

Why and How to  
Increase Student Metacognition in the  
College Composition Classroom

By

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## Introduction

This thesis does not argue that one traditional paradigm for writing instruction is superior to all others. Instead, it emphasizes the importance of an individual being aware of what occurs as the process of writing unfolds for him or herself. Many familiar processes for completing writing tasks are commonly carried out below the level of conscious awareness and, therefore, beyond one's capacity to improve. Focusing instruction on raising such awareness has the potential to greatly increase this capacity for conscious writing improvement. Conscious awareness of one's own knowledge, cognition (intellectual activity), and the carrying out of cognitive coordination is known as metacognition. When applied to writing, metacognition allows for the efficacy of cognitive activities involved in the writing process to be evaluated, improved, and, as a result, for one's writing process to be seen as malleable and under one's conscious control.

Though this may sound scientific and complicated, mental processes are very natural. Many are so natural that they are carried out each day below the level of consciousness. Raising these processes to consciousness does not have to complicate writing but, instead, may allow for the process of creation to be seen and engaged with. In the absence of metacognitive awareness, students may naturally employ writing practices that have become habitual, whether through personal choice or as the result of instruction, without a conscious evaluation of the efficacy of such practices. Awareness of the use of these practices makes them no less natural, but it does allow for them to be evaluated, carried out more efficiently, and consciously controlled by the writer. This conscious control can also lead to increased intrinsic motivation as successes and

failures are attributed to cognitive functions and strategies under the writer's control and not seen as the result of talent or other externally controlled factors or obstacles.

However, before elaborating further, I feel I must limit my focus. I do not intend to talk about all writing, in all contexts, here; therefore, the classroom to be discussed throughout this thesis is the college composition classroom, but even the purpose of this course is not always a unified concept. The college composition class, its purposes, its focus, and its place in the academic world have often lead to contentious and interesting discussions in written scholarship and in English departments themselves. In some ways, the focus of this thesis is part of this discussion. In order to clearly put forth what I believe to be a practical and effective approach to teaching college composition, I would first like to clarify the type of composition class to which I will be referring and what I believe the purposes of that class to be.

At SUNY Fredonia, where I attend graduate school and work as a teaching assistant, the requirement for college composition consists of one course. I will not discuss whether our program is unique to other programs in this respect, but this fact does have a severe impact on the structuring and intended purposes of the college composition class. The objectives and methods set forth in the following chapters are designed and proposed for a program such as this, with these two facts in mind: (1) college composition is necessarily multidisciplinary (2) one three-credit course is the only required writing class for all students. In a program such as this, with such a small amount of time to help students, one goal of the composition class should be to ensure that students have the writing skills needed to complete future tasks required of them at the college level. Therefore, the argument and methods that follow, in one respect, treat college composition as a means of multidisciplinary preparation for college level writing.

However, focusing on improving one type of writing does not mean that other types of writing are not improved in the process, and increasing metacognition does not only improve students' ability to attain academic success in one class or in one academic or self-regulated context. It potentially improves students' ability to effectively meet writing goals, regardless of the context or source of those goals, increasing their capability to more efficiently write as a means of self-expression or discovery; to understand or criticize their place in, and understanding of, the world as it is determined by social factors such as race, gender, class, and sexual orientation; or as a means of learning itself. These are realistic, worthwhile goals for the composition class or the individual writer; they are goals often proposed and discussed by rhetoric and composition scholars, and they can all be more effectively met by increasing metacognition.

Metacognition is not a new school of thought or a new theoretical box into which scholars and teachers can safely place themselves and/or in which they will find all of the answers. Instead, it is a way of thinking about writing and writing pedagogy, a re-conceptualization intended to encourage the reconciliation of the conflicts and dichotomies found in these fields. Metacognition is not specific to one form of writing or one set of goals; it transcends such boundaries because, essentially, it is an awareness of one's general process for setting goals and creating plans to achieve them. This encompassing and transcendent quality is why adopting a metacognitive approach to teaching college composition has the potential to benefit the greatest number of students by ensuring that they are as well prepared as possible to meet diverse writing goals in future learning environments, professional environments, and self-regulated/creative contexts.

**A Natural Relationship:**  
**Metacognition, Cognition, and Writing**

Simply put, metacognition is “thinking about thinking.” Specifically, it is the conscious awareness of one's own knowledge and the carrying out and/or coordination of cognitive functions. However, cognitive monitoring and control can be activated in two ways, as John Flavell described concisely in his seminal 1979 article “Metacognition and Cognitive Monitoring.” The more common of the two, according to Flavell, is that in which a retrieval cue from a familiar situation triggers a search for a task completion strategy, previously used in a similar situation, and that strategy is then implemented without the process entering a person's conscious awareness (908). However, in the second type of cognitive monitoring discussed by Flavell, a segment of metacognitive knowledge “may be activated as the result of a deliberate, conscious memory search, for example, for an effective strategy” resulting in “a conscious experience (called a metacognitive experience in the present model of cognitive monitoring)” (908). This second type is more useful and important to the writing classroom, and it is this type of activation that has come to be commonly referred to as metacognition today.

Helping students engage in the type of conscious experience described in the latter instance can be used to improve writing because, through conscious awareness of cognition in the writing process, steps can be taken to carry out cognitive processes and cognitive coordination more effectively. As previously mentioned, in the absence of metacognitive awareness, a writer presented with a familiar task (college students are generally familiar with being asked to complete writing assignments, though their experiences will undoubtedly be diverse) may be able to complete the task but may not be consciously aware of the ways in which

he or she most comfortably or effectively does so. This is the writing process equivalent of what is occurring in Flavell's first example. In this case, regardless of conscious awareness, the writer completes a writing task because the familiarity of the situation causes the search for, retrieval, and implementation of strategies used on such familiar tasks in the past, but these actions occur below the writer's level of conscious awareness.

Influential and well-known cognitivist Linda Flower provided a succinct statement endorsing metacognition in her 1994 book, *The Construction of Negotiated Meaning: A Social Cognitive Theory of Writing*, when she stated that "awareness makes progress possible" (224). Cognitive functions or cognitive coordination occurring below the level of conscious awareness are also implicitly occurring beyond the writer's understanding and control. By definition, metacognition provides a way to deal with the deficiencies of such a process because it *is* raised awareness on the part of the writer about the mental (cognitive) processes that occur while writing.

**Writing is Not a Creative Accident:**  
**Damaging Ideas Caused by Limited Awareness**

Limited awareness regarding the mental processes and strategies used while writing not only impedes a writer's ability to evaluate and improve the writing process; it has also resulted in the act of writing itself to be generally and damagingly viewed by novice writers as a process entangled with myth and mysticism. The perpetuation of student ignorance regarding the practical, cognitive steps carried out when writing causes the finished product to be viewed as the result of impractical, uncontrollable, un-teachable factors such as talent, or inspiration, or some students' "natural ability" to write better than others. These ideas deter and discourage students who do not feel that they have this natural ability. Such ignorance breeds feelings of

inadequacy in novices and adds to this discouragement an absence of direction as to how to go about improving themselves as writers and students. The lack of pragmatism that results from this ignorance regarding the teaching of and process of writing is damaging to novice writers. A practical way to look at writing is needed. Though talent does factor into the equation of great writing, it is not the only factor. And talent alone is not sufficient for the creation of any piece of writing, not even that of great writers.

The damage caused by limited metacognitive awareness relates to the damage caused by what Linda Flower and John Hayes described in their seminal 1981 article, “The Cognition of Discovery: Defining a Rhetorical Problem,” as “the myth of discovery” (63). Flower and Hayes argue convincingly that the idea of “discovery” in writing implies that good writers have a natural talent to search the world or their own souls or minds and discover beautiful, intelligent things to say. This idea completely dismisses the important roles that discipline and practicality play in the writing process and denies novice writers one of the most crucial pieces of information about successful writing: “writers don't find meanings, they make them” (Flower and Hayes 63). Inspiration or discovery is only *part* of a complex, social, individual, cognitive process that eventually results in a writing product that the author deems “finished.” Inspiration can happen to anyone, at anytime, but successful writing requires the writer to be constantly and simultaneously “searching memory, forming concepts, and forging a new structure of ideas, while at the same time trying to juggle all the constraints imposed by his or her purpose, audience, and language itself” (Flower and Hayes 63).

As Flower and Hayes suggest, “it is this process we need to understand more fully” (63). How can a writer be asked to complete a writing task and carry out such an involved, intricate, intellectual process blindly, without being made aware of its complexity, and then judged or

graded on how well he or she has done so? Writing is not a creative accident. Students are best equipped to learn about and improve their writing when made aware of the cognitive process that necessarily occurs in conjunction with the mystical, personal, transcendental aspects of writing—such as inspiration—in order to achieve a writing goal. This awareness *is* metacognition. This type of practical outlook on writing provides students and teachers with means by which to dispel the undue, harmful privileging of talent in great writing. Focusing on metacognitive awareness allows us to teach writing as a process that requires more discipline, determination, and conscious effort than talent or inspiration and allows students who may not see themselves as “natural” or “talented” writers to develop the types of mental processes that are used by those who are.

**Moving and Speaking Beyond Categories:**  
**Metacognitive Pluralism**

I would like to clarify that, though I agree with many of the points argued by Flower and Hayes, especially regarding the ways that limited cognitive awareness is harmful to novice writers, I am not a cognitivist. I hope it has been clear that I have tried not to practice binary, dichotomous, or exclusive thinking thus far. Instead, I advocate each individual's creation of a dynamic writing process, adaptable to all contexts and rhetorical situations through a conscious blending of all writing strategies, philosophies, and perspectives that an individual finds useful in each individual context or situation. Cultivating this type of writing process in the composition classroom must consist of exposing students to a diverse range of theoretical perspectives, strategies, and methods, raising their awareness about the fact that they have learned and possess these things, how they have learned them, and when and how to implement them as the result of negotiating particular social contexts, conventions, and expectations.

This type of process cannot be created in our students by perpetuating the same type of binary, tidy, insulated categorization that is often characteristic of rhetoric and composition scholarship. A review of influential literature in the field, compared to what has been revealed through the cognitive analysis of the processes of experts, shows that the philosophical and theoretical posturing inherent in scholarship often dismisses the actual pragmatic practices of experts. Writings by such scholars are rather disconnected and academic, and expert writers and experienced, effective teachers often ignore such dogma in their own practices. Experienced writers and teachers allow the needs and requirements as dictated by each task, and by each diverse group of students, to determine which methods and strategies will be most effective, regardless of their stance on a philosophy or their rigid alignment with certain schools of rhetoric. However, pluralism or hybridism among rhetorical schools is often not encouraged by, or reflected in, the majority of rhetoric and composition scholarship.

This is understandable to a certain extent. Categorization does, after all, “allow us to organize a plethora of ideas, theories, and philosophies so that we might talk about them in coherent ways” (Gradin 14). The vastness, individuality, and complexity of the writing process practically demands that we attempt to impose some kind of order through classification and categorization in an attempt to make sense of such a daunting creative undertaking. But it is this very vastness, individuality, and complexity that make the idea of a writer staying exclusive to one rhetorical school of thought absurd.

Sherrie Gradin, author of the 1995 book *Romancing Rhetorics: Social Expressivist Perspectives on the Teaching of Writing*, suggests that the writings of James Berlin and other scholars who attempt to offer direction and clarification to new teachers and students of rhetoric and composition are greatly responsible for this strict categorization. Though Gradin

acknowledges that these scholars may be justified to some point in their attempt to categorize and simplify theories of writing and writing instruction for the reasons previously stated, this approach becomes harmful when the actual practices of effective teachers and expert writers are ignored or oversimplified in the name of convenience or in order to show favoritism toward one rhetorical school over another. Gradin argues that Berlin and other such authors are often guilty of both of these things.

However, many, like Berlin, adamantly argue that there *are* philosophical differences between the established schools of rhetoric and composition that support this type of strict categorization. For instance, James D. Williams, in his 1998 book, *Preparing to Teach Writing: Research, Theory, and Practice*, describes romanticism/self-expressivism as a school of thought in which “writing is used for self-discovery and a search for individual truth. As such, its proponents do not see academic content as a proper subject or focus” (36). However, like Gradin, I feel that scholars in the field of rhetoric and composition are not being realistic about the importance of expressivist tenets, such as an awareness or search for one's “self” and an attempt to speak with a personal and individual voice, in all forms of writing, and these scholars may be oversimplifying or ignoring the ways that writers actually compose when they make this philosophical distinction in order to fuel academic debate.

Analyses of expert writers’ discussions or written pieces regarding their processes (even those of expressivists such as Donald Murray and Peter Elbow) reveal a natural use of hybridism or pluralism of methods from many, if not all, various camps in rhetoric and composition, whether the writers are conscious of it or not. This contradiction between the true processes of successful writers and the scholarship available to those teaching college composition can result in the use of teaching methods that force students to write in ways that are unnatural and

harmfully myopic. As a feminist scholar, Gradin condemns patriarchal western thought, and its tendency to dichotomize rather than embrace difference and contention, for the perpetuation of such harmful practices. Though I will not discuss the patriarchy, there is evidence of a distinct dissonance between the practices of successful teachers and expert writers and the methods and theories for writing and teaching writing represented by rhetoric and composition scholarship.

Part of the appeal of using a metacognitive approach to teaching writing is that it allows writing instructors and students to make the lines that separate these different approaches permeable, as well as to use them to supplement, and to be in transaction with, one another based on something much more logical than convenient categorization: the writer's conscious evaluation of what a piece of writing needs to more effectively meet the goals set by the writer himself or the assignment requirements. In this respect, metacognition offers a way for novice writers to embrace and effectively use the type of pluralism that is so evident in, and significant to, the writing processes of these experts.

