of how I presented a certain term mattered especially in terms of audience because I had the example and the definition too close together [...] I also worked hard at adopting the mindset that I have to constantly think about the audience because they influence the constraints of the paper as do I and how I compose the paper. (Student #1 1301 WP1)

The most obvious thing occurring within this sample is repetition. Student #1 uses the term "audience" eight times within this short space. Though it is perfectly acceptable and expected that a writer uses the term "audience" when discussing audience, student #1 does not go far beyond simple parroting. Especially in the first paragraph, it is clear that the inclusion of "primary audience" and "secondary audience" is simply a sort of namedropping, which almost suggests student #1's desire to check the box and show the instructor that they (student #1) at least knows what is being discussed in the course. This is not a bad thing, but I think it is pretty clear in this sample that student #1 is grappling with the course content at a lexical level. There is no evidence of a deeper conceptual understanding at this point because student #1 does not provide specific details about how they view their audience or how their audience relates to their writing process.

Similarly, student #2 presents their understanding of writing using two of the threshold concepts that were prevalent within their writing course. In the excerpt below it is

interesting to see in the excerpt below the difference between student #2's definitions of writing, though their newer definition of writing is arguably more developed:

My theory of writing has significantly altered after completing this first writing project. I originally defined writing as “physically transferring ideas and opinions onto paper using words which form into coherent sentences.” I almost started laughing after looking back at this definition—although I am not necessarily wrong, the rhetorical definition of writing involves so much more than just communicating ideas and opinions. I now define writing as “a social activity used to communicate ideas and facts between a writer and a reader, who join in on a conversation about the material.” [...] These differences in definitions demonstrate the drastic amount I have learned in the past month about writing.

While composing my project, I began to piece together all the information surrounding composition, audience, and rhetorical situation and make connections between what the authors of the academic sources said. By using these connections, I drafted the project by highlighting my definitions of the terms and illustrative examples from the texts, which played a major role while I was establishing the interdependence of these components of writing. (Student #2 1301 WP1)

As student #2 points out above, their two definitions of writing definitely work to “demonstrate the drastic amount [they] have learned in the past month about writing.” Yet, when understanding the course content, student #2's new, refined definition of writing seems to parrot much of the course content. Their original definition is much more personal and, yes, maybe simplistic, but it is clear that student #2's new definition simply displays some of the threshold concepts and key terms used within the course. For example, a “social activity used to communicate ideas” is a moment of parroting in which the student simply inserts the TC Writing is a Social and Rhetorical Activity. Similarly, in the second clause of the new definition, student #2 uses the phrase “join in on a conversation about the material,” which is, again, clearly a moment of parroting where the student calls up another TC from the course, Scholarship as Conversation.

In the excerpt above, student #2 does not demonstrate parroting as blatantly as can be seen in other examples, but I recognize it as parroting and repetition because there is not

much substance beyond simply using some of the course language. In the second paragraph of student #2's 1302 WP1, student #2 again uses some of the language of the course, "composition, audience, and rhetorical situation," to simply say that they used these things to "make connections" among their sources. Again, there is nothing wrong with parroting the course terms and concepts, but this utterance does not show instructors that students have a strong conceptual understanding.

Student #1 presents us with a similar instance in which they seem to be simply using some of the terms without explaining things such as the "how?" or "why?" questions:

My past understanding of academic writing was completely understanding one's audience, exigence, constraints and purpose and demonstrating that in one's writing. I always draw my definition of rhetorical situation from Haas and Flower. They say that it is "a message sent to someone by somebody for some reason." This assignment has changed my understanding of a rhetorical situation because I think it's also about how one sends this message by using ethos, pathos, logos or other rhetorical bingo terms. (Student#1 1302 WP2)

While this student is definitely engaging in effective reflection, they are only scratching the surface, exemplifying what I argue parroting to look like. The student does exactly what the prompt asks, but they do not go into detail about how and why these "rhetorical bingo terms" would be used in academic writing. The language used within this reflection also provides us with a look at the role repetition plays within parroting. The student simply repeats the terms used within the course without any sort of explanation, which is to be expected when first grappling with new concepts. They even use the phrase "rhetorical

bingo terms,” which was an in-class activity that McCracken used to introduce new rhetorical terms. I want to emphasize the idea that parroting and repetition should not be viewed as bad things, nor do they suggest a certain level or lack of intelligence. Instead, parroting and repetition in the lexical sense are necessary stepping stones in the process of learning. Reflections provide a space to witness such learning.

