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A Rhetoric of Reflection

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A Rhetoric of Reflection

Kathleen Blake Yancey, Ed.
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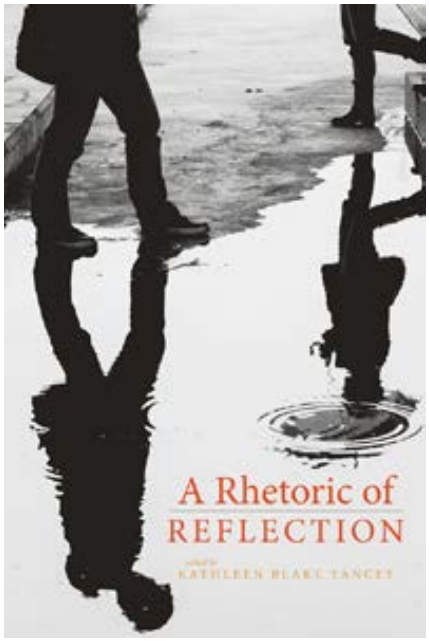

The research and theorizing contained within *A Rhetoric of Reflection* relies on Kathleen Yancey's key terms for reflective practices. The terms "reflection-in-action," "constructive reflection," and "reflection-in-presentation" frame the critical conversations between Yancey, Anne Beaufort, J. Elizabeth Clark, Jeff Sommers, and Kara Taczak (4). Harkening back to Yancey's 1998 *Reflection in the Writing Classroom*, this collection takes as foundational the work of philosopher Donald Schön to conclude that reflection is "the dialectical process by which we develop and achieve, first, specific goals for learning; second, strategies for reaching those goals; and third, means of determining whether or not we have met those goals or other goals" (6). Yancey uses the collection's introduction to provide a brief history for reflection's role in rhetoric and composition, and how this not only relies on but also builds upon Schön's work.

First Yancey defines reflection as "tightly focused on the mental activities of the composer in the process of composing" (3). This focus, citing Sharon Pianko and Sondra Perl, identifies the syntactic, linguistic, and structural choices made by the composer. Yancey notes that in the late 80s and into the 90s, reflection scholarship took on a new life, citing her own work (1992), Nancy Sommers' "Writer's Memo" portfolio (1988), and Roberta Camp's "biography of a text" (1992) as all involving ways to incorporate reflection into pedagogy. These arguments contend that reflective pedagogy should: "(1) elucidate student composing activities in students' own descriptions so as to see what was otherwise invisible and (2) provide a context for an instructor-student conversation about the draft itself" (4). Yancey next elaborates on the framework for the thirteen chapters collected in *A Rhetoric of Reflection*. She claims that "the scholarship on reflection is in a third phase or generation" (5). This claim is supported in a long summary and justification of sequence and selection of the chapters in the collection. She organizes the collection into three parts, first "beginning with the classroom," next providing a "field-specific context for reflection," and finally "outlining promising practices" (14). In the first section, the authors ar-

ticulate various theories on reflection and then apply that theoretical knowledge to practices examining teaching for transfer in academic contexts.

This section alone should attract many readers in the field of rhetoric and composition, especially readers whose research interests and teaching methods include reflection. Readers of *Community Literacy Journal* may especially enjoy Taczak and Robertson's discussion of "reflection" that "must serve as both process and product" as students attempt to make sense of transferring knowledge learned not only into other academic genres and contexts, but into the different contexts and writing situations present within their communities (14). Additionally, as Yancey elucidates, "Leaker and Ostman consider the various kinds of reflective knowledge, especially that created by participants in communities of color," which prior learning assessment practices "may be excluding" (15).

The opening section thoroughly prepares the reader to advance into *A Rhetoric of Reflection*'s second act, "address[ing] the relationships among reflection, language, and difference" (15). A fascinating case study made by Asao Inoue and Tyler Richmond concludes that faculty "tend to ignore the possible racialized nature of the discourse of student reflection assigned and expected in US writing classrooms" (15). Yancey situates Inoue and Richmond's important call to action after Bruce Horner's "Reflecting the Translingual Norm" to illuminate the pressing issues in the field.

