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## Metaphoric Competence As A Means To Meta-cognitive Awareness In First-year Composition

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METAPHORIC COMPETENCE AS A MEANS TO META-COGNITIVE AWARENESS IN  
FIRST-YEAR COMPOSITION

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Arts  
in the Department of English  
in the College of Arts and Humanities  
at the University of Central Florida  
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## ABSTRACT

A growing body of writing research suggests college students' and teachers' conceptualizations of writing play an important role in learning to write and making the transition from secondary to post-secondary academic composition. First-year college writers are not blank slates; rather, they bring many assumptions and beliefs about academic writing to the first-year writing classroom from exposure to a wide range of literate practices throughout their lives. Metaphor acts as a way for scholars to trace students' as well as their instructors' assumptions and beliefs about writing. In this study, I contend that metaphor is a pathway to meta-cognitive awareness, mindfulness, and reflection. This multi-method descriptive study applies metaphor analysis to a corpus of more than a dozen first-year composition students' end-of-semester writing portfolios; the study also employs an auto-ethnographic approach to examining this author's texts composed as a graduate student and novice teacher. In several cases writing students in this study appeared to reconfigure their metaphors for writing and subsequently reconsider their assumptions about writing. My literature review and analysis suggests that metaphor remains an underutilized inventive and reflective strategy in composition pedagogy. Based on these results, I suggest that instructors consider how metaphoric competence might offer writers and writing instructors an alternate means for operationalizing key habits of mind such as meta-cognitive awareness, reflection, openness to learning, and creativity as recommended in the *Framework for Success in Post-Secondary Writing*. Ultimately, I argue that writers and teachers might benefit from adopting a more flexible attitude towards metaphor. As a rhetorical trope, metaphors are contextual and, thus, writers need to learn to mix, discard, create, and obscure metaphors as required by the situation.

To my wife, Elizabeth. Thank you for your support, patience, motivation, and love.

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## CHAPTER ONE: ‘THOU SHALT NOT COMMIT METAPHOR’: RETHINKING METAPHOR’S PLACE IN WRITING STUDIES

“A large part of self-understanding is the search for appropriate personal metaphors that make sense of our lives. Self-understanding requires unending negotiation and renegotiation of the meaning of your experiences to yourself. In therapy, for example, much of the self-understanding involves consciously recognizing previous unconscious metaphors and how we live by them. It involves the constant construction of new coherences in your life, coherences that give new meaning to old experiences. The process of self-understanding is the continual development of new life stories for yourself.” – George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, 233

Metaphor is a way of defining abstract, and often complex, concepts by describing these ideas in relationship or in contrast to something else, usually more concrete. For example, explanations of emotions such as anger and love are often rendered in metaphor. Love can get *off the tracks*, a relationship can be said to be *going nowhere*, or romance can *take off*; all of these are metaphorical expressions based on the conceptual metaphor: LOVE IS A JOURNEY (Kovecses; Lakoff and Johnson). In the epigraph above, Lakoff and Johnson use the conceptual metaphor LIFE IS A STORY to explain metaphor’s value for facilitating reflexivity and thus contributing intellectual and emotional growth. That is, they argue that understanding the metaphors that people live by and creating new metaphors is a way of reading and writing ourselves into the world.

The present study is an multi-genre, multi-method approach to writing study: part of which is an auto-ethnographic examination of my experiences as a graduate student in the University of Central Florida's rhetoric and composition program and a descriptive study of metaphor in first-year writing students' texts. I examine the metaphors that I have used to frame my understanding of writing processes, teaching writing, the identities of writing instructors, and writing students in order to reflect on learning to teach and learning to write in academia. I also examine students' texts and their use of metaphors to illustrate how metaphor works in student writing self-portraits.

My argument in this thesis is four-fold: I will argue that (1) metaphors provide writers a readymade example of how the construction of meaning occurs; (2) metaphors work together in groups and therefore form complex coherences—that is, they readily mix; (3) Because metaphors require interpretation, the result of such interpretation may be meta-cognitive awareness of language's rhetorical and constructed nature, however, because of their extraordinary persuasiveness, metaphors often become powerful and often inflexible beliefs that require active engagement to challenge and change; and, (4) new metaphors are not always necessary for transforming beliefs—rather, how a writer or teacher capitalizes on the potentiality of a particular metaphor makes a critical difference in how writing and teaching writing is conceptualized.

Like many first-year composition instructors before me, I have adopted a view that the writing classroom plays an important role as a place for students to think critically and reflectively about themselves as learners, as writers, and as members of academic and public communities. As I reflect on my experience teaching this first-year writing, I see the first-year

composition classroom as an important place for writers to self-consciously form and shape their views about writing through the identification, analysis and creation of metaphors. Moreover, in my own academic studies of writing, metaphor has been the epistemological basis for understanding the processes of writing and how knowledge is cognitively and socially constructed.

From my perspective, the readers who likely will find this study most beneficial are graduate students in rhetoric and composition, who also are pre-service teachers interested in issues of meta-cognition, mindfulness, reflection, and metaphor. Graduate instructors of new writing instructors may also find this text useful for understanding the role that identity formation plays in the professional development of new writing instructors. Similarly, this study is likely to be of interest to instructors of first-year composition courses who want to incorporate metaphor into their teaching practices as well as those who aim to encourage meta-awareness among their students.

Below, I begin by providing a review of the literature that establishes metaphor's current status in writing studies and then discuss metaphor's value as a generative and reflective strategy for writing students (both undergraduate and graduate) and new writing instructors in learning to write their way into academia. I describe metaphor's potential value for transfer of learning, reflective awareness, and issues of student authority. Finally, I provide summaries of the chapters that follow.

### **Metaphor's Limited Status in Writing Studies**

While metaphor has been widely recognized as a pervasive figure of speech in everyday language, particularly in the fields of psychology and cognitive linguistics, the study of

metaphors of writing has remained a niché within writing studies (Seitz; Giles; Eubanks). Such reclamation of the significance of metaphor in the fields of philosophy, psychology, and linguistics, did not come easily, after years of rhetorical neglect as study of figurative language was viewed as vice; philosopher Max Black cleverly puts it in his *Models and Metaphors*: “Addiction to metaphor is held to be illicit, on the principle that whereof one can speak only metaphorically, thereof one ought not to speak at all” (25). Black draws inspiration from literary critics, whom he says “do not accept the commandment, ‘Thou shalt not commit metaphor,’ or assume that metaphor is incompatible with serious thought” (25). Despite remaining a niché in writing studies research, metaphoring periodically has been a method for trying to make sense of writing issues.<sup>1</sup>

However, some metaphor theorists have argued that the way metaphor has been employed in writing studies has continued the tradition of treating metaphor as a stylistic appendage rather than a significant mode of thought; Seitz and Eubanks have argued that, generally, writing studies has focused on arguing for or against particular metaphors rather than investigating how metaphor works. Eubanks notes that, “...writing scholars have agreed that metaphor is important. But that is not the same thing as interrogating the nature of metaphor—not the same as explaining anew the way metaphor is constituted and the way it functions” (172). Likewise, compositionist James Seitz argues that writing studies considers metaphor as a tool or strategy that can be “used” and discarded by students as needed rather than a way of

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Berthoff’s *The Making of Meaning*, 1981; Elbow’s *Writing with Power*, 1981; Cooper and Holzman’s *Writing as Social Action*, 1989; Burnham’s *Writing from the Inside Out*, 1989; Flower’s *The Construction of Negotiated Meaning*, 1994; Helmers’ *Writing Students*, 1994; McPhail’s *Zen in the Art of Rhetoric*, 1996; Casanave’s *Writing Games*, 2002; Barwashi’s *Genre & the Invention the Writer*, 2003; Baake’s *Metaphor and Knowledge: The Challenges of Writing Science* (2003); Tomlinson’s *Authors on Writing*, 2005; Giles’ *Motives for Metaphor in Scientific and Technical Communication*, 2008; Eubanks’ *Metaphor and Writing*, 2011.

understanding and acting (294). Seitz argues that another reason that metaphor remains a contentious topic in writing studies is that “[composition studies] remain bogged down in the murky waters of legislating a proper place for metaphor, a place where metaphor will not contaminate the supposed purity of literal language” (288). In the classical tradition, metaphor has been relegated to the canon of style, thus its inventive possibilities have been subverted as a generative rhetorical strategy. Indeed, metaphor has been a source of concern for rhetoric as it marked the decline of field’s importance to knowledge making by emphasizing taxonomy and figurative cataloging (Ricoeur); it has been derided as the source of confusion in language rather than clarity, even though its critics have often used metaphor as a strategy (Locke; Hobbes); and students sometimes receive negative feedback from instructors when they use metaphor overtly (H. Miller). In short, scholars argue that in writing studies metaphor is treated as an optional tool, rather than an embedded everyday feature of language as philosophers and linguistics have argued quite convincingly (Nietzsche; Richards; Black; Lakoff and Johnson; Ortony; Ritchie; Kovecses).

Many of composition studies’ central theoretical concepts—author/writer, clarity, flow, voice, audience, argument—are abstract concepts through which theorists have described using metaphor and are even metaphors themselves. Seitz, for example, argues that, “process itself can be approached as a ‘worn-out’ or ‘forgotten’ metaphor, one that we might ‘revive’ in order to examine its limits” (291). In the next section, I review research highlighting the intrinsic value of metaphor for language teaching and learning.

## Metaphor's Value for Language Teaching and Learning

In *Mind, Metaphor and Language Teaching*, Randal Holme argues that metaphor may be an exemplar of how we construct meaning in language. He writes that,

The keys to the nature of language acquisition may rest with the cognitive hooks that are embedded in a language in order to make it easier to learn or acquire. Metaphor, as the mechanism that reveals how grammatical and abstract meaning has been constructed in language, may constitute one of those hooks. Metaphor is a linguistic clue to how the mind structures meaning. Metaphor is also a manifestation of cognitive processes that are central to our capacity to generalise our learning and to make a creative response to new circumstances. (123)

Holme argues that metaphor does three things to assist the language teacher and learner.

Metaphor shows “how the mind: (1) conceptualises the meanings expressed in language, (2) copes with the new and strange, and (3) acquires and uses new knowledge” (Holme 27). The value of teaching writing students to not only recognize metaphor but to analyze and generate their own metaphors gets to the core of what language teaching is about: making meaning.

Even Aristotle acknowledges that metaphor is used in everyday speech. He writes that “all people carry on their conversations with metaphors” and he notes that “metaphor especially has clarity and sweetness and strangeness, and its use cannot be learned from someone else” (Kennedy 223). When Aristotle claims that metaphor cannot be learned from another, this may suggest that teaching metaphor is impossible. However, another view of this is that metaphor is an innate capacity that we begin to develop early in life. Ritchie, in *Context and Connection in Metaphor*, notes that there is “evidence that some fundamental metaphorical connections may be

innate, part of the way the brain itself is organized” (4). Randal Holme describes how as infants we associate standing with pleasure and falling down with discomfort, thus, we embody the conceptual metaphors “happy is up/sad is down” (23). Therefore, metaphors become embodied and socially constructed metaphorical expressions such as “I’m on cloud nine” (HAPPY IS UP) and “I’m feeling down in the dumps” (SAD IS DOWN).

Educational and development psychologists have attempted to define elements as well as stages of metaphoric competence, with much of the research focusing on individuals with brain injuries, second-language learners, and young children (Gardner & Winner; Low; Geary). While metaphor use and creation may be argued to be a prevalent and pervasive trait of language use, the ability to recognize, use and create metaphors like other creative processes varies among individuals. Some populations such as individuals with Asperger’s Syndrome face challenges with understanding metaphor. In *I is an Other*, James Geary describes “Rebecca,” a Ph.D. student in mathematics education who has Asperger’s Syndrome, and her difficulty grasping conventional, everyday metaphors. Rebecca, Geary explains, carries around the *Asperger’s Dictionary of Everyday Expressions* to “translate the foreignness of figurative language” (56). In the course of my own teaching, I encountered a student with Asperger’s Syndrome. As an instructor who relied on metaphor to explain abstract writing concepts, I frequently heard this student express confusion in my class and helping him learn rhetorical concepts, many of which based on metaphors or theorized through metaphor, often required extended conferences. A study of metaphor use among 148 college students, none identified as having learning challenges, found that only about 18 percent of students were aware that they used metaphor in their writing (H. Miller 88). This study, as well as the anecdotes described above, suggest that a

lack of instructor awareness of how metaphor works and does not work may pose teaching and learning problems for the classroom. Likewise, a lack of individual awareness of metaphor use may prevent students from recognizing how their own tacit language uses may pose challenges for understanding the abstract concepts they encounter in college. Scholars have tied metaphoric competence to meta-awareness, mindfulness, reflection and other forms of critical thinking (Yancey; Langer; Casanave; Holme; Charteris-Black, Giles).