Later in the semester of their 1302 course, student #1 demonstrates a more nuanced, conceptual understanding in the excerpt from another reflection below:

For my letter, in order to communicate with my audience I had to make sure they knew exactly why I was directing this information at them and what knowledge I had on the subject because otherwise they might not read my letter. Because all of these people have been involved in education for a long time, I needed to prove my authority and why their school district mattered to me. For my poster, in order to communicate to my audience I had to show them that I had knowledge on the subject in order to get them to listen to what I have to say. (Student #1 1302 WP4d)

The specific question for the excerpt above from student #1’s WP4d simply asks, “What barriers in communicating to your audience(s) did you encounter?” However, student #1 is also reflecting after completing a research essay and moving toward a composition project in the 15th week of the course. So, during WP4d, the students were much more submersed in the course content and had more context in which they were applying the conceptual knowledge they have been learning all semester. Nonetheless, the excerpt from WP4d shows that the student has moved beyond the simple process of lexical parroting and into the more nuanced process of conceptual reiteration. It is easy for us writing scholars to see that

rhetorical elements are riddled throughout this reflection. For instance, student #1 explained that they had to prove to their audience that they had knowledge of the topic being discussed, which demonstrates an understanding of student #1's perception of the rhetorical term "ethos" without simply stating that they needed to establish a strong ethos.

In following along with my model above, I want to revisit the idea that repetition comes up within moments of reiteration as well. While in some reflections (that use either parroting or reiteration) repetition can be more difficult to see, it is pretty clear in student #1's WP4d. One of the most obvious examples of repetition comes straight from the prompt, which commonly contains repetitive elements. The prompt contains the phrase "communicating to your audience(s)." Student #1 includes slight variations of this throughout their WP4d, such as "communicating to the parents," "communicating to my audience," "communicate with my audience," and "communicate to my audience." These slight variations show how repetition is still present even when students move toward a more conceptual understanding of the course content or knowledge. Though student #1 goes on after these moments of repetition to provide further explanation, which means that this reflection exemplifies a reiterative moment rather than a moment of parroting, it also shows that repetition is present within both parroting and reiteration. Incidentally, student #1's excerpt from WP4d is but a small portion of the reflective assignment—it is the answer to one of six questions in the prompt—which makes it interesting that four instances of repetition show up within such a small space. Though these examples are slight variations of the language used in the prompt, they are examples of repetition nonetheless. Student #1 still demonstrates that they have a clear understanding of this concept.

To show another moment of reiteration, I provide an example below in which student #1 demonstrates their understanding of a specific concept discussed in both their

FYW course and the information literacy sessions. I find this example particularly interesting because it shows student #1's arrangement of how they plan to employ the concept "presearch":