It is in the third section of *A Rhetoric of Reflection* that research on reflection comes into its own. Elizabeth Clark's essay begins this section and she draws connections between selfie culture, reflection, and self-involvement. Clark discusses social media culture with empathy for student populations that are immersed in this culture, while also focusing on the ways students' engagement with social media simulates the kind of multimodal reflection that often occurs in ePortfolios at her home institution. Clark argues that "while the selfie is a sporadic and brief connection to an audience, reflective writing, in contrast, is a deeply intensive act of self-assessment" (151). Most notably, Clark argues that "reflection should provide for ambiguity and defer closure" so that students can experience *reflection-in-presentation* by engaging writing events using different strategies, filters, modes, and practices (16).

Moving out of the classroom, the fourth section of *A Rhetoric of Reflection* discusses reflection and writing technologies across the curriculum programs and different social and methodological approaches. Kevin Roozen's "Reflective Interviewing: Methodological Moves for Tracing Tacit Knowledge and Challenging Chronotropic Representations" offers a student perspective on self-literacy through reflective interviews with different themes and contexts. Roozen offers reflective interviewing as "an epistemic process through which writers generate and communicate knowledge of their writing and how they have invented, and continue to invent themselves as literate persons in the world" (253). One type of reflective interview question Roozen proposes is the open-ended prompt so that the interviewee can consider epistemological concerns, instead of specific writing tasks, events, or artifacts.

In the final section, Jeff Sommers revisits research foundational in many of the previous chapters. In "Problematizing Reflection: Conflicted Motives in the Writer's Memo" Sommers discusses reflection practices within the writer's memo as a genre

and "its effects on students and its effects on teachers evaluating students' writing" (17). In particular, Sommers investigates the problem of performance in student reflection that often threatens the authenticity of memos as student artifacts. Sommers recounts a student, Mitchell, whose memo is "no longer engaged . . . in reflection but instead is an author asking for feedback." Of course, that is one form of productive writerly behavior; however, "this behavior is not as much about reflection as it is about assessment, both by the student himself and subsequently by the teacher" (276). Sommers' detailed complication of the "Writer's Memo" that hangs over other scholarship in *A Rhetoric of Reflection* is an easy highlight, taking great care to note with skepticism the "positively idyllic" discussions of reflective genres (274). Sommers breaks down a number of problematic elements, including origins of the assignment ("student-teacher memos" originally) which have developed to serve the student-author in more meaningful ways. Sommers poses an important question: "how compatible is helping the teacher with reflection on one's own learning?" (276). The chapter addresses the scaffolding of writing assignments and challenges educators to better understand "what happens when reflection takes place in the rhetorical situation of the classroom" (286).

Doug Hesse continues the discussion of genre, focusing on the personal essay as a genre-based example of reflective writing. His "Reflection and the Essay" examines "the role of reflection in the personal essay . . . as a generative and critical force for authors" (17–18). Hesse's chapter is an obvious stand out in the collection, as it is both insightful and humorous in ways other chapters in the collection are not. In fact, "Reflection and the Essay" acts as a sort of justification for the collection a whole, as Hesse writes "I speculate that we might need essayistic reflection as much now as ever" (298). Surely Yancey would agree, and in the glow of this last chapter begins a conclusion which aims to summarize and synthesize the various scholarship contained therein. Found within the conclusion is a "Shared Perceptions" section that lists key questions, terms, and ideas on reflection.

Like the many writing events and rhetorical situations that authors and educators are presented with, reflection itself has a unique ability to create communal and individual moments of meaning making. Each chapter in this collection offers a variation on or expansion of Yancey's previous work to draw new conclusions, some based on reflecting on reflection, and others arguing that reflection itself is a meaningful practice for student writers. Yancey's earlier work clearly influences this edited collection and there is much to recommend. Yancey has collected work from the field for educators and scholars with interests in the many ways reflection can complicate, support, and develop the ways students write, and the ways we understand writing.

Works Cited

Yancey, Kathleen Blake. *Reflection in the Writing Classroom*. Utah State UP, 1998.