

Report  
on  
Perceptions and Experiences of the Role of Reflection within the  
Freshman Composition Curriculum at Texas Tech

Submitted to  
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Abstract: This report is a sequential, mixed methods study of perceptions of reflection, specifically Writing Reviews assignments, within the Freshman Composition curriculum at Texas Tech University. Through interviews of Composition Program Administrators, a survey of students and instructors, and post-survey interviews with students and instructors, the study reveals generally negative perceptions of reflection and presents various explanations for possible discordances within the use of Writing Reviews in the curriculum. Recommendations are made for possible adjustments to Writing Reviews for the future to improve their effectiveness in the curriculum.

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## Executive Summary:

### Research Study Purpose , Question, and Background

The purpose of this three-phase, sequential, mixed method study is to understand the role of reflection within the Freshman Composition program at Texas Tech University. It focuses predominantly on this research question: What are the stated understandings and experienced perceptions of the role of reflection within the Freshman Composition program at Texas Tech University? The Freshman Composition Program at TTU (or ICON, Interactive Composition ONline) is a distributed assessment, systems approach to teaching and learning. The curriculum for this program was redesigned for Fall 2006/Spring 2007.

### Methodology and Methods

This study, though implementing mixed methods, maintains a constructivist, qualitative philosophical position, seeking understandings and explanations, rather than experimental finding to test a theory. Methods were sequential in nature: In the first phase, three Composition Program Administrators were interviewed and information from the interviews was used to create a survey to administer to students and instructors in the program. 93 students and 10 instructors were surveyed. Four students and three instructors were then interviewed after the survey to explore various findings from the survey in more depth. The data from these methods is highly questionable due to the poor distribution and amount of the sample. The findings and conclusions of this study should be viewed within the context of this shortcoming.

### Summary of Findings:

A majority of students question the relevance of Writing Reviews in the context of other assignments in the course and don't like them or get much out of doing them. Also, a majority of students don't believe Writing Reviews help them construct knowledge or move forward in their learning or activities; 2/3rds consider them empty rehashing of course material. However, instructors for the most part believe in the constructivist value of reflection—matching the value placed on this reflection by the curriculum designers. Interestingly, a majority of students felt that doing the Writing Reviews focused on revision helped them produce a better final draft than if they had not done the reflective activity.

### Conclusions:

Using notions from Clay Spinuzzi's "integrated scope analysis," theories of Rhetorical Reflection and Curricular Reflection framed within the Three Poles of Reflection, and King and Kitchener's ideas on the development of reflective judgment, two key discoordinations were found to help explain these generally negative views toward reflection:

#1: Missing theory of reflective skill development

No allowance is made in the design of Writing Reviews for the development of the intellectual capacity to reflect by students.

#2: Mismatch between Rhetorical Reflection and Curricular Reflection

Student difficulties and dissatisfaction with Writing Reviews may in part be due to placing a Curriculum Reflection task in the position that more naturally is a position for Rhetorical Reflection.

### Recommendations:

The study makes these recommendations:

- 1) Incorporate in-task Rhetorical Reflection prompts between drafts;
  - 2) Use Curriculum Reflection in clear post-task situations;
  - 3) Simply Writing Review prompts;
  - 4) Make Writing Review prompts more contextually sensitive, especially to students' developmental ability to reflect.
- The study also offers recommendations for improvements in study design if this research question is investigated again.

## **Introduction**

### **Statement of the Problem**

Writing Program Administrators and individual teachers design curriculum with particular activities to accomplish particular pedagogical goals. Any instructor or curriculum designer faces the problem of whether their intentions behind a part of a curriculum match with the real experience of students (that is, does the *delivered curriculum* match the *experienced curriculum*). One such activity is the inclusion of reflective writing pieces inside the Freshman Composition curriculum called "Writer's Reviews" at Texas Tech. Since the Freshman Composition Program recently underwent a curriculum redesign, there may be questions about how well these "Writer's Reviews" are performing their intended function in the curriculum. Since TTU also has a distributed work system from the pedagogical side (Curriculum Designer/Program Administrator, Classroom Instructor, Document Instructor), there could be a mismatch in understandings about reflection's role among these levels as well.

### **Background Information**

The Freshman Composition Program at TTU (or ICON, Interactive Composition ONline) is a distributed assessment, systems approach to teaching and learning that serves approximately 2500 students each semester. Curriculum is designed by the Composition Program Director, and the teaching of this curriculum is divided between Classroom Instructors who meet once a week with students and Document Instructors who grade student work turned in entirely online in a program called TOPIC. In Spring 2007, 59 instructors are employed to serve 2244 students (26 CIs and 33 DIs), and most CIs also work as DIs.

For Fall 2006 and Spring 2007, the curriculum in English 1301 and 1302 requires two essays, and each contains two reflective pieces per essay for a total of four reflections per semester. (The only exception is an assignment after the first draft of Essay #1 in 1301 that asks students to reflect directly on what to revise for the second draft of that essay, called "Assignment #4".) Within the curriculum, Writing Reviews represent the most obviously reflective types of writing assignments. Below is a copy of a Writing Review from English 1301:

### **Sample Writing Review Prompt from English 1301**

Description: Look back on your brief assignments 1-3, your first draft (1.1), peer responses to your first draft, and any in-class writings and/or notes you've taken. Write a 300-400 word reflection on what you have learned, or understood differently, about academic writing based on your work in the course so far, and how you've applied that learning in your own work. Start your review by explaining your definition of academic writing, and then discuss how your definition has or has not changed based on your work so far. Discuss what you have learned about considering different audiences when writing, using summary and evaluation strategies when writing, integrating, outside sources when writing, and presenting ideas with the correct tone of voice (the objectives of the assignments thus far). In addition, you may also discuss other writing experiences you've learned thus far.

Grading Criteria:

1. Organization of your response, including logical presentation and transitions of ideas
2. Specificity of your response, including use of detailed examples and direct quotations/paraphrased content from your own work or from peer responses & instructor feedback
3. The quality (including grammatical and mechanical) of your writing

("Instructor Resources")

Each of the four Writing Reviews in both courses follows this basic pattern

- Look back on \_\_\_\_\_
- Write a 300-400 word reflection on what you have learned, or understood about \_\_\_\_\_
- Discuss what you have learned about \_\_\_\_\_
- The same grading criteria of organization, specificity, and quality/correctness

The prompts vary the specific assignments to review and learning objects to discuss, but this basic pattern persists for all Writing Reviews.

Below is a chart outlining the place these Writing Reviews have within the Fall 2006/Spring 2007 curriculum:

<b>English 1301 and 1302 Assignment Sequence</b>
<b>Essay Cycle #1</b> Brief Assignments #1-3 Draft 1.1 Peer Response 1.1 Writing Review Brief Assignments 4-6 Draft 1.2 Writing Review
<b>Essay Cycle #2</b> Brief Assignments #7-9 Draft 2.1 Peer Response Writing Review Brief Assignment #10-12 Draft 2.2 Writing Review **1302 has no assignment #11

Typically, Writing Reviews are placed after drafts, and in the case of first drafts, they are always placed after peer response.

The last item of background information to note is that the current Freshman Composition curriculum was implemented for the first time Fall 2006 and represents a change from the curriculum in place before. English 1301 previously included four essays with three drafts for each essay. Peer

responses and Writing Reviews were done between each of the first two drafts; then after a final draft there was only a writing review (no peer response). English 1302 was more complex in its drafting; however, it used writings that built from draft to draft and incorporated peer response between early drafts and writing reviews after each draft.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this three-phase, sequential, mixed method study is to understand the role of reflection within the Freshman Composition program at Texas Tech University.

- The first phase of the study was a qualitative exploration of the design intentions behind reflection's place in the curriculum by interviewing present and past Composition Program Administrators.
- In the second phase, ideas and themes from these interviews were used to develop a survey so that the intentions and expectations about reflection articulated by the designers of the curriculum could be examined in relation to the attitudes and experiences of those who deliver the curriculum (Classroom and Document Instructors) and those who experience the curriculum (students).
- In the third phase, qualitative interviews were used to probe significant results from the survey in more depth.