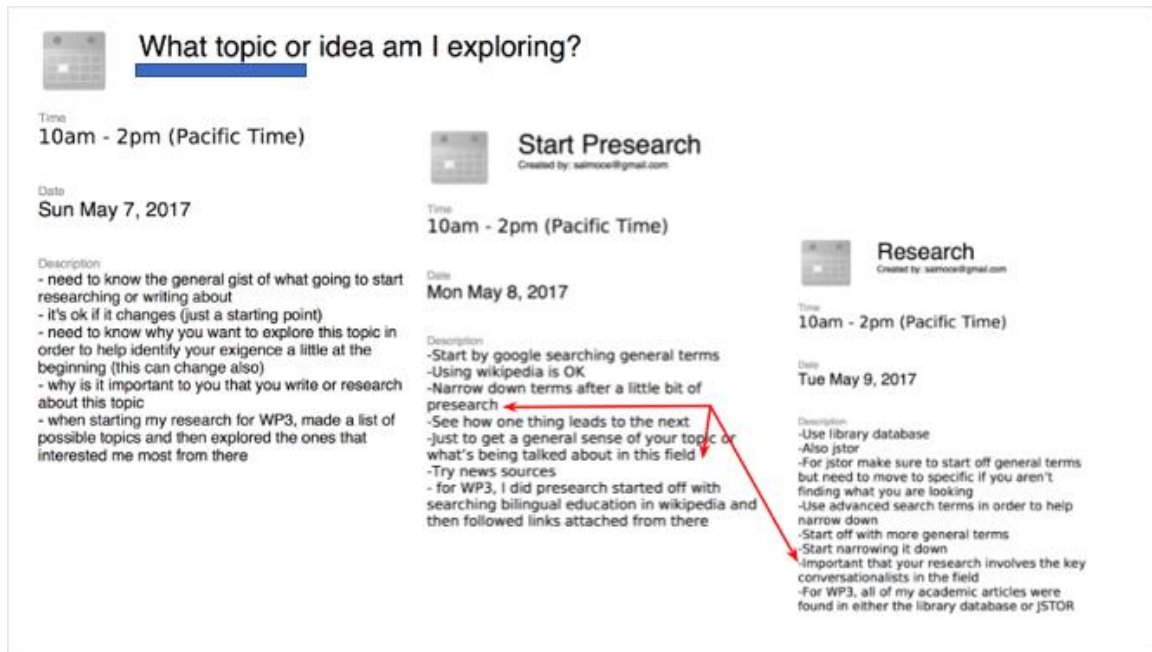


Figure 4: Student #1 1302 WP5

This example provides another look at a moment of repetition and reiteration. The assignment asked students to reflect on their first writing assignment from the class and come up with 10 questions they would ask each time they start a writing assignment. Students were also asked to complete this reflective assignment in any genre they saw fit that would have some sort of effect on their final product. Student #1 chose to complete this reflection in the form of a research calendar as to reflect how they will approach the writing and research process. In this example, student #1 repeats some of the key terms used in both the writing classroom and the information literacy sessions, specifically "presearch."

Student #1, however, seems to own this term much more conceptually than what they were demonstrating in the beginning of the semester. Student #1's ownership of the term "presearch" can be seen not only in their personal definition of presearch but also in the fact that student #1 includes a description of how they will be applying this concept to their research process specifically, brief though it may be. Important, too, is the fact that reiteration does not have to be *correct* or *accurate*. Instead, such reiterative moments suggest more of what I have discussed as a sort of conceptual ownership seen in the personal language use that comes along with reiteration.

Interviews

Some of the more personal language and moments of reiteration used by both of the students are readily apparent in the interviews. This is because (1) the interviews occur after the course ended, which means the students are no longer as close to that course language as they once were; and (2) the students being interviewed are candidly asked to answer questions in relation to their writing process. Though I found that the reflections were more revealing overall when viewing the reiterative process, I think it is important to include the interviews because they demonstrate that these students have some understanding of the knowledge they gained in their FYW courses.

As explained above, McCracken conducted interviews with both of these students after the writing course had concluded. These interviews provide interesting information because these students are explaining how they approach writing after the conclusion of their FYW course with McCracken. While I was able to listen to the entirety of these interviews, I will only be including only a few excerpts that show how these students are thinking about writing and what knowledge about writing has stuck with them across contexts. What's more, these interviews show how these two students have moved well

beyond simple parroting of the concepts and terms from their FYW course. The students' language in these interviews serves as an example of reiteration because they are using their own language to explain the conceptual knowledge they have gained in their writing course. In other words, they now discuss such concepts in a more personal manner. Though their understandings may differ, they *own* these concepts more than they did during their FYW courses. The first example is from student #1 in an interview with McCracken:

Then the other one was authority right? I would say like authority like just has ... I would define it as like the knowledge to be in the conversation. You don't necessarily have to have like a PhD in field of it but you have to be knowledgeable and you have to have done your research and you have to know like what's being talked about in the conversation in order to have authority in that conversation. (Student #1 Interview)

Student #1's explanation of course content the following semester demonstrates that some of the knowledge gained in their writing course has stuck with them. Though reiteration is showing up within this interview, this only reinforces what I found in the reflective writing assignments above. I would like to note, however, that moments of reiteration found in the interviews show that these two students come away with different conceptualizations of the course content, specifically the threshold concepts in these examples. Notice below that student #2 articulates a different sort of understanding of the concepts Scholarship as Conversation and Writing is a Knowledge-Making Activity:

We read in order to learn and to effectively write. We write to learn and to join an ongoing conversation. Research combines the two. It creates the opportunity to credibly join a knowledge-making conversation that others are also interested in. The question involved should be personal to you and something you can't easily lose interest in. It should also be a question that you can write about, whether it be because you have personal experience on the topic or have conducted some sort of research. (Student #2 Interview)

Student #2 clearly links the two driving concepts and explains their relationship in their own words. Though there may be a better or stronger relationship between these two concepts, student #2 shows that they are *owning* their understanding of these concepts. Student #2 makes the case that research combines the two threshold concepts: Scholarship as Conversation and Writing is a Knowledge-Making Activity. They suggest that conducting research combines these two concepts as research provides a writer “the opportunity to credibly join a knowledge-making conversation.”

Going through this data, I can recognize where students are in the reiterative process, which can at the very least be a useful tool for determining what students may need more help with in the course or what they seem to have a strong understanding of already. Reflections have proven useful for assessing student understanding, but it has been interesting to track the language use of these two students within their reflections because it introduces a new way of analyzing reflective practice. In certain instances, it is more or less difficult to determine whether a student was presenting a moment of parroting or reiteration. This being said, the distinction is important and instructive, and there may be more work to be done in order to further distinguish between these moments.

V. PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

In this chapter, I explore the pedagogical implications of using reflection within the composition classroom. I focus primarily on curriculums that use a key-terms approach, teaching for transfer, threshold concepts approaches, or some combination of these. I include and discuss two reflective prompts that I have seen promote effective student reflection. However, I recognize that there are of course many ways to prompt effective reflection.