Holme writes that students often view language as randomly constructed—that is, rules and meanings appear arbitrary. He explains that, “further thought about the processes of that language’s emergence and the traces that these processes leave behind can help them to recognise its underlying systematicity” (129). This systematicity can be observed in the way that institutions and individuals use metaphors to “frame” the way they describe different views of reality. Donald Schön argues that metaphors act as “frames” that enable and constrain our ability to make meaning and act on those meanings.

Just as the size and shape of a mirror’s frame as well as a mirror’s surface affects what and how we may see of ourselves, a metaphor can open us to a new way of thinking or limit us to a particular way of thinking. An example of framing or “reframing” a problem in writing studies through metaphor appears in Joseph Harris’s essay “The Idea of Community in the Study of Writing.” Harris argues that the term “community” or “discourse community” is often one of consensus—“the sort of group invoked is a free and voluntary gathering of individuals with shared goals and interests” (15). Harris reframes the idea of community in writing through the metaphor of the city to allow for communities that allow for dissensus. Harris’s reframing of the metaphor of community offers a more flexible view of the attributes that constitute a community.



Arguably, if consensus were the primary attribute for what defines a community, few communities would fit neatly into this conceptualization of what communities are and how they function. The way composition and pedagogical theorists, writing instructors, and students themselves chose to “frame” writers and writing processes enables and constrains how writers construct their identities and how writing is conceived and, ultimately, enacted.

Interestingly, Holme’s research is targeted at second-language teachers. Writing students are often treated as second-language learners or outsiders entering new, insider discourses. The metaphor of students as travelers into a “strange land” or as needing enculturation to become part of a tribe of learners makes Holme’s text all the more relevant to how students move from the academic discourse of high school to college and the various academic ‘dialects’ they may encounter (see Bartholomae’s “Inventing the University”; McCarthy’s “Strangers in a Strange Land”; Sutherland’s “Unsettling a Metaphor We Teach By”).

How students frame their identities and ideologies through metaphors inside and outside the boundaries of the university influences the rhetorical choices they make while writing. As a graduate student and new writing instructor, I viewed myself as well as my students as travelers, as foreigners learning the language and culture of different academic “tribes;” that learning to write in a community was learning accepted ways of writing; and, moreover, ways of *thinking*, *doing* and *being* in a community (Gee). Marguerite Helmers claims in *Writing Students* that based on analysis of instructors’ testimonials in *College Composition and Communication*, writing teachers have frequently framed their students through metaphors of lack and deviance. She argues that the student-as-traveler (a popular trope in educational discourse) can license a related and potentially limiting metaphor of students as “exotic,” one in which teachers help

students *go native*, or in modern parlance, enculturate (101). Helmers calls for more positive representations of student as writers that acknowledge the experiences they bring to the university; that is, teachers recognize that students are not blank slates. Seitz argues that “much of the resistance that students exhibit is not a sign of ‘inexperience’ but of their maturity: like professional writers they recognize, unhappily that writing can never fully anticipate its reading” (293). So, instructors also benefit from identifying the ways in which they frame writers and the practices of writing and considering new metaphorical frames for writing.

Barbara Tomlinson claims in her essay “Tuning, Tying and Training Texts” that “a good deal of what people ‘know’ about composing (perhaps most of what they know) is based not on careful observation of their own activities, but on this culturally shared information [metaphorical stories] about the writing process” (59). She argues that “metaphorical stories [about writing] enable us to understand and communicate about amorphous, fragmented, complicated experiences like the process of writing; they enable us to bring coherence to our conceptions and communications about composing” (60). Similarly, Philip Eubank contends in his essay “Conceptual Metaphor as Rhetorical Response” that metaphors are “signalers of commitments” (195), commitments that should be mined and evaluated by writing students in order to complicate and enrich their understanding of writing. Ultimately, metaphor can provide writing students with a way of seeing how the social construction of knowledge occurs and takes form in language.

I want to suggest that the analysis and generation of metaphor is an important aspect of rhetorical analysis that helps to reveal this concept of framing, encourage critical reading and writing, and foster meta-awareness of writing processes and attitudes toward writing. Holme

argues that, “an awareness of metaphors can help students adopt a critical stance toward texts because it helps foster an understanding of how rhetoric is used in order to advance a given authorial purpose” (130). He describes metaphor as an “affective or emotional trigger” and, similarly, linguist Jonathan Charteris-Black sees metaphor as a “way of creating cognitive and affective meaning” (251). The emotional power of metaphor is tied directly to the idea of metaphor as a “meta-metaphor” of meaning making in motion. In reviewing Aristotle’s definition of metaphor, Paul Ricoeur explains that “metaphor is defined in terms of motion . . . . To explain metaphor, Aristotle creates a metaphor, one borrowed from the realm of movement; *phora*, as we know, is a kind of change, namely with respect to location” (17-18). Kuang Ming-Wu writes that metaphors “shock” and “move” us; that “emotion” is at its root “e-motion” (174). This affective quality of metaphor connects its use most closely to the rhetorical appeal of *pathos*, which writing students can then analyze for the rhetorical effects of metaphor choice as a persuasive strategy. Writing on the emotive power of metaphor, Charteris-Black contends that,

Emotions, rather like perception of metaphor, are ultimately part of a subjective world in which our interpretation depends on such diverse influences as our past experiences of people, of situations, and of language. Analysis of metaphor is often, then, an exploration of the inner subjectivity of speakers—what it is that is unique to their perception of the world—and forms the basis for their response to particular situations and to particular ideas. (11)

In other words, metaphor analysis provides a method for understanding a rhetor’s motives.

Metaphor also has ties to appeals of *logos* and *ethos*: Wu argues that analogy (a type of metaphor) is a form of logic (as in “ana-logic” or a logic of relationships, and a “logic of

discovery”) while Charteris-Black claims that metaphor choice contributes to the ethos of rhetors as metaphors often reflect cultural beliefs (54; 24). Thus, metaphor as a figure of thought and speech offers access to analysis of all three rhetorical appeals.

Metaphor has often been thought of as primarily a poetic or literary device (Lakoff and Johnson; Lakoff and Turner; Kovecses). By looking at conventional metaphor use in non-literary texts, writing students also gain opportunities to see how writers of all types rely on deliberate and unconscious use of metaphors to communicate. Tomlinson argues that teaching writers how to use “metaphor reading as a critical method teaches us that words are more than tools and writing is more than technology” (2). In a study of college writers’ use of metaphors in the composing process, Hildy Miller describes an instance of a poet “[shaping] his final text” through metaphor and in a case study how a writing student “experimented with structuring his essay” through a overarching metaphor (92). Baake and Giles both demonstrate quite extensively how scientists use metaphor as a rhetorical strategy for invention as well as developing effective means for communicating the results of their science. Illustrating the relevance of metaphor as everyday language in non-literary texts, including academic arguments, can help students begin to see how writers, including themselves, manufacture texts through rhetorical choices.

Another aim of this study is to argue how instructors might use multiple metaphors to encourage greater mindfulness of situated writing practices. Lad Tobin suggests that “[composition teachers] need to recognize that writers may use very different metaphors for different aspects of the process, different kinds of writing, and different kinds of audiences” (451). Contrary to what writers have traditionally been taught about metaphors (namely, that they don’t mix), Tomlinson argues in *Authors on Writing* that writers need to cultivate metaphor

flexibility; she claims that, “authors frequently use multiple and conflicting metaphors to describe their writing acts” (24). Thus, I argue, that students may require a range of metaphors to understand how writing functions and changes in different writing situations.

### *Metaphor and Transfer of Learning*

The word metaphor comes from the Greek *metapherein* meaning ‘to transfer’ or ‘to bear’ or ‘carry over’ (Wormeli 6). Wu treats metaphor as a “ferry over to novelty” (23). Thus, metaphor approximates the movement of mind in learning. Writing instructors gain a powerful tool for transfer of learning in the use of metaphor and analogy. Gavriel Salomon and David Perkins write, “Transfer is facilitated when new material is studied in light of previously learned material that serves as an analogy or metaphor. [. . .] For example, students may initially understand the idea of an atom better by thinking of it as a small solar system, or how the heart works by thinking of it as a pump. Of course, most such analogies are limited and need *elaboration* and *qualification*” (par. 20, my emphasis). This last sentence is a key point; metaphor requires more than tacit acceptance—students and teachers must negotiate and re-negotiate the metaphors they rely on to explain how writing works.

One of the risks inherent in using metaphor to teach and learn writing is a naïve acceptance of metaphor as offering an accurate depiction of reality. When metaphor congeals into ‘truth’ it masks the instability of language, according to Nietzsche. So, as Giles claims, “Metaphor can become problematic when it becomes myth” (3). Lad Tobin also echoes this as one of his central arguments in “Bridging Gaps”:

Once any metaphor becomes dominant in an individual’s mind, in a classroom, in a university, or even in a society, it influences, limits, and controls subsequent actions. For

that reason the metaphor itself needs to be examined and debated and, ultimately, negotiated by the group. (451)

Thus, the process of unraveling the entailments of metaphors serves as a critical element in teaching writing through metaphor. Instructors must not just teach students to create metaphors, but to see the extent to which they are useful for creating knowledge. When metaphors become myths, they become unchallenged and cliché. These clichés become rules that are tacitly accepted. Instructors in the metaphor-based classroom must encourage metaphor flexibility—showing students how to not only generate but knowing when to abandon metaphors which are no longer helpful (Giles 75; Tomlinson, *Authors on Writing*, 126). Moreover, metaphors are contextual; meaning, writers can't metaphor in the same way in every situation. Metaphor flexibility and adaptability requires students learn to adjust the metaphors they use for particular audiences and how they use metaphors, sometimes obscuring metaphors.

By engaging writing students in identifying, analyzing and generating metaphors in the composition classroom, writing instructors might work to elucidate the ways that writing studies have defined writers and writing as a field for better or worse (see Helmers' *Writing Students*). Through metaphor, students also become aware of the metaphorical stories that shape their identities as writers and their beliefs about what writing is and could be in their life. Ultimately, metaphor not only offers a way for writing instructors to encourage the development of meta-rhetorical mindsets, but as Jonathan Charteris-Black argues metaphor may offer a mode of empowering writers and writing instructors to examine, challenge and propose alternative ways of thinking about writing and how it is taught and learned. As Lakoff and Turner have argued:

To study metaphor is to be confronted with hidden aspects of one's own mind and one's own culture . . . . To do so is to discover that one has a worldview, that one's imagination is constrained, and that metaphor plays an enormous role in shaping one's everyday understanding of everyday events. . . . It is vital that we understand our own worldviews and the processes that guide both our everyday understanding and our imagination. (*More than Cool Reason* 214)

Over the past 20 years, writing scholars have continually questioned what first-year composition courses can possibly accomplish in preparing new college writers for the tremendous diversity of writing styles they may encounter in their academic and professional careers. In addition, it is now perfectly clear to most scholars that the two-semester timeframe is inadequate for significantly altering writing practices. Given what prevailing theories tell us about learning to write (that writing is situated in specific rhetorical contexts; that learning to write more often than not requires tacit historical, cultural, and social knowledge of values and practices; and that literacies are complex and multi-layered), writing scholarship and education theory has steadily progressed from away from the instrumental towards the conceptual in first-year writing. For example, Downs and Wardle argue that first-year composition ought to be reframed as an introduction to writing studies while Wallace contends that the sequence might be better framed as an "introduction to authorship" (see "Teaching about Writing, Righting Misconceptions"; *Compelled to Write*). That is not to say that writers do not write extensively in first-year composition, but the focus of writing in the sequence frequently is on writing itself (a rhetorical approach to pedagogy), how the writer has learned to read and write, how other writers' practices vary depending on the situation, and how they identify with the label of "author" or "writer." The

emphasis on conceptual learning, identity, and transferable writing knowledge draws renewed attention to the value of metaphor for its worth as a “device for moving from the well-known to the less well-known” (Ortony 51). Despite tremendous interest in metaphor research since the 1950s—Danesi claims to have amassed a bibliography of more than 5,000 entries on metaphor in just a few years prior to 2004—application of the trope as a methodology for learning theoretical and conceptual knowledge in writing studies has been sporadic at best (6).

