

*A Rhetoric of Reflection*, edited by Kathleen Blake Yancey. Logan: Utah State UP, 2016. 338 pages.

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Kathleen Blake Yancey introduces *A Rhetoric of Reflection* with a useful history of academic research on reflective practices, which she articulates using “the conceptual lens of a generation” (9). The first generation, which began in U.S. universities in the 1970s and included studies like Sharon Pi-anko’s “Reflection: A Critical Component of the Composing Process” (1979) and Sondra Perl’s “Understanding Composing” (1980), focused on “identifying and describing internal cognitive processes” involved in composing (9). A second generation, which emerged in the late 1980s and included Roberta Camp’s “Portfolio Reflections in Middle and Secondary School Classrooms” (1992) and Jeff Sommers’ “Behind the Paper: Using the Student-Teacher Memo” (1988), developed “mechanisms for externalizing reflection” to make reflective practices visible in classroom and assessment contexts (9). This new collection introduces a third generation of reflection in writing studies that critiques, revises, and advances the work of these earlier generations.

The third generation that is Yancey’s primary interest foregrounds the “epistemological value of reflection” and its rhetorical power (10). This view of reflection in the writing class opens up areas of study and practice beyond assessment, beyond established genres like the stand-alone letter of reflection, and perhaps beyond academic writing. Yancey summarizes the role of reflection in creating new knowledge:

Through the practice of reflection, we draw on what is culturally known and infuse, interweave, integrate it with what we as individuals know—cognitively, affectively, and socially—to make a new knowledge that draws from the extant but is not a replication of it, that is, instead, unique, a knowledge only each one of us can make as it is in dialogue with what is. . . . [W]hat we are learning in this third generation of work in and on reflection is that it offers much more to writers and teachers of writers than has previously been assumed. (11)

Contributors extend new lines of inquiry into established areas of writing studies research, like teaching for transfer and portfolio assessment. Several chapters apply the accumulated scholarship on reflection to advance study of new media, particularly the reflective practices that deepen learning in digital contexts. My initial interest in *A Rhetoric of Reflection* grew from my experience studying and teaching rhetorical uses of personal narrative; I was par-

ticularly curious to see how contributors theorized forms of academic writing that foreground the personal and the reflective. While I was surprised this topic was not addressed, the strength and wide applicability of the chapters make this excellent collection an indispensable resource for writing teachers and scholars.

*A Rhetoric of Reflection* is divided into five sections: Teaching and Assessment; Relationships: Reflection, Language, and Difference; Reflection and Media; Reflective Conversations outside the Writing Classroom; and Reflection and Genre. By building on many of the ideas that Yancey explores in *Reflection in the Writing Classroom* (1998), the chapters in this collection show how integral to the field Yancey's theory of reflective practice has become. This is particularly true of the chapters within the Teaching and Assessment section: "Reflection: The Metacognitive Move towards Transfer of Learning" by Anne Beaufort, "Reiterative Reflection in the Twenty-First-Century Writing Classroom: An Integrated Approach to Teaching for Transfer" by Kara Taczak and Liane Robertson, and "The Perils of Standing Alone: Reflective Writing in Relationship to Other Texts" by Michael Neal. Each takes as a starting point Yancey's theory of three related forms of reflection: reflection-in-action, constructive reflection, and reflection-in-presentation. Several chapters in the collection—including "From Selfies to Self-Representation in Electronically Mediated Reflection: The Evolving Gestalt Effect in ePortfolios" by J. Elizabeth Clark, "Toward Defining a Social Reflective Pedagogy for ePortfolios" by Christina Russell McDonald, and "Problematizing Reflection: Conflicted Motives in the Writer's Memo" by Jeff Sommers—take up portfolios and writers' memos as their explicit foci or as examples of reflective practice. The recurring interest in these genres suggests that writing scholars regard them as primary sites of reflection, or at least the sites that produce the kinds of reflection most relevant for study and assessment.

Though common reference points are shared, the essays in this collection usefully explore reflection across different writing instruction terrain. Several authors in the collection locate reflection outside the undergraduate course, in contexts like prior-learning assessment, faculty development, and the practices of working writers. Pamela Flash's chapter "From Apprised to Revised: Faculty in the Disciplines Change What They Never Knew They Knew" details her work with faculty participating in a writing-enriched curriculum program at the University of Minnesota. Her model treats faculty reflection (rather than instructional practices) as the primary point of intervention, in order to "unearth obstructive assumptions residing at the paradigmatic level" and bring those ideas out "for examination and possible revision" (245).

The contributors provide a guide for using reflective writing in multiple ways, with a variety of learning outcomes. In "Reiterative Reflection in the

Twenty-First-Century Writing Classroom,” Taczak and Robertson argue that a specific type of rhetorical reflection supports learning transfer. Students who engage in reflection throughout invention, arrangement, and delivery of a piece of writing, rather than as an after-the-fact practice, develop reflective frameworks to understand writing in different contexts and to “reimagine previous writing knowledge that they can adapt to a new situation” (60). Several writers address the obstacles that may prevent reflection from being productive for students or faculty. Flash explains that her project aims “to steer reflective ruminations—in our case, reflections about writing and writing instruction—away from all this self-conscious autobiographical scrutiny, to divert the temptation of retreating to the familiar, and to increase the likelihood of collective and progressive curricular transformation” (246). Jeff Sommers revisits the genre of the writer’s memo, which he defines as the “self-reflective communication from a student writer to an instructor that accompanies a submitted draft” (271). In this chapter, Sommers rethinks his earlier articles on the genre and critiques the research designs and unqualified confidence of that earlier writing. He asks, “just who is supposed to be ‘helped’ by the Writer’s Memo, the student-writer or the teacher-evaluator?” (272). The chapter recommends scaffolding reflective writing with regular “acts of description and analysis” throughout the semester, and acknowledges that the writer’s memo is a hybrid genre serving multiple purposes at the time of writing (285).

*A Rhetoric of Reflection* gains its strength and wide applicability from the contributors’ diversity of research methodologies, classroom applications, and theoretical commitments. However, this range also limits the extent of discussion on topics like identity and culture in reflective practices. I was left wondering how reflection in writing classrooms parallels or resembles reflective writing that students do elsewhere, and the ways that students’ identity performances (particularly in online contexts) might be relevant for writing pedagogy. Similarly, Doug Hesse’s study of the ways personal essays “trace thinking as it occurs” demonstrates that rhetorical uses of the personal might be a productive area of research for writing scholars (288). The past three decades have seen a surge in the popularity of life writing (among readers, scholars, and academics who experiment with personal criticism), so studies of the relationship between on-page reflection and reflection during planning and revising stages might be a useful area for future work.

*A Rhetoric of Reflection* demonstrates the vitality of the accumulating body of work on reflective writing, and raises new questions for composition theory and practice. The reflective processes that *A Rhetoric of Reflection* examines appear much less circumscribed and more unsettled (to echo both Flash and Yancey) than I understood them to be before reading the collection. I conclude my reading with a renewed interest in asking my students in writing, rhetoric,

and women's studies courses to reflect on their work, and with a more flexible and sophisticated sense of how I might do so.

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### **Works Cited**

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