Good teachers are good thieves. Many good teachers know how to (re)appropriate the assignments of other teachers. But, how do writing instructors go about adopting newfound knowledge? For example, how do we incorporate theories that suggest new implications for how people best learn? Do we redesign all of our assignments to fit some new mode of thinking? It can be difficult to admit at times, but teaching can simply be a process of trial and error. In discussions surrounding pedagogical theories, many of us have probably heard the phrase *pie in the sky* at some point, but what makes something *cake by the lake*, for lack of a better way of putting it? When does a theory become practical so that it goes into application? Who gets to determine which theories are practical or not? And, what are the determining factors for such decisions?

While I don't profess to have *the* answers to such questions, I have seen how the integration of theories can work within the college writing class. More specifically, my research with McCracken at St. Edward's University provided me the opportunity to see how a curriculum focusing on threshold concepts in writing was built, tailored, and, ultimately, assessed to best fit the specific needs of the class. My particular experience dealt with the integration of threshold concepts in writing presented in Adler-Kassner and Wardle's edited collection on threshold concepts in writing studies, *Naming What We Know*,

which ultimately works toward student transfer of writing skills. However, I am interested, for pedagogical reasons, in how we go about determining students' perception of the knowledge we are introducing to them when integrating theories and concepts into our curriculum. I argue that coupling theories and concepts, such as threshold concepts, with reflective assignments is crucial in order to assess the effectiveness of any pedagogy while also fostering the transfer of such knowledge. Reflection does not only serve as a space for instructors to assess student understanding but also provides an opportunity for students to (re)articulate their understanding of writing, learning, transferring, etc. so that they may see more clearly what they are *trying* to do with such knowledge. In short, I am interested in what directions seem most promising and worth exploring in regard to reflection in practice.

The concept of reflection itself is something that takes many forms. There is no *one* way of creating reflective assignments, which makes it all the more difficult to determine if reflection is actually helping students. However, when done correctly, many scholars argue that reflection is a crucial step in promoting growth and transfer (Taczak). Yancey—the go-to composition scholar when it comes to reflection—provides a brief description of what reflection currently looks like:

Today, in the third generation of reflection in writing studies, we understand reflection much more capaciously: among other defining features and characteristics, it is defined as a key move in transfer of writing knowledge and practice; is understood as culturally constructed; requires its own curriculum; takes different forms in different media, which bring with them different affordances; has distinctive characteristics as a genre; and, not least, is defined as rhetorical, that is, as an epistemological practice. (*A Rhetoric* 303)

While Yancey's description above is quite a bit to unpack, I want to highlight the importance of how scholars in writing studies now situate reflection as both process and product.

Reflection does play an important role in the knowledge-making process, hence the rhetorical element, but it also provides a product or space that demonstrates such knowledge. Students grappling with new knowledge articulate their understandings of what may have once been more tacit in their reflections. In other words, the process of reflection provides a space for students to learn about their learning, demonstrate their learning, and think about their thinking as a form of metacognition.

Students are also demonstrating their understanding through their product, the reflective assignment. While the correlation between reflection and transfer is a current area of study in composition, I am curious about how reflection works when coupled with specific pedagogical approaches in writing studies such as:

- The traditional teaching of writing using key terms
- Teaching for transfer (TFI)
- Using threshold concepts in writing studies

In the excerpt above, Yancey states that reflection “requires its own curriculum,” which is understandable given the *capaciousness* of reflection. But, at least as a new instructor, I wonder how this is accomplished. How is reflection used effectively within the classroom? I know that it is not very effective to have students write an unguided, vaguely described reflection that simply asks them to reflect on their writing process. Regretfully, I have tried this. My students did not understand what they were to be doing or why they were doing it. It is

understandable that students need some direction when reflecting. If reflection is coupled with specific concepts, those concepts need to show up, or at least be relevant, in the reflection-based curriculum so that students can see the significance of the reflection. Yet, as Yancey argues, if reflection becomes too much of a routine it is not as useful (*A Rhetoric* 308). This by no means suggests that reflection should not be common practice within the classroom but instead that reflection needs to take various forms and challenge students in different ways so that they are engaging in the oftentimes messy and awkward learning process.