If rhetoric’s chief focus is on *pistis* (belief), as Aristotle claims in *On Rhetoric*, then instructors cannot begin to alter their first-year college writer’s writing practices unless they can address the assumptions, beliefs and ideologies that they cling to as writers are shaped by a wide variety of literate practices throughout their lives. Metaphor reveals traces of these beliefs, and I argue that elaborating and qualifying these metaphors may result in meta-cognitive awareness and, thus, reconfigured conceptualizations of writing beliefs for both students and teachers.

Without understanding the assumptions and beliefs writers bring to the writing classroom, instructors risk teaching *against* or *past* the writers they wish to reach. Even more detrimental to writer’s attitudes and engagement in learning, instructors make the mistaken assumption that students *lack* this knowledge in the first place without determining how they understand writing to work. Armstrong, citing BouJaoude, identifies the “importance of looking beyond learners’ behaviors in order to understand the beliefs underlying and motivating these behaviors” (216). Citing Bandura and Vacca, Paulson and Armstrong argue that, “students’ beliefs about learning and their conceptualizations about themselves as learners have long been associated with levels of academic success” (494). Throughout this descriptive study, I aim to illustrate how metaphoric competence may offer college writers as well as their instructor a



means to meta-cognitive awareness, self-reflection, openness to learning, creativity, and most importantly transfer of learning.

### **Research Questions & Methodology**

For this research project, I sought answers to the following questions:

1. What are the metaphors that I used during my graduate studies to describe writing? How did I develop and use metaphors in my writing practices? What metaphors did I use to define the roles of teachers and students in first-year writing?
2. What metaphors did students in my writing classes use to describe writing processes? What changes, if any, occurred in these students' definitions of writing and metaphors of writing between the beginning and end of the semester?
3. What are the implications of the analysis of my metaphors and my students' metaphors for my writing and my future approaches to teaching writing?

To answer the above research questions, I examined essays I wrote during what I consider to be the most productive periods of my graduate studies primarily during my second and third semesters when I began teaching first-year writing. I analyzed both rough drafts and completed essays to determine how I used metaphor as a rhetorical strategy in my graduate studies.

I also draw on a corpus of 14 student portfolios from my two fall 2010 sections of first-year composition classes. In particular, I analyze students' texts including auto-ethnographies, related essays on the topic of revision, think-aloud protocols, student journals, and end-of-semester reflection letters. These assignments focused on students' conceptions of their writing processes. For example, the auto-ethnography assignment engages students in analyzing and

evaluating the way they write by conducting a think-aloud protocol and empirical analysis of their behaviors and habits in writing.

For the purposes of this study, I plan to use Jonathan Charteris-Black's Critical Metaphor Analysis methodology described in his *Corpus Approaches to Critical Metaphor Analysis*.

Similar to critical discourse analysis, critical metaphor analysis involves three stages: metaphor identification, interpretation, and explanation (Charteris-Black 35). Charteris-Black describes two stages in identification: "a close reading of a sample of texts with the aim of identifying candidate metaphors" and "a further qualitative phase in which corpus contexts are examined to determine whether each use of a key-word is metaphoric or literal" (35). For the interpretation stage, I have used a list of conceptual metaphors (and related metaphorical expressions/key words) to assist in searching for prevalent metaphors in writing studies, my own writings, and student texts. I have taken these metaphors from Tomlinson, Reddy, Eubanks, Lakoff and Johnson, and Kovecses. For example, Reddy lists over 140 metaphorical expressions that relate to the conduit metaphor (also known as the "windowpane theory of language" or "container metaphor") (Reddy 311; Eubanks). The conduit metaphor has been criticized as a faulty model of communication theory because it emphasizes a unidirectional model of communicating, according to Reddy. The third stage, explanation "involves identifying the social agency that is involved in their production and their social role in persuasion" (Charteris-Black 39).

In the fall semester of 2010, I was assigned to teach two sections of first-year composition (ENC 1101). At the beginning of the course, I attempted to integrate brief activities that involved students in the creation of writing-related metaphors and, at the end of the course, reflection and revision of these metaphors. From Lad Tobin's essay "Bridging Gaps: Analyzing

Students' Metaphors for Composing," I asked students to respond to the prompt, "Writing an essay is like . . . ." Similarly, students also were asked at the beginning and end of the semester to reflect on their definitions of "good" writing and "good" writers. I used these definitions and metaphors as baseline indicators of students' beliefs about what writing is and how they changed over the course of the semester.

While the auto-ethnography assignment, in many cases, was viewed by students as positively illuminating for how they write, from my perspective as an instructor seeking to enhance students' conceptions of writing as both situated cognition and social practice, the assignment often reinforced problematic positivistic notions of writing. In some cases, the assignment (its methodology and the accompanying readings) led to "error hunting" and a focus on metaphors of economy, efficiency and fluency (which Tomlinson contends is a derivative of the conduit metaphor) as marks of good writing. While some students eventually came to appreciate this assignment for helping them gain self-awareness of how they write, other students complained quite vocally that the think-aloud protocol interfered with their natural or normal writing process.<sup>2</sup> The auto-ethnography assignment and think-aloud methodology licensed prominent conceptual metaphors scholars have linked to the Conduit Metaphor, such as KNOWING IS SEEING and WRITING IS SPEECH. The conceptual metaphors of WRITING IS SPEECH and WRITING AS TRANSCRIPTION that act as the framework for this writing activity have been widely

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<sup>2</sup> Tomlinson provides an important perspective on this method for studying writing processes: "...Studying composing through speaking-aloud protocols is often criticized as interfering with writers' normal writing processes that are assumed to be silent and unobservable. Yet we perpetrate a mild fraud in positing the existence of a 'normal' writing process, rather than searching for ways of mapping, analyzing, and understanding the many different processes that take place when people write." (30)

criticized in its metonymic form of “voice” and “authentic voice” as a vestige of expressivism (Eubanks’ *Metaphor and Writing*). Below I provide summaries of the chapters to follow:

*Chapter 2 – Constructing, Negotiating, Performing: A Graduate Student’s Metaphors for Writing and Teaching Writing*

In this chapter, I rhetorically analyze the metaphors that I have used to construct my understanding of the processes of writing as well as discuss metaphors I have used in developing a sense of my identity as a writing instructor. I will discuss metaphor’s role in my own composing processes through a detailed analysis of successive drafts in two separate contexts within graduate studies. In particular, I will focus on a handful of conceptual metaphors that I have relied on to develop my understanding of writing processes. I argue that the adoption of multiple metaphors and recognition of the limits of these metaphors can contribute to meta-cognitive awareness, mindfulness, and reflective practice in writing.

*Chapter 3 – Reflections and Distortions in Writing Self-Portraits*

In this chapter, I will analyze the definitions and metaphors offered by writing students and analyze a variety of texts in which students discuss their writing processes, including an auto-ethnography assignment, in-class journals, reflection letters and reading responses. Kathleen Blake Yancey contends that: “Through reflection we teach ourselves through metaphor, and that is the primary mode of students’ native languages” (201). I also discuss how assignments and pedagogies can license specific metaphors and how these metaphors resulted in unintended consequences for meeting the learning outcomes I developed for my course. In the two sections of first-year writing that I taught, students’ initial definitions revealed an understanding of the rhetorical goals of clarity, that writing must be coherent or “flow,” and must

“make a point.” Missing from many of these definitions was the contextual basis of writing and the concept of writing as a transaction between writer, reader, text, and context. Ludwig Wittgenstein argues in *The Blue Book & The Brown Book*, “We easily forget how much a notation, a form of expression, may mean to us, and that changing it isn’t always as easy as it often is in mathematics or in the sciences. A change of clothes or of names may mean very little and it may mean a great deal” (57).<sup>3</sup> I.A. Richards concludes *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* by arguing for the value of the “command of metaphor—a command of the interpretation of metaphors” as a means to take control of our lives (135). In other words, we can allow metaphor to rule us or we can attempt to take command of it by engaging in “reflective awareness” of how metaphor works (116). I will argue that metaphors allow students not only to reflect on their writing beliefs, but also see how these metaphors may distort their perception of what writing is and might be in their lives. Through the examination and creation of metaphors, students may reconfigure their writing beliefs and, I will argue, teachers need to play a more active role in this belief formation.

#### *Chapter 4 – ‘Mixing the Unmixables’: A Case for Metaphoric Competence in the First-Year Composition Classroom*

In this chapter, I argue for incorporating metaphoric competence into first-year composition pedagogy to help operationalize key habits of mind such as meta-cognitive awareness, reflection, openness to learning, and creativity. Drawing on Kuang-Ming Wu’s and Philip Eubank’s claims that metaphors mix, I argue for a rhetorical and contextual approach to metaphor. I offer a practical rubric synthesizing various elements of metaphoric competence

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<sup>3</sup> As the title of Paul Ricoeur’s study of metaphor suggests, metaphor “rules” language in ways that often seem inconsequential, but when we examine its rhetorical force more closely we may discover that metaphors and the ideologies that we associate with them are difficult to discard.

from a range of metaphor scholars and briefly touch on the variety of pedagogical approaches in which metaphor has been applied to composition courses. Finally, I suggest areas for continued investigation in metaphor scholarship and first-year composition.

## CHAPTER TWO: CONSTRUCTING, NEGOTIATING, AND PERFORMING – A GRADUATE STUDENT’S METAPHORS FOR WRITING

“When writers talk about their views, they teach themselves and others how to perceive and interpret the writing process. And in writing, as in other activities, perceptions and interpretations help guide our actions. The subjective reality of composing as writers represent it reflects historical, cultural, biographical, and cognitive factors; it influences theory, pedagogy, and perhaps the writing process itself.”– Barbara Tomlinson, “Cooking, Mining, Gardening, Hunting,” 58

In the beginning of each episode of the reality T.V. show *Man vs. Wild*, survivalist “Bear” Grylls drops into an exotic locale—for example, the Mojave Desert, the Panamanian jungle, or the Arctic Circle—by helicopter, motor boat or by parachute, and then must find his way back to civilization by the end of the show. Using only his knife and the natural resources around him, Grylls fashions rafts, makeshift shelters or animal traps to survive.

For me, writing is often entering an unknown wilderness. I find I frequently have to reread the landscape each time I write, maybe climb a tree to see the land from a different perspective, or find a path cut by a previous hiker. Often, I have to cut through thick underbrush of text to carve a path or forge something coherent, hoping I have the right directions or I can read the landscape well enough to complete my journey. I hope that the tools and skills I’ve gathered over the years will help me construct shelter out the materials at hand.

Like wilderness survival, successful writing is about adaptation. Adaptation in writing requires the ability to remain flexible when confronted with different writing environments. This

kind of flexibility can be achieved by creating new categories, changing our perspectives, and being sensitive to the situatedness of communication: a critical method for enhancing these abilities is the act of metaphoring.

In *Authors on Writing*, Barbara Tomlinson asserts that she composes by many metaphors, “discard[ing] and tak[ing] up metaphors as I work moving fluidly from one to another” (126). This strategy of moving from metaphor to metaphor is a key point I wish to argue in this chapter about how metaphor works in composing and learning to write and teach. Multiple metaphors are necessary for writers to compose in a variety of rhetorical situations. The ability to identify and employ acceptable metaphors within different rhetorical contexts is an important element of metaphorical competency, meta-cognition and mindfulness.