Research regarding metacognition is important to fostering this type of pluralism because it provides a position from outside of the field of rhetoric and composition from which to honestly evaluate the discrepancies between scholarship and practice. Douglas Hacker—co-editor of the *Handbook of Metacognition in Education* [published in 2012] touches on the relationship between metacognition and pluralism in his influential 2009 article “Writing is Applied Metacognition.” Hacker argues that by using a metacognitive approach to teaching writing, instructors can utilize a method that “incorporates critical elements from all the various writing camps” (155). To Hacker, writing is a primarily metacognitive process “in which the production of text is the result of a person’s goal-directed monitoring and control of [his or her] cognitive and affective states” (155). This re-conceptualization of writing has the potential to resolve

problems, conflicts, and insularity between existing writing theories because increased metacognition frees the writer and the teacher from the constraints and myopia of a single theoretical or philosophical perspective by grounding arguments and methods in actual practice as well as theory and scholarship.

### **Metacognition, Attribution, and Talent**

Studying the writing processes of experts from a cognitive perspective has yielded useful and practical insights into the replicable and recognizable steps used by experts when writing. When combined with increased student metacognition, these steps provide direction for writing improvement by offering novices strategies to implement and evaluate within their own processes. Just as importantly though, a cognitive analysis of expert writing processes has also revealed a possible practical explanation for the expert's talent. Such cognitive analysis also offers a way to recognize the important role played by attribution. Even for experts, attribution of successes and failures to cognitive processes under their control can be seen as a key factor relating to these experts' persistence, discipline, and intrinsic motivation to improve their own processes. For these reasons, the recognition and analysis of the cognitive processes employed by expert writers obviously have great significance on the discussion surrounding effective practices for teaching college composition because emulating the successful processes of experts is a helpful way to teach in a manner that most closely aligns with natural and successful writing processes.

Barry Zimmerman is a well-known researcher in a field closely related to metacognition known as self-regulation. Self-regulation is related to metacognition because it is the achievement of a self-controlled learning/creative process characterized by an individual's ability to set goals, attempt to make progress toward those goals, and use feedback to choose and

implement specific strategies intended to subsequently meet those goals more effectively, regardless of context or subject matter, through increased metacognition. In his article “Becoming a Self-Regulated Writer: A Social-Cognitive Perspective,” Zimmerman analyzed the actual writing processes of a range of well-known, expert writers, including Ernest Hemingway and, one of the people most responsible for shifting the scholarly and pedagogical focus from writing product to writing process, Donald Murray. His findings provide evidence that what is commonly recognized as talent is, in psychological terms, an innate ability to carry out the coordination of cognitive and metacognitive functions efficiently.

Though these writers were not consciously attempting to use metacognition in their writing processes, the experts in Zimmerman’s study demonstrated a tendency to set goals, monitor those goals, and implement strategies aimed at meeting them more effectively (such as setting a daily time or page requirement in order to complete a task on time). In addition to the creation of goals and the implementation of self-regulatory strategies, expert subjects also assessed the efficacy of the implemented strategies by evaluating the product against a standard of some sort, either on their own or by asking someone such as a teacher or colleague or peer to do so. These expert subjects used such feedback to influence the changes to be implemented when the process was subsequently repeated. Zimmerman terms this cycle a “strategic feedback loop” (78).

Zimmerman’s study also adds legitimacy to a metacognitive approach to college composition by providing evidence that, although *successful* or *experienced* writers recognize the importance and necessity of using such self-regulatory strategies, it is seldom obvious to *novice* writers. Furthermore, he presents a review of self-regulatory literature that shows that such strategies “can be defined and assessed in both field and laboratory settings” (94). The evidence

provided by his own research and his review of related literature also provides evidence that students who used one or more of the self-regulatory processes modeled by experts wrote more effectively, “producing more informative papers, better organized papers, and attaining higher grades in writing” (95).

Other research by Zimmerman has yielded important information about how metacognition affects students’ feelings of self-efficacy and intrinsic motivation. Zimmerman is also the author of an insightful 2012 article entitled “Self-Regulation: Where Metacognition and Motivation Intersect.” In this article, Zimmerman argues that metacognition has the potential to increase motivation due to the writer’s shift in attribution. Metacognitive awareness increases feelings of self-efficacy because successes or failures in writing are attributed to practical cognitive steps, processes, or strategies under the writer’s control rather than to the damaging, uncontrollable factors previously mentioned, such as natural talent.

Positive perceptions of self-efficacy and fulfillment provided by such awareness, according to Zimmerman, are responsible for the motivation felt by expert writers to continue to write. And early metacognitive researcher Wayne J. Wiens, in his article “Metacognition and the Adolescent Passive Learner,” even went as far to state that “the connection between being able to control one’s thinking and the pleasure derived from that control and its results is what creates motivation for all sentient beings” (144). When positive writing feedback is attributed to the metacognitive control over one’s cognition and cognitive coordination, it has the potential to increase motivation and fulfillment due to the writer’s knowledge that he or she consciously controlled and implemented what was successful about the writing process. And the reverse is also true: negative writing feedback can also be attributed to factors that can realistically and practically be improved upon due to the same metacognitive awareness and control over the

writing process. The metacognitive awareness of such control resolves feelings of inadequacy and lack of direction by providing students with practical methods for improving themselves as writers.

Thus, metacognition and the resulting ability to self-regulate one's writing process has been shown in clinical and field settings to improve student writing products. But metacognition also has the ability to motivate students by replacing former connotations of writing, characterized by confusion and lack of guidance, with positive feelings of control and fulfillment brought on by conscious awareness. Such metacognitive awareness has the potential to motivate students to engage in writing in order to re-create feelings of fulfillment and self-efficacy, not simply to receive credit or to avoid punishment. These same feelings of self-efficacy and fulfillment also have the potential to motivate students and increase their overall academic and/or professional performance if metacognitive ways of thinking, and not simply a set of skills, are transferred to other course-determined or self-regulated contexts.

### **Fostering Metacognitive Pluralism Through Direct Instruction and Elaboration in the Writing Workshop**

An instructor cannot always be standing over each student's shoulder ensuring that evaluations and strategic choices are correct and that they successfully navigate and negotiate each social context effectively. Students will have to make such decisions and negotiate such contexts on their own while being consciously aware of what they believe and want to achieve as writers, the strategies at their disposal for doing so, and of their ability to implement them at the most effective time as called for by each writing context.

Writing strategies are effective and can be learned, but one must understand how social context governs the writing process and product in order to choose and implement them most

effectively. In order to expose students to a wide range of strategies, but also cultivate an ability to choose and implement them at the right time, I believe that both clear, explicit instruction and constant and conscious practice are essential in the classroom. Eric Jensen, neuroscientist and author of the textbook *Super Teaching*, offers two very important findings about the workings of the brain that support this argument. Jensen advises instructors to keep blocks of direct, explicit instruction to no more minutes than the age of one's students (i.e. 6-7 minutes for first graders, 18-19 minutes for college freshmen) because this amount of time is that for which each age group is able to remain focused. According to Jensen, retention of desired skills is increased when the majority of class time is spent actively practicing the learned material.

This scientific evidence provides support for advocates of the workshop setting for writing instruction such as Nancie Atwell, author of the textbook *In the Middle: New Understandings about Writing, Reading, and Learning*. Atwell advocates devoting large chunks of class time to composing, drafting, revising, and one-on-one conferences with students in combination with what she calls mini-lessons which consist of no more than 15 minutes of direct instruction (Atwell).

When the focus is raising metacognition, the writing workshop becomes a place for the student to implement and practice writing strategies introduced through mini-lesson instruction within the context of creating his or her own piece of writing. Mini-lessons are short, succinct lessons regarding the use of specific writing skills or strategies. Immediate practice following succinct, specific instruction regarding modeled strategies allows students opportunities for conscious, metacognitive implementation of the newly presented strategies within the context of working on their own current writing projects.

Consciously attempting, evaluating, and continuing or abandoning these strategies in the workshop setting, and in the context of the immediate, tangible writing assignment, allows students the opportunity to attempt strategies that have proven effective for other writers while they are still fresh in their minds. Also, asking students to do so in the workshop setting encourages—and perhaps even subtly forces—they to step outside of their comfort zone and attempt writing strategies that may seem unnatural, foreign, intimidating, etc. By attempting such strategies after learning and discussing them in the workshop setting, rather than allowing a knee-jerk reaction to result in immediately protesting or abstaining from them, students widen their breadth of writing strategies, raise the fact that they possess them to a level of conscious awareness, and improve their skills of evaluating, continuing, or abandoning such strategies in a controlled, conscious, autonomous manner. Without the safe space for experimentation provided in class by the writing workshop, students may fall prey to dismissing ideas or strategies that could be effective and helpful to them out of ignorance, fear of the unfamiliar or poor grades, the demands of other course work, or the false security that has been created in many students as the result of successful writing at previous levels and in familiar contexts.

The writing workshop creates a space for social interaction, dialogue, and the evaluation of writing, and revision strategies, tapping into the power of social learning while providing focus through direct writing skills instruction in an attempt to optimize the use of the limited time available in the composition class and increase the effectiveness of peer feedback and social interaction. This is another great example of the strength that can result from pluralism among writing theories. Rhetorical scholar Kenneth Bruffee argues that “any effort to understand and cultivate in ourselves the kind of thought we value most requires us to understand and cultivate the kinds of community life that establish and maintain conversation that is the origin of that

kind of thought” (Bruffee 399). Denying social interaction within the classroom and limiting it to existing exclusively between the teacher and student would be to deny students one of the most powerful and natural methods of learning in which humans engage.

But it is also true that denying the importance that cognitive structure and discipline play in the processes of successful writers in favor of a strict and exclusive social argument would be to deny writing students a very important tool kit proven to be imperative to the success of expert writers. A focus on improving metacognition in the writing workshop provides a space for both of these perspectives (and ideally all perspectives) to come together, not eclectically, but through conscious metacognitive ability and evaluation.

### **Chapter Organization**

Chapter one presents a review of metacognition throughout the history of psychology, attempts to present a clear definition of the concept or theory, and examines the relationship between metacognition and self-regulated learning. Metacognition reconciles opposing stances regarding the individual vs. social nature of learning and knowledge to allow for a more complete understanding of the writing process and learning process in general. Chapter one also discusses this as well as the ways that metacognition affects motivation and feelings of self-efficacy, and the chapter closes with a discussion of the ways that metacognition aids in creating the type of active, life-long learners and effectual involved citizens that create the world for themselves rather than accept it as it is given to them and their role within it as called for by seminal philosophers such as Paulo Freire.

Chapter two addresses the familiar and traditional categories into which college composition instruction theories are commonly separated and placed. A history of rhetoric and composition, the major theoretical approaches to teaching composition, and the reasons for their

strict insularity and categorization will be explored. The well-known work of James Berlin will provide the traditional models that will be critiqued in favor of metacognitive pluralism. The theories of important scholars such as Witte, Bizzell, and Flower, who have argued for similar attempts at pluralism in the past, as well as the more recent social-expressivist perspective provided by Gradin, will be presented and the fact that such approaches are still largely ignored in composition classrooms will also be discussed. In order to further advocate for metacognitive pluralism, chapter two will take a case study approach to examining the writing processes of certain expert writers in order to prove that such writers practice such pluralism naturally and successfully, and the ways that metacognition provides a practical approach to cultivating such pluralism, reaching and improving the skills of the most diverse and encompassing range of students possible, is the last point argued in the chapter.

Chapter three presents an approach to composition instruction developed with raising metacognitive awareness in mind. Direct instruction through mini-lessons regarding pre-writing, writing, and revision strategies in the writing workshop has the potential to increase students' breadth of writing and revision strategies. The use of social and independent elaboration time in the writing workshop setting provides an opportunity for students to learn, think critically, and create pieces of writing in a social and engaging context, and direct instruction is necessary to widen student's breadth of writing strategies. Chapter 3 provides lesson examples and a clear, replicable approach to combining these two facets of effective instruction through increasing metacognition in order for students to create an effective, dynamic, individualized, and constantly adapting writing process.

# Chapter 1: The Importance of Metacognition in Education

## Defining Metacognition and Self-Regulated Learning

As previously explained, metacognition is the conscious awareness of one's own knowledge, cognition (mental processes), and/or the coordination of cognitive activities. Conscious awareness of this kind is not necessary for cognitive acts and cognitive coordination to be carried out. Cognitive functions, and the monitoring and control of cognitive functions, can happen without our conscious awareness. As discussed in the introduction, seminal metacognition researcher John Flavell was one of the first to discuss this difference. According to Flavell, what happens most often and most naturally is that a retrieval cue from a familiar situation triggers a search for a task completion strategy, previously used in a similar situation, and that strategy is then implemented without the process entering a person's conscious awareness (908). However, it is also possible for knowledge to "be activated as the result of a deliberate, conscious memory search, for example, for an effective strategy" (908). This results in "a conscious experience (called a metacognitive experience in the present model of cognitive monitoring)" (908). The latter sections of this chapter will discuss cultivating this type of metacognitive experience in the classroom and why that is important. First, however, I will further define metacognition and a closely related field known as self-regulated learning (SRL).

Strictly defined, metacognition specifically refers to a person's awareness of cognitive functions; it does not necessarily refer to the "self-directive process by which learners transform their mental abilities into academic skills" (Zimmerman 65). The term used for such transformation is self-regulated learning (SRL). Despite these clear and important differences

between metacognition and SRL, many theories and ideas overlap, and often cross a thin and permeable boundary, between the two. Over approximately the past thirty years, researchers such as Zimmerman, Schunk, and Bandura have extensively researched and published work in this emerging field of study.