The idea of including key terms in a writing class curriculum is a common approach, especially in teaching-for-transfer models. Key terms, in a similar way to threshold concepts, are useful for students for many reasons. For example, key terms provide students with a language to use when entering the *conversation* of any given discipline; they outline foundational or *threshold* knowledge; and, they construct a sort of conceptual base to build upon. I want to point out that key terms and threshold concepts are different, however, a key terms approach is nearly unavoidable when teaching in any discipline; thus, a threshold concepts curriculum will also include key terms in order to provide a common language. Within writing studies, Yancey provides an example in which “the combination of key terms—here, *audience, genre, context, and purpose*—and reflection help [students] understand and negotiate the new task” (*A Rhetoric* 313). When students are faced with new composing tasks, key terms and some experience with reflection can help them consider various angles from which to approach the task. The key terms Yancey uses here are great for composition because they are not genre or discipline specific, meaning that they can transfer to any instance of composing. In fact, key terms show up in almost any curricular approach regardless of discipline, theories, concepts, etc. that a course surrounds. When coupled with

reflection these terms are understood more effectively—conceptually that is—because students are asked to articulate their perception of said concepts within a specific context. The concepts that come along with these terms are, at the very least, reinforced when the terms are not only employed but also explained and situated by students in their own words.

What’s interesting to note here is the relationship between lexical comprehension and conceptual comprehension, or the relationship between language and thought. The understanding of a word’s meaning is just the first step before the meaning is understood and thus can be employed conceptually. Reflections serve as a space or another opportunity outside of the writing or composing product to explicate thought. What’s more, as Bruce Horner explains while discussing the thought/language relationship, “reflection, coded as *thought*, is distinct from and identified with its prior expression in language, determining whether, in fact, the language has successfully communicated the thought or whether the thought itself is in need of revision” (106). To put it more simply, reflections provide instructors another chance to look at both the language and the thought of a writer in order to know how to help, if need be. This is not to say that a writer’s languaging or thinking is wrong if their audience does not understand the message; instead, it suggests that the language may simply not be familiar to the audience and that reflection can help pinpoint where the issue is occurring.

How do we go about considering all of these aspects of reflection when creating a curriculum for reflection in a writing course? I now examine a sample reflective prompt from a first-year writing course in order to highlight some important aspects that speak to some of the ideas above. Below, I include a prompt from McCracken’s FYW course, which, in short, asks students to reflect on various aspects of their writing assignment. More specifically, this reflection asks students to examine their process of shifting from a research

essay to a composition project that uses three different genres to address target audiences. McCracken's reflective assignment encompasses many of the elements that Yancey argues are crucial for effective reflection. The reflection below includes many of the key terms (*audience, genre, context, and purpose*) that Yancey suggests and, as seen with the inclusion of the rubric, McCracken has also constructed a curriculum for reflection as well:

Reflection on Your Composition

In this reflection, you will analyze the process of moving from your research essay to your composition project, as well as think through questions that involve key terms. Think about what rhetorical choices you have made, and consider the following questions:

Audience

- What barriers in communicating to your audience(s) did you encounter?
- How did you overcome these barriers?

Process

- How was the composing process different from your research essay?

Genre

- Why did you choose the three genres that you did?
- How did the genre affect the audience choice?

Reflection

- What rhetorical practices did you find yourself using?
- Were they effective in the way you presented them?

Discourse Communities

- How was your original discourse community affected in new genres?

Research

- What kind of research did you do for this project? how was it different from what you did for WP3?
- What information literacy practices did you use to help you adapt your existing research to your selected audience?
- What adjustments did you have to make to your strategies to find appropriate support? ("Reflection on Your Composition")

This prompt asks students to do many things. They are not being asked to simply describe their process but also to explain why they made the choices they did, how effective

they believe their approach was, and what difficulties they faced. Students are asked to answer specific questions in relation to key terms and concepts they have focused on throughout the semester. This means that students are being asked to articulate their understanding of such knowledge and how they have applied it practically. Students thus grapple with their understanding of both thought and language surrounding course content. If a student does not understand a specific concept, any issue will hopefully be more visible within the reflection so that an instructor can better address the issue, whether it be an issue with language or conceptual understanding. For example, when a student is addressing their choices involving their genres for this project, they are more likely to show how conscious the decision process was within the reflection as opposed to the composition project itself. While a student may be well-versed in the genre of a specific social media platform, the instructor cannot tell from simply the social media post that the student understands how to identify and address a specific audience. It is only in the reflection in which the student will be prompted to address questions involving the audience or the perceived audience that such understanding is made apparent.

This assignment is not only effective for providing instructors with an opportunity to determine student understanding, but it also provides students with an opportunity to think critically about their processes and more consciously understand why they made the choices they did. While many students may take their education seriously and actively think about and use what they have learned in the courses, reflection explicitly asks students to examine their education, which, arguably, promotes the transfer of skills and knowledge to other situations.

As I have discussed with a key-terms approach above, reflection can also be coupled with a TFT approach. For example, Taczak and Robertson discuss how reflection is crucial

in a TFT curriculum. They support the idea that “[r]eflection is a central and reiterative practice” of teaching for transfer because it “creates the framework for transfer to occur” (*A Rhetoric* 45). Through reflection, students learn how to explain their theory of writing, which then develops a better understanding of how to approach any writing situation. Taczak and Robertson also explain how reflection must be “deliberate and systematic because this type of reflection is what fosters transfer” (*A Rhetoric* 46). The idea of reflection being deliberate and systematic can be seen in the sample assignment above. Students are asked to reflect on specific aspects—arguably crucial aspects—so that they get an idea of what skills or concepts are most important and might help them in other contexts. For example, if students are asked to reflect on their audience, which might be situated as a key term, they will be more likely to view audience as an important aspect of any and all writing. What’s more, while students are probably learning about and discussing the concept of audience throughout a semester, reflective assignments incorporate a “reiterative approach to give students a series of opportunities to make decisions and create some understanding of their writing” as well as some understanding of the concepts they are learning in relation to their writing (*A Rhetoric* 46).

Courses that focus on transfer often emphasize the importance of some sort of reflective element within the curriculum. Jessie Moore highlights many important ideas surrounding the discussion of transfer. She explains how David Perkins and Gavriel Salomon elaborate on the differences between “forward reaching” and “backward reaching” transfer saying that in “forward reaching, high road transfer, the learner considers how to apply the knowledge to future situations and alternative contexts, anticipating a future need; in backward reaching, high road transfer, the learner abstracts important characteristics of the current situation and looks to the past for relevant experiences and applicable

knowledge” (Moore). Though this excerpt does not explicitly discuss reflection, there are definitely elements that suggest that reflection would be an effective way for students to consider “how to apply the knowledge” and anticipate “a future need.” What’s more, Perkins and Salomon’s concept, high-road transfer, “requires ‘mindful abstraction’ of knowledge from one context to another”; whereas, low-road transfer—another concept discussed by Perkins and Salomon—“relies on a new context triggering practiced habits” (Moore). These ideas related to a TFT approach echo much of the discussion on reflection.

As noted above, effective reflection requires a “deliberate and systematic” approach, which is similar to the idea that students must consciously think about how the knowledge they gain is applicable—or transferable—to other contexts (Robertson and Taczak 46). The conversations on transfer and reflection are so inextricably linked that curriculums including either of these concepts many times include the other. A reflection-based curriculum will include elements of TFT curriculum and vice versa. For example, in the above reflective assignment, students are asked to discuss how different genres affected their audience choice, which, similarly to a TFT approach, asks students to articulate their perception of how varying rhetorical elements affect the choices they make in new writing situations. It is important to note that the assignment preceding this reflection was a research essay and the assignment following this has students deliver the same message in different genres. This assignment sequence essentially follows a TFT model in that it requires students to use what they have learned throughout the semester to approach new writing situations. Coupling this assignment sequence with a meaningful reflection provides another opportunity for students to see, understand, and articulate how they approach these situations.

While I suggest that TFT and reflection share many qualities, I want to revisit the idea of a key terms approach because this approach too shows up in TFT and reflection

curriculums. It seems unavoidable to include some sort of key terms within the classroom because they provide a language for students to talk about and learn about writing. However, it is, obviously, up to the instructor to decide how prevalent these concepts are within their course, which means that any of these pedagogical approaches can be more or less emphasized within a course. An instructor may place more value on any of these concepts making them the focus of the course and seemingly more important. Yet, an effective coupling of these concepts means that they would work more harmoniously, thus promoting and supporting one another, which seems like an idealistic arrangement of any pedagogy. I am not suggesting that these approaches require one another; instead, I want to highlight the idea that the coupling of such concepts can be useful, almost unavoidable, in many cases.

In McCracken's course—which focused on threshold concepts—elements of key terms, reflection, and teaching for transfer approaches can be seen. As this was a FYW course, many of the key rhetorical terms (audience, genre, context, etc.) show up throughout the course because they are, as the name suggests, key. This course, however, also employs several threshold concepts outlined in *Naming What We Know*. Throughout the semester, students were assigned readings from this collection to learn about concepts in writing studies, which is similar to a writing-about-writing approach (WAW). In an interview with McCracken, I asked if she deliberately designed the course using theories from key terms and TFT approaches. She said that her course design definitely included key terms as to provide students with a language to talk about writing and rhetorical elements, but she explained that her design was influenced less by TFT than WAW. She situated her design more as what she called a writing-about-transfer course. The course did not focus on specifics from TFT and repurposed ideas from WAW.