In this chapter, I will describe and analyze the metaphors that I used in research essays and personal journals written during my graduate studies in rhetoric and composition in an effort to answer the following research questions: What are the metaphors that I used during my graduate studies to describe writing? How did I develop and use metaphors in my writing practices? What metaphors did I use to define the roles of teachers and students in first-year writing? In particular, I focus on writing produced in three semesters (Fall 2009, Spring 2010, and Fall 2010), during which I began my teaching career.

This chapter is also a response to calls made by Lad Tobin and Marguerite Helmers for research that examines a teacher’s own self-awareness in an effort to critically engage with their own beliefs about writing and education. Tobin argues in “Analyzing Student Metaphors for Writing” that writing instructors (as well as students) should continually examine, debate, and negotiate metaphors for writing (451). In the absence of this metaphor analysis, hidden



ideologies can take control of the classroom. In *Writing Students*, Helmers encourages writing instructors to adopt new types of reflective teacher research that is “intended to alter teachers’ perceptions of themselves in relation to their class and their subject. In fact, many of the research ‘stories’ foreground the researcher’s growing knowledge and contrast it with earlier misconceptions” (134). I examine metaphors I used to describe my conceptions of students and teachers and connect those to metaphors that Helmers identifies as commonplaces within teacher testimonials.

My rhetorical approach in my graduate courses almost exclusively was to investigate, interrogate and critique the metaphors used by writing theorists as a method for developing my argumentative claims. In addition, I began generating multiple metaphors to explore my conceptions of writing in different environments. This strategy proved successful throughout my graduate course work, and is one I argue that has the potential to assist students in grappling with the complexities of writing, gaining meta-awareness of their writing strategies and identifying new ones, and reflecting on the limits and implications of their own beliefs about writing. As I wrote throughout graduate school, I began exploring a range of prominent conceptual metaphors that circulate in composition studies and educational theory, including those of construction, travel (and a related metaphor of negotiation), ecosystems, and performance. The metaphors I used to describe my writing and my views of writing processes were multiple as well as context- and system-oriented. In contrast, while a handful of students in my first-year composition classes reconfigured their metaphors or expanded their interpretation of the metaphors they chose, few chose new metaphors, and even more rarely did they appear to choose to combine, mix, or use multiple metaphors deliberately. These first-year students wrote in a

decidedly different context than I did as a graduate student who came equipped with bachelor's degree in English and 10 years experience writing professionally in a variety of contexts and genres. Still, there are indeed parallels in that both my students and I were entering new communities and uncertain of our positions and authority. Armstrong claims in the conclusion of her study titled "Using Metaphor Analysis to Uncover Learners' Conceptualizations of Academic Literacies in Postsecondary Developmental Contexts" that, "the use of metaphors for metacognitive exploration and reflection may also be valuable to students beginning their postsecondary literacy instruction" (216). As an area for future research she suggests that, "comparative studies of teachers and students in the same instructional context may be useful on several levels" (216). Studies that focus only on students' conceptualizations of academic literacies are limited in that they do not take into account the way that instructor's conceptualizations "affect the way they teach postsecondary developmental literacy" (Armstrong 216). This study attempts to begin to respond to this need for comparative studies.

This chapter is designed around three interrelated metaphors: constructing, negotiating, and performing. These metaphors operate on multiple levels. They can be thought of as a condensed and fused rhetorical canon—constructing encompasses the traditional notions of invention and arrangement, negotiation can be thought of as moving as a writer and a reader through a text (inventing and arranging texts so readers can move through it) and negotiation can also be related to style (as a way of doing something), while performance encompasses notions of delivery and memory. Constructing, negotiating, and performing may also serve as metaphors for learning and teaching. When we learn we create knowledge, we manipulate it, and then often

we enact it. Similarly, when we teach, we create and scaffold assignments, we must manage changes in the classroom, and interact with students.

Below I begin by describing my emerging understanding of writing through the metaphor of social construction. Then, I trace the metaphoring strategies I, as a graduate student, used in the invention, arrangement, and revision of two essays from two different classes within the rhetoric and composition track in the English program during the same semester to illustrate how metaphor works in composition. Following this, I examine metaphors I used to describe teachers and students and the relationship between the two roles in a variety of essays that addressed student-teacher relationships. I conclude with a reflection on the value of multiple metaphors for writing and theories of writing. Contrary to what traditional textbooks tell us about how to use metaphor, multiple mixed metaphors are not incompatible but often form complex coherences and are necessary for understanding alternative perspectives. In the end, I hope to illustrate how metaphoric competence may lead writers and instructors to greater meta-cognitive awareness of their own pedagogical practices.

### **Writing as (Social) Construction: Putting the Pieces Together**

In their mapping essay “The Social Perspective and Professional Communication,” Thralls and Blyler trace the foundations of social constructionist theory (1993). They outline three strands of the *social perspective*—the social constructionist approach, the ideologic approach, and the paralogic hermeneutic approach—and base their review of these strands on four attributes: community, knowledge and consensus, discourse conventions, and collaboration (127). However, they argue that, “perhaps most binding [among supporters of the social

perspective] is the fundamental rejection of positivism and the windowpane theory of language” (125). Social constructionists, according to Thralls and Blyler, believe that “socially mediated meaning—or to use an alternate term, *interpretation*—is central to the social perspective” (126, italics in original). Moreover, theorists who advocate the social perspective claim “communications are invested with meaning only through the *interactions* of writers and readers. . .” (125, my emphasis).<sup>4</sup>

As a novice journalist, I had subscribed to the uncritical notion of the news media as conduit for transferring information. The defensive commonplace “don’t shoot the messenger” is echoed frequently as a way to distance members of the mass media from the content it “delivers.” In other words, messengers are not responsible for the content of the messages they share with readers; journalists simply act as a conduit or conveyor of information.

This perspective began to shift when I changed professions and perspectives to begin to see that journalists were not simply “reporters” but active shapers of content whether they knew it or not. In my application essay to graduate school, I began with a narrative to describe my growing awareness of the rhetorical and socially constructed nature of language. I wrote that

During a crisis communications seminar I attended for public relation professionals, the instructor said that journalists ‘manufactured’ their stories. The instructor might as well have slapped me in the face. As a former journalist and new public relations manager, I approached him during a break and said that I disagreed. The stories I wrote as a newspaper reporter, I said, were objective and only based on facts and on what others said.

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<sup>4</sup> In chapter three, I discuss what social theorists term “interaction” through another term “transaction.” Transaction, I argue, is virtually identical to the idea of interaction. According to Merriam-Webster’s College Dictionary (Tenth Ed.), transaction is defined as “a communicative action or activity involving two parties or things that reciprocally affect or influence each other.” Interaction is defined as “mutual or reciprocal action or influence.”

He politely explained that he meant manufactured in the sense that reporters sometimes create a false sense of ‘balance,’ believing they are being objective. Reporters often provide two opposing opinions in a story, sometimes even when one of those opinions is factually incorrect. This moment became a turning point in my thinking about how writers, politicians and other professionals manipulate language for good, neutral and unscrupulous purposes, whether they are aware of it or not.

A single word—*manufactured*—forever altered my perception of human language use. Having no prior experience with social construction theories, this passage signifies an emerging consciousness of the rhetorical nature of language. Though I was aware of rhetoric in the pejorative use of the term while I worked as a newspaper journalist, I lacked the self-awareness to see myself as a deliberate or even indirect manipulator of the texts I produced.<sup>5</sup>

As I entered my first semester of graduate school and was introduced to theories of social construction, I began making connections between my life experiences and the theories I was being exposed to; as I.A. Richards notes in *The Philosophy of Rhetoric*, “the mind is a connecting organ” (125). A central tenet of conceptual metaphor theory is that metaphors are experiential; to put it another way, metaphors are embodied in what we do or have done in our everyday lives (Lakoff and Johnson).

As a teenager, my family embarked on what became a five-year project to build a geodesic dome. I spent a large part of summers and weekends for nearly five years during my pre-teen years handing tools to my dad while he cut a piece of pipe or hung drywall. This

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<sup>5</sup> Krippendorff argues that “journalists are not exempt from believing that they report facts as accurately and truthfully as possible while on the long run merely reproducing an institution that makes society see itself but only through its own infrastructure” (19).

experience led to me to relate my experience building a house with theories of social construction.

As a new graduate student, I took the metaphor of construction somewhat literally in the process of engaging with the idea of writing as building or constructing. A conversation with my father about the experience of building our home started the process of my attempts to connect writing with a metaphor of construction and eventually led to a focus on metaphor, more broadly, as a focus of study. My first major project in graduate school was an annotated bibliography on metaphor theories, construction metaphors, and pedagogical approaches using metaphor.

Ralph Wahlstrom contends in *The Tao of Writing: Imagine, Create, Flow* (2006) that writers who have been taught to see writing as construction

come to believe that writing is a process of arranging chunks—awkward and heavy bricks of a sort—into rigid structures that match the templates in old writing books. The result is that too many of us stumble and trip as we lug about these ponderous chunks of concrete. (8)

Wahlstrom's reframing of the metaphor of writing as construction as "[lugging] . . . chunks of concrete" calls to mind the genre of the five-paragraph essay. For sure, certain kinds of formulaic writing license a metaphor of composing as bricklaying, which can have a stultifying effect on some writers. However, for many genres to be effective in context they often must adhere to "rigid structures"; for instance, granting agencies often require nonprofits to follow strict frameworks in grant proposals, sometimes unique to their organization.

In my first semester as a graduate student, I volunteered for a service-learning project to research and write a grant proposal for a university literacy program. Arranging the chunks of a

grant proposal was not an issue in a generic sense. What *was* at issue were the social aspects of identifying potential grantors *and* submitting a grant. As a writer learning a new genre, I discovered that tailoring a proposal to a specific grantor was more challenging than I expected, given the knowledge a grant writer needed of potential grantors, their processes, deadlines, grant-making requirements, and the kinds of groups that the grantor typically supported. At the end of the semester, I was left with drafting a generic proposal as the bulk of my time was spent attempting to research and identify appropriate venues for a proposal.

Wahlstrom's critique of the metaphor of construction is valid for many writers who have been taught only a limited number of rigid genre structures, such as the five-paragraph essay. However, as a metaphor for writing, construction can offer a multi-faceted view of writing: one that encompasses not only knowing how texts fit together but also the socio-cultural knowledge required to compose successfully. The metaphors of WRITING AS CONSTRUCTION and THEORY IS BUILDING have a well-established history that stretches back to Aristotle; for instance, Jan Brochner identified hundreds of metaphorical references to construction and builders in at least 16 of Aristotle's works, particularly when the concepts were difficult and highly abstract (522). I began to see the construction of my family's house less as a singular affair (my father as the sole house builder) and the process of building as occurring within a social context where to build our home required my father to acquire knowledge of construction practices from multiple texts, financial loans from his younger sisters, and assistance with manual tasks from his wife, brother-in-law, and children. Building, like writing, is more often than not a social affair. Moreover, builders build for a reason. A builder's perspective leads them to certain frames and designs they are more familiar with. In my father's case, he and my mother became, in his words, tired of

living in boxes. These kinds of comparisons and reflections allowed me to begin to see writing as a collaborative venture—one that made sense to me as I recalled my experience ghostwriting and collaboratively authoring editorial columns and texts for officials in the nonprofit where I worked or the blurry line of whose words were whose when I think back to writing as a journalist with my editors.

In my second semester of teaching first-year composition (fall 2010), I began the semester describing writing an essay as designing and building a house. From my lecture notes for my first-class, I told students that

Building a house is difficult if you only study the end product. To really learn how to build something you have to do it. How theorists describe something is not always exactly as it happens for each of us. My dad built a geodesic dome home when we were kids. I asked him recently about the process because I was interested in how it compared to this metaphor of writing. His theme was “measure twice, cut once.” In building a house you do this so you don’t waste materials and don’t screw up the first time. But in writing the metaphor doesn’t necessarily hold. The way I write, the first draft is almost always a botched product. I have to go back and replace parts. To carry the metaphor, remove doors, break out windows and sometimes, build an entirely new house because the first one was built on a faulty foundation.