This study provides descriptive information about reflection's place within the Texas Tech University Freshman Composition program. The knowledge obtained from this study, while helpful for the

specific Composition program at TTU, should also provide information about reflection to other writing programs or instructors who use reflection within their writing curriculum.

### **Research Questions**

What are the stated understandings and experienced perceptions of the role of reflection within the Freshman Composition program at Texas Tech University?

How well do these stated understandings and experienced perceptions of the role of reflection within the Freshman Composition program match among the distributed deliverers of the curriculum (Curriculum Designer/Program Administrator, Classroom Instructor, Document Instructor)?

How well do the stated understandings and experienced perceptions of the role of reflection within the Freshman Composition program match between the distributed deliverers of the curriculum and the students experiencing the curriculum?

### **Review of Literature on Reflection**

To gain perspective on the use of reflective assignments within the TTU Freshman Composition Program, a brief summary of scholarly views on reflection is needed. Jennifer Moon in her book *Reflection in Learning & Professional Development* offers a comprehensive picture of reflection and its place in learning. In the face of multiple viewpoints on reflection, she creates the notion of

"frameworks" and the "input-outcome model of reflection." Moon sees all reflection as falling within the same mental process: "reflection itself is a mental process with purpose and/or outcome. It is applied in situations where material is ill-structured or uncertain in that it has no obvious solutions, a mental process that seems to be related to thinking and to learning" (5). What distinguishes different kinds of reflection is not the process or nature of the reflection, but the "framework" or purpose to which it is used: "it is the framework of intention and any guidance toward fulfillment of that intention that is significant in distinguishing one act of reflection from another. The mental process itself may not differ from one situation to another" (15). Despite the diverse applications of reflection, Moon maintains that reflection is a simple process and the cause of its diversity is due to the framework behind its use rather than to different mental processes.

Accordingly, Moon creates the "input-output model of reflection" (see Figure 1) to illustrate the affect of "frameworks" on reflection. In Moon's conception, the result or "output" of the mental process of reflection is influenced by the purposes to which it is being put:

Table 8.1 An input–outcome model of reflection

Inputs to reflection	Outcomes of/purposes for reflection
⇒ ⇒ reflection ⇒ ⇒	
Theories, constructed knowledge or feelings	learning/material for further reflection; action or other representation of learning; critical review; reflection on the process of learning; the building of theory; self-development; decisions/resolutions of uncertainty; empowerment and emancipation; other outcomes that are unexpected – eg images or ideas that might be solutions; ??emotion
There is also the capacity to 'be reflective', which seems to be an orientation to the activities of life rather than a mental process as such.	

Figure 1: Jennifer Moon's "input-output model of reflection"

Moon notes that these outcomes are not mutually exclusive and could even form combinations.

Within the field of Composition and Rhetoric, Kathleen Blake Yancey in her book *Reflection in the Writing Classroom* has done the most to theorize the use of reflection. Drawing significantly from Donald Schon's notions on reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action, she creates the categories of *reflection-in-action*, *constructive reflection*, and *reflection-in-presentation* to offer useful descriptions for many types of reflective assignments that might be found in a freshman composition class. Starting in the 1980s, reflection's main entrance into composition classrooms has predominantly been through the "portfolio letter" that accompanies an end-of-course portfolio (described in great detail in Yancey's category of *reflection-in-presentation*). This dominant use of reflection within composition and rhetoric can be counterweighted with a secondary trend coming from notions of the writing process and David Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle.

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

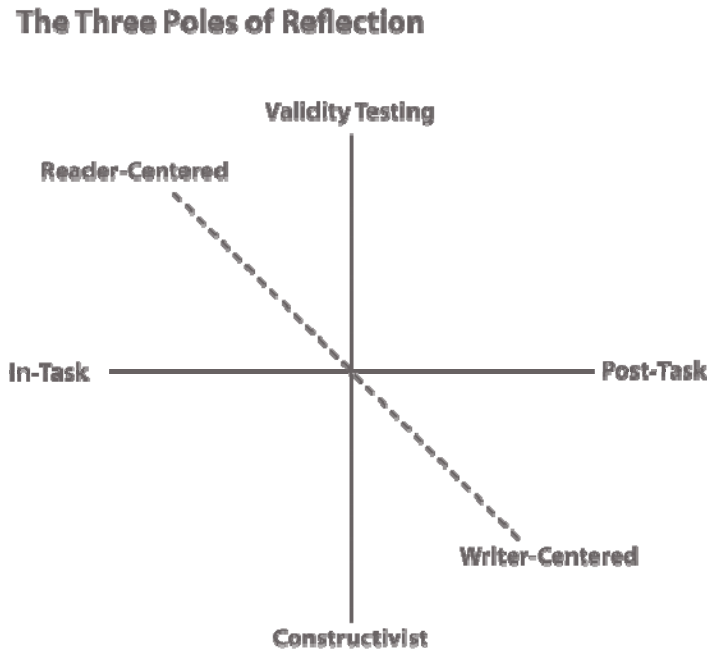


Figure 2: The Three Poles of Reflection

As in Moon's input-output model, the different "poles" are not opposites but refer to dominant tendencies of each framework. Likewise, these poles don't preclude that they might be concurrently happening. However, the three poles model offers a useful taxonomy for understanding reflection if they are not adhered to in too rigid a manner. The chart below describes these two trends of reflection within composition and rhetoric following the three poles of reflection:

<b>Rhetorical Reflection</b>	<b>Curricular Reflection</b>
--writer(or learner)-centered	--reader(or teacher)-centered
--in-task	--post-task
--validity testing	--constructivist
--action/problem-solving	--evaluation/demonstration
	--interpretation

## Curricular Reflection

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

Significantly, Yancey points out that this constructive reflection builds from previous acts of in-task reflection:

Constructive reflection...works from (but is not co-identical with) reflection-in-action.

In part, constructive reflection is the *cumulative effect* of reflections-in-action on multiple texts, and thus in part it can be seen as contributing to a more generalized response to a set of particulars. Thus, constructive reflection *entails* reflective transfer—that is, a writer's ability to *gather* knowledge and apply that knowledge to similar problems. (51)

Out of multiple, particular experiences, constructive reflection's goal is to help students find "prototypical models" that could be applied in other similar types of experiences.

Foundational to all reflection is the notion of "articulation"—that is, reflection involves a discursive act of representing in language (preferably writing) one's reflective thinking. Jennifer Moon looks in particular to the work of Elliot Eisner to describe the constructivist value of articulation: "Describing an experience is not a direct translation because of the limitation of words and the reinterpretation (or reconstruing) that is involved in the process. The subsequent reflection may thus be a verbalized version of the experience, not the experience itself" (Moon 29). As Eisner himself says, "perception is a cognitive event and ...construal, not discovery, is critical" (qtd. in Moon 32). We learn, then, as much from our perceptions and representations of an experience as from the experience itself, and reflection helps students shape that learning by pushing them into consciously articulating their learning experience: "learning will emanate from the process of representation (Eisner 1991)" (Moon 23). Echoing these views, one of the TTU Composition Program directors interviewed for this study expressed the role articulation via reflection has within a writing class:

[Writing Reviews] force the writer to articulate and develop a vocabulary and terminology to articulate what steps the writer takes in the writing act. ... Required written articulation is the best means of bringing into consciousness largely unconscious and often chaotic mental processes.

Two good examples of this constructivist framework are Jeff Sommers' *Writer's Memos* and "process logs" where students articulate their process of writing. For Yancey this means making the classroom "a place where students can speak on their own behalf *so that they too can begin to see how they learn*" (42). The premise of this constructivist practice is that articulating to ourselves what we have learned is

essential for learning: through finding our own language to express what we know, we construct our own learning.

A distinction must be made, however, between writer-based and reader-based constructivist Curricular Reflection: the key factor differentiating these two poles of reflection is whether the primary purpose behind the reflection is for teacher assessment and evaluation or for student learning. Ideally, these two purposes cohabit and amplify each other (what Yancey refers to as *bothand*), but the focus on reflection in the field of composition and rhetoric has been dominated by portfolio evaluation and the place of reflection within that evaluative context. The most extreme case of teacher-centered Curricular Reflection is what Yancey calls "reflection-in-presentation." The epitome of this kind of reflection is the portfolio letter that comes at the end of the semester or even at graduation (post-task) for evaluation purposes. The high stakes of the grade shapes this form of reflection. The audience for the reflection is very self-consciously the teacher, and the purpose is to demonstrate knowledge and skill. As a tool for assessment,

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

Reflection offers a powerful tool for expanding the possibilities for how teachers evaluate and for the kind of learning that students might do during an assessment situation. In a more closed learning context where criteria for evaluation are strictly defined and where specific learning objectives or

knowledge is measured, portfolio letters become another testing situation to see if students have the "right" answer. The test also becomes concerned with not only demonstrating knowledge but demonstrating the capacity to reflect (Yancey 147). In a more open learning context where the criteria for evaluation are more constructivist in nature, students are allowed to discuss what they think is relevant as opposed to spouting out what they think the teacher wants to hear and will reward with a good grade.

Lastly, Yancey also explores how reflective assignments during the semester have teacherly value. As a teaching tool, Yancey believes this form of reflection works as a way of "seeing in" to what students are thinking in order for the teacher to better understand their writing and learning: "I've seen that if I as teacher knew more and knew better, I could be more useful to students" (42). Various types of reflective writing assignments during the course (such as writer's memos, process reflections, mid-term reflections, or companion pieces), then, serve the purpose for the teacher to check the status of the student in order to better intervene or evaluate.

### **Rhetorical Reflection**

Rhetorical Reflection is founded upon principles of reflection established by John Dewey and experiential learning from David Kolb. Central to this form of reflection are two key elements:

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

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

First, Rhetorical Reflection occurs "in-task" and fits fairly well with what Schon and Yancey call reflection-in-action. Dewey sees reflection as goal-driven and defines it as, "Active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and the further conclusions to which it tends" (9). This "careful consideration" for Dewey, though, is triggered by uncertainty and the need to solve a problem within this task: "crucial for him [Dewey] is the initiation of reflective thinking in a state of doubt or uncertainty or difficulty. It is the need to solve the 'perplexity' that guides the process" (Moon 12). Mezirow believes that this sense of perplexity is necessary for reflection, and he calls it the "pre-reflective phase." For Mezirow, the application of reflection to this perplexity centers around validity testing and problem-solving:

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

This "careful consideration" of assumptions and beliefs done "in-task" represents a deep form of self-assessment that can help students identify problems and lead to solutions or realignments to better complete the task. Schon, in particular, frames this sort of reflection within the context of action:

Reflection-in-action has a critical function, questioning the assumptional structure of knowing-in-action. We think critically about the thinking that got us into this fix or

this opportunity; and we may, in the process, restructure strategies of action, understanding or phenomena, or ways of framing problems. (Schon 28)

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

Yancey points to Jeff Sommers' *Writer's Memos* as good examples of this kind of reflection-in-action.

The key determinant on whether we would call these "fresh accounts of the composing process"

Rhetorical or Curricular Reflection is whether these accounts are done in the midst of the writing process (in-task) or turned in with the final product (post-task). As in-task reflections, these *Writer's Memos* could influence the choices and adjustments the writer makes in the revision of their writing piece. Likewise, the key determinant distinguishing Rhetorical Reflection is its orientation toward the writer or learner's needs more than the needs of the teacher and evaluation context. Work done by King and Kitchner on reflective judgment, Habermas on emancipation, Barnett on reflection as a tool for evaluation and critique, as well as Van Manen, all see reflection as a tool applied to a task whose main benefit is for the individual (Moon 13-17).

Because Rhetorical Reflection is so linked to a task or experience, it has strong connections to David Kolb's *Experiential Learning Cycle*. Both Jennifer Moon and Jack Mezirow link Kolb's cycle to Dewey's own belief that reflection must be followed by action or experiment to test what is arrived at through reflection (what Dewey called the "hypothetical-deduction model") (Mezirow 101). In Kolb's *Experiential Learning Cycle*, the learner starts from an experience. This experience then undergoes "reflective observation" which generates "abstract conceptualization." This abstract conceptualization is

then the basis for "active experimentation" leading to another attempt at the experience (whether another iteration of the same experience or a modified version of that experience).

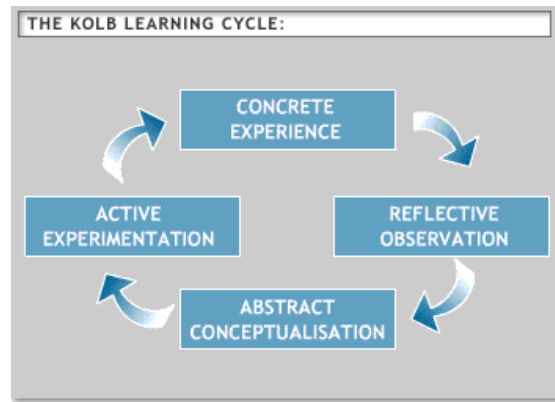


Figure 3: David Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle (Mobbs).

Writing essays represents the single most important "experience" within a Freshman Composition class.

The chart below shows how the writing cycle and experiential learning cycle align:

Experiential Learning Cycle	Writing Process
Concrete Experience (1.1)	Draft (1.1)
Reflective Observation	Peer Response/Reflection
Abstract Conceptualization	
Active Experimentation	Revision
Concrete Experience (1.2)	Draft (1.2)
Reflective Observation	Peer Response/Reflection
Abstract Conceptualization	
Active Experimentation	Revision
...the cycle repeats	...multiple drafts

Kolb's phases of reflective observation and abstract conceptualization fold together within the writing process activities of peer response and reflection. Moon coalesces the work of multiple scholars who

have extended Kolb's work (Boyd and Fales; Atkins and Murphy, Boud, Keogh, Walker; and Steinacker and Bell) to identify the characteristics of reflective activity within the experiential learning cycle:

- develop the need to resolve something;
- clarification of the issue;
- review and recollection;
- processing of knowledge and ideas;
- eventual resolution and possible action and transformation. (Moon 31)

These characteristics are all hallmarks of Rhetorical Reflection, and represent how reflection assists in learning from experience.

Although all reflection contains elements of *looking back*, *looking here*, and *looking forward*, Rhetorical Reflection and Curricular Reflection are distinguished by the contrasting frameworks or purposes that guide them. These distinctions will prove helpful later in interpreting the results of this research.

## **Theory, methods, procedures**

### **Methodology**

This study is a qualitative, empirical study using mixed methods in a sequence. Despite its implementation of mixed methods, it maintains a constructivist or interpretivist philosophical position. As Mairead Dunne, John Pryor, and Paul Yates note, "The research process and any ensuing accounts would be shaped by the methodological assumptions inherent in the different and particular ways of looking at and representing reality" (13).

The use of mixed methods within a qualitative methodology needs a brief explanation. Within the field of Composition and Rhetoric, the call for mixed methods research was heralded as far back as 1992 when Gesa Kirsch and Patricia A. Sullivan in the introduction to *Methods and Methodology in Composition Research* championed Susan Miller's advocacy of "multi-modal approaches" to research (3). Increasingly, researchers like John Creswell position mixed methods research along side quantitative and qualitative methods. The problem comes mixed methods are considered from a methodological or philosophical framework. Isadore Newman and Carolyn R. Benz believe the split between quantitative and qualitative is a false dichotomy and seek grounds for reconciling them:

We take the position that the two philosophies are neither mutually exclusive (i.e., one need not totally commit to either one or the other) nor interchangeable (i.e., one cannot merge methodologies with no concerns for underlying assumptions). Rather, we present them as interactive places on a methodological and philosophical continuum based on the philosophy of science. (xi)

Within their interactive continuum, qualitative approaches serve to develop theory to explain experience, while quantitative approaches tests theory for a confirmation or disconfirmation of hypothesis (3). Their continuum presents qualitative and quantitative methodologies working in concert at the same time.