Metacognition is the essential component to achieving SRL. Without metacognitive awareness of one's knowledge, abilities, and constantly used mental processes, one would be unable to consciously evaluate a task and set cognitive goals in the most effective manner. These processes will still obviously occur (writing tasks get completed without specific metacognitive knowledge), but only out of habit and with no element of reflection, evaluation, or subsequent improvement. But, although metacognitive awareness is obviously necessary for this reason, it must be consciously coupled with action in order for awareness to lead to improvement. The result of this coupling, if carried out consciously, is self-regulated learning, made possible with the use of metacognition.

Becoming a self-regulated learner in all learning contexts is obviously a lifelong task that a composition instructor could not be expected to bring about in one semester. This is why I have chosen to focus my thesis on the cultivating of metacognitive awareness. Increasing metacognition and raising students' choices made while writing to consciousness has the potential to stimulate evaluation of, and dialogue regarding, these choices. Raised awareness and dialogue regarding the carrying out of this type of conscious evaluation has the potential to encourage student autonomy and ownership over their choices.

Feelings of autonomy and ownership are integral to creating what metacognition researcher Douglas Hacker refers to as a "sense of agency" (Hacker 1). Both Hacker and SRL researcher Barry Zimmerman argue that experts and successful learners are not passive about

receiving instruction. For experts and successful learners, “learning is viewed as an activity that students do for themselves in a proactive way rather than as a covert event that happens to them in reaction to teaching” (Zimmerman 65). This is what it means to be a self-regulated learner. Zimmerman appropriately quotes William Butler Yeats as an epigraph for his article “Self-Regulated Learning: Where Metacognition and Motivation Intersect”: “Education is not the filling of a pail but the lighting of a fire.”

SRL should be cultivated across all disciplines and in all learning contexts—young and old, inside and outside of the classroom—and is 100% necessary for students and professionals everywhere to perform and achieve at top levels in all contexts. By fostering a metacognitive stance toward writing in the composition classroom we will take the first step toward creating writers who think for themselves, know themselves and what they are capable of, and who have the capability and motivation to continue learning throughout life and in all contexts, outperforming others and feeling more intellectually fulfilled than others in a personal sense and in personal contexts.

### **New Term, Old Idea**

Though metacognition, as its own branch of psychology, is only as old as the initial work of Flavell and others in the later 1970’s and early 1980’s, the concept of self-control over cognitive functions and the desirable nature of such abilities are as old as psychological study and inquiry. In 2008, Fox and Riconscente traced the thread of evaluating and controlling our own actions or thinking strategies through the history of psychological theory from James to Piaget to Vygotsky and found that, though it has taken many different names throughout the history of the field, metacognition, in some raw form, has always been present. Interestingly, all three of these seminal psychological scholars, in some way, focus on the human mind advancing

from a state lacking in self-awareness, self-observation, and self-regulation to one in which all of these actions are possible, and, for all three, the state in which a human being is capable of these things is the most advanced.

Roughly a century ago, William James' introspective observations introduced the world to many of the psychological theories and areas of inquiry still studied today, and metacognition is no exception. James' focus on what he referred to as the "Self" likely grew out of the fact that his explorations were most often carried out through introspective observation (Fox and Riconscente 375). This technique essentially consists of "looking into our own minds and reporting what we there discover" (James 185) and necessarily requires the use of metacognition in that one must be aware of one's own thinking in order to carry out such an observation and reporting. Also, James specifically associates awareness of one's own cognition with his idea of the most advanced mental state or the state that he associates with adulthood: "A mind which has become conscious of its own cognitive function...not only knows the things that appear before it; it knows that it knows them. This stage of reflective condition is . . . our habitual adult state of mind" (James 272-273).

Jean Piaget's work turned away from the introspective approach of William James, and many of his theories were derived from observing interactions between children in social and educational settings, as well as through observations of, and verbal explanations from, children during "spontaneous or constructed problem-solving situations" (Fox and Riconscente 378). Piaget's work regarding the stages of human development is well known and influential. He argues that humans move through four stages as they grow and develop mentally: the sensorimotor and operational phases occur in the child's early development, from 0-2 and 2-7

years of age respectively. Piaget termed the final two the concrete and formal operations stages, occurring from 7-11 and 11-25 years of age respectively (Piaget 2 articles).

The work of L.S. Vygotsky is both very similar to, and very different from, that of Piaget. Vygotsky also focuses on life-long cognitive development. However, Vygotsky offers a more individualized and less-rigid interpretation of a person's advancement through cognitive phases, and these are similar in duration and chronology to Piaget's. Vygotsky focuses more on how this development occurs socially, primarily through language acquisition, for each individual, rather than as a result of simply increasing in age. The similarities and differences between the theories of these two seminal scholars could fill volumes, but what is more important to a discussion on metacognition is the similar ways that both of these theorists, like James before them, place a high level of importance on gaining conscious control over one's mental processes and equate such control with what they consider to be the most advanced state of cognitive function.

For Vygotsky, humans' "development of metacognition and self-regulation begins with the internalization of their interactions with others" (Fox and Riconscente 386). Metacognition not only allows one to be aware of this internalization, it also aids one in being aware of changing contexts, allowing for awareness one's own mental abilities and how they align with the demands of a given task situation (Fox and Riconscente 386). Piaget can be seen as surprisingly similar to Vygotsky in this respect. Vygotsky argues that the internalization of social interactions leads to the development of metacognition, and Piaget argues this as well.

Interactions with others and the reactions to thoughts and behaviors that others give in these instances teach the developing individual "how to speak 'according to' others, and not simply 'according to' our own point of view" (Piaget 249). Internalization of the reactions of others results in a person's thought becoming "decentered," furthering an individual's realization that

“one’s own perspective, reasonings, and actions are positioned as one of many possible perspectives” (Fox and Riconscente 378). Thus, an attempt at deliberately directing thinking outward in order to communicate with, understand, and control other people or objects also results in thought being directed inward as one attempts to reconcile the dissonance felt through the interactions with others.

Metacognition can be seen in the work of all three of these theorists who all believe that awareness of mental functions is the foundation necessary for reflection, evaluation, and conscious mental improvement or adaptation to occur. All three believe that this type of reflective and evaluative ability, applied to every individual context, results in a person being able to adjust behaviors and speech for success in each context by reflecting on the ways that others react, and all three believe this to be the “adult” state of mind or the highest stage of cognitive development. Though Piaget and Vygotsky differ in many ways, their beliefs about developing self-regulatory practices as the result of internalizing the modeled actions and reactions of others in social settings are quite similar and quite a departure from the early introspective work of James.

The fact that these theorists differ on their view of the social or individual nature of developing self-regulatory practices—the latter two are focused on its social nature and James is focused on the ways that metacognition can help the individual understand him or herself better through introspection—is important because cultivating metacognition in the classroom will need to take both the individual and the social nature of learning itself into consideration in order to be successful and in order to become an acceptable and useful philosophy for a range of teachers who will undoubtedly differ greatly regarding their views on the individual and the social nature of learning.

**Metacognition, the Individual,  
and the Social Nature of Knowledge and Learning**

For all three of these psychologists, attaining the most advanced state of cognitive ability necessarily involves an interaction between the self, the cultural context that creates the self, and the cultural context affecting the current task. James argues that introspection is important to developing mental abilities linked with metacognition, such as reflection and a self-awareness, that allow us to not only possess certain knowledge but also to know that we possess that knowledge. However, these abilities, according to Vygotsky and Piaget, must be developed socially. For Vygotsky, the social development of these abilities consists of observing, emulating, and internalizing behavior and language modeled by others, resulting in the learning and internalization of social standards against which the individual evaluates him or herself through reflection. For Piaget, the development of these abilities is achieved by internalizing and reflecting on the reactions of others (which become internal standards) as we try to exert direct influence on people, objects, and situations. This leads to the development of a process for evaluating the self in a similar manner to how it is evaluated by others.

The internalization of socially-learned skills has been further explored in SRL research. In a 1999 article, Kitsantas and Zimmerman provided a succinct, scientific, and research-based explanation of four observable levels of the process of internalizing socially acquired skills. The four levels are described as observation, emulation, self-control, and self-regulation. The observation level is characterized by “witnessing or hearing accounts of a model who possesses expertise,” (241). Novice practitioners of many skills, ranging from personal to academic, observe the carrying out of a skill and are provided not only with a “clear image of how the skill is executed” (241), but they also witness and vicariously experience the rewards received by the

model and are, in turn, potentially motivated to attain similar mastery (241). Level two—emulation—“refers to the adoption of the model’s abstract pattern or style motorically rather than through mimicry of individual response components” (271). Emulation and the social feedback received regarding the efficacy of such emulation in various contexts provide the novice with a personal standard to internalize and further reflect on and improve (241).

The final two levels, self-control and self-regulation, are related to the idea of scaffolding: providing students with instruction and then slowly removing support as the students become more and more capable of completing the task on their own. At the self-control level, according to Zimmerman and Kitsantas, the novice gains the ability to perform a particular modeled strategy without the model present, instead relying on “personal representations of modeled performance standards to guide them during self-directed learning experiences” (242). And, at the final level—self-regulation—the writer is able to “adapt behaviorally to changing tasks, audiences, and intrapersonal states” and, in the case of writing instruction, a “strategy can be used automatically without careful self-monitoring, and proficient writers shift their attention toward performance outcomes” (242) (i.e. rather than focusing on the correctness of standard English conventions, one can focus on the desired effect or thematic goal of a piece of writing (242)).

Metacognition is the link between individual and social learning theories and cannot only be used to raise an individual’s awareness about skills he or she possesses; it can also be used to raise awareness of the process of observing, internalizing, and negotiating the constraints and expectations of individual social contexts. And this is what makes binary thinking so limiting and damaging. Learning theories and philosophies focused on the individual and social aspects of learning are not only both valid; they are both essential to effective writing instruction. Writing

strategies are useful. Disciplined writers use them constantly and successfully, and an individual's ability to recognize, evaluate, and continue or discard strategies based on conscious reflection may account for a great deal of what we refer to as talent, and this process can be cultivated by focusing instruction of metacognition. But the use of such strategies and reflective practices are only effective when coupled with an ability to consider the conventions of the context influencing the writer and the product.

Knowledge and skills are acquired through social interaction, but without attaining a certain level of self-awareness, students may not even know that they possess such knowledge and skills. Limited metacognitive awareness about how skills are acquired, rather than innate; how assignments and contexts are negotiated; how goals are set, and how strategies possessed by the individual are implemented in order to achieve them can result in an individual attributing low academic proficiency to factors such as a lack of talent or ability. And many students can become understandably discouraged by this idea. Metacognition can be used to teach practical ways to blend individual practices and knowledge with an ability to negotiate all contexts, weakening the hold of discouraging ideas about talent and increasing a writer's sense of control, intrinsic motivation, and feelings of self-efficacy.

**Where Metacognition and Motivation Intersect:**  
**Self-Efficacy and Causal Attribution**

What motivates students to learn? What motivates experts to spend so much time working on mastering a craft or a field of study without anyone requiring that they do so? These may sound like philosophical questions but, as will soon be explained, psychology, especially the branch of metacognition, and philosophy are closely intertwined. From a psychological

perspective, there are two types of motivation: extrinsic, meaning coming from an external source, or intrinsic, coming from within.

Zimmerman argues that, “historically, educators have focused on social encouragement and extrinsic ‘bells and whistles’ to try and elevate students’ levels of motivation” (66). But experts are not spending hours each day working on a task or skill because they are being given gold stars. They are motivated intrinsically to keep returning to the task. Intrinsic motivation is stronger, more genuine, and longer-lasting than extrinsic motivation provided by approval from a teacher or grades or some sort of treat. Focusing on raising metacognitive awareness in the classroom can create feelings of intrinsic motivation for students through feelings of autonomy and fulfillment experienced through knowing that one has completed an established goal as the result of conscious, directed effort and performance.

In a very insightful early article investigating the link between motivation and metacognition, Wiens argues that “the connection between being able to control one's thinking and the pleasure derived from that control and its results is what creates motivation for all sentient beings” (144). But, though experts and experienced writers and students feel this connection and are driven to replicate the feelings of fulfillment and success that come with such endeavors, novices in a new discipline may not “immediately derive powerful self-motivational benefits, and they may lose interest” (Zimmerman 66).

According to Zimmerman, whether consciously or not, successful learners engage in a process of evaluation, reflection, and adaptation, which he terms a personal feedback loop. The relationship between metacognition and feelings of self-efficacy and motivation, can be best understood in the context of this process. There are three phases of this process: the forethought phase, the performance phase, and the self-reflection phase (Zimmerman 67, 178, 300). The

cyclical and constantly recurring nature of this process results in each phase being closely tied to and affected by that which comes before and greatly tied to affecting that which comes after, and none can really occur without the others.

During the *forethought phase*, beliefs about self-efficacy greatly affect one's interest in a task, beliefs about how successful one will be in the endeavor, what goals are set to complete the task, and what strategies will be used to achieve them as one reflects on past experience. Feelings of fulfillment and success motivate students to attempt similar tasks again in order to recreate a similar experience with similar positive feelings. And the opposite is true as well: negative feelings of failure, discomfort, and/or anxiety result in students feeling unmotivated or even resentful toward subsequent similar tasks.

Information regarding such past experiences is retrieved from the previous phase of the personal feedback loop, or what may be called the last phase for an individual task or assignment, the *self-reflection phase*. During this phase, an individual is evaluated against a standard, and he or she receives feedback. Psychology researcher Zimmerman identified three major types of evaluative standards: prior levels of performance, mastery of all components of a skill, and social comparisons with the performance of others" (68). Zimmerman argues that "it is important to note that a student's choice of standard can greatly affect their perceived outcomes and subsequent motivation" (304). For instance, encouraging students to focus on prior performance and personal growth as a means of comparison may be more beneficial than encouraging them to focus on comparing their product or performance to that of peers on an individual assignment.