Within this passage, I emphasize a process-oriented view of writing, arguing that studying end products is less fruitful for learners. The passage also poses a contradiction: while my father’s rule of thumb for house building is *measure twice*, this doesn’t necessarily apply to my writing process. Construction may suggest something too stable for the instability and ‘do overs’



necessary in composing practices. Similarly, I used metaphors of construction to explain the reasoning behind working on “global” concerns such as a writer’s thesis, the arrangement of the essay, before addressing “local” concerns such as spelling and punctuation. As I sat with groups of students throughout the day, I repeated the following analogy: “If you are a builder, why would you paint a wall when the framework is falling apart? You might have fixed the chipped paint, but you still have a weak structure.” As a metaphor for studying writing processes, the metaphor of construction used above I would argue is useful as it brings to mind the difficulty of studying how to create based on an end product. (However, given that metaphors are highly personal, for students who had not had the experience of house building, it’s not clear whether the metaphor is all that useful. Instead, perhaps, it might have been more useful to ask students to generate similar metaphors or to actually respond and challenge the question I posed about the metaphor of construction.) What the metaphor of construction does not immediately do is bring to mind the experience of *social* construction; for instance, the problems I faced in learning to write a proposal. For the *social perspective* to become clearer I needed other metaphors.

### **Negotiating Metaphors in Comp Theory: How Metaphor Moves**

In her essay “Repetition and Metaphor in the Early Stages of Composing,” Linda Peterson analyzes the way author Richard Wright uses metaphor and repetition as writing strategies “both for generating ideas and for revising them,” during the composition of an “interview statement” for his book *Black Boy* (430). Peterson identifies a common conceptual metaphor—SEEING IS KNOWING—that Wright uses to develop his thesis and modifies upon subsequent drafts. Through subsequent drafts, Peterson shows Wright beginning in his draft with the simile “like eyeglasses” to describe his experience reading other autobiographical books and how that affected his writing

(433). Other sight metaphors appear in Wright's drafts including "alien eyes," "borrowed eyes," "shed light for me," and alters the sight metaphors as he moves through drafts to "Books became the windows through which I looked at the world" (433). Peterson argues that, "despite a stronger countermovement toward non-figurative prose, Wright's language continues to depend upon metaphor"; Even as he "uses metaphors . . . he also tries to be free of it" (433; 435). Despite this paradoxical movement/countermovement of metaphor as she describes Wright's composing process, Peterson suggests Wright's approach as a potential model for teaching students how to use metaphor as rhetorical strategy. Peterson summarizes what she believes to be the essential lessons from analyzing Wright's process:

. . . Metaphor has generative power for the early stages of conceiving and composing expository texts; that much expository prose, of which philosophical prose is one kind, involves the working out of implications contained in an original or structural metaphor; and that this working-out process often includes an attempt at writing in 'plain,' non-figurative language. (436)

To this last point, Peterson argues that, "the attempt to write in non-figurative language is futile in any ultimate sense" (436). Peterson provides a second example of one of her students attempting to avoid metaphor in analyzing the implications of the metaphor "A human being may be called a sponge" (437). The student's attempt to avoid metaphor results in language that continues to be metaphorical, subverting the metaphor by drawing out entailments of the conceptual metaphor; for example "when squeezed they give off H<sub>2</sub>O" becomes "have an abundance of info/knowledge they give off when pressured" (437). Peterson's observations of the futility to write in non-figurative language suggests perhaps another strategy in teaching

metaphor; that is, students should not only learn how to *uncover* metaphor in text but also learn how to *disguise* it.

While it has been well established that metaphor plays a prominent role in a wide range of discourses, a level of abstraction exists in various discourses that makes metaphor more or less prominent stylistically. In her study “Metaphoric Components of the Composing Process,” Hildy Miller presents three case studies of students who use metaphor as a generative strategy in composing. She uses the study to suggest that students learned that the problems they encountered when attempting to use metaphor in academic genres “suggest a real bias against using metaphor” (94). That some instructors might hold a bias against the use of figurative language is undeniable. In the study, Miller describes Gena’s frustration with having to obscure her writing methods: “In order to avoid negative comments by instructors, however, she revises all drafts rigorously and prunes out most evidence of metaphor. She is frustrated by having to conceal her real processes in composition classes” (90). However, Miller’s own data suggests another explanation for her subjects’ challenges in employing metaphor in the composition classroom. She writes that subject Gena and Bette “learned to set limits on the more *absurd connections* and pruned out other metaphors, in order to fit *academic conventions*” (91, my emphasis). These challenges may also have to do less with direct bias against figurative language and more to do with the disciplinary and genre conventions that constrain how metaphor is used in composing. I would argue that metaphor should not and cannot be used effectively and, at the same time, indiscriminately. It must be employed in a manner acceptable to the discipline and the context. At the same time, metaphor is almost always a risky strategy as employing it

effective almost always requires a writer to understand what metaphors are acceptable to their intended audiences.

Borrowing Peterson's approach, I will illustrate how I used metaphor as a generative strategy in composing two essays for my rhetoric and composition graduate courses. While the present study, including the following chapter, primarily focuses on the value of metaphor for meta-cognitive awareness, this chapter is intended to show how metaphoric competence can not only help with conceptualization of writing theories but also help provide strategies for academic writing practices, such as inventing and arranging.

The first essay is a brief 500-word synthesis essay composed in a class titled Modern Rhetorical Theory. The prompt for the essay asked students in the course to revisit their definition of rhetoric, which students wrote in an online discussion post at the beginning of the semester and to defend a definition or propose a new one and explain the reasoning supporting the definition of rhetoric chosen. The second essay is a 2,090-word essay examining metaphors for composition for a class called Theory and Practice in Composition. In these essays, metaphor plays a prominent role in the generation of ideas for essays. In both cases metaphors are proposed, transformed, abandoned, and obscured as part of the composing process. These two essays also connect to a rhetorical strategy I implemented in my own classroom: asking students to explore their own definitions of abstract and complex concepts: that is, defining good writing and describing writing through metaphor.

In my first attempt at generating a new definition of rhetoric in the draft of this first synthesis essay, I reviewed the definition I posed at the beginning of the semester: "My definition of rhetoric was 'communicating the right message at the right time in the right place

for the right reasons. Rhetoric is the collection of skills a rhetorician needs to get people to feel, believe or act the way the rhetorician wants others to behave.” In online class discussions, I had struggled with developing a new definition, opting to remain committed to my first definition, which captured elements of *kairos*, *ethos* and audience. This definition had served me well, and gained some support from other classmates in online discussions. As I considered this definition more deeply, however, I began to critique it noting that while the repetition made the definition memorable, what is “right” is ambiguous and often situated in local practices. I further argued in my notes that, “describing rhetoric as a ‘collection of skills’ reduces rhetoric to a set of tools, not an integral part of language. Rhetoric is more than a set of tricks, gestures or figures of speech.” Metaphor becomes a key strategy in arguing against this previous definition where I note that the metaphorical expression “collection of skills” can be interpreted as a reductive metaphors such as “tricks” and “gestures” that have been used to degrade rhetoric’s force in knowledge making.

As Peterson suggests, there is a movement and countermovement between figurative language and abstraction. In this first draft, my new definition of rhetoric became “rhetoric encompasses the theory and practice of how knowledge is formed (generating ideas) in the social milieu and how those ideas are formed to create meaning with the aim to persuade.” In this definition, rhetoric becomes less about the individual rhetor communicating to an audience and moves toward a definition that emphasizes the social perspective in how meaning is made. Still, metaphor remains present in the phrases “knowledge is formed” and “generating ideas”—conventional metaphors so mundane that they would usually not be recognized as metaphors. These suggest constructive and organic metaphors, respectively. Organic or, more specifically,

ecological metaphors begin to emerge in my second draft, where metaphoring becomes a more deliberate strategy for generating ideas:

What have I learned about rhetoric. Rhetoric helps illuminate truth or that truth is not truth in the fixed sense.

Fixity of truth is a lie.

What about a metaphor for rhetoric. Rhetoric is an ocean. I[t] has all species of speakers and ideas are like plankton. They get recycled. Nah that sucks. What else.

Rhetoric is like a forest. The roots of the trees are connected but they are not visible because they are covered by leaf debris of years and years of shedding and growing.

Maybe its not rhetoric. Maybe it is language and communication are rhetoric.

What do I know about a forest. It can be huge. The trees are stable. Who's doing the speaking? The trees don't speak. But the trees provide the shelter and substance for the forest creatures. Hmmm. This is [not] working as well as I thought. What else? I like this idea, but how can I make it stronger.

This nature/ecological metaphor. Language is dialogic. How is a forest dialogic? Truth gets cluttered in the underbrush? You have to dig to the roots to find out how things are connected.

The ecology metaphor has been used to describe language as a dynamic system that evolves over time and one that reveals that interrelationships and intertextuality of language. Prior to graduate school, my work as an environmental advocate for a nonprofit organization allowed me to gain a basic understanding of ecology, participate in conservation planning meetings, and reading works on my own by noted ecologists such as Harvard scientist E.O. Wilson. As I read Mikhail

Bakhtin during the Spring 2010 semester, I saw similarities between his descriptions of language as interrelated with social consciousness and the interconnectedness that Buddhist philosophy and theories of ecology share. As a student of Buddhist philosophy in my undergraduate studies and frequent reader of Buddhist philosophy, a book that I frequently return to is *Being Peace* by Vietnamese monk Thich Nhat Hahn. He claims in this text that, “In one sheet of paper, we see everything else, the cloud, the forest, the logger. I am, therefore you are. You are, therefore I am. That is the meaning of interbeing. We interare” (114-115). Reality and being is co-existing—a challenge to the Cartesian mode of understanding existence and reality. This quote made an appearance in one of the later drafts, but I removed it in the final draft in part because of space constraints (the instructor required no more than one-page, single-spaced type). Hahn’s metaphor is one that seeks to shed light on the metaphysical connections that can be observed in a single sheet of paper. Similarly, in *The Problem of Speech Genres*, Bakhtin crafts a system metaphor defining utterance as a “link in a very complexly organized chain of other utterances” (B&H 1233). In reading Bakhtin, I made a connection to Nhat Hahn’s philosophy of “interare.” This metaphor of interconnectedness is emphasized in abstract complex system metaphors such as ecosystems.

The ocean metaphor appears as a raw attempt to suggest a diversity of approaches to communication and to attempt to draw on the conceptual metaphor IDEAS ARE RESOURCES in the “ideas are plankton” metaphor. The metaphor, however, is quickly abandoned as I lacked the familiarity with oceanography to build adequate connections between the source and the target. The “rhetoric is a forest” metaphor represents another attempt at comparing language with an ecosystem. The first aspect of the metaphor that trees are sometimes interconnected by root

systems and that years of debris may cover the roots suggests the origins of language become obscured over time by layers of use and change. Like the ocean metaphor, it becomes problematic because of the lack of viable entailments I can produce.

In the fourth draft, the ocean metaphor is abandoned and the forest metaphor gets a brief mention: “What will make this work? I keep hoping some sort of structure will emerge or some hook. I liked the forest metaphor. But I wasn’t able to extend it.” Both metaphors work to emphasize different systemic entailments of rhetoric and these natural ecosystems, but neither seems to represent a viable metaphor for my essay.

The fourth draft continues with a catalogue of definitions of rhetoric from authors read during the semester. Peterson notes that Richard Wright uses a catalogue, which she describes as a form of repetition, to organize autobiographical books that influenced his writing. Using Wright’s list of book titles, she argues that though these appear dissimilar, “latent within each catalogue is the repetition of a principle or core of meaning” (431). The definitions I catalogued began with quotes from Francis Bacon and ended with Friedrich Nietzsche, who would become a central focus for the final draft of this brief essay. By the fourth draft, I begin to identify Nietzsche as the rhetorician who “had the greatest impact” in trying to develop a new definition of rhetoric, and I propose imitating his style as a rhetorical move in a draft. Another draft later, Nietzsche becomes the launching point for a new catalogue—connecting him with Bakhtin and Burke. From this draft emerges several new metaphors that will shape the final draft of this essay. The sixth draft begins this way:



When I started this semester, my definition of rhetoric was very Aristotlean [sic] . . . as the semester comes to a close, I find myself trying to imagine a more complicated definition one that encompasses the lack of fixity in language.