Though she was not focusing on TFI, McCracken explained how a threshold concepts approach does promote the transfer of such knowledge. Downs and Robertson explain this notion in their chapter included in *Naming What We Know* writing that “threshold concepts of writing are general principles that apply across a wide range of writing situations, even as those situations range widely” (105). This idea can be seen within my discussion above about the assignment sequence designed by McCracken surrounding the sample reflection prompt. Since students are repurposing a specific message for different genres, mediums, and audiences, they are, in fact, actively transferring the skills they learned throughout the course, which fits with Perkins and Salomon’s low-road transfer because students are being asked to transfer what they have learned to a new context.

Upon looking at the above reflection prompt, I noticed that threshold concepts were not mentioned at all. McCracken explained that at this point in the semester—as this is one of their last assignment sequences—she wanted to see how, or if, the threshold concepts came up *naturally*. The reflection was used as both a way for students to learn more about their perceptions of the knowledge gained throughout the course and as a way for McCracken to see what specific concepts students employed and, thus, transferred to these new writing contexts. McCracken went on to say that it was interesting and useful to see how students articulated the threshold concepts within their reflections because it provided her with the opportunity to see how well students understood the concepts or if they were simply repeating (parroting) the concepts in the same language used in the course. What’s more, McCracken was also able to see how students situated the key terms in relation to the threshold concepts and how they applied such knowledge to their writing process and the assignment. Below, I include a reflective assignment that I designed based upon

McCracken's reflection prompt and with the help of another professor's prompt. I include this below because I am able to discuss why I made each choice for pedagogical reasons:

Writing Assignment 4: Reflection

English 1310 • Day • Fall 2017

Important Dates:

Workshops: 11/28 & 11/30 & 12/5

Final copy due: 12/5 (submitted to TRACS by 11:55 p.m.)

Reflection due: **In class** during the final exam

You will compose a reflection of at least 500 words explaining the final product of your remix project delivered to incoming freshman. In this reflection, you will be writing to me so that I understand, essentially, what you did and why you see it was the best way to deliver your message. This is where you will discuss the rhetorical choices that you decided to implement in your final project. In other words, you will explain why you made the final choices you did, and what changes you made from when you proposed the project to when you created the remix. For example, you may have thought your proposed project was too difficult to produce based on things such as time, skill, delivery, etc. Or, you might have decided that your project should include an interactive element (e.g. poll, questionnaire, response, etc.). It might seem repetitive, but I want you to walk me through the choices you made after writing the proposal. After seeing the project, how effective do you think it is? Looking back, do you think you could have gone a different direction that would be more effective? Or, why do you think your choices worked (or didn't)? Use the reflection to think about how you progressed through your project. Think about the choices you made and why. I want to know how your project went according to you as a writer/composer. I want to know why you made the final choices that you did.

Similarly to McCracken's design, I did not want to include language that would essentially influence my students to parrot my exact language within the prompt. What's more, by not including specific concepts discussed throughout the course, I would be able to see which concepts students saw as more applicable or important for their specific needs. This does not mean that students discussed concepts and rhetorical decisions in purely their own terms, but I definitely noticed a difference in how they articulated their process and understanding of employing such knowledge. Though my course did not focus on threshold

concepts in any way, I want to point out that students latch on to specific knowledge they gain in the classroom for various reasons, regardless of whether it is key terms, threshold concepts, rhetorical terms, etc. My main goal while designing the above prompt was to push students to think about the choices they make while writing. However, I also wanted to gain insight into which concepts they took the time to mention and maybe even expand on. I do not claim to be an experienced writing instructor, but I did thoroughly enjoy reading my students' responses to this reflective prompt. What's more, I gained valuable insight to which concepts students found important as well as which concepts needed more explanation. Though I felt this reflection helped strengthened my students' understanding of their writing process, I learned a lot as an instructor because I was able to hear from my students how the course content was being applied.

Sure, reading and assessing student work is a valuable, integral part of teaching, but reflection provides new opportunities to see how students are thinking. My reasoning behind assigning this specific reflection was to hear how students were (re)shaping an existing project to address a new rhetorical situation. This assignment sequence—what I called a remix assignment—essentially had students change how they delivered their message, who they addressed (audience), and, most importantly, understand and articulate why they made the choices they did. To start, my students wrote a research essay describing a change they would make on our college campus and why. Then I had students write a letter to me describing how they would deliver the message from their research essay to the audience of incoming college freshmen (this portion was in any medium they chose: twitter, Facebook, PowerPoint, flyer, etc.). Finally, I asked my students to reflect on this process using the prompt above. We discussed rhetorical elements throughout the semester, and, while I did not ask highly specific questions about such rhetorical elements regarding their projects, my

students discussed many of these elements while explaining the choices they made while remixing their research essays.