Purest in either methodology question the commensurability between the two. Egon G. Guba and Yvonne S. Lincoln believe that within philosophical paradigms both qualitative and quantitative can

work together: "paradigms are, in some ways, commensurable; that is, they can be retrofitted to each other in ways that make the simultaneous practice of both possible" (200). However, this mixing of methods is not possible between "axioms of positivist and interpretivist models, because the axioms are contradictory and mutually exclusive" (201). This research project follows Guba and Lincoln's perspective on mixed methods by maintaining a dominant interpretivist paradigm that retrofits a quantitative method (namely, a survey) to serve the qualitative purpose to seek explanations and understandings, not test theories.

This research also follows Cindy Johaneck's belief in collapsing the qualitative/quantitative dichotomy by adopting a close connection to context: "A Contextualist Theory of Epistemic Justification reframes our current view of epistemology-in-competition and constructs instead an epistemology dynamic that emerges naturally from *the need to know*" (108). She believes close attention to questions that arise from context leads to appropriate research methods. This focus on context fits with recent field method research within Technical Communication which investigates particular questions within workplace contexts.

### **Procedures and Methods**

Data for this study was collected from three different subject populations:

- Current and past TTU Composition Program Administrators (interview1 current Administrator, 2 past Administrators)

- Current Classroom Instructors and/or Document Instructors (Survey CI/DIs and interview 3).
- Current Freshman Composition 1301 and 1302 students (Survey students and interview 4—2 from 1301 and 2 from 1302)

From February 15, 2007 through April 15, 2007, data was gathered through the following methods: interviews and surveys of subjects. The overall qualitative method matches what Uwe Flick calls a "snapshots" approach (as opposed to a case analysis, longitudinal study, retrospective study, or comparative study) whose goal is to investigate "circumstances at the time of the research" (148).

The data collection will follow what Creswell characterizes as a sequential form of mixed methods. The sequence of these three phases were as follows:

*Pre-survey interviews with Composition Program Administrators* were conducted to learn the purposes and roles which the curriculum designers see for the reflective writing pieces (Writing Reviews) in the composition program. Information from these interviews were then used to formulate the survey questions used for the different subject populations. The interviews were held online in TTU MOO and transcribed. Textual analysis of these interviews was used to identify questions and topics to use within the survey.

*Students, Classroom Instructors and Document Instructors were then surveyed* using an online survey instrument. Although there was one master survey, questions were adapted for the two populations to

probe possible comparative answers to similar questions. Students were recruited by an invitation to participate in the survey posted within TOPIC, the online interface used by all TTU composition students to turn in work. Instructors were recruited by an email invitation sent to the listserv for all Classroom and Document Instructors.

The survey was pilot tested by one instructor from TTU and two students in my Freshman Composition II class (which used similar types of reflection as the TTU curriculum). Results of the survey were tabulated (see Finding Section) and analyzed. Feedback on the survey and survey data were discussed with Mr. Ernest Tsacalis, a colleague from San Antonio College, and Dr. Angela Eaton from the Technical Communication and Rhetoric program at Texas Tech University.

*Post-Survey Interviews* were conducted with students, Classroom Instructors, and Document Instructors to explore various insights and questions gained from the analysis of the survey results. These semi-structured interviews were held online in the High Five MOO and transcribed. Recruitment for these interviews was done by asking survey respondents to express their willingness to be interviewed along with an email address for follow-up contact. Textual analysis was used to interpret the transcripts of these interviews, and no formal coding mechanism was implemented.

Thus, the sampling for the survey and post-survey interviews was a self-selected sample. Details on the sampling are as follows:

Subject Population	Total Pool	Survey Sample	Post-Survey Interview Sample
1301 students	342	10	2
1302 students	1902	83	2
DI/CI Instructors	59	10	4

Student Response Rate = 4%

Instructor Response Rate = 17%

### **Critique of Procedures and Methods**

The results of these methods are liable to three key imperfections: the self-selection sample for surveys and post-survey interviews, the low survey response rate, and the lack of a basis for comparison to evaluate survey question results.

Since only those subjects who volunteered were surveyed and interviewed, questions exist about whether these results constitute a representative sample. Neither a random sampling or what Patricia Goubil-Gambrell calls "purposeful sampling" were used (588). If better sampling techniques were used, a larger and more equally distributed sample of 1301 and 1302 student might have been acquired. The extremely low student response rate (4%) does not constitute a large enough sample from which to generate conclusions. The instructor response rate is better at 17%, but each should be in the 30% range. Survey questions also may not yield meaningful data because no basis for comparison was created. Since many questions asked for attitudes toward specific assignments, these attitudes could not be weighed next to attitudes students might hold toward other assignments in the curriculum. There is no way of knowing if these attitudes only apply to the assignment in question (Writing Reviews) or

reflect attitudes that might hold true for other or all assignments in the Freshman Composition program. All data should be viewed with these imperfections about the survey in mind.

## **Results, findings, data**

### **Data**

#### **Findings from Phase-One of the Research Study: Interviews of Composition Program**

##### **Administrators**

Interviews with the three Composition Program Administrators yielded three key areas of concern:

- Attitudes

What is the general attitude toward these reflective writing assignments? Did students and instructors see them favorably or unfavorably? Was there a gap in their attitude toward these assignments? Did students perceive these assignments as having an important place in the overall curriculum?

(Questions #3 and #4)

- Effect/Learning

Designers of the curriculum hold specific notions that reflection helps students construct knowledge and helps students within what one interviewee calls the "Writer Feedback Loop." These two views toward reflection match the purposes behind Rhetorical Reflection and Curricular Reflection. As one interviewee mentioned: "We assume a lot about reviews and critiques—I'd like some validation that we are putting students' time to good use."

Questions were designed in the survey to probe students' impressions and beliefs about whether these Writing Reviews had the desired effect for learning that the curriculum designers intend. Questions in this area to instructors were designed to probe whether instructors believed they saw these Writing Reviews have this desired effect upon students.

(Questions #5, 6, 7, 13, 14)

- Engagement/Motivation

There was much concern about the kind of engagement students had for doing these Writing Reviews. Was the motivation mainly an internal motivation or just a motivation to do an assignment and get a grade? Did the prompted and coerced nature of these activities have some impact on students' views on Writing Reviews?

Concern was expressed that these Writing Reviews were an empty genre for students that did not have any significant impact on their learning or eventual writing.

(Questions #8, 9, and 12)

Two additional topics for survey questions were added as well, although they were not significant issues derived from these interviews:

- Evaluation

Questions were also raised about the impact of evaluating these Writing Reviews. Did

students get anything from the feedback on them?

(Questions #10 and #11)

- Behavior

Of interest also were questions about how much time students spent reviewing work before writing Writing Reviews and then how much time they spend writing them.

(Questions #1 and #2)

### Findings from Phase-Two: Survey of Document/Classroom Instructors and Students

The complete data for the survey can be found in Appendix A, including the questions presented to both students and instructors. Only findings that seem to be of significance are presented here. Below is data for one question to demonstrate how the survey data is represented:

Attitude:

3S. In the context of the learning goals and other assignments in the Freshman Composition course, Writing Reviews seem to be	3I. In the context of the learning goals and other assignments in the Freshman Composition course, Writing Reviews seem to be			
	Percent % Response			
	Instructor	Student Total	1301	1302
Very Important	0	5	10	5
Important	36	25	30	21
Neutral	27	20	30	17
Unimportant	36	25	10	29
Very Unimportant	0	29	20	32
Total Respondents	11	93	10	76
Skipped this question	1	1		
Average score on Likert 5 pt. scale	3.0	2.7	3.0	2.5

- 54% of students found Writing Reviews to be unimportant within the context of learning goals and other assignments in the course (29% of this group felt it was very unimportant).

36% of Instructors felt Writing Reviews were unimportant.

- 23% of students have a favorable attitude toward writing Writing Reviews—53% have an unfavorable attitude.

#### Effect/Learning:

- 33% of students agreed that Writing Reviews helped them understand what they are learning better—51% disagreed.  
27% of instructors agreed.
- 25% of students agreed that completing Writing Reviews helped them move forward to their next assignment—53% disagreed.
- 31% of students agree that while writing Writing Reviews they make connections and discover insights that they might not have otherwise had—59% disagree.  
45% of instructors agree—27% disagree.
- 46% of students agreed that 1301 Assignment #4 focused on revision helped them spot things about their draft that they had not considered before.  
71% of instructors agreed.
- 54% of students agreed that completing Assignment #4 helped them produce a better final draft than they might have if they had not done this activity.  
71% of instructors agreed.

#### Engagement/Motivation

- 64% of students agree that writing the Writing Reviews is an empty rehashing of course material and they don't get much out of them—40% of this total strongly agree.  
63% of instructors agree—27% of this total strongly agree.
- 78% of students agree that as they write Writing Reviews they are motivated predominantly by a desire to get a grade and fulfill an assignment.  
100% of instructors agree—64% of the total strongly agree.
- 59% of students agree that their main goal while composing Writing Reviews is to write what they think their evaluators want to hear—25% disagree.  
91% of instructors agree—55% of this total strongly agree.

### **Report of Findings from Phase-Three: Classroom/Document Instructor and Student Interviews**

Interviews with Instructors and Students yielded these significant findings:

- Attitudes
  - Attitudes amongst interviewees were mixed, though generally favorable toward these reflective assignments.  
  
*Student #1 (1302): "I like the idea of reflection. I think it is a way for a student to step back and look at their work and progress in front of them, instead of rushing to finish the class. ... It gives me a chance to look at my progress instead of just focusing on mistakes and such."*  
  
*Instructor #2: "I really like the writing reviews. I just had to do a portfolio review and defend it, and it is kind of the same thing. I think it is important to reflect on what you have written in order to grow as a writer."*  
  
*Instructor #3: "I actually like the reviews. I think students often tend to produce better stuff on those assignments [better writing than in finished drafts]."*
  - Although most students appreciated Writing Reviews as a freer and easier type of assignment to do, one student felt the reprocessing of previous assignments was redundant

because they had discussed these assignments in class.

*Student #4 (I301): "Why do students need to tell teachers what they learned in a writing review, we have class discussion and inform the teacher what we learn each week. I feel that it is wasted time. ...I feel that it [doing Writing Reviews] is very repetitive."*

*Student #4 (I301): "I feel that they should be dropped and yes. let us be able to do a little more alone. It allows students to be able to learn I feel without everything being handed to them on a silver platter as if they were not capable adults to write or correct a paper."*

- Learning/Engagement

Interviewees were presented with findings from the survey that showed students predominantly did not think Writing Reviews helped them construct knowledge or help them move more successfully to the next assignment. When probed for explanations for this finding, interviewees offered a number of explanations:

- Students and instructors pointed to possible problems with the prompt:

*Student #1 (I302): "I think the portion where it [the prompt] says to state our definition of 'academic writing' is a bit broad, and a bit obvious. ... it is a bit one-sided in a students point of view. There is really only one correct answer."*

*Student #1 (I302): "Since the prompt is so broad, we don't really know what to put or how to begin."*

*Instructor #1: "In the first term, I thought the students didn't understand the assignment, partly because some of the language eluded them (I was asked what "specificity meant many times, for example) and partly because of the format and detail of the question. That is, they didn't read the whole question, and so their responses were often partial; sometimes answering only about their first draft, but not their peer responses, and rarely did students remark on their in-class writings, and/or notes (because they didn't take any, I expect). As such, I thought the assignment, at least in the first term, was beyond the students' ability and understanding."*

*Instructor #1: "About the format: what I mean there is how the question is presented, both in terms of its detail and how its laid out. Layout/format might be easier to look at: we have good research that indicates that bulleted lists are easier to read/recall. Here, the extent of the*

*instructions are so lengthy, I think we lose the students part way through."*

*Instructor #2: "In response to question one I've always thought that the grading criteria was a bit redundant. ...It says just about the same thing for every assignment. ... in the Writing Reviews ...the students should have some room for creativity here. These shouldn't have the same structure as all of their other assignments because they are the students' own thoughts and reflections." [So you would be in favor of more open ended reflections?]" Definitely."*

- Instructors questioned students' intellectual development and readiness for performing productive reflection.

*Instructor #1: I don't think a student at the introductory level is able to conduct "self-criticism" very well at all, then I don't think s/he is ready to say how to improve in the future. This kind of reflection is advanced; many of these students haven't even got fully developed brains yet (literally)!"*

*Instructor #3: "Reflection may be a bit too advanced. ... Reflection I think is a task that maybe only more advanced writers can master. ... Yet, 1301/2 students can mimic it and incorporate notions of audience into their writing. ...I do believe it's worthwhile even for those who 'can't' reflect."*

- Some instructors and students indicated that the ability to do Writing Reviews improved the longer they were in Freshman Composition.

*Student #1 (1302): "I think and know (to an extent) that many students do not take writing reviews seriously. I had somewhat of the same attitude last semester in 1301, however, I realized that if I really put thought and effort in it and did it correctly, it mentally made me avoid making the same writing mistakes. ...Its a way to evaluate myself and force myself to redesign my way of thinking."*

*Student #1 (1302): "In the beginning of english 1301 I was personally confused by the assignment. I began to think of it in different terms such as mistakes that I had made, and academic growth. Because of this, I saw improvements in my writing review grades."*

*Instructor #1: "Well, as I said, in the first term, I noticed the students were not able to conduct these well at all, and seemed to resent them (I marked many that raved about how awful the assignments were, how terrible TOPIC was, etc.) but then in the second term, this seemed to change. The WR seemed to improve considerably. ...there was a distinct improvement in the maturity of the WRs I marked this term over last."*

*Instructor #3: "Maybe in time it will get more productive and deeper"*

- Students voiced experiences when they came to a conclusion within a Writing Review that then helped them make changes in an essay.

*Student #1 (1302): "Well, for example in a few drafts, I had some trouble in structure and format...I had no idea how to piece my evidence together. I stated it in my writing review and said that it would probably be helpful for me to do an outline. Which I did end up doing later on."*

*Student #2 (1302): "looking back on a first draft and keeping mind peer responses and document instructor responses has made a better final product for myself in the past. ... making things more specific; better clarification on past thesis statements; also this aides in a well targeted research strategy."*

- Students and Instructors predominantly felt Writing Reviews did help students reconsider what they had written and learned through the course, though one student disagreed.

*Student #2 (1302): "i agree with that, [Writing Reviews help you understand better] it makes one reflect on past assignments and aides in future improvement"*

*Student #3 (1301): "Well, as far as i know that wriiting reveiew does help me understand and helped me improved my writing"*

*Instructor #2: "It makes students re-consider what they have written and learned throughtout the semester. I also think it helps them to see patterns in their writing that they would not see if they were not told to look over it."*

- Engagement/Motivation

Interviewees were presented with the finding from the survey that showed the strong belief amongst students and instructors that Writing Reviews were empty rehashings of course material, that students are primarily motivated to get a grade and write what the evaluator wants to hear.

When asked for an explanation of these results, interviewees answered with these explanations

- Instructors thought these results may not be meaningful because students are not enthusiastic about any of their Freshman Composition assignments since most are majors in other disciplines.

*Instructor #1: "First, the 2/3 negative response doesn't seem too bad to me. It suggests 1/3 might think they were worth their time. On any assignment, especially with year one students, I'd say a 1/3 approval rating is pretty good. Then, the second comment, about doing the work for a grade, is probably true of many students for every assignment, class, exam, etc., throughout their degree. So I don't think that's a response I'd take negatively or badly. Nor am I surprised to see that students try to write what they think the instructor wants to hear---it's certainly what I did, and still do, in my course work."*

*Instructor #3: "I think that just about everything these students do is for a grade. I don't think this in a bad way. It's just that this class is not what most of them are interested in. They want to learn about engineering or science or something. You don't get many students that say 'I want to go into comp studies when I grow up.'"*

- Instructors believed "going through the motions" was not necessarily a bad thing because that is how they pick up tacit knowledge.

*Instructor #1: "I am not sure all the students are 'just going through the motions' and even when they do, I think they take something away with them, regardless. ... Also, sometimes 'going through the motions' is enough--it promotes learning, whether the students like it or not."*

*Instructor #3: "I think they do go through the motions and that is not a bad thing. ... "I think that going through the motions is how students pick up tacit knowledge about writing."*

- One student voiced a feeling of disenfranchisement with the entire course because of the difficult evaluation on essays. This led her to question the validity of her efforts within the whole course.

*Student #2 (1302) "partly due to student dis-enfranchisement with this system, i myself am experiencing this as well. ... "It comes to a point where we just want are grades so we can be done. ... I have yet to see a student average above a B - and these are freshman courses. ... Lots of us actually try and to what avail beyond a mediocre grade point average - i've taken junior level courses that were easier A's. ... For me at least, i'm content with a C for the semester just to be done with TOPIC and placed into a real English class were my writting will support a higher GPA."*

## *Conclusions*

As noted in the "Critique of Procedures and Methods," the weaknesses in the survey sample and questions make any conclusions based on this data highly speculative--a larger, better distributed sample is needed upon which to base conclusions that might reliably be considered representative. Despite this weakness, tentative conclusions will be offered based upon the data within this study.

It might be helpful at this point to restate this investigation's research question: What are the stated understandings and experienced perceptions of the role of reflection within the Freshman Composition program at Texas Tech University? The findings from the survey seemed to indicate these broad understandings and perceptions about reflection:

- A majority of students question the relevance of Writing Reviews in the context of other assignments in the course, and they don't like them or get much out of doing them.
- A majority of students don't believe Writing Reviews help them construct knowledge or move forward in their learning or activities; 2/3rds consider them empty rehashing of course material. However, instructors for the most part believe in the constructivist value of reflection—matching the value placed on this reflection by the curriculum designers.
- Interestingly, a majority of students felt that doing the Writing Reviews focused on revision helped them produce a better final draft than if they had not done the reflective activity.

If we operate under the assumption that students should see the relevance for any learning activity they engage in, then these findings are disturbing. Likewise, if we believe in the mediating role reflection

plays for learning and helping students construct knowledge, then these findings indicate that students are not getting the benefit they should from doing reflection. Only the finding about reflection's favorable impact when applied to a revision situation seems to indicate something positive about reflection and fall in line with the curriculum designers' theoretical goals for this activity. Yet this last finding contradicts the previous two.

Clay Spinuzzi's theories of genre analysis provide an interesting possible perspective for analysis. Spinuzzi introduces the notion of *genre ecologies* as "interconnected and dynamic sets of genres that jointly mediate activities" (63). Individual assignments within a curriculum (such as Writing Reviews), then, can be seen as "tools-in-use" designed "to jointly mediate the activities that allow people to accomplish complex objectives" (40, 63). For a freshman writing class, the objectives focus on learning writing and complex literacy skills. Spinuzzi uses Activity Theory and what he calls the "integrated scope analysis" to plot out "destabilizations" within a genre ecology:

Level	Activity Theory Term	Destabilization
<b>Macroscopic</b>	Activity (cultural-historical, unconscious)	Contradiction
<b>Mesoscopic</b>	Action (goal-directed, conscious)	Discoordination (genre perception, genre management)
<b>Microscopic</b>	Operation (habitual, unconscious)	Breakdown

Figure 4: Three levels of scope, their activity theory terms, and destabilizations (Spinuzzi 68).

Spinuzzi describes how destabilizations are coconstitutive: "Macroscopic contradictions manifest themselves as mesoscopic *discoordinations*, difficulties in perceiving and managing genres in the ecology. Discoordinations in turn manifest themselves as microscopic *breakdowns*, points at which workers find

that they must reinterpret the genres they are using" (67). Translating Spinuzzi's three levels of scope into terms related to reflection, we might state that the *macroscopic* level of scope refers to the theoretical and intential "frameworks" or purposes behind reflection, the *mesoscopic* level of scope is the reflection prompt, and the *microscopic* level of scope is the operation or completion of these reflective prompts done by students. Findings from the post-survey interviews point to two possible explanations for these negative, yet contradictory results from the survey: that students' ability to perform and appreciate the value of reflective assignments may be developmental, and that the negativity and problems surrounding Writing Reviews may be due to the Writing Review prompts and frameworks behind these prompts. Using Spinuzzi's three levels of scope analysis, two contradictions at the macroscopic level may contribute to the "destabilizations" apparent in this research study's findings.

### **Macroscopic Contradition #1: Missing theory of reflective skill development**

It appears that the theory underlying the inclusion of reflective writing assignments into the Spring 2007 TTU Freshman Composition curriculum may include assumptions about reflection's affect on the development of students' understanding and writing skills, but no allowance is made for the development of the intellectual capacity to reflect by students. The theories of intellectual development in college students were first introduced by William Perry in 1970, but have been most significantly researched and established by Patricia King and Karen Kitchner in their Reflective Judgment Model. King and Kitchner chart out seven stages of developmental progression and conclude that reflective thinking is a skill that develops over time: "Overall, the findings from the longitudinal and cross-sectional studies of reflective judgment suggest a slow but steady pattern of development" (187). This

missing element of development at the macroscopic level is apparent in the mesoscopic level of the Writing Review prompts. The chart below presents the first Writing Review assignment in 1301 and the last two Writing Review assignments in 1302 and show the lack of evolution within the prompts:

1301 Writing Review 1.1	1302 Writing Review 2.1 and 2.2
<p>Look back on your brief assignments 1-3, your first draft (1.1), peer responses to your first draft, and any in-class writings and/or notes you've taken. Write a 300-400 word reflection on what you have learned, or understood differently, about academic writing based on your work in the course so far, and how you've applied that learning in your own work. Start your review by explaining your definition of academic writing, and then discuss how your definition has or has not changed based on your work so far. Discuss what you have learned about considering different audiences when writing, using summary and evaluation strategies when writing, integrating, outside sources when writing, and presenting ideas with the correct tone of voice (the objectives of the assignments thus far). In addition, you may also discuss other writing experiences you've learned thus far.</p>	<p>Writing Review Topic 2.1            Description: Look back on your brief assignments 7 – 8, your first draft of the problem posing/solving essay (2.1), your peer responses for your 2.1 draft, and any in-class writings and/or notes you've taken. Write a 300 - 500 word reflection on what you have learned about recognizing, analyzing, and articulating problems and solutions (the objectives of brief assignments 7 – 8 and draft 2.1. Discuss what you have learned, or understood differently, about academic writing based on your work in the course, and how you've applied that learning in your own work. Some possible topics you might discuss include the challenges you encountered in identifying a significant problem, in gathering background research about the causes and people/stakeholders involved, in developing feasible solutions, or in integrating source content into your feasibility essay. In addition, you may also discuss other learning experiences you've had related to writing brief assignments 7 – 8 and the 2.1 draft.</p> <p>Writing Review Topic 2.2            Description: Look back on your brief assignments 9 - 10, your final draft of your problem posing/solving essay (2.2 draft), and any in-class writings and/or notes you've taken. Write a 300 - 400 word reflection on what you have learned about ethics in academic writing (the objectives of brief assignment 10) and about writing a feasibility essay.</p> <p>Also, discuss more broadly what you have learned, or understood differently, about academic writing based on your work in this course, how you've applied that learning in other courses, and how you expect to use writing in your courses in your major. Some possible topics for discussion might include how you see principles of writing for a specific audience transferring (or not transferring) to your other courses in your major and how you can see the strategies of writing, revising, and re-writing applying to other academic assignments or workplace assignments, to name a few.</p>

The similarity between the first and last Writing Reviews within the Freshman Composition curriculum is clear. The only difference is that the penultimate Writing Review asks for a more

comprehensive review of their learning experience in 1302; however, the first part of Writing Review 2.2 and the entire prompt of Writing Review 2.1 are nearly identical to the first Writing Review done in 1301.

Findings from the post-survey interviews specifically highlight a developmental progression in students' abilities to productively perform these reflective assignments. The mesoscopic level gap in developmental sensitivity in the prompts may explain the microscopic level breakdowns of confusion, alienation, and genericness of response. This discoordination at the mesoscopic level experienced by students is evident in the sameness in these Writing Reviews, the complexity of the prompts (especially for 1301 students), and the lack of allowances made in the design of these prompts for the development of students' ability to reflect productively.

### **Macroscopic Contradiction #2: Mismatch between Rhetorical Reflection and Curricular Reflection**

Spinuzzi also points out the important element of history within genres (42). The history of the TTU Freshman Composition program may in part explain what has manifested itself as a mismatch at the macroscopic level of the Writing Reviews between Rhetorical and Curricular Reflection.

Previous versions of the Freshman Composition curriculum incorporated Writing Reviews between drafts as clear instances of Rhetorical Reflection, as the example Writing Review from the TTU ICON English 1302 2003-2004 curriculum reveals:

Two days after submitting your peer critiques, you will be asked to log into TOPIC and critique your own draft. A "Writing Review" is your own critique of how well you've responded to the assignment in preparing a draft and what you've learned from the commentary and critiques of your draft. In this case you are looking at your own Preliminary Writing Assignment draft 0.1. You will respond to the prompts as a kind of mini-essay. You should write about 200-250 words. The purpose of the writing review and peer critiques is to allow you the opportunity to reflect on some of the tools and strategies you have learned to use in your own writing and in the development of your writing process. Often, the suggestions you might make for other writers involve things that might improve your own writing. Also, taking the opportunity to review your own writing and consider the critiques given to you by others can help you develop plans for revision that will assist in future assignments. (48)

Charting this prompt on the Three Poles of Reflection, the main framework of this reflection is clearly writer-centered, in-task, and for validity testing. Even the Fall 2006 and Spring 2007 1301/1302 Policy Statements present Writing Reviews with a clear Rhetorical Reflection framework:

#### Writing Reviews

At various stages in the writing process you will compose *a writing review*. A writing review is a first-person narrative that discusses some of the choices you made in composing the essay draft, and includes your plans for the next draft or the next essay cycle. Like the peer reviews, the writing review draws your attention to a piece of student writing – in this case your own – and ask you to bring to bear critical skills in determining what is working and what isn't. But in the case of the writing review, you not only look for effective and ineffective elements in your own writing, you also articulate your own intentions for how to proceed. Stating your self-criticism and your plans for improvement this way leads to a greater self-conscious understanding of the writing process and your own writing tendencies. Some writing reviews will ask you to examine your entire portfolio of work. These assignments, at midterm and the end of the semester, are your opportunity to discuss the progress you're making in the course by making reference to each piece of writing you have produced, including drafts, peer responses, and writing reviews. Effective writers think of themselves *as* writers, and nothing encourages that perception more than reflecting on the larger picture of you as a developing writer. ("Instructor Resources")

Yet the actual Fall 2006/Spring 2007 Writing Reviews are clearly Curricular Reflection in orientation. They predominantly ask students to look back and construct their understanding

from previous assignments and activities. The discoordination at the mesoscopic level of the Writing Review prompts may in part be due to placing a Curriculum Reflection task in the position that more naturally is a position for Rhetorical Reflection, leading to microscopic level confusions about the relevance of Writing Reviews and content that is an "empty rehashing" of course material.

### ***Recommendations***

The following recommendations are presented for consideration if the use of Writing Reviews is revised for Fall 2007/Spring 2008:

1. Incorporate in-task Rhetorical Reflections between drafts, similar to Assignment #4 in the Fall 2006/Spring 2007 1301 curriculum. Even the post-draft Writing Review done before moving on to the next essay could be rhetorical in nature, discussing the problems and choices made in the drafting process and what was learned from this process.
2. Use Curriculum Reflection in clear post-task situations. These Curriculum Reflection oriented Writing Reviews could be positioned after final drafts and/or they could be positioned as mid-term or final course reflective assignments. One suggestion could be to label these reflective assignments "Learning Reviews" to clearly distinguish them from the more rhetorical in nature "Writing Reviews."
3. Simplify Writing Review prompts and make them more focused in purpose or framework but more open-ended. Students should have a clear sense of why they are doing the Writing Review, and they should have more ownership of what they consider relevant to write.

4. Make the Writing Reviews more contextually sensitive, both to the place students are in a writing cycle and the learning of the course and to the place they are in the development of their ability to reflect.
5. If another study of the place and perceptions of Writing Reviews in the curriculum of Texas Tech's Freshman Composition is done, it should seek to make these key changes from this study:
  - a. Acquire a broader, more diversified sampling of student and instructor data. This could be accomplished better by targeting randomly selected sections of 1301 and 1302 to fill out surveys during their class meeting time.
  - b. Create survey questions that place attitudes and perceptions of Writing Reviews within a context of other assignments in the course.

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### Appendix A: Composite Results from the Student and Instructor Survey on Reflection

Administered 3/19/07-3/30/07

1S. How much time, approximately, did you spend reviewing previous work before you wrote each of your Writing Reviews?	1I. How much time, approximately, do you hope students would spend reviewing previous work before they write each of their Writing Reviews?			
Percent % Response				
	Instructor	Student Total	1301	1302
None	9	11	0	12
Less than 30 minutes	45	57	40	56
30-60 minutes	45	26	30	26
60-90 minutes	0	3	0	4
More than 90 minutes	0	5	30	3
I hadn't thought about it	0	1	0	1
Total Respondents	11	93	10	76*
# skipped this question	1	1		

\*Students self-identified as either 1301 or 1302 students. Seven students did not do this self-identification.

2S. How long did you on average take to write each of your Writing Review?	2I. How long do you believe on average students take to write each of their Writing Review?			
Percent % Response				
	Instructor	Student Total	1301	1302
15-30 minutes	91	40	40	41
30-45 minutes	9	27	10	28
45-60 minutes	0	15	0	18
60-75 minutes	0	13	30	11
More than 75 minutes	0	6	20	4
Can't Tell	0	0	0	0
Total Respondents	11	93	10	76
# skipped this question	1	1		

3S. In the context of the learning goals and other assignments in the Freshman Composition course, Writing Reviews seem to be	3I. In the context of the learning goals and other assignments in the Freshman Composition course, Writing Reviews seem to be			
Percent % Response				
	Instructor	Student Total	1301	1302
Very Important	0	5	10	5
Important	36	25	30	21
Neutral	27	20	30	17
Unimportant	36	25	10	29
Very Unimportant	0	29	20	32
Total Respondents	11	93	10	76
Skipped this question	1	1		
Average score on Likert 5 pt. scale	3.0	2.7	3.0	2.5

<b>4S.</b> My attitude toward writing these Writing Reviews is	<b>4I.</b> My sense is that students' attitude toward writing these Writing Reviews is			
	<b>Percent % Response</b>			
	<b>Instructor</b>	<b>Student Total</b>	<b>1301</b>	<b>1302</b>
Very Favorable	0	6	0	5
Favorable	10	17	20	14
Neutral	50	25	30	24
Unfavorable	20	28	30	30
Very Unfavorable	20	25	30	26
Total Respondents	10	93	10	76
Skipped this question	2	1		
Average score on Likert 5 pt. scale	2.3	2.6	2.9	2.5

<b>5S.</b> As a result of completing the Writing Reviews, I understand what I am learning better.	<b>5I.</b> As a result of completing the Writing Reviews, I believe that students understand what they are learning better.			
	<b>Percent % Response</b>			
	<b>Instructor</b>	<b>Student Total</b>	<b>1301 Total</b>	<b>1302 Total</b>
Strongly Agree	0	7	10	7
Agree	27	26	40	24
Neutral	36	18	20	18
Disagree	36	30	30	30
Strongly Disagree	0	21	0	24
Total Respondents	11	87	10	76
Skipped this question	1	7		
Average score on Likert 5 pt. scale	2.9	2.8	3.3	2.7

<b>6S.</b> Completing the Writing Reviews helps me move forward to the next assignment or activities in the course. That is, they help me solidify knowledge or solve problems that then assist me in my next activity.	<b>6I.</b> Completing the Writing Reviews helps students move forward to the next assignment or activities in the course. That is, they help students solidify knowledge or solve problems that then assist them in their next activity.			
	<b>Percent % Response</b>			
	<b>Instructor</b>	<b>Student Total</b>	<b>1301 Total</b>	<b>1302 Total</b>
Strongly Agree	0	7	0	8
Agree	27	18	50	14
Neutral	18	16	10	16
Disagree	55	37	40	37
Strongly Disagree	0	23	10	25
Total Respondents	11	87	10	76
Skipped this question	1	7		
Average score on Likert 5 pt. scale	2.7	2.5	3.3	2.4

<b>7S.</b> I find that while writing the Writing Reviews I make connections and discover insights that I might not otherwise	<b>7I.</b> I believe that while writing the Writing Reviews students make connections and discover insights that they might not			
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have had.	otherwise have had.			
	<b>Percent % Response</b>			
	<b>Instructor</b>	<b>Student Total</b>	<b>1301 Total</b>	<b>1302 Total</b>
Strongly Agree	9	2	0	3
Agree	36	29	40	28
Neutral	36	10	10	11
Disagree	27	38	40	37
Strongly Disagree	0	21	10	22
Total Respondents	11	87	10	76
Skipped this question	1	7		
Average score on Likert 5 pt. scate	3.5	2.5	2.8	2.5

8S. I find writing the Writing Reviews to be an empty rehashing of the course material and I don't get much out of them.	8I. I believe asking students to write the Writing Reviews is an empty rehashing of the course material and that they don't get much out of them.			
	<b>Percent % Response</b>			
	<b>Instructor</b>	<b>Student Total</b>	<b>1301 Total</b>	<b>1302 Total</b>
Strongly Agree	27	40	22	42
Agree	36	24	44	22
Neutral	9	14	22	12
Disagree	18	21	11	22
Strongly Disagree	9	2	0	3
Total Respondents	11	86	9	76
Skipped this question	1	8	1	
Average score on Likert 5 pt. scate	3.5	3.8	3.8	3.8

9S. I am motivated as I write these Writing Reviews predominantly by a desire to get a grade and fulfill an assignment.	9I. Students are motivated as they write these Writing Reviews predominantly by a desire to get a grade and fulfill an assignment.			
	<b>Percent % Response</b>			
	<b>Instructor</b>	<b>Student Total</b>	<b>1301 Total</b>	<b>1302 Total</b>
Strongly Agree	64	38	20	39
Agree	36	40	40	41
Neutral	0	15	20	14
Disagree	0	8	20	7
Strongly Disagree	0	1	0	1
Total Respondents	11	87	10	76
Skipped this question	1	7		
Average score on Likert 5 pt. scate	4.6	4.1	3.3	4.2

10S. I generally understand the basis for the grade I receive on my Writing Reviews.	10I. I believe students generally understand the basis for the grade they receive on their Writing Reviews			
	<b>Percent % Response</b>			
	<b>Instructor</b>	<b>Student</b>	<b>1301 Total</b>	<b>1302</b>

		Total		Total
Strongly Agree	0	14	20	13
Agree	64	44	50	43
Neutral	9	17	20	17
Disagree	27	19	20	19
Strongly Disagree	0	7	0	8
Total Respondents	11	86	10	75
Skipped this question	1	8		1
Average score on Likert 5 pt. scate	3.4	3.4	3.6	3.3

11S. The feedback I receive in the Writing Reviews clarifies, confirms, or helps me understand something better.	11I. The feedback students receive in the Writing Reviews clarifies, confirms, or helps them understand something better.			
	Percent % Response			
	Instructor	Student Total	1301 Total	1302 Total
Strongly Agree	0	5	10	4
Agree	30	22	50	18
Neutral	20	32	20	34
Disagree	50	26	10	29
Strongly Disagree	0	17	10	17
Total Respondents	10	87	10	76
Skipped this question	2	7		
Average score on Likert 5 pt. scate	2.5	2.7	3.4	2.7

12S. While composing the Writing Reviews, my main goal is to write what I think my evaluators want to hear.	12I. While composing the Writing Reviews, students' main goal is to write what they think their evaluators want to hear.			
	Percent % Response			
	Instructor	Student Total	1301 Total	1302 Total
Strongly Agree	55	26	50	24
Agree	36	33	40	33
Neutral	0	18	0	20
Disagree	9	23	10	25
Strongly Disagree	0	2	0	3
Total Respondents	11	87	10	76
Skipped this question	1	7		
Average score on Likert 5 pt. scate	4.4	3.7	4.3	3.6

13S. Through the writing of Assignment #4, I was able to spot things about my draft (whether positive or negative) that I had not considered before.	13I. Through the writing of Assignment #4, I believe students are able to spot things about their draft (whether positive or negative) that they had not considered before.			
	Percent % Response			
	Instructor	Student Total	1301 Total	1302 Total
Strongly Agree	14	2	0	3

Agree	57	44	40	46
Neutral	14	36	60	29
Disagree	14	11	0	14
Strongly Disagree	0	7	0	9
Total Respondents	7	45		35
Skipped this question	5	49	10	41
Average score on Likert 5 pt. scate	3.7	3.2	3.4	3.2

<b>14S.</b> Completing Assignment #4 helped me produce a better final draft than I might have if I had not done this activity.	<b>14I.</b> Completing Assignment #4 helped students produce a better final draft than they might have if I they not done this activity.			
	<b>Percent % Response</b>			
	<b>Instructor</b>	<b>Student Total</b>	<b>1301 Total</b>	<b>1302 Total</b>
Strongly Agree	14	7	10	6
Agree	57	47	70	40
Neutral	14	22	10	26
Disagree	0	18	10	26
Strongly Disagree	14	7	0	9
Total Respondents	7	45	10	35
Skipped this question	5	49		41
Average score on Likert 5 pt. scate	3.6	3.3	3.8	3.1

## **Appendix B: Author Reflection on the Research Study**

The reader should take this study with a strong degree of skepticism. As a novice researcher, this project has been a learning journey for me, and though I tried my best to conduct this research in a quality manner, it is flawed.

In the planning phase of this research, I made the novice mistake of choosing a method before I had a strong sense of my methodology. In addition, I can't hide my own interest in reflection and the theories I have developed over time as I have researched it in other contexts. Because of my previous work, I have developed theories about how reflection works within the writing process, and I have a natural tendency at this point to test these theories. This positivist inclination within my own thinking ran counter to the constructivist philosophical assumptions of qualitative research. I struggled to frame my mixed method research study within this qualitative paradigm (see my blog for evidence of this struggle <http://thespeculum.blogspot.com/>), and I fear I have not done the best job. I have consciously, almost rhetorically, sought to seek understandings and explanations and not prove any theory.

The study was most deeply flawed by the sampling I did of instructors and students for the survey. I have learned that sampling is an art, and the researcher must make careful plans to acquire a sample that will yield a representative sample. I did not get that sample in this study; thus, the data from the survey is not a complete picture of views on Writing Reviews in the TTU composition program. Any conclusions and recommendations I have made based upon this data could be said to be my own fiction. However, as a good qualitative researcher, I have done my best to bring my own interpretive skills to

bare on what data I had as best as I could. At the very least, this study could serve as a useful pilot study to guide the redesign of another research study asking the same research questions.

Lastly, I am somewhat surprised at myself at how I wrote the final report. Originally, I had thought I would be able seamlessly to incorporate a reflexive voice within my research study, but I found that once I had begun writing in the objective, third-person voice I could not add the subjective, reflexive voice into the text. Intellectually, I favor this reflexive presentation because it constantly presents information and actions within a subjective context, and I don't believe the objective perspective actually exists. The failure to present this report in this reflexive way is yet another indication of my novice status as a researcher.

Despite the shortcomings of this research study, I hope that it has presented information, analysis, and recommendations that may prove useful to the Freshman Composition curriculum at TTU. Following the genre of "field research" within the field of Technical Communication, I have sought to enter a context of "work," observe it closely, and present my understandings and interpretations of that context with the intention of improving that "work" context.

Lennie Irvin

8 May 2007