Metacognition plays an important part in this phase. When feedback is received from any internal or external evaluation, the success or failure of the evaluation is attributed to factors

viewed as under the writer's control or outside of the writer's control. A lack of awareness regarding mental processes carried out during a learning task (i.e. writing) can result in success or failure in the endeavor being attributed to "uncontrollable factors such as a lack of talent or ability" which "prompts learners to react negatively to setbacks and discourages efforts to improve. However, attributing errors to controllable factors, such as the use of a particular strategy, can sustain motivation during periods of subpar performance" (Zimmerman 304).

Zimmerman refers to this as causal attribution. Metacognitive awareness increases a student's ability to attribute successes and failures to controllable factors such as strategy choice, level of effort, or time spent on task. This type of awareness and attribution of successes and failures to consciously controlled factors has the potential to increase intrinsic motivation. Attribution of writing success or failure to factors that the writer can consciously control results in increased feelings of self-efficacy, and such feelings can potentially lead students to actively seeking to recreate similar instances that result in similar feelings on their own. This is intrinsic motivation.

To return to Zimmerman's model, the information regarding past experience is retrieved from the self-reflection phase and affects a student's feelings of self-efficacy and intrinsic motivation. Feelings of self-efficacy determine the goals set to complete a task and the effort that a student puts forth based on past experience in the forethought phase. But the implementation of strategies aimed at achieving those goals occurs in the *performance phase*. Metacognition is an important aspect of this phase as well; conscious awareness of personal goals allows for a conscious implementation of strategies possessed by, and knowingly possessed by, the individual in order to achieve them.

Zimmerman's research regarding writers' natural use of the personal feedback loop provides evidence that feelings of self-efficacy and intrinsic motivation affect current writing tasks as well as future writing tasks. Increasing student metacognition can potentially increase both of these areas by helping students become aware of the link between controllable aspects of the writing process and desirable evaluations of the product. This sense of control can result in increased intrinsic motivation to proactively seek out and replicate academic endeavors in order to replicate feelings of fulfillment. This is the lighting of the fire to which Yeats is referring. Philosophically, these are the students we wish to create: creators of their own future, not passive receptors of reality as it has been pre-fabricated by others. Metacognition can be seen as the practical means with which teachers can possibly achieve such idealistic philosophical ends. The lack of such a practical method for doing so may account for such an aversion to combining the practical and philosophical in education, and is yet another reason why the time is ripe for a change in pedagogical focus to the metacognitive.

### **Metacognition and Educational Philosophy**

The importance of a clear teaching philosophy is an often-discussed topic and fills the pages of many text books and journals dedicated to teaching and teacher training, but Kenneth Knoblauch may have described its importance most succinctly in his 1984 book *Rhetorical Traditions and the Teaching of Writing*. According to Knoblauch, a focus on teaching methods alone yields a narrow view of “the isolated techniques and strategies . . . and tricks of the trade that teachers share with each other in order to find something entertaining for the next day's lesson” (1). What Knoblauch terms a philosophical perspective is useful in a classroom focused on raising metacognitive awareness because it requires an instructor to consciously investigate

“the attitudes and values, the beliefs and suppositions, that give rise to method, that cause teachers to prefer doing things one way rather than another” (1).

Knoblauch argues that this conceptual shift from methods to the philosophy behind the methods is required if one wishes to become “philosophical” about teaching. However, as metacognition was a fledgling area of psychological inquiry at the time he was writing, I believe that he was using the term “philosophy” in reference to many aspects discussed by metacognition theorists today. Consider Knoblauch's pithy explanation about what it means to be

“philosophical” about teaching writing:

. . . it means being aware of what one is doing and why. It includes having an exploratory and reflective attitude toward ideas, issues, and questions pertinent to how people write and how they develop as writers. It means observing writers' actual practices as the test of plausible generalizations about what writing involves and how it occurs. It means speculating about the significance of what is observed in order to enhance or revise earlier conclusions. It means applying personal conclusions to the larger conversations about writing and teaching that is going on today in professional journals and conferences—and that has been going on for centuries. It means teaching from sound conceptual premises that are understood, consciously sustained, and continually modified in light of new knowledge about composing and accumulated experiences in the classroom. It means conceptual as well as methodological flexibility, a willingness to discard comfortable old beliefs and practices or to adopt unfamiliar new ones when there are good reasons—rooted in careful observation and rigorous speculation—for doing so (2).

Knoblauch gives away his unconscious alignment with metacognition through the use of words and phrases such as: “being aware,” “reflective attitude,” “revise earlier conclusions,” and “consciously sustained.”

Metacognition cannot only aid a teacher in making this conceptual shift from method to philosophy in teaching, but metacognitive awareness of such a process can aid an instructor in being consciously aware that it is happening, as well as how it is happening, potentially improving her ability to consciously sustain the shift in focus during future instruction. The

process of evaluation that a metacognitive teacher goes through is a very similar process to that which the metacognitive writer goes through.

A focus on increasing metacognition through dialogue and conscious practice helps to break down the walls between student and teacher and invites students to critically question methods, philosophies, and strategies for writing introduced by the teacher. By discussing his or her use of metacognition, not only while writing but also while teaching, the instructor is modeling metacognitive behavior and the transferring of metacognitive skills from one context to another. Inviting students into, and letting them examine, discuss, and evaluate teaching and writing methods makes teaching more transparent, transactional, and dialogic, teaching students how to think rather than exactly what to think.

Brazilian philosopher Paulo Freire is a seminal voice advocating for this type of dialogic, transparent approach to teaching. Freire is strongly influenced by postmodernism and schools of thought such as Marxism and phenomenology, and Freirean ideas are influential and well-known in the world of educational research, theory, and scholarship,

In his 1964 book *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire discusses what he defines as “the banking concept of education.” In this paradigm, “knowledge is a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable on those whom they consider to know nothing” (197). But this “knowledge” is actually only the truth as it has been expressed to the masses through the ways of understanding perpetuated by the oppressive class. And, as Freire states through the use of a quote from Simone de Beauvoir “the interests of the oppressor lie in ‘changing the consciousness of the oppressed, not the situation that oppresses them’” (198). Freire argues that the teacher who subscribes to this system and to this idea of truth is an instrument of the oppressor in that he simply continues to “fill” ignorant or empty students with the knowledge

that he possesses which has been deemed by the oppressors as “true” or “right.” In this model of teaching, the oppressed are always kept in that role because they believe it to be the only reality due to the deliberate lack of options offered them by the oppressors in order to continue a system in which the oppressed remain ignorant and the oppressors remain safe and comfortable in their positions of power.

Freire argues that the aim of education should be to help students understand that objective reality is not something that exists and can be given to someone. Instead, he argues that reality and truth and meaning are constructed by each individual dynamically and constantly as experiences and new information are internalized, decoded, and measured against past held beliefs and experiences. This type of subjectivism is feared by the oppressors who want to preserve and perpetuate the ignorance of the masses that keeps them in power.

Again limiting our scope to the college composition class presented in the introduction, and the instructor of such a class, a banking concept approach could manifest itself as the instructor focusing on teaching students the “best” way to write in an academic, professional, or personal context. However, Freire would argue that the instructor’s idea of the “best” way to go about writing in those contexts is tainted by the instructor's experience and ideology, and such an approach could run the risk of alienating students who have different experiences and characteristics than those of the instructor and only helping those students who have experiences and hold views similar to the instructor’s own.

How does metacognition help us avoid such a classroom and achieve a goal more closely aligned with the ideas of Freire? With a focus on the use of metacognition, the instructor’s ideology is less influential because the focus of instruction becomes improving students’ ability to become successful, independent writers and thinkers who shape and create meaning rather

than passively accepting their world as it is presented to them. This type approach to learning is necessary to create independent, dynamic students and writers able to evaluate the conventions and expectations of academic, professional, and personal contexts for themselves and explore, evaluate, and determine which strategies to replicate or discard depending on how well they help to achieve different and specific goals in these specific contexts.

In his textbook *Active Strategies for Deepening Comprehension*, Jeff Wilhelm describes this type of shift from teaching what we believe is the “right” answer to cultivating students’ ability to find this answer for themselves as teaching the “how” rather than the “what.” “Information changes and develops quickly over time; it is the procedure of doing something that is most transferable to new situations” (Wilhelm 26). Metacognition is the how, and the subjective opinion of the “best” writing method held by the instructor is the what. But metacognition is adaptable to any “what,” where the instructor’s idea of the best method may only be useful for his assignments and in his class. Making this shift aids the most diverse number of students and prepares them for success in the most diverse number of contexts.

### **Teaching the How Rather Than the What**

Memorization and conformity are not worthwhile goals in the composition classroom because they only prepare students for success in contexts that directly mimic that in which the memorization and conformity take place. It is also very difficult to sell such goals to students as worthwhile for any reasons other than avoiding punishment or to pass on to the next meaningless and irrelevant required task, thus rendering such goals devoid of intrinsic motivation. Students are best served by fostering a combination of replicable strategies and an ability to negotiate all contexts. But such a task may not only sound daunting, but also eclectic, perhaps confusing, and

even as if we would need to cram additional instruction time into already packed and frazzling schedules.

I propose that is not the case. What is needed is simply a shift in conceptual focus. Metacognition not only provides this necessary shift in focus, but it has the potential to improve a teacher's ability to create practical, specific steps with which to achieve the broad classroom goals of this new focus. Using metacognition to focus on the how rather than the what, for students and for teachers, helps to cultivate an ability to consolidate and meet seemingly eclectic and disconnected goals.

Shifting to a metacognitive focus in writing instruction does not mean learning new prescribed methods for teaching and adhering to them without question. This would defeat the goal of becoming independent metacognitive thinkers, readers, and writers. It provides a way to teach a process, a way of thinking, that involves a philosophical approach to learning, a dialogue that weighs all options and viewpoints so that no way of thinking or learning that lights a fire in a learner gets excluded.

## **Chapter 2: Re-Conceptualizing Rhetoric and Composition Scholarship**

It is futile to deny the profound effects of context on writers, students, and people. But do political, social, and economic forces write the writer? Is there no sense of human agency involved in the act of composing? Questions such as these have fueled heated debates in the field of rhetoric and composition for decades, and a debate still rages over what should be seen as more important: the role of the individual or the role of cultural influences and social context. Much of the scholarship influential in the field tends to respond to this question by attempting to polarize these two positions. This tendency results in an incomplete understanding of the writing process and in an inadequate ability to aid a classroom of diverse writers in creating dynamic, individual, and effective writing processes.

However, a number of important scholars have advocated for an approach that attempts to reconcile, rather than dichotomize, the important role of the individual and the importance of understanding the role of social and cultural context on the writer and on the act of composing. In her 1982 article “Cognition, Convention and Certainty: What We Need to Know About Writing,” Patricia Bizzell describes theories that focus on the individual as inner-directed and those that focused on social and cultural factors as outer-directed and states that “answers to what we need to know about writing will have to come from both the inner-directed and outer-directed theoretical schools if we wish to have a complete picture of the composing process” (370). This article was written in critique of early cognitive research that focused primarily on the individual and not the importance of understanding the forces that create the individual.

Much of this early and seminal cognitive research was conducted by rhetoric scholar Linda Flower agreed with this critique and stated, in her 1989 response to Bizzell and other social constructionists, that “attempts to dichotomize may leave us with an impoverished account of the writing process as people experience it and a reductive version of what we might teach” (282). Rhetorical scholar Stephen Witte also agreed, stating that exclusively adhering to one polarized view or the other “may ultimately point as much to the inadequacy of a purely ‘social perspective’ as it does to the inadequacy of the Flower and Hayes cognitive process theory” (262). Though these exchanges and calls for an understanding of both theories occurred in the 1980’s and 90’s, the tendency to dichotomize the self and social factors in rhetoric and composition scholarship continues today. But a contemporary call for integration or pluralism of theoretical approaches is occurring in the field of metacognition.

Douglas Hacker’s 2009 article, “Writing is Applied Metacognition,” addresses this continuing dichotomy and suggests ways that a focus on metacognition in writing instruction could reconcile both entrenched sides by creating a new theory “that incorporates critical elements from all of the various writing camps” (155). Metacognition provides a structured process with which to integrate these two ends of the theoretical spectrum by rising above such disagreements and fostering a writer’s ability to set goals, choose and implement the most effective methods or strategies in order to meet those goals, and create a process that is effective, regardless of whether the purpose of the writing task is personal, or a means to an end in a structured professional or academic context.

Adopting a metacognitive approach will require a bit more of us as teachers. But what may appear as more work on the surface may actually only require an increased awareness of what we already know, as opposed to requiring us to learn more. For instance, widening our

students' breadth of writing strategies will mean widening our own breadth of writing strategies. This means we will have to acquire a philosophical and methodological familiarity with the four major schools of thought in rhetoric and composition. But a basic familiarity of this type was required of me as an undergraduate secondary education major and was furthered as an English graduate student, and, since I attended an accredited institution that was required to meet state standards for teacher preparation, I do not feel that my experience was atypical. Furthermore, a review of popular texts intended to aid novice or future teachers of composition reveals that the majority commonly contain such a survey of theories and methods.

What I am saying is that pre-service secondary ELA teachers and TA's preparing to enter the composition classroom are often required to become familiar with the cognitive, expressivist, and social-epistemic approaches to teaching writing, as well as the neo-classic/modernist approach. A metacognitive approach to teaching writing only requires that, as we continue our education and become instructors, we do not become myopic. Instead, switching one's focus from only one of these theoretical positions to the metacognitive theoretical position broadens the scope of study and understanding of the writing process. Even if we were to believe in one theoretical position over all others, it is hard to believe that all of our students would agree with, and benefit from, that limited approach. Focusing on metacognition helps us provide the greatest amount of facilitation for the most diverse group of students by providing them with a breadth of strategies while also fostering their ability to understand when and why to implement them. Before discussing ways to integrate the major theoretical positions in rhetoric and composition, this chapter begins by providing a survey of the philosophical views held by these schools. This review or survey is in no way comprehensive. The theories and writers that make up these categories form a vast and complicated web that I could not fully explain here. The purpose of

this overview is to provide a background and highlight certain salient aspects important for the discussion of metacognitive pluralism later in this chapter.

### **Rhetoric, the Greeks, and Objective Truth**

Rhetoric comes to us from the ancient Greeks and, originally, dealt with oral language. Skill in this area was primarily put to use in the courts and governing assembly. Aristotle defined rhetoric as “an ability, in each particular case, to see the available means of persuasion” (Williams 14). Greek philosophers like Aristotle were less interested in pragmatics and more interested in exploring the *concept* of reality as well as the *nature* of truth, virtue, and knowledge. Unlike Plato, Aristotle did not believe that the purpose of rhetoric was to “find” the truth as it is provided by the outer world; instead, he argued that its purpose was to *create* truth.

Proof is central to Aristotle’s rhetoric; but proof in the scientific sense that we have of it today is not what Aristotle was referring to. For him, proof meant the reasons that speakers give for their audience to allow themselves to be persuaded to accept the position of the rhetorician (primarily the speaker in Aristotle’s time and primarily the writer in ours). As explained in one of Aristotle’s most famous works, *On Rhetoric*, the three most persuasive types of proof, in this sense are ethos, pathos, and logos.

Ethos refers to the character of the rhetorician. It is rhetorically effective, according to Aristotle, for the speaker to find a way to project a “good” character—one that is considerate, intelligent, etc. Pathos refers to the use of emotion in rhetoric. Emotion can be a powerful tool in rhetoric because it has the ability to circumvent reason. The effectiveness of pathos can be seen as negative because of this opportunity for manipulation regardless of evidence, but the power of emotion can also be effective at moving people to do good. Logos is the third important method of rhetorical persuasion that Aristotle discusses. It can be translated as reason, analysis, or

information and can consist of fact, common knowledge, specialized knowledge, etc. Aristotle's discussion of these types of proof has been profoundly important to the field of rhetoric and continues to be so today. Aristotle can also be considered thousands of years ahead of his time in the way that he considered and analyzed the psychology of the reader, emotions associated with this state of mind, and the reasons that could have led to it. This psychological inquiry is, quite likely, the earliest of its kind (Williams 22-23).

Other Greek philosophers, like Socrates and Plato, stood in opposition to Aristotle and "proposed that everything was absolute and that change occurred only at a superficial and ultimately trivial level" (Williams 13). For rhetoric, this meant that Plato and Socrates believed that truth existed outside of the human being and the human mind. By adopting the role of gadfly and constantly attempting to reveal holes in others' logic Socrates tried to expose the "truth" *contained in the world* through dialogue; but man played no role in creating that truth. Though they believed dialogue to be important to the process of searching for the truth, this truth was not open to interpretation and was the same for everyone. This is the paradigm that dominated formal education from the sixteenth century until the mid-twentieth century.

### **Product vs. Process**

During the mid-twentieth century, rhetorical scholars began to strip down rhetoric and argue that idea generation, arrangement, and content in general belonged to realms beyond the scope of rhetoric. By dismissing content as a focus, nothing was left to the realm of rhetoric besides style. The twentieth century incarnate of this Platonic, stripped down version of rhetoric and composition that separated content from form and took as its focus the conveyance of absolute truths is the most important incarnation for the discussion here. Like other theoretical schools in rhetoric and composition, it has multiple names; it is most commonly referred to as

current-traditional or neo-classical perspective. However, both of these titles expose the tenets of this approach to composition. In both instances, the first word— current or neo (meaning new)— represents the idea that these techniques are being used today, and the second word connotes the past (traditional/classical). The names are fitting and characteristic in this respect because this school of rhetoric and composition seeks to engage in the writing of today by using classical methods or theories used for centuries. Generally, since this approach to rhetoric and composition focuses only on stylistic features of the finished writing product and not the generation of ideas, content, or the process used in writing, it is also commonly referred to as the product model.

In response to the neo-classical or product-oriented approach, scholars began challenging and resisting this paradigm roughly around the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century. One of the questions asked during this period caused a monumental shift away from product: “what is involved in the act of writing” (Williams 28)? Nine years later, Donald Murray re-emphasized this question in his essay “Teach Writing as Process Not Product” when he stated that, under the product-oriented system, “year after year students shudder under a barrage of criticism, much of it brilliant, some of it stupid and all of it irrelevant” (3). According to Murray’s article, these methods do not improve the product because criticism of the product does not consider, revise, or improve the process that produces it.

### **Process-Oriented Writing Theories: Explanations, Critiques, and Commonalities**

The rhetorical positions that focus on the writing process rather than product have been categorized and re-categorized over and over within the field. Many rhetorical scholars, such as James Berlin have contributed seminal scholarship to this discussion. As a matter of fact, Sherrie

Gradin, author of *Romancing Rhetorics: Social Expressivist Perspectives on the Teaching of Writing*, goes so far as to state that “James Berlin has most influenced our understanding of current rhetorical theory” (2). For this reason, like Gradin, I will use Berlin’s as the traditional definitions for the expressivist, cognitive, and social-epistemic categories. These definitions and explanations are seminal in the field of rhetoric and composition. In this section I have included his definitions as they appear in his well-known articles “Contemporary Composition: The Major Pedagogical Theories” and “Rhetoric and Ideology in the Classroom.” Primarily, in order to flush out the beliefs most responsible for the conflicts between these perspectives, I will attempt to explain each one’s answer to these questions: Do political, social, and economic forces write the writer? Is there no sense of human agency involved in the act of composing?

### **The Expressivist Perspective**

Berlin argues that expressivists (or what he terms expressionists) believe that “the existent is located in the individual subject” (484), and that, “while the reality of the material, the social, and the linguistic are never denied, they are considered significant only insofar as they serve the needs of the individual” (484). Writing is “a creative act in which the process—the discovery of the true self—is as important as the product—the self discovered and expressed.” By moving away from social distractions and influences, the writer is able to engage in a personal exploration in an attempt to understand truth. The act of composing is not an academic endeavor, nor does it need to be systematized or analyzed, and, according to textbook author James Williams, expressivists “do not see academic content as a proper subject or focus” (36).

What is perhaps most interesting, and the most, at least for me, complicated to understand, is the expressivists’ perspective regarding objective truth. Though this group rails against the neo-classical product approach to assessing and studying student writing because it

ignores the ways that students go about creating the product, it does not extend that line of thinking to the point where it believes that students are creating truth as they create a piece of writing. Instead, expressivists, according to Berlin, believe that when individuals are “spared the distorting effects of a repressive social order their privately determined truths will correspond with the privately determined truths of all others: my best and deepest vision supports the same universal and external laws as everyone else’s best and deepest visions” (Berlin 486).

In other words, the expressivists vehemently disagree with the practice of grading or attempting to improve a piece of writing by ignoring the way it comes in to being in different ways for each individual, but they agree with the idea that truth, unlike the writing process, *is* the same for everyone. Both the neo-classical theoretical camp and the process-oriented expressivist camp take the Platonic view of truth as being something that is already existent in the world waiting to be discovered. The purpose of learning itself, or writing more specifically, is to find and understand the “universal” ideas that others or the world have provided for us.

This “truth,” as it is discussed by expressivists, is found by writing without constraint, without an assigned purpose, as he or she uses the production of text as a means of self-discovery. This has led some expressivists to argue that academic content is not a proper area of focus for studying the writing process. But this is not a view held by all expressivists. As a matter of fact, those labeled as expressivists, most often, have not labeled themselves as such, and not all of those placed into such categories hold exactly the same beliefs.

As a matter of fact, expressivists, in my research experience, embrace some type of methodological pluralism more often than writers in other camps as they try to infuse voice and power into words that are written for multiple contexts and use self-exploration for practical objectives idea such as idea generation. Donald Murray advocates for this type of approach in his

article “Writing and Teaching for Surprise” in which he states that “students become writers when they first write what they do not expect to write. They experience the moment of surprise that motivates writers to haul themselves to their writing desks year after year” (1). But Murray goes on to discuss that what we (the reader) are experiencing on the page is not the inspiration for what he wrote but the finished product. Murray’s article provides proof that the act of self-discovery is not viewed by all expressivists as only useful if employed for non-academic reasons. A student can embark on this mission of discovery in order to find words to say that were unknown to the writer until he began writing, even if the purpose is to turn the discovered ideas into an academic assignment or publishable piece of writing constrained by conventions and the expectations of audience.

### **The Cognitive Perspective**

Berlin argues that the cognitivist approach grew out of a need for a systematic, empirically-based method for teaching a new wave of students how to succeed in college. The marriage of college and financial success did not occur until the twentieth century when the academic realm was tied to the economic and the “path to success became a university degree in one of the new scientific specialties proven to be profitable in the world of industry” (480). This resulted in an influx of middle-class students who had not been prepared for this type of path as well as their predecessors, primarily from wealthy families who had commonly received college preparatory education (480).

The cognitivist approach is the most scientific theoretical approach to the process of writing. The foundational work in this field was done by Linda Flower and John Hayes who wrote a series of articles together in the early 1980’s. Flower and Hayes’ research attempted to treat the writing process as a problem solving act for the individual writer. Berlin further

describes this perspective as one on which “certain goals, problem-solving heuristics, and solutions . . . are regarded as inherent features of the universe, existing apart from human social intervention” (484).

Do political, social, and economic forces write the writer? Is there no sense of human agency involved in the act of composing? In the cognitivist paradigm, “the existent, the good, and the possible are inscribed in the very nature of things as indisputable scientific facts, rather than being seen as humanly devised social constructions always remaining open to discussion” (Berlin 484). Though cognitivists do not prescribe to the figure of the solitary inspired writer, early cognitive work on the writing process (Flower and Hayes 1981, 1982) focused on the individual mental processes of the writer and relegated social and contextual factors to subcategories such as prior knowledge or the “rhetorical situation” (Bizzell 370). This focus on individual ability and heuristic methods and the lack of focus on the cultural and social factors that create goals, epistemic ideas, and determine the requirements for pieces of writing are the reasons this perspective is disputed by social-epistemic theorists such as Bizzell, Bartholomae, and Berlin; and their focus on discrediting importance of ideas such as inspiration exploration without constraint are in direct dispute with the beliefs of the expressivist camp.

### **Social-Epistemic**

These critiques of the cognitive perspective from scholars such as Bizzell, Bartholomae, and Berlin basically characterize the position of the social-epistemic perspective. A common criticism that social-epistemic theorists often cite of the expressivist and cognitivist schools is that they unrealistically focus attention on the process of the individual solving a problem (in the case of cognitivism) or exploring for personal discovery (in the case of expressivism). Social-epistemic critics of these schools argue that the problem with this focus on the individual in the

act of writing is that it does not examine the extent to which the ideas implemented in order to solve a problem or the version of “truth” that is discovered by an individual searching for something to say or learning about him or herself through the act of writing are constructed by the writer’s past and present cultural environment, epistemological ideas, and social context.

The social-epistemic school is influenced by an interesting milieu of social constructionist or deconstructivist theories such as linguistics, ethnography, and Marxism. Berlin explains that, according to this perspective, “the real is located in a relationship that involves the dialectic interaction of the observer, the discourse community (social group) in which the observer is functioning, and the material conditions of existence (488). Language and the ways that we use language—such as writing—cannot be separated from the cultural environment in which they occur. Berlin explains that, though social-epistemic theorists, like most others grouped into these three process-approach categories, do not all share the same exact beliefs, “they share a notion of rhetoric as a political act involving a dialectical interaction engaging the material, the social, and the individual writer, with language as the agency of mediation” (488). Theorists such as David Bartholomae, Patricia Bizzell, Kenneth Bruffee, and Henry Giroux are often cited by Berlin and others as those who fall into this camp (Berlin 488, Gradin 5). Those who align themselves with the social-epistemic perspective argue that the primary purpose of writing should be to explore, understand, expose, and, if necessary, change the influence that social factors have on our beliefs and language use.

I feel that categorization of this type could be seen as a natural reaction to attempting to understand such a complex task as creating a piece of writing. As a matter of fact, it would be impossible for me to discuss using metacognition to combine and benefit from these theories if no categorization existed. But the problem that seems to still persist in the field of rhetoric and

composition is that this categorization is often used to champion one theory or position or approach over another. This type of alignment creates boundaries where none naturally exist. Metacognition can transcend and break down these boundaries and allow us to use all effective methods and philosophies effectively, and in a controlled conscious way, as dictated by the constraints of a certain context, or by the desires of the individual in self-regulated contexts.

**Metacognitive Pluralism:**  
**Achieving a More Complete Understanding**  
**of the Writing Process and How to Teach it**

Though a clear difference is obvious between the neo-classical, product-focused model and other theories that focus on process, it has been demonstrated that differences also exist between the various process-focused theories, and they are often in conflict with one another. However, many scholars have pointed out that, despite these differences, these models also overlap in many important ways and the understanding and utilization of this overlapping is integral to understanding the complexity of the writing process, carrying it out most effectively, and teaching others to do so. It is this argument that I am taking up here. Furthermore, I am arguing that raising metacognitive awareness is essential to achieving this understanding and creating a system for using these theoretical, methodological, and philosophical approaches together effectively.

Do political, social, and economic forces write the writer? Is there no sense of human agency involved in the act of composing? Social-Constructionists like Patricia Bizzell, David Bartholomae, and Kenneth Bruffee believe that, in essence, the individual writer is a myth in as much as we are all creations of cultural experiences. Thus, studying the processes of how a writer creates a piece of writing is futile without an understanding of the social forces that

created him or her. In this sense, these critics are right, and this is a major flaw in the early cognitive work of researchers such as Flower and Hayes.

In his well-known article “Collaborative Learning and the ‘Conversation of Mankind’” rhetorical scholar and social-constructionist Kenneth Bruffee explicitly builds on Vygotsky’s scholarship and the idea that “reflective thought is public or social conversation internalized” (397). Only after learning the “‘skill and partnership of conversation’ in the external arena . . . do we learn to displace that ‘skill and partnership’ by playing silently ourselves, in imagination, the parts of all the participants in the conversation” (397-398). We must witness or experience new skills in a social context before they can be attempted and internalized, resulting in cognitive growth. Vygotsky, Bruffee, and the social-constructionists argue this point convincingly and give us reason to believe that “any effort to understand and cultivate in ourselves the kind of thought we value most requires us to understand and cultivate the kinds of community life that establish and maintain conversation that is the origin of that kind of thought” (Bruffee 399) in our classrooms. Therefore, the ways of thinking that are conducive to effective writing, for example, cannot manifest in students unless they are immersed in a community which takes writing as its primary focus in conversation, instruction, and activities.

Not only are new skills introduced and internalized in the social setting, but social factors also determine what shape a piece of writing will take and what conventions it will be required to follow in order to be successful. Bruffee believes that, as writers, we are generally “guided in our work by the same set of conventions about what counts . . . as a question . . . as having a good argument” (Bruffee 401) and we deem a piece of writing finished when we “think it conforms to that set of conventions and values (Bruffee 401).

But how can a student take into consideration the social and contextual factors affecting her writing process without taking some cognitive step to initiate such consideration? Is not considering the conventions of a discourse community a heuristic tool used to improve a writing product? Consciously making the consideration of cultural factors a step in one's writing process in order to more effectively meet a writing goal (whether the goal is a better grade, a more probing act of personal discovery, or a more honest, less hegemonic understanding of social stimuli) can only be accomplished through metacognition. Social-construction theories of learning need to be involved in writing instruction and the work of these scholars has made this case effectively, but I feel that those who choose to exclusively align themselves only with social-construction theories are guilty of a myopic focus that does not consider the ways that negotiating and understanding the effects of social factors and context naturally and necessarily involves constantly evolving thought processes.

The ways of thinking that are conducive to effective writing cannot manifest in students unless they are immersed in a community which focuses on writing in its conversations and interactions. But participation in these conversations cannot occur unless students are presented with the diverse range of knowledge and skills available to effective, successful, expert writers so that they are able to discuss, experiment with, and evaluate these skills and this knowledge socially. Direct instruction of cognitive skills and strategies provides the knowledge and the skill sets to which I am referring. Perspectives on learning and writing that focus on the individual as well as the social are not only both valid, they are both essential to achieving a complete understanding of the writing process and the most effective ways we may teach our students.

The published conversation between Linda Flower and Patricia Bizzell advocates for exactly this type of a more complete understanding of the writing process through embracing

aspects of the social and the individual positions. What is monumentally important to the discussion of moving beyond traditional categories is the fact that neither of these scholars dismiss the other as completely without merit in order to clearly show favor for her own theory. Instead, she proposes a combination or pluralism. Bizzell argues that social construction could be used to “shore up” the aspects that she finds weak in the Flower and Hayes cognitive model, namely the relegation of social factors to a less important status than the cognitive activity of the individual writer (Bizzell 370). Linda Flower further expands on the possibilities for such pluralism and directly grounds the conversation in the classroom when she discusses her vision of an interactive theory in her 1989 response to Bizzell “Cognition, Context, and Theory Building.”

In this article, Flower explicitly argues that a dichotomous understanding of the cognitive and social-constructionist views greatly limits one’s understanding of, and ability to improve, the writing process. Instead, she elaborates on ways to achieve a combination of the two theories and, more importantly, the ways that doing so will result in more effective teaching. Flower breaks down the cognition/context dichotomy by describing the ways in which the two naturally and constantly interact while writing. Two important examples from this article include the arguments that context naturally cues cognition and that cognition mediates our performance and decisions within certain contexts.

Like Flavell, Flower argues that certain situations or contextual cues trigger a writer to activate prior strategies used to solve similar problems in the past. Even if we concede that these strategies were learned through the internalization of socially reinforced actions, an individual mental step (consciously or not) has to be taken in order to retrieve those strategies and complete the task at hand. Increased metacognition can improve such a search and retrieval because it

offers students a way to “know what they know.” By becoming aware of the repertoire of strategies they possess, the social ways in which they constantly learn and internalize such information from social sources, and being conscious of the social, verbal, or written cues that act as retrieval initiators, students are able to further control this act; allowing it not to occur as an act of luck or some creative accident, but through conscious awareness students are able to understand where they come from, what they know, and how to succeed.

The effects of social influences on the individual cannot be overlooked. The hegemonic influences of any particular time or place constantly dictate nearly every facet of life, and we cannot fully understand the way that we learn and grow and change as individuals or as groups of people without understanding that internalizing the social interactions and creating an internal dialogue with ourselves in order to effectively evaluate our thoughts and actions. However, we are individuals. We make individual choices as we write (though these choices are influenced, of course, by our prior experience and environment) in order to solve a problem in individual ways. Both viewpoints are not only valid they are essential. Metacognition can be the bridge between the individual and the social aspects of writing specifically and learning in general.

**Metacognition, Pluralism,  
and Modeling the Successful Processes of Experts**

As mentioned in the introduction, scholars like Berlin may be oversimplifying or ignoring the ways that writers actually compose when they make this philosophical distinction in order to fuel academic debate. Cognitive analyses of expert writers’ discussions or written pieces regarding their processes (even those of expressivists such as Donald Murray and Peter Elbow) reveal a natural use of hybridism or pluralism of methods from many, if not all, various camps in rhetoric and composition, whether the writers are conscious of it or not. This contradiction

between the true processes of successful writers and the scholarship available to those teaching college composition can result in the use of teaching methods that force students to write in ways that are unnatural and harmfully myopic.

Expert or experienced writers are hybridists. When freewriting needs to be employed in order to search for the right words or find voice or explore one's feelings or beliefs, it is. When a piece needs to be put back on track by considering audience and making sure that the piece includes the conventions, meets the expectations, and will evoke the desired response, he or she does. In order to demonstrate this type of process, I will analyze the exact words of one of the most influential voices in the field of rhetoric and composition: Donald Murray. Why would a quick look at Murray be worth our while? Murray was one of the most published rhetoricians of all time until his death. He published hundreds of articles and books with a consistency nearly unparalleled.

In Murray's wonderful article, "Writing and Teaching for Surprise" he discusses his use of freewriting as a tool for discovering words that he would not have created but through the process of actually composing. By using writing as a form of thinking itself, and as a tool for plumbing the depths of his brain, Murray begins to see thoughts and words on the page that he never intended to write, but are nonetheless exciting to him and give his piece new life and direction. But this short piece by Murray, advocating for the expressive approach by recounting an act of individual discovery brought about by writing without considering intended audience, organization, etc. deals with only one tool used by one writer during one instance during his process. Murray knows this and gives himself away as a pluralist when he says that he will now take these few surprising kernels that have come about as an act of writing for surprise and turn

them on his lathe and that they will become the starting point, or the building blocks of a future piece.

When Murray takes these newly discovered ideas and turns them on his lathe, there are a few different things he may mean. Being one of the most published writers in the field of rhetoric and composition, and a writer of fiction as well, we could assume that the requirements, influences, and strictures of the publishing world, among other things would be factors that determine how this piece will be further shaped on the lathe. This sounds quite a bit like audience consideration to me. Audience consideration is discussed by both the cognitive and the social-constructionist school, but, as pointed out by Berlin and Williams earlier in the chapter, these very considerations and constraints are precisely what the expressivist school advocates throwing off.

But Murray is a published, successful, professional writer who understands that the discovery achieved by freewriting is only part of his writing process. He fully intends to continue to shape this piece to fit the mold of academic writing or the conventions that make good fiction. By considering these things and focusing on an academic or institutional publishing goal it could be argued that Murray is violating one of the strongly held beliefs of expressivists: that writing does not deal with academic content, but is instead a tool for self-exploration and discovery in order to find truth.

Murray's position as someone who advocates for writing as a means of self-discovery is at odds with the fact that he writes very often for publication and academia. In order to be successful in the realm of academics or in the world of publishing, one cannot simply write and discover and then hand the piece in. On the contrary, a piece of writing still needs to go through certain steps in order for it to be of publishable quality. Murray knows this and consciously

enacts strategies that will shape whatever piece being worked on into a publishable product. In this specific case, Murray implements steps often used and discussed by the cognitivist and social-constructionist perspectives, but besides being a good example of a pluralist, he is also a good example of an aware and dynamic writer. These aspects of a successful writing process can be cultivated in students through the use of metacognition.

Murray's statement about turning his newly discovered kernels on his lathe in order to craft it into a publishable piece is proof that other methods besides expressivist will need to be involved. However, the awareness that certain strategies will need to be employed in order to produce a certain outcome is also proof of effective metacognitive monitoring. Murray has a goal for the piece of writing to be shaped on the lathe; he wishes to have a piece of publishable quality, one that explains his point clearly and/or evokes a desired emotion or reaction from the audience. In order to find the direction of this piece, or to find anything to say at all before a subject was even chosen, Murray employed the strategy of freewriting. By using the method of freewriting he was able to discover things that he did not know he wanted to say, or state them in ways that he had not known he could or wanted to; Murray was able to discover the sentences or thoughts or turns of phrase that inspired more writing.

Murray also knows that this piece is not finished, and this is where I feel he ceases to be an expressivist and proves that he—like all other confident, successful writers—is a pluralist. He makes the conscious decision at this point to employ other strategies. These strategies are what he refers to when he uses the metaphor of the lathe. He has found a log, a piece of lumber, a cold hard piece of rough metal, through his act of discovery, through writing without constraint or consideration of external factors. But he will need to determine the shape and the curves and the ornamental carvings of the finished product by employing strategies to do so.

He will study and consider aspects such as the constraints, expectations, and common background knowledge of the discourse community in which he wishes to publish or share the piece. He will consider these things that he has or will discuss with colleagues, internalizing the information and outcomes of these conversations, creating an internal dialect for himself. He has chosen and implemented cognitive strategies on his own, disciplining himself to write everyday in order to keep his skills sharp and generate ideas for prospective pieces. And all of these processes, strategies, interactions were all generated by an unconstrained, free, individual exploration of his socially created self which is unlike any other.

## **Chapter 3: Pedagogy for Increasing Student Metacognition in College Composition**

I wish to help students become writers that are personally fulfilled and successful across multiple contexts like Donald Murray. I believe that one of the most important keys to Murray's success is his successful and constant blending of the ideas and methods from more than one rhetorical perspective. Murray does not mention metacognition in his writing process, but I believe that Murray's fulfilling and successful process can be studied and emulated by students through a focus on increasing metacognition in the classroom. This chapter is broken into sections that represent aspects of writing instruction I believe to be essential to cultivating metacognitive pluralism in my students: autonomy and critical thinking, the use of writing workshop, and the importance of reflection.

### **Autonomy and Critical Thinking**

Metacognition scholar Douglas Hacker says that "successful students take control of their own learning." (155). Freire says that education is an active process of inquiry, that man naturally questions and interprets his world against his past experiences and constantly creates truth for himself. Linda Flower says that students are creating meaning for themselves even as they write. I agree, and the ability to consciously create meaning rather than simply accept answers is an important skill that I wish to encourage in my students. Autonomy and critical thinking are essential to achieving this, and I consciously implement several pedagogical strategies aimed at cultivating these skills and provide social and individual opportunities in which to practice them.

I believe that students need to feel that what is being discussed in class is relevant and important to their lives outside of the classroom in order for them to truly care about learning. One way that I try to reveal a clear connection between class material and students' personal lives or other course contexts is by leaving the selection of topics largely up to the students. My only stipulation for this agreement is that the topic choice must be relevant to the contemporary world. Not only does this create a connection between class material and the students' lives outside of the classroom, it encourages students to question and analyze aspects of society often considered normal, unshakeable, and/or given in ways that can be sustained for 2-3 pages.

Each paper also includes a research component that requires students to seek out ideas, opinions, and commentary regarding their chosen subject in order to find out what others have thought and said, gaining exposure to ideas and opinions other than their own, perhaps even some they have never even considered. Requiring students to consider and evaluate viewpoints other than their own is a valuable step in creating critical thinkers who do not simply accept the world as it is given to them. Requiring research, social interaction, and dialogue is intended to open students' minds to other viewpoints. Piaget argues that this leads to "decentered" thinking in which one's perspective is seen as one of many. An early step towards critical thinking is the realization that our reality is largely questionable and constructed, not absolute. These opportunities for exposure to other's views combined with the motivation felt to prove ideas and points students feel are relevant and important to them provide opportunities to cultivate this type of thinking.

At the college level, more often than in high school, students are required to engage in original and critical thought in order to complete assignments. This requires students to cultivate an ability to generate and find answers to questions in order to guide their argument, research,

and/or discussions. However, if I wish to create an environment that fosters critical questioning and discussion, I feel that I would benefit from not only providing a space for such an environment but also providing students with appropriate levels of instruction regarding the skills necessary to do so.

For instance, each semester, I use gender roles as an ice-breaking first topic around which to generate conversation, provide specific instruction, and foster an environment that encourages critical questioning. I provide short articles concerning issues such as the increase in number of stay-at-home dads and their appearance in the media, the alleged suggestive power of blue and pink clothing and gender-specific toys, and research regarding gender bias in education. Through short individual freewriting tasks and large and small group activities intended to create dialogue, students discuss how their lives have been affected by gender roles, the positive and negative effects, nature vs. nurture, etc. Through this series of lessons, I am using direct instruction, modeling, and structured social interaction early in the semester to create a respectful environment encouraging dialogue and critical questioning. This type of conscious awareness of my objectives allows me to take these steps early in the semester in order to create an open environment in which students practice their skills of critical questioning and idea generation through social interaction with increasing autonomy throughout the semester. If transferred, these abilities are keys to academic success at the college level.

An instructor will not be able to stand over each student's shoulder ensuring that these evaluations, choices, and negotiations are carried out effectively. Students will have to make such decisions and negotiate such contexts on their own while being consciously aware of the strategies at their disposal and of their ability to implement them at the most effective time as

called for by the writing context. Such abilities require conscious critical thought, not the unquestioning acceptance of an instructor's prescribed methods.

In this thesis, I have talked a great deal about the interaction between the individual writer and social context. Writing strategies are effective and can be learned, but successful writing requires an understanding of the ways that social factors create and control diverse individuals and diverse contexts. Some writers may achieve skill at recognizing and negotiating these contexts without conscious awareness that they have done so. But I can attempt to aid students in emulating this successful process by not only providing strategies for successful writing but also providing a space to practice and discuss choosing and implementing those strategies most effectively in a range of contexts. Increasing metacognition, through direct instruction of specific strategies, social interaction and discussion, and conscious immediate practice of new strategies within the context of a current writing assignment is intended to create such autonomous thinkers and writers.

Cultivating student autonomy and ways to critically engage with the academic and non-academic world are objectives that can be met in the composition classroom through increased metacognition, and these skills greatly increase students' potential for success if consciously transferred to other academic, professional, and personal contexts. Students' awareness of their possession of such abilities is the first step in their conscious transfer to other contexts under negotiation. The raised awareness of the possession of such skills and the awareness of the ability to implement and coordinate them effectively is metacognition, and this is the reason that it is an essential ability to teach to our students.

### **Thesis Research Repetition**

Though, at first, it may seem ironic or contradictory with my views on autonomy and critical thinking, I use a very formulaic, repetitive research assignment for every 2-3 page unit paper and for the final 8-10 page paper each semester. I want my students to be successful in multiple contexts. This is an objective that shapes much of my teaching and one that has shaped much of this thesis as well. I could try to achieve this goal by attempting to teach every single possible context, what it means to write successfully in each, and provide methods for doing so, but that seems a bit overwhelming and impractical.

Increasing student metacognition in order to teach the “how rather than the what” provides a way to address this problem. As discussed in chapter 2, Wilhelm argues that “it is the procedure of doing something that is most transferable to new situations” (Wilhelm 26). This is what drives my decision to repeat the formal academic paper over and over again throughout the semester. I not only believe that we should focus on helping each of our students develop a transferable writing process that can be adapted to all contexts, I believe they should consciously strive to make that transferable process as personalized as possible regardless of context.

For instance, though I believe in so many expressivist philosophies and believe that the conscious implementation of certain methods given to us by that perspective is the only way to achieve greatness in many forms and contexts, I do not believe that simply ignoring, or rebelling against the fact that a large percentage of the writing done in college contexts is done under externally imposed, academic constraints. This is especially important here since, as discussed in the introduction, this thesis focuses on a composition program that requires only one three-semester writing course for all majors. A student will not create a dynamic, successful and individualized writing process by ignoring the importance of negotiating the conventions of

academic discourse as Berlin claims the expressivists would encourage. A metacognitive focus provides a way to develop skill in using methods and strategies from this paradigm within the context of academic writing under externally imposed constraints, not sacrificing one for the other.

Creating a personalized successful writing process in this context may be seen as the most difficult because academic writing is often viewed as a form of writing that is the least personal and/or individualized. However, I would argue that those connotations relate to the finished product required in this context, not the writing process. The writing process can be highly personalized and individualized regardless of context or intended product. A metacognitive focus provides a way to cultivate students' ability to discuss, internalize, and evaluate strategies and negotiate contexts, changing their writing process into a more personal, fulfilling, and successful experience, even in what is traditionally considered the most impersonal context. With a window of only one semester, I choose to focus on increasing metacognition in my students and cultivating their ability to personalize the traditionally impersonal academic context.

Through increased student metacognition, success in creating this personal process for the traditionally impersonal academic context is attributed to strategies employed and steps taken by the writer, potentially increasing intrinsic motivation for replicating writing as a personally fulfilling process and of possible conscious transfer of the personalized process to future contexts. After focusing on consciously personalizing one's writing process in the traditionally impersonal academic context, such a process could potentially occur more easily in future contexts, many of which are traditionally considered more personal than the academic.

**Direct Instruction and Elaboration:**  
**Teaching Metacognitive Pluralism through the Writing Workshop**

The ways of thinking that are conducive to effective writing cannot manifest in students unless they are immersed in a community which focuses on writing in its conversations and interactions. But participation in these conversations cannot occur unless students are presented with the diverse range of knowledge and skills available to effective, successful, expert writers so that they are able to discuss, experiment with, and evaluate these skills and this knowledge socially. Direct instruction of cognitive skills and strategies provides the knowledge and the skill sets to which I am referring. Perspectives on learning and writing that focus on the individual *and* those that focus on the social are not only both valid, they are both essential to achieving a complete understanding of the writing process and the most effective ways we may teach our students. Writing strategies are effective and can be learned, but one must understand how social context governs the writing process and product in order to choose and implement them most effectively.

In order to expose students to a wide range of strategies, but also cultivate an independent ability to choose and implement them at the right time, I believe that both clear, explicit instruction and constant and conscious practice are essential in the classroom. Eric Jensen, neuroscientist and author of the textbook *Super Teaching*, offers two very important findings about the workings of the brain that support this argument. Jensen advises instructors to keep blocks of direct, explicit instruction to no more minutes than the age of one's students (i.e. 6-7 minutes for first graders, 18-19 minutes for college freshmen) (10) because this amount of time is that for which each age group is able to remain focused. According to Jensen, retention of

desired skills is increased when the majority of class time is spent actively practicing the learned material (11).

This scientific evidence provides support for advocates of the workshop setting for writing instruction such as Nancie Atwell, author of the textbook *In the Middle: New Understandings about Writing, Reading, and Learning*. Atwell advocates devoting large chunks of class time to composing, drafting, revising, and one-on-one conferences with students in combination with what she calls mini-lessons, which consist of no more than 15 minutes of direct instruction. This evidence also helps to support social-cognitive theories that argue for both direct instruction in conjunction with, rather than in place of, group work and collaborative learning opportunities to reinforce learned information and internalize socially reinforced behaviors (Zimmerman and Kitsantas, Flower, Schunk, Bandura).

The use of writing workshop to provide direct instruction and provide class time for guided practice and elaboration cannot only be used to effectively blend the social and the cognitive but to cultivate a conscious process for attempting, exploring, and evaluating new possible strategies and steps from any source. The learning of new strategies from any variety of traditional paradigms can be the focus of mini-lesson instruction in the writing workshop, and the conscious practice or discussion of those strategies can be the focus of the elaboration portion. This type of required experimentation with new strategies also serves another purpose: practice consciously implementing strategies and philosophies to which the student may not have been previously exposed and not allowing students to simply replicate the same habitual, unexamined, comfortable process. Openness and the ability to recognize, attempt, and evaluate new ideas and strategies are necessary for growth and improvement. These

characteristics or skills are not possessed by every writer, and the writing workshop is a place to create such writers and thinkers.

Not only can such activities be an opportunity to discuss the strategies themselves, they can also provide a space to introduce and discuss the views and philosophies and names of paradigms from which these strategies are derived. Is there a reason to introduce a skill such as outlining to students without discussing that Flower and Hayes and other cognitivists believe that writing success is determined by a writer's individual ability to set goals for herself and implement strategies in order to most effectively meet those goals?

I argue that these are exactly the conversations that need to occur in order to create the classroom that Bruffee encourages: one in which we can “cultivate in ourselves the kind of thought we value most” by cultivating “the kinds of community life that establish and maintain conversation that is the origin of that kind of thought” (399). Avoiding philosophical discussions will not create the types of dialogic community required for such conversation and social learning. Instead, the writing workshop can be a place where students’ learn a breadth of successful writing strategies *and* a breadth of ideas about writing itself

The following sections provide brief examples and explanations from my own classroom that illustrate the ways that I use direct instruction and elaboration time in the writing workshop to teach each of the process-oriented rhetorical perspectives and to cultivate metacognitive pluralism in my students.

### **Social-Construction**

My class is very social in nature, and discussion plays a large role in its structure right from the beginning of the semester. Weeks of writing workshop activities are alternated with weeks of discussion, often prompted by reading or watching certain pieces having to do with the

topic I've chosen or the multiple topics chosen by students. Social interaction and discussions internalized result in students' academic growth (Bruffee, Vygotsky, Piaget). Through think/pair/share activities, active drama pedagogy, and large and small group discussions, students are exposed to diverse opinions and have the opportunity to internalize the ideas, interactions, and reactions of others and evaluate them against the background of their own past experience in a constant cycle of meaning making, standard setting, and evaluation.

Not only can *implicit* social benefits be achieved through discussion, interaction, and collaborative learning, but certain skills that are important from a social-constructionist perspective can also be *explicitly* taught through direct mini-lesson instruction. One example of such a skill is the ability to recognize, evaluate, and negotiate the expectations and requirements of various discourse communities. When teaching this mini-lesson, I employ active pedagogy by breaking students into groups of four or five and providing each group with one of the following scenarios:

1. Conducting a job interview
2. Friends eating pizza and watching sports
3. Siblings and parents riding together in an automobile
4. Ordering at a restaurant

I then ask students to create a few lines of dialogue with one another (preferably involving all members of the group) that demonstrate what they would say and the ways they would say it in their particular situation. These performances are very short, engaging, often funny, and help to generate a discussion regarding the important role that context plays in influencing oral and written communication.

Students then engage in elaboration through guided practice time in which they revise their own papers. I ask them to specifically search for instances where the reader (the instructor

in this case) may need more information since I am not a member of the discourse community of experts providing the research for such papers. Also, I am of a different generation, and certain cultural aspects of their lives are unfamiliar to me, so I ask them to consider that fact when they are determining what information is common knowledge and what needs to be specifically provided. Students also search for instances in which their style and/or vocabulary become too relaxed, as if they were blogging or emailing or text messaging friends rather than writing an academic paper. Students use me and each other as resources to create plans for revising these aspects, and I end the class with a discussion about how and why to include this step of context negotiation in the writing process for each assignment and in each context.

Though the importance of context negotiation is a cornerstone of the social-constructionist rhetorical perspective, it cannot be achieved without the use of metacognition. Conscious awareness of writing as a process and one's ability to consciously revise that process is necessary in order for students to make context negotiation a replicable and effective step in their writing processes. Steps and strategies can be evaluated, replicated, or discarded consciously by a writer by attaining a certain level of metacognitive awareness. Successful, expert writers like Donald Murray, as discussed in chapter 2, consider the conventions of context and discourse communities while writing, but this consideration may happen so naturally that it does not enter his consciousness.

Metacognition provides a way for the replicable step of context negotiation to become a conscious choice that can be taught to novices rather than the result of someone's natural writing mind. By raising discourse communities to consciousness through conversation, providing methods for successfully negotiating them, providing time for students to practice implementing this step consciously through elaboration time, and discussing ways to consciously transfer this

step to future contexts, I can facilitate the creation of writing processes in my students that are similar to the natural and successful processes of experts.

### Cognitive

Cognitive strategies such as outlining and thesis creation lend themselves well to the writing workshop format. Creating a specific and clear thesis statement and crafting it into a specific and clear introductory paragraph that gives one's paper direction is a great example of the type of skill that can be taught through mini-lesson instruction and practiced individually and through social interaction in the form of peer revision during elaboration time.

In my own classroom, I begin by providing students with a checklist of aspects I wish to see in an introductory paragraph (i.e. a clear and arguable thesis statement that can be presented and defended within the assigned 2-3 pages, some context explaining why the topic is important to our contemporary world, and some proposed action, solution, or new way of thinking that could improve the negative and/or improve or sustain the positive aspects of the topic). Students then spend the first half of elaboration time (approximately 15-20 minutes in a 50 minute class) attempting to create a thesis statement and form it into an introductory paragraph while I conference with individual students and answer any questions they may have.

During the second half of the elaboration portion of the workshop (or slightly less, approximately 10 minutes, if students need more time to write) students exchange papers with a partner and evaluate each other regarding how effectively they have met the requirements of the checklist. First, I ask them to read one another's work silently, evaluating it against the criteria from the checklist and actively writing notes about positive aspects and those in need of improvement. Partners then engage in a short informal discussion about the evaluation, and any

notes written down while reading are explained, providing feedback and suggestions for how and what to improve upon or sustain.

This lesson is closely linked with the previous example of context negotiation but also takes the student one step further along the writing process through the use of metacognition. Becoming aware of the necessity of context negotiation is important for students to create a successful writing process. This lesson employs cognitive strategies with which to do so. In order to successfully negotiate individual contexts, students must know what the conventions of those contexts are, where to find them, and how to implement successful methods and strategies to fulfill them. In this lesson, students learn that a step that can be consciously replicated in each writing context through the use of metacognition is to carefully read an assignment sheet for required components; in this case, as previously specified, this information is provided by a handout specifying what is required in each thesis statement for the rest of the semester: a clear and arguable thesis statement that can be presented and defended within the assigned 2-3 pages, some context explaining why the topic is important to our contemporary world, and some proposed action, solution, or new way of thinking that could improve the negative and/or improve or sustain the positive aspects of the topic.

Through the use of metacognition, this step can be replicated for any future assignment that includes a handout. Another clear and replicable step consciously practiced in this lesson is the building of a thesis statement and introductory paragraph. The building of such a thesis and the inclusion of the stated requirements of a particular context is a useful and almost necessary strategy in numerous diverse contexts. By providing concrete cognitive steps with which to complete the tasks of context negotiation and successful thesis creation and providing time for conscious practice and immediate peer feedback, students learn how to use metacognition to

replicate these useful and successful cognitive processes and how to determine in which contexts they are required.

This is a great example of the ways that rhetorical perspectives—in this case the social-constructionist ideas regarding context negotiation and the cognitivist ideas regarding writing as a problem solving activity— can be naturally and successfully blended with one another. By encouraging and discussing this blending in the classroom, I am able to increase metacognitive awareness regarding the blending of the methods and philosophies derived from both of these paradigms. Such blending is a key component in the writing processes of experts. By raising awareness that this blending occurs and encouraging it in my students I am taking the first step toward helping them use it in the most effective and successful way. This is metacognitive pluralism.

### Expressivist

The teaching and discussion of expressivist methods provides a certain amount of balance and allows for a more open discussion of personal voice and individual stylistic choices. The cultivation and use of such skills are important in all contexts. Freewriting is one expressivist method used by many instructors as an idea generation strategy, but expressivist methods and philosophies also have a place in the finished writing product in academic contexts as well. Introducing practical strategies for achieving these things may motivate students who feel that academic writing as lacking in personal expression or relevancy.

One instance regarding the blending of personal voice and academic writing that I seem to experience every semester is the use of the word “I.” Each semester, when discussing personal voice in academic writing, at least one student asks me about using the word and waits with baited breath to hear my answer. He or she may tell me that a teacher in high school said that the

use of the word was invariably banned from academic writing. Certain students are adamant about this rule, since being good rule learners and memorizers are keys to success in high school, and they almost resent my refusal to acknowledge such a rule as useful. Instead of asking students to prescribe to such a rule, I open the discussion up to the class. I may ask students to engage in a few moments of brainstorming or freewriting about instances in academic writing or other contexts when the use of “I” is not only appropriate but useful and rhetorically effective.

After a few semesters of experiencing this discussion, I was on the lookout for effective student uses of the word “I” and personal anecdotes that furthered a coherent argument. Due to this metacognitive awareness regarding a desire to improve subsequent instruction regarding this aspect, I was able to find a great example from a male student discussing his experience as a grocery cashier in his piece about welfare reform. After asking the student's permission, I was able to make copies and keep this student example. Now I use the example each semester; the analysis and discussion that it stimulates is an effective form of direct instruction and provides a model for students to use in future assignments.

In this example, my primary goal is simply to raise the use of “I,” and the importance of personal voice in many types of academic writing, up for discussion and stimulate students’ own evaluation of its effectiveness in certain situations. To repeat from chapter 1, conformity, mimicry, and memorization are only effective when a student is presented with the exact same contexts in which they were learned. Teaching students to never use the word “I” in academic writing is limiting and damaging in itself due to the fact that it could crush the potential of the next philosopher or poet who could change the world by teaching him or her to stifle their personal voice because it is against the rules. Rather than teaching that student to accept dogmatic ideologies about writing and limiting her potential, we may all be better served by

teaching her to evaluate when the use of strong personal voice is appropriate and when it is not rather than smothering personal expression out of her writing entirely.

Through providing a model and facilitating a discussion intended to raise student's awareness and confidence in their own ability to negotiate contexts and decide when to use personal voice and the word "I," I am able to provide students with direct instruction, yet not formulaic teacher-centered instruction, regarding an important expressivist principle that is often elusive to teach. Rather than teaching students whether or not the use of the word is always correct or always incorrect, the objective becomes using metacognitive awareness to increase confidence in their ability to employ such evaluative powers on their own from context to context.

The ability to choose their own topics often results in students choosing topics with which they have had personal experience. Because of this, I ask students to use the elaboration portion of the workshop to review their current piece and determine if there are portions that could be enhanced through the introduction of personal voice or the inclusion of personal experience. This lesson is reiterated, and particularly effective, at the end of the semester when students are required to expand one of their short unit papers into a ten page research paper. One of the specific strategies that we discuss in class for expanding the paper from two to ten pages is the use of pathos or evoking emotion in one's audience. The inclusion of personal experience and power through voice are things that I encourage in my students' academic writing, and it is often a recognizably improved aspect of students' final papers.

### **Attribution, Transfer, Reflections, and Portfolios**

I strive to make writing without consciousness as nearly impossible as I can. Some class sessions end up being entirely devoted to discussing the different approaches that students take to

completing writing assignments. In a Socratic manner, I ask questions and attempt to get them asking questions. It often becomes clear that writing instruction before college was focused on the what: a “right” way to go about writing, and questioning the reasoning behind these prescribed rules and methods had rarely been thought of. So, I often ask why and wait for students to reply. At times, I may employ a “think, pair, share” methodology and ask students to spend a few minutes freewriting about a step, or steps, in the writing process and/or how and why we carry these things out in certain ways. Other times, we brainstorm individual steps we each use in our writing processes: from proofreading to where to find the quietest or loudest computer labs or coffee shops on campus in which to get work done. We discuss the ways that we, as individuals, have different views on those things. Entire class periods devoted to discussing the writing process with students are important to me because they engage students in conscious reflective thought and evaluation.

But, through experience, I have also come to believe—as does Constance Weaver, author of *The Grammar Plan Book: A Guide to Smart Teaching*—that students discuss and learn about these things most effectively when it is within the context of a direct and tangible current project (7-8). One way that I am able to encourage conscious, reflective thought and evaluation of past products in the context of a current, tangible writing assignment is through a workshop day entirely devoted to each student reviewing the most recent graded assignment. In class, I ask students to consciously create strategies to replicate successful aspects of the past product and processes to improve unsuccessful aspects of the past product in the current assignment. During this session, students interpret my written comments, ask questions for clarification, and create some sort organized inventory of the “good” and the “bad” aspects of the past product. Students search for these aspects in the rough draft on which the student is currently working. A plan is

created for ensuring the positive aspects are replicated and added if not present in the current product, and for the negative aspects to be improved upon so that they are not simply replicated again without conscious thought about doing so. The improvement of unsuccessful aspects of a past writing product or process and the transfer of successful aspects to future tasks are important goals in my classroom. All students may not recognize the need for an ability to create a method for such evaluation and transfer on their own.

This type of instruction also asks students to examine the connection between intended or required writing goals and steps taken to achieve them. Asking students to make a conscious plan for sustaining or improving aspects of the writing process in order to improve future products employs increased metacognitive awareness and causal attribution. Creating intrinsic motivation in students to write and learn on their own is an important goal in my composition class that can affect chances of success throughout students' college careers. Increased attribution is a crucial step in achieving this goal, and I employ many strategies for encouraging conscious reflection for this reason.

Through large and small group discussions and exercises, multiple class periods are devoted to active and engaged dialogue about what students do as they write and the process of evaluating and repeating or discarding parts of, or steps within, one's individually determined and controlled writing process. Simply raising these topics for debate rather than doling out writing success in a neat and prescribed form seems surprising and new to many students. The goal of these periods is raised awareness of what occurs as we write. Through group discussion and activity, I attempt to make it very difficult for any student to resist thinking about and discussing his or her writing process, hopefully raising a natural, habitual process to the surface for examination.

However, this examination only reaches its full potential when coupled with conscious reflective action aimed at improving subsequent implementations of those processes and, by extension, future writing products. Reflection assignments have the potential to reveal specific areas of a students' writing process as in need of improvement or as successful. I do not only ask students to reflect on their writing process from assignment to assignment individually, I also ask them to engage in various types of long-term reflection. The mid-semester writing reflection assignment asks students to do just that. Students are asked to review their work and informally answer these questions:

- How has our focus on various writing skills affected your writing process or your final writing products?
- If you don't think that your writing has changed because of them, why? Discuss if being more conscious about some of these specific aspects as you continue to write throughout the semester could result in more noticeable change.
- Have you taken steps to transfer these methods to other class contexts? What is, or would be, the benefit of doing so?

At the end of each semester, a much more formal reflection assignment is required, and the thoughtfulness and completeness with which students answer their choice of a few reflective questions accounts for 20% of their final grade for the course:

#### Writing Process/Portfolio Reflection

The purpose of this assignment is to ensure that you review your portfolio in order to see the positive progress that you've made, where you could still stand to improve, and to articulate the steps of your own writing process so that they can be replicated, changed, and/or improved intentionally. **You**, alone, decide when, why, and how to change this process, but you must be conscious of it in order to do so.

Here are some of the goals we have been focusing on this semester:

- Guide students to become conscious of writing as a process
- Help students realize and benefit from the concept that the writing process individual and recursive
- Participate in activities for self-evaluation of writing at multiple stages throughout the drafting/writing process

- Participate in activities for peer-evaluation of writing at multiple stages throughout the drafting/writing process
- Provide writing skills instruction regarding revision and editing within the context of students' own writing process with time in class to practice and improve these skills
- Encourage conscious implementation of learned and naturalized writing skills and strategies in the future in order to improve subsequent writing tasks

Please number your responses and be sure to answer each question completely.

1. Review your paper with the lowest grade and then the paper with the highest grade. What is it that you made the biggest improvement on? This answer could be taken from the rubric assessment (maybe you really jumped in one particular area such as “grammar” and that is shown simply by the number score), or from the comments that I made in the margins or at the end of your paper. Was this improvement conscious or intentional? If so, how did you go about making it? If not, what are some ways that you can make yourself more conscious about your writing process?
2. Review or skim the grades or comments on your papers. Find one aspect of your writing that has been or is a persistent problem that still needs improvement? Suggestions include: sentence clarity, thesis/conclusion strength, consistency (sometimes the same effort doesn't get put in to each assignment), procrastination (if you are up late into the night or early in the morning to finish a draft right before it is due, then your study skills need improvement, and not improving them will continue to affect your writing), voice (this may be the toughest thing to improve for most writers). Explain some ideas, strategies, or plans that you could consciously implement to go about improving this aspect.
3. You have written a substantial amount of work for this class. I do not expect that every assignment made use of the exact same steps, but I'm sure that there are similarities. Write a narrative walking me through and explain the general steps of your writing process and why each step is important to your process. Or, create an annotated, bulleted list (similar to our annotated bib.) of the general steps in your writing process. For each bullet, state the step and include an annotation that explains how and why each step continues to be important and repeated in the writing process.
4. Discuss 2 skills/exercises/steps/lessons learned, carried out, or experienced in this class that you have transferred to other course contexts. What skills were they? What made each skill useful in other course contexts? Discuss if each skill has changed the way you study or write generally and if you see yourself continuing to use it.

The final question refers directly to students' transfer of skills learned in composition to other contexts. This is a topic consciously discussed throughout the semester. I believe that the

biggest problems with the issue of skills transfer to other class contexts are that it is not openly encouraged or discussed, and no skill set is provided for making it happen. Because of this, I have included questions designed to encourage this type of discussion on each of these reflection assignments. Not only included here, several class periods are devoted to discussing various discourse communities, code-switching, and audience awareness, particularly focused on how it pertains to certain academic contexts.

## Conclusion

The method for teaching composition set forth in this thesis has not argued that one traditional paradigm for writing instruction is superior to all others. Instead, it has emphasized the importance of an individual being aware of what occurs as the process of writing unfolds for him or herself. The mental processes associated with metacognition (reflection, dialogue, the implementation of feedback to improve similar subsequent attempts) are inevitable, natural, and constantly occurring. In the composition classroom, a focus on cultivating students' abilities to carry out these processes consciously, thus controlling and understanding them more fully, rather than as a result of programmed habit and recitation, has the potential to increase their ability to recognize when they need to be carried out, to adjust them according to changing contexts, and to improve them when they are once again attempted. The feelings of personal control derived from such metacognitive awareness has the potential to lead to higher levels of intrinsic motivation for students, driving them to seek out academic challenges that allow them to replicate the feelings of fulfillment of which they now know the cause.

The teaching of this ability provides a way to consciously create mental processes similar to those used by successful, expert writers. By raising student awareness regarding the practical steps carried out, or strategies used by, these expert writers; providing direct instruction regarding how, when, and why these strategies are used; and providing an environment in which students can comfortably experiment with and discuss them, the act of writing becomes less nebulous and mystical for novice writers. This type of re-conceptualization is essential to providing instruction to a diverse group of first-year college writers with diverse backgrounds,

diverse majors, and diverse future plans. Metacognition can transcend such boundaries because, essentially, it is an awareness of one's process for setting goals and creating plans to achieve them.

By using metacognition to focus on exploring the writing process consciously in order to find what works most effectively for each individual, in each context, rather than attempting to impose on our students our view of the "correct" method for writing, I believe that we are creating more autonomous thinkers and potentially active citizens and professionals, as well as better writers. Re-conceptualizing writing instruction to focus on metacognition allows us, as teachers, to not only *advocate* for active thinkers and motivated students; it provides us with a way to improve the actual carrying out and practice of such thought. Autonomous, critically aware writers cannot be created by only exposing them to one view of writing or writing instruction. A focus on metacognition provides a way to expose students to as many various writing styles, methods, and philosophies as possible while making the point of the class not choosing the "correct" prescribed method, but how to adapt an individual writing process to various writing tasks by drawing on a wide range of strategies as dictated by each writing assignment as well as the writer's awareness of his or her own personal preferences or habits.

Myopic, exclusive methods for writing and writing instruction are no longer effective for meeting the diverse needs of an increasingly diverse student body in the required college composition course. A hybridist or pluralist approach to writing and writing instruction is necessary for meeting the needs of these students and preparing them for the challenging and rapidly changing world into which they are soon to enter.

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