The various approaches outlined above, though abstract, illustrate some of the ways that reflection is coupled with or can be coupled with different curricular designs. I argue that reflection is one of the most, if not the most, important concepts to include in any curriculum because of its extensive application. Reflection is extremely useful to both students and instructors. More specifically, as Yancey puts it, “As [students] learn, they witness their own learning: they show us how they learn. Reflection makes possible a new kind of learning as well as a new kind of teaching. The portraits of learning that emerge here point to a new kind of classroom: one that is coherently theorized, interactive, oriented to agency” (*A Rhetoric* 8). Reflection is an effective way for teacher-scholars to also see how new theories, concepts, and pedagogies function and how they are adopted. However, difficulties arise when employing reflection because of the capaciousness described by Yancey. Again, there is no *one* way of designing reflective assignments. Students need to be taught how to write reflections in order for the reflection to be most effective.

My main takeaway from all of this is that reflection is, in fact, highly useful for coupling with a threshold concept curriculum, though I would argue it is important for any and all learning. There are many similarities between reflection’s usefulness in a TCs pedagogy and a TFT pedagogy. As stated above, reflection is an effective method for assessing student understanding. Reflections provide instructors a glimpse of the liminal space that students exist in when grappling with TCs. When a writer—or student—articulates their understanding of a given concept, idea, theory etc., their readers get some idea of how the writer perceives said notion. Though such articulation may not be perfect, the ultimate goal is to most effectively deliver a message. Reflection presents a similar set of

standards in that it too is trying to deliver a message as effectively as possible. Even though the *self* may not necessarily be *the* target audience—as Burke suggests can be the case sometimes—reflections typically have individuals step back and think about a given subject in a different way than before.

Through effective reflection, instructors also gain valuable insight to their students' progression throughout a course. Students are grappling with knowledge throughout a course. Instructors are supposed to help guide students through this liminal space so that the knowledge becomes more licit, and students can actually call upon such knowledge after the course concludes. Designing effective reflective assignments, as discussed above, is but one method of determining students' progression.

By clearly defining and understanding parroting, repetition, and reiteration, instructors could be more aware of where their students are with course concepts, theories, or ideas, especially when students wrestle with such knowledge in a liminal space. While teachers hope to see students grasping knowledge, it can be very difficult to assess where students are in this process. If student parroting becomes a recognized step within education, instructors might be able to work more closely with students in identifying problems with both language use and conceptual knowledge in order to determine appropriate future directions. In Yancey's *Reflection*, she discusses some of the ways that writing instructors can recognize if a student's reflection-in-presentation is not effective. One of these ways includes "a text that parrots the context of the class or the teacher without demonstrating the influence of either" (82). While Yancey does not present this as always being the case, or as some sort of *law* within composition studies, I believe there is a bit more that can be said about such moments of parroting. When students are failing to engage in reflective assignments—or at least in the ways we instructors want them to—being

able to distinguish among parroting, repetition, and reiteration would be useful for guiding students towards more effective reflection to help them become more effective writers.

While reflective assignments may be commonplace within many composition classrooms, I think instructors need to take a more critical approach when assessing students' articulation of their understanding of course content. Throughout my project, I have discussed two students' understandings of specific threshold concepts that were used within their composition courses. However, the threshold concepts are not the most important element here. Instead, I focused on the students' language use in relation to the course content, which just so happened to be threshold concepts. I am by no means devaluing threshold concepts, but I want to make the point that a critical look at the reiterative process within student reflections might be useful for gaining valuable insight as to where students are in their path to a conceptual understanding of course content.

Most of my understanding of reflection, and what effective reflective assignments do (or should do), comes from Yancey's work. However, I think there is still much more to be explored surrounding this conversation because reflection, if viewed as a metacognitive process, is pretty heavy, or meta, if you will. It can be difficult to say anything definitively about such a concept like reflection. Reflection is a deep and complicated process, and writing studies could benefit from further parsing what reflection entails, as I have attempted to do here. However, I think reflection is an invaluable resource in education because of its multifaceted identity. Reflection can help learners better understand what they are learning, and it can help teachers get a better understanding of how students are perceiving and potentially going to be employing such knowledge. Further research can, and should, be done surrounding reflection's usefulness within education. While there are many directions scholars could go in order to further research on reflection, I believe that continuing

research on students' language use within their reflections is a viable direction. The reiterative process I have discussed within this project has shown some interesting moments within these two students' education. To strengthen this notion and perhaps develop some sort of strategy for examining the reiterative process within student reflections, I am interested in a longitudinal case study in which I would have access to more student data over a longer period of time.

My work during this project has revealed many directions that are worth pursuing, such as student identity in reflective writing; student understanding in reflective writing; student language use in relation to course content within reflective writing; etc. I am most interested in students' language use because I view language and knowledge as inextricably linked. Reflection helps us better understand that relationship. The better we understand student reflections, the better we can help students and teach them to become more reflective writers.

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