Of all the rhetors we've read, Nietzsche [sic], Bakhtin, and Burke have had the greatest impact on the way I view rhetoric now. Before graduate school, I had never read Nietzsche. But my love and interest for metaphor drew me to him. As I read Nietzsche, [it was] as if the gossamer thread obscuring words and things began to melt away.

Bakhtin seems cut from the same cloth as Nietzsche's. Burke's willingness to play with paradox appeals to me as well. All three of these men see rhetoric as something that takes place in the social echo chamber. We don't own our words; they are simply borrowed.

Metaphors of instability and impermanence form figurative threads throughout this passage. In this emerging view of rhetoric, language is no longer "owned" but something "borrowed," it is an "echo" (a mirrored sound; not even 'real' speech), and something that can readily change shape and disappear ("melt away"). These metaphors play in contrast to metaphors of creation and construction in the second half of the sixth draft.

Yet utterance defines who we are. Such complexity leaves a rhetorician gasping for air. Our level of control of what we say goes beyond school and genetics to a broader social milieu that connects our language with those who dominate us and those we dominate. Rhetoric is something like the 'force' in Star Wars. Nietzsche, Bakhtin and Burke make rhetoric a powerful magic force. Burke explains that 'the realistic use of addressed language to induce action in people became the magical use of addressed language to

induce motion in things (things by nature alien to purely linguistic orders of motivation' (B&H 1337).

Math may measure. Science may discover. But rhetoric creates reality.

In Bakhtin, reality is created by semiotic communication. He writes that the 'laws of this reality are the laws of semiotic communication and are directly determined by the total aggregate of social and economic laws' (B&H 1175).

Each time we write, we are creating a new world. The best rhetoricians are able to 'lie' about themselves in a way that convinces the audience that their reality is truth.

Like the students Gena and Bette in Hildy Miller's study, I obscure the more "absurd connections" to fit with "academic conventions" (91). The Star Wars metaphor is never mentioned in the final draft, only remaining in the final draft in the following phrases: "I find myself imagining a more complicated, *mystical* meaning of rhetoric" and "rhetors are able to use *word-magic*." During this semester, in my Persuasive Writing class, the instructor assigned for reading William Covino's *Magic, Rhetoric, and Reality*. This text clearly influenced my views on rhetoric and the power of language to seem like magic. Bakhtin's notion of language operating as a reality of its own becomes central thesis for the final draft. This notion becomes "word-worlds" that rhetors use to "move people into another's place." The naturalistic metaphors of ocean and forest are instead abstracted into "word-worlds" and "tiny universes of utterances." Each successive draft in the process of writing this essay involves a movement and countermovement of metaphor, but in contrast to Peterson's description of Wright's metaphors, the contexts clearly differs dramatically.

My essay's audience primarily was my graduate instructor and the goal was to demonstrate that I had synthesized key theories into a compact and convincing explanation. In this case, I made a conscious effort to risk a nontraditional, poetic style; my previous two essays in this class had been much more traditional and expository. Wright's interview statement was intended for a much broader and more public audience than my essay, where the risks were arguably magnified. While Wright appears to be muting his metaphors, I attempt to turn the volume up by shaping and interweaving metaphors in a way that attempts to blur the line between the poetic and the rhetorical—attempting an alternate style.<sup>6</sup> The extent to which writers adjust the volume on their metaphors depends upon the rhetorical situation, but as Peterson points out, it is futile to try to replace them with non-figurative language. Instead, metaphoring effectively is a matter of identifying which metaphors (or interpretations of metaphors) will be socially acceptable.

In my case, I had consistently and successively tested the boundaries of what might count as acceptable writing in online discussions by writing in a variety of genres from the simple (playing on pop music references in a title to a response post about Mary Astell) to the more complex (performing a self-dialogue with an imagined masculine self David and an imagined feminine self Davina as a response to reading H el ene Cixous). Having met with positive feedback from the instructor for these small attempts and, moreover, becoming familiar with some of the instructor's published works in this low-stakes learning environment, the risk of

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<sup>6</sup> In science writing, Baake argues that scientists also share an measured discomfort with using metaphor. He contends that, "[Scientists] depend on metaphoric language to generate theory across disciplines and, equally important, to make their studies seem exciting, cutting edge, and worthy of publication and funding. At the same time, scientists try to distance themselves from metaphoric expressions when they want to appear rigorous and far removed from the social fray that discursive language inspires. Hence, these scientists rely on metaphor, while at the same time trying to rise above it" (6).

attempting a more poetic style was minimized from my perspective. At one point in the semester, the instructor shared a copy of one of his narrative essays about the merging of boundaries between the roles of teacher and gay man. This move gave me license to experiment with more personal, narrative forms that I had yet to encounter in academia. Ultimately, these successive drafts are attempts at testing the aptness of metaphors for a specific audience—a key aspect of metaphoric competence.

The second essay, titled “Negotiating Metaphors in the Writing Process,” that I discuss below served as one of the catalysts for the present study of metaphor. This essay, written in February 2010 in *Theory and Practice in Composition*, was written in response to a prompt seeking students’ understanding of what researchers know about the “writing process.”<sup>7</sup> Having had a course with this instructor in the prior semester, I was familiar with the genres the instructor typically required as well as what appeared to qualify as an effective text in her class. This knowledge, coupled with the experience of reading several of this instructor’s published works, also informed my decision to approach my use of metaphor in a different way in the final draft. Rather than use metaphor alone to make my arguments, I made metaphors of writing processes the subject of my argument.

The discovery draft of this essay begins by attempting to recall what theorists I read in the course have said about the writing process and then turns to discussions of strategies I as a journalist had taken when presented with different writing environments. Like the previous essay the discovery draft leads to an internal debate over metaphors:

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<sup>7</sup> As part of the composition of the essay, I decided to keep a log of my writing process. In total, this essay required multiple drafts composed over four days and took almost 8 hours and nearly 7,000 words to generate a 2,000-word essay.

Maybe I should try something risky and describe my metaphor for a recursive model.

What's a metaphor for the writing process? What do I know? I don't know that writing music is a similar process. I think I need to go farther away. Any natural processes?

I liked the idea of a looped circuit board. But I don't know much about electronics. What about cycles?

Recursive process. The pre-write/write/rewrite or incubation/

Flowers and Hayes Planning/translation/reviewing (monitor)

The writing process is like an ecosystem.

The writing process is like a rollercoaster.

The writing process is like a ice cream sandwich.

The writing process is like a nervous system.

The writing process is like seed.

The writing process is like a flower opening up.

The writing process is like a heartbeat.

The writing process is a pair of scissors.

Come on Dadurka be more imaginative.

The writing process is like gestation. But that suggests an end product. But what's wrong with suggesting an end product? Come on, writing doesn't go on and on.

The writing process doesn't either.

So what is a process that goes back and forth. Is it negotiating?

I like that. Negotiating and hammering out a deal with yourself. You have to negotiate not only the content but I think there's multiple meaning there that would apply.

OK. So what happens in the negotiation. You have a goal and the instructor/editors has a goal. The audience has a goal. You have to negotiate a piece of writing that satisfies your desires/goal and one that achieves parity/happiness with your audience. This might mean giving up some or part of your goal in order to compromise. Is writing a compromise? Also, when you go in to negotiating you may be limited by the terms of the deal. If you are inflexible with your demands, then you risk losing opportunities for compromise. Is there something bad suggested here with compromising? People are compromising the quality of their work, are they?

In the passage above, metaphoring runs rampant—from the conventional (“like a rollercoaster”) to the absurd (“like a[n] ice cream sandwich”) to the sentimental (“like a flower opening up”). Some metaphors are borrowed (‘like a seed’ is a reference of a reference: Nancy Sommers’ use of Barthes’ quote that “writing is more a seed than a line”) while other metaphors emphasize metonymic qualities of writing (writing as cutting or revision; ‘a pair of scissors’). Each metaphor accesses a different attribute of writing. Towards the end of the passage, a key moment occurs when I identify negotiation as a useful comparison to the experience of writing. As this metaphor is identified, I begin expanding its entailments (“So what happens in the negotiation. You have a goal and the instructor/editor has a goal. The audience has a goal”) and begin questioning the implications of a metaphor (“Is writing a compromise? . . . Is there something bad suggested here with compromising?”). This discovery draft is not only discussing a negotiation, but also is an example of internal negotiation itself. Recognizing such internal negotiations is a crucial element of dialogism and a critical strategy for learning to imaginatively construct audiences and different textual identities (what some might call styles).

In his essay, “Why Metaphors are Necessary and Not Just Nice,” educational psychologist and metaphor theorist Andrew Ortony describes the four parts of metaphor: the *tenor* (now often called the *target*), the *vehicle* (also called the *source*), the *grounds* and the *tension* (45). For example, in the metaphor “writing is negotiation,” “writing” would be the tenor of the metaphor and “negotiation” would be the vehicle. The shared attributes of the writing and negotiation are considered the grounds and those they do not share form the tension in the metaphor. This passage demonstrates another element of metaphoric competence, the working out of the grounds and the tension in a metaphor. The passages above also illustrate the process of interpreting and analyzing a metaphor’s possible meanings and provide reasonable justifications for such meanings—another aspect of metaphoric competence.

In the second page of the first discovery draft of this essay, rather than staying with the single metaphor of negotiation, another series of metaphors are proposed.

Negotiating. What else? This is something that has potential. Hmmm. Hmm. Brain is tired. What else. Different parties for negotiating. What else? So this is a goal directed process. But it does suggest that the goals may need to change in order to satisfy the product. You may not get what you set out to achieve, but you will have struck a deal (an end product).

So is the writing process separate from writing? This is kind of a silly question. Is pre-writing separate from writing? I don’t think so. These are overlapping processes. That would defeat the purpose of recursivity. Ahhhh.. what else/ think Dadurka. What else could you say here. Other than you re still tired. I don’t know. I don’t know. I don’t know. what other things could we do or say in the metaphor.

What other metaphors for writing process.

The writing process is like cutting and pasting.

The writing process is like meditation.

The writing process is like washing clothes.

The writing process is like washing the dishes to wash the dishes.

You must not over analyze the process. Washing the dishes to wash the dishes. You are writing without judging. You are just observing that you are writing. This is free flowing<sup>8</sup> thought. But how do you move from writing to organization or arrangement. Am I only talking about the invention process? At what stage does a writer determine whether or not they know what they are saying? Do they ask themselves questions? Do they write or keep writing until they have generated an excess of material and determined a focus? Focus. Focus. Focus. Generate. Generate. Generate. Point. Point . Counterpoint [sic]. Hmm. What else here? Too much pausing and [sic] judging. I like [sic] the washing the dishes to wash the dishes. This is in line with who I am or want to be [sic] as a teacher. I want to be [sic] able to give wise flexible advice to students on how to find their way to write. This is a really weird discovery draft but I think there's something to it. I have to put more down on paper to find out what I am trying to say.

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<sup>8</sup> In the passage above, this tangent leads to a comparison of writing to everyday household tasks such as “washing the dishes to wash the dishes.” This last phrase is taken again from Vietnamese Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hahn’s book *The Miracle of Mindfulness*. The phrase is meant to signify a way practicing focus and mindful awareness of the task at hand. Hahn writes that “[while] washing the dishes one should only be washing the dishes, which means that while washing the dishes one should be completely aware of the fact that one is washing the dishes” (6). If, Hahn writes, we wash the dishes “thinking only of the cup of tea that awaits us . . . we are sucked away into the future—and we are incapable of actually living one minute of life” (8). This level of mindfulness and the metaphor of flow as it relates to composing becomes a central issue about the performative nature of writing in the following chapter on student metaphors for writing.



So how does washing the dishes to wash the dishes relate to writing [sic]. We don't rush through the writing. We have to be aware of what we are doing and how it is having an effect on us. We may not know what we want to say until we've [sic] said it. So, what about revising. How do we teach students to judge their own writing? They could generate endless loads of crap here like I am doing and not revise it a bit. There has to be that switch where they begin to assess their own writing and its value.

Flower contends that negotiation as a metaphor for the construction of meaning calls on attributes of multivocality: "voices that set goals, pose constraints, propose language, promote commonplaces . . . . voices of past experience and present opportunity" (67). In the final paragraph above, the dialogical nature of self-talk appears in force. This can be noted in the shift from third to first to second person. Moreover, the text becomes a place to question how a writer negotiates the move from different states of composing.

As in the first essay described in this chapter, the next draft again begins a pattern of cataloguing different metaphors by category such as music, mapping, tools, birth/conception, and anti-metaphor (where writers compare something to what they argue it is not; for example, "Nancy Sommers has shown that revision, as it is carried out by skilled writers, is not an end-of-the-line repair process . . .") (Flowers and Hayes 275). The next draft continues the free writing of the first discovery draft in an effort to describe my own writing process in metaphorical terms. In this draft, composing music is compared to writing: "I like the idea of rehearsing. The music metaphor is close to my heart." Then I begin the process of questioning the metaphor and its relationship to writing:

What [is] the metaphor for my writing process? Is it like composing a song? I jot down lists of song titles? I play a chord or chord progression looping it until I find words to fit over it? Do I alter the chords? How does that relate to writing? Am I looping words? Or am I repeating some idea until it jogs another idea? I ask lots of questions of myself.

This questioning concludes with what becomes the guiding question for theorizing composing processes and metaphors: “Are metaphors useful for students to understand their own writing processes?”

In the following draft, I use a mix of questions and stasis theory to determine my focus in the essay. This process led to the following claim, which became the central thesis of this essay:

Many metaphors for the writing process abound. The important thing for writers to discover is their metaphor for writing – not their metaphors for writing. One metaphor will not do. Metaphors are models for the writing process. The writer needs an array of models to work from.

In the following draft, I composed two brief anecdotes to explore potential scenes of writing processes that lend themselves to an explanation of *voice* in the writing process and then concluded by offering a tentative purpose for this essay: “My purpose in this paper is to describe the various metaphors for the writing process and to analyze their strengths and weaknesses in explaining the recursiveness of the writing process. (Too broad).” The “too broad” appears to be the voice of an internal critic suggesting that the simplicity of this design might not be successful in providing the kind of rich argument I anticipated the instructor would want to read. However, the topics of strengths and weaknesses, ultimately, become the guiding organizational structure for a major portion of the essay. In this case, I ignored my own self-critique of this structure.

At this point, I began composing an outline that consisted of categorical propositions and directional moves such as “Developing a metaphor for the writing process can assist writers in understanding their methods better,” “The important thing is that writers don’t get locked into one view of the writing process or into a metaphor that prevents them from playing with and shaping language,” and “Survey metaphors for the writing process: pattern/framework/house; a map; a seed; musical composition; electric grid; birth/conception. And analyze their various strengths and weaknesses in providing writers with a view of the writing process.” From this outline came the composition of the first complete draft and a second draft with only minor revisions.

Some argue that the process of metaphoring itself is “a form of dialogue” (Baake 13). I would add metaphoring acts as a form of negotiating with one’s ideas, one’s texts, and one’s imagined selves. This idea of negotiation as a dialogue with the self appears to be a major metaphorical and rhetorical strategy in the initial stages of this particular instance of my writing processes. In *Authors on Writing*, Barbara Tomlinson argues that composing is “dialogic and interactive—focuses attention on the multiple voices and implicit dialogism of metaphors of discursive sociality” (73). Tomlinson offers the conceptual metaphor of CHARACTERS AS COAUTHORS as a ready explanation for how fiction writers compose. She argues that this metaphor is suggestive of “writers writing through a dialogic process, when writers talk to themselves, to their texts, to their characters, and they find all of these sources and an entire history of texts talk back to them” (74).

While composition studies more recently has focused on informational texts and tended to steer away from studying writers who compose in poetic and literary genres, leaving these

studies to the literature and creative writing disciplines, Tomlinson draws directly on the body of metaphorical competence that author-writers have to offer in highlighting the negotiative aspects of textual “conversation” and the construction of meaning. She writes that “for these authors, their texts not only speak for themselves, they move and change for themselves” (77). Thus, these metaphors of social discursivity “emphasize continuing engagement at the scene of utterance. They negotiate patterns of tension and constraint, freedom and convention, that inflect everyday experiences of composing” (77). Linda Flower argues for a metaphor of negotiation for constructivist theory in *The Construction of Negotiated Meaning*. She writes that “[n]egotiation, . . . draws our gaze to a dilemma-driven and goal-directed effort to construct meaning in the face of forces that—unlike the enveloping flow of conversation—are hard to ignore” (66). Negotiation as a metaphor, Flower contends, has more flexibility as it not only suggests a conversation, but also accesses the attributes of navigation and movement suggestive of other meanings of negotiation (70). Negotiation is therefore consistent with the idea of writing as a recursive process, one in which the writer must move back and forth with internal and external negotiations to accomplish a writing task.

Like Tomlinson, I “take up” and “discard” metaphors as they are needed to test concepts and play with ideas. In the process of composing, mixing and playing with metaphors becomes a means of discovering new lines of argument, identifying areas where our conceptual knowledge may be limited, and seeing how metaphor contributes to dialogism. In this section, I have tried to elucidate the ways in which metaphor moves within texts (both invention and revision), how metaphoring may vary distinctly in different contexts even when closely related, and how analysis of metaphor itself can play a role in

meta-cognitive awareness of writing processes. In the following section, I describe how metaphor contributes to a teacher's meta-cognitive awareness of their ideologies regarding the roles of teachers and students.

### **Learning to Write and Teach Writing as Performing**

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, teachers using metaphor analysis to understand students' conceptualizations of academic literacies may also benefit from considering their own beliefs and their role in re-shaping or reinforcing new college writers' perceptions of academic writing. When writing teachers write about themselves and their students, they place themselves in *character* and *play* roles that reveal the ideologies that underscore their pedagogies. In "Teaching is Performance: Reconceptualizing a Problematic Metaphor," Elyse Lamm Pineau notes that "performance . . . still holds a largely pejorative meaning for the cultural psyche. By its very nature it is suspect, associated with pretense, artifice, deception, affectation, and entertainment" (4). This critique of performance mirrors those that positivists have used against figurative language, poetics, and metaphor. Paraphrasing Schopenhauer, Richard Lanham claims that "style . . . is a mask. Stylistic study, by the logic of its address, unmask us. It teaches us that there is nothing inevitable about our self, our thoughts, or the words they are clothed in" (179). By identifying and analyzing the metaphors—those figures of style—that writing teachers use to describe the roles of students and teachers, we may unmask hidden beliefs about writing and teaching writing that influence our perceptions of what is possible in the classroom or underestimate students' capacities to learn (see Helmers' *Writing Students*).

Pineau, who grounds her discussion of the teaching as performance metaphor on the performance ethnography of Dwight Conquergood (10), frames the teacher not simply in the

metaphors of “teacher as actor” or “teacher as [performing] artist” but as a “thinking artist” (7-8). She describes the “‘poetics’ of educational performance” as “recognizing that educators and students engage not in the ‘pursuit of truths,’ but in collaborative fictions—perpetually making and remaking world views and their tenuous positions within them” (10). Pineau describes a teaching seminar in which novice teachers were asked to “translate theory into practice” by acting out different metaphoric incarnations of teaching roles, including “gardeners and midwives;” “tour guides, conductors, and authors;” and “executives” (12). Each of these metaphorical roles, argues Pineau, are accompanied by specific classroom behaviors and practices. She contends that

[o]ne day of metaphoric performance revealed in crystalline, experiential, and immediate ways what a week of lecture/discussion on educational theory had failed to achieve.

Moreover, students were confronted with the performative fact that actors construct their audiences, and no performance occurs in a social vacuum. In other words, while performance empowered students to imaginatively construct their teaching personae, it also forced them to reflect critically upon the implications of their enactments.

Metaphor, in the case above, serves as a form of reflective practice, mindfulness, and meta-cognition: a chance for new instructors to try on different ideological costumes before entering the classroom. Through a series of texts written during my graduate studies described below, I found that I constructed my teaching personae in a variety of ways, including those of conductor, enforcer, and collaborator. These “roles” were more than metaphoric, but also had pedagogical consequences. By reviewing a teacher’s metaphors, we unsettle latent ideologies and can reconsider the value and limitations of our beliefs about what it means to teach writing.

Just as my understanding of theories of social construction was informed by my experiences as the son of an amateur homebuilder, my experiences as an amateur songwriter and jazz guitarist served as the source of metaphors for learning to compose and teaching writing.

In the fall semester of 2009, I wrote my first “teaching philosophy” for a class titled Teaching Technical Writing. The genre of the teaching philosophy is intended to share a teacher’s beliefs about teaching, a description of how one of their classes operates (or, in my case, would operate), examples of how the teacher teaches, and the teacher’s philosophy of education and their role in students’ lives (“Developing a Professional Portfolio,” UCF Faculty Center for Teaching and Learning Web site). As I began to draft my teaching philosophy, one of my advisors at the writing center suggested I choose a metaphor for how I envision the teaching and learning of writing. The overarching metaphor I chose for teaching was jazz improvisation. My understanding of learning to write (and compose) and teach was, in part, informed by my experiences and memories as a guitar teacher when I would substitute for my instructor at the local music shop and eventually taught students of my own. As a student of jazz guitar since I was 12 years old, connecting writing with teaching and learning music was a field of knowledge in which I had acquired some expertise over many years of practice, allowing me to transfer knowledge of one learning domain to another.

The focus of my teaching philosophy was on the collaborative nature of musical performance. I asserted that, “my turning point as an improvising musician came when I realized that to improvise more effectively I could not simply practice scales or learn licks [short musical phrases], I would need to practice and perform as part of a group of musicians and apply musical theory to a musical situation.” The class, Teaching Technical Writing, for which this teaching

philosophy was composed as well as an introductory research course taught by the same instructor involved required collaborative writing projects that helped contribute to this notion of writing as collaborative performance.<sup>9</sup> These experiences reinforced previous professional experiences of collaborative writing I had had as well as problematized collaborative writing as an activity in learning to write. However, like any metaphor, the teaching as jazz has its limitations.

In “Finding the Blue Note: A Metaphor for the Practice of Teaching,” Rick A. Breault argues that jazz as a metaphor for teaching practice does not adequately capture what educational theory tells us about “good” teaching. Breault argues that, “jazz is not simply the act of improvisation. It is performed by musicians who share a language, a culture and, to some extent, personality traits and purposes” (160). He contends that “although the idea of improvisational thinking is important to understanding teaching, the characteristics of jazz music and musicians are sufficiently different from those of teaching and teachers as to make the metaphor inappropriate, or at least limited, in understanding the teaching act” (162). For one, Breault argues that jazz is outwardly complex while teaching is inwardly so; teaching appears deceptively “simple” (163). Moreover, jazz musicians portray a persona that often is intended to intimidate competitors (164), the genre “[relies] heavily on the ensemble,” (167) and is “mediated through and limited by the performer’s technical proficiency” (168). Instead, Breault suggests that teachers consider themselves more like blues musicians, because teaching is more often a “solo endeavor” (167); teaching, like the blues, is “primarily a vocal art” (168); and

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<sup>9</sup> When I talk about writing as performance, I do not mean that they were performances in a literal sense; for example, reading our texts aloud or presenting our group projects, but as in performing the act of composing and interacting through revision and feedback.



teaching is often associated with working-class roots and a desire to help “give students practical tools that will allow them to address social causes more effectively” (169). I agree with Breault that the jazz metaphor for teaching is particularly disturbing in the notion of intimidation as a form of enculturation into the field. Yet, I am not ready to completely abandon the metaphor because it offers much in the way of understanding the level of preparation and practice required for teaching writing.

In *Rereading the Sophists*, Susan Jarratt discusses the sophist-like practices of so-called expressivist Donald Murray who performed writing publicly in his classrooms, a practice reminiscent of Gorgias (90). This public, performative approach to writing, according to Jarratt, helped demystify writing techniques for students and helped “assert the importance of practice” (90).<sup>10</sup> Breault notes that “practice . . . [emerges] as a positive implication of the blues metaphor” for teaching, though I would argue the same is true of the jazz metaphor (172). He asserts that “seldom do teachers practice their pedagogy in the way that musicians practice their performances. They may grade papers or plan lessons during their non-teaching time, but do not practice new techniques” (172-173). While the initial focus of this metaphor in my teaching philosophy was on learning to write and doing so collaboratively, in reviewing this metaphor again I see it as helpful for understanding the way that I failed to enact the implications of this metaphor within my teaching practice. I had certainly prepared for classes, but I had not “practiced” my lessons as I might practice before a musical performance; I practiced on my

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<sup>10</sup> I had attempted a similar public form of composing by showing students a video-recorded version of a think-aloud to the same prompt that they would compose a think-aloud protocol to. This was a gesture towards public composition, but as a graduate student juggling my own courses while teaching I felt that I did not have the time to demonstrate my entire composing process to students. For this reason, I believe the potential such a demonstration was incomplete. Had I to do it over again, I would have attempted to write along with my students or shown them samples of successive drafts from the samples used in this chapter.

students in class. Moreover, I had not considered how I might integrate the notion of writing practice within the classroom. Students did various kinds of writing in my classes—free writing, writing reflections, and reviewing and responding to peers’ writing—but did not practice specific techniques or moves in writing.

Investigations of the metaphors that teachers use to conceptualize and theorize their practice may reveal gaps in their approaches, as I discovered in the discussion above. Moreover, as illustrated in the following section, reviewing how teachers characterize student writers through metaphors offers a means for understanding how our perceptions of student agency and authority might affect our relationships with students as well as what we believe they are capable of learning.

In teacher testimonials and narratives of the classroom, students are often portrayed through metaphors of deviance. In *Writing Students: Composition Testimonials and Representations of Students*, Marguerite Helmers argues that “approaches to pedagogy that are premised on the idea that students somehow need to be corrected presume that students have somehow not learned rules the right way, have forgotten important information about writing, or have been taught incorrectly” (61). Helmers cites instances of where writing instructors have used metaphors of illness to describe students’ “lack” in the writing classroom that must be corrected.

Midway through my first semester of teaching in Spring 2010, I wrote a commonplace essay, as part of the *progymnasmata*, the classical series of scaffolded writing exercises, about students who refused to revise their writing in my spring class. This essay, part of a class titled Persuasive Writing, was one of the few opportunities to “play” with writing on a graduate level

in a very serious discipline and program. The commonplace I used as the basis for this essay was “Follow the path of least resistance.” At this point in the semester, I had been attempting to emphasize the value of revision in my class, and found my attempts unpersuasive with my students. Many of my students in this class treated revision as a form of editing, focusing only on their texts’ surface-level elements, such as grammar and punctuation. This essay served as an opportunity for me to vent my frustrations about this challenge.

In this essay titled “Prosecuting Hit-and-Run Student Writers,” I compared students to careless, even criminal drivers and implied that the teacher is an enforcer or litigator of language: “The complacent student sees writing as a once-and-done activity, not a process. Once I get going, these students say, the words just flow. . . . Such a fantasy breeds dangerous contentment.” My metaphor of punishment for students who “refuse to challenge themselves to rewrite” is a variation of the “student as deviant” narrative that Helmers charts in teachers’ testimonials. Grades, in this essay, are a tool for punishment, they are used to “mark down” lazy students who “favor the easy path.” But effort is not measured in number of drafts or number of hours spent writing or number of words. Effort is contextual and contingent on the learner’s ability, their prior knowledge, their motivation, various social factors, and their will to complete a writing assignment—all factors that are difficult to assess quickly and accurately.

Another metaphor of lack that played a role in my conception of “hit-and-run student writers” was a simile comparing students and their first-draft texts to “parents with ugly babies at a beauty pageant, parading their infants [or their essays] around remarking, ‘Aren’t they adorable?’” Here students are portrayed as “in love” with their own writing—blind to the reality of others’ perceptions of what they have created. Here the comparison focuses on outer

appearance of a text instead of the contents or substance of the creation. The metaphor I chose to criticize students who failed to revise, ironically, actually reinforced a metaphor of appearance or surface-level view of texts—that appearances matter more than substance.

This essay prompted the following comment from the instructor who reviewed my commonplace essay: “Students usually don’t get ‘it’ until they are well into their professional lives.” This comment rang true for my own experiences in learning to write and revise. I can trace a series of experiences in being goaded to revise—a community college professor who continually returned an essay throughout the semester without a grade, being encouraged by a graduate teaching assistant to recast verse in a university poetry class, and one-on-one editing sessions with the assistant city editor at the newspaper where I worked. This instructor’s comment led me to read Muriel Harris’s study of one-draft and multi-draft writers. I was aware that writers’ decisions to revise writing were not always clear-cut; some studies, according to Harris, suggested that revision often did not result in markedly better drafts. As a former journalist, I knew that sometimes the first draft was all I had time for to make the deadline; revision happened in the heat of writing, not easily separated from the drafting as Berkenkotter attempts to illuminate in describing Donald Murray’s composing and revision processes. Moreover, as a student of writing I knew that some assignments were worth spending more time on, while others because of their simplicity demanded less attention.

I could argue here that all that this essay represented was venting—a playful attempt to share my frustrations and entertain my cohorts and instructor. But it also was a rhetorical choice. These were not simply metaphors that I played with, but real frustrations I experienced and expressed in this essay. I chose these metaphors, as Helmers argues, because they are part of the

culture of writing studies. Helmers cites a central tension in teaching that has yet to be adequately resolved: “Although both student-centered approaches to teaching first year composition and the development of a philosophy that valued the writing process lead to new methods for teaching writing, composition remained divided by what is perhaps the essential dichotomy of the field: the student versus the teacher” (78).

In the case of this assignment, I had chosen this topic. However, I would argue that asking not just pre-service teachers, but prospective writing teachers and those within a program to describe their perceptions of students may be revealing for addressing problematic assumptions about students’ motivations and capabilities. Such a project may help teachers consider the implications of their beliefs for their pedagogical practices.

As both a graduate student and an instructor I was beginning to see how this position afforded a view of the confusion that could emerge between teachers’ and students’ goals—what Kathleen Blake Yancey describes as the intersection of the “delivered curriculum” (what teachers plan for students) and the “experienced curriculum” (and what students experience in the classroom) (18). In an essay I wrote titled “Strange Beasts in ‘Comp-Landia’: Axiological Diversity and Modal Confusion in College Composition” in *Theory and Practice in Composition*, writing instructors were characterized as beasts or, more aptly, monsters. This metaphor was a way of providing examples of how modal confusion (teachers teaching with pedagogies at odd with their evaluation methods) can play out in the classroom. Playing off of Richard Fulkerson’s reference to *Through the Looking Glass* in his essay “Composition at the Turn of the Century,” I wrote that in this “ultra-diverse axiological environment instructors risk coming off as strange beasts—perhaps Jabberwockies—to students.” Helmers cites instances of “basic writing”

students self-identifying with bestial metaphors—describing themselves as birds, mice, and dogs (106). Helmers argues that instructors used bestial metaphors to “distance the instructor from the student” (107).

As a graduate student, I framed teachers as having the potential to confuse and frighten students—a recognition that my students’ difficulties with writing (and my own past confusion in the classroom) might not be the students’ fault but instead the teachers’. Fulkerson includes a particularly disturbing instance of modal confusion in which a writer composes an emotionally driven piece about her experience in a concentration camp and the instructor evaluates the writing based on grammatical issues. The teacher as monster metaphor became a move to elaborate on the idea of modal confusion and its implications for the classroom:

In one particularly messy scenario, students may encounter a composition teacher who holds a rhetorical axiology, uses expressivist classroom techniques, and evaluates students from a formal standpoint (“Composiiton Theory in the Eighties” 423). . . . In other words, teachers risk become Jekyll and Hyde to their students: a caring, nurturing teacher in class seeking to help them express their personal voice, while later issuing attacks of red ink on the faulty grammar and poorly crafted sentences of their papers.”

The monster metaphor becomes shorthand for the actions of a teacher that seem contradictory or don’t appear to make sense. In this case, the metaphor becomes a rhetorical move to criticize a form of mindless teaching.

While these essays reinscribe the dichotomous roles that both students and teachers use to lay blame for educational missteps, they serve another purpose: problematizing the roles and relationships between students and teachers. One of my attempts to address the dichotomy

between teacher and student relationships occurred in a personal narrative about the rhetoric of teaching and gender. In this essay, I attempted to recast myself using the feminist approach that Anzaldúa sets out in *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* in the metaphor of the border crosser. In this essay, I explored the different metaphoric roles teachers, particularly men, often frame themselves in from “coach, counselor, helpful big brother, wise guy, stern father figure, and pop reading quiz authoritarian.” I noted that I had played all of these roles as a “rite of passage” in deciding my approach as a new teacher and emerging identity as a new father.

One notable problem with borrowing a feminist metaphor of nurturer is its broader implications of teacher as parent. Helmers argues that the metaphor of mother/nurturer for the teacher of composition is no better than the mother/maid metaphor (141). She writes that, “teaching writing has been cast as women’s work. It has been associated with drudgery, as an underpaid, undervalued service to children” (140). Similarly, Hawlitschka asserts that “a growing body of research in feminism and composition warns of this eagerness to embrace metaphors of nurture . . . they replicate traditional women’s roles, as well as the view of teaching (especially the teaching of writing) as a female occupation” (213). Further complicating this teacher as parent metaphor is my attempt to reconcile feminist theory and its implications for men as teachers.

At the end of the essay through a narrative scene with a student taking agency for his topic, I painted myself as an emerging border crosser—someone who “could begin to imagine myself as border crosser and mentor to other men, working as their collaborator not simply a guide, coach, or authoritarian.” There appeared to be a happy ending to this essay and resolution with the acknowledgment that the sometimes self-imposed and

cultural restrictions placed on men make their role as teacher more complicated.

However, at the end of the piece I acknowledge that teacher-student relationships can never be simple or harmonious. The “essential dichotomy” of student and teacher, as Helmers describes it, is, from my perspective, a necessary tension in learning and teaching writing and rhetoric. Indeed, the notion of as “teacher as collaborator” with students helps equalize and loosen the tension between student and teacher. Teacher-student collaboration is not unusual—it’s the foundation of the apprenticeship model, frequently enacted in conferences, and some instructors have demonstrated through participatory action research how students and instructors may co-research, co-author, and co-publish studies together (Wendler et al.). However, such a metaphor of teacher as collaborator may white wash the inherent tensions in teaching and learning. Jarratt, citing Kathleen Weiler, notes that the classroom is

‘always a site of conflict’ . . . the recognition of this inevitability of conflict . . . is not grounds for despair, but rather the starting point for creating a consciousness in students and teachers through which the inequalities generating those conflicts can be acknowledged and transformed. (113-114)

Such a view contributes to a broader range of roles and modes of teaching an instructor might need to assume inside and outside the classroom and with different students and different situations. Through a sophistic view of teacher as performer, Jarratt describes the “feminist/sophistic pedagogy” as “[varying] greatly depending on the make-up of the class in relation to his/her own subjectivity” (114). Moreover, the sophistic teacher might find it



necessary to play or perform different perspectives or “voice an unrepresented view” in classroom discussions (114).

Through the analysis of metaphor in varied genres—the teaching philosophy, the essay, and the personal narrative—I have begun to highlight some of the latent ideologies in my conceptualizations of teaching writing and learning to write. As Helmers and Tobin suggest, these kinds of negotiations and reflections on the implications of metaphors should be part of a teacher’s ongoing practice. In the “teaching as jazz” metaphor there are some unhappy cultural implications about the enculturation methods jazz performers have traditionally used to bring novices into the field. Similarly, when teachers frame themselves through the metaphor of enforcer (dictating a rigid practice of revision), they reinscribe a rule-based, current-traditionalism the field has long-sought to distance itself from. Indeed, as evidenced by my own writing practices described earlier in this chapter, I did little revision in traditional notions of the term. However, more than simply highlighting negative practices, reflection on these metaphors suggest new ideological approaches to teaching and teacher-student relationships. In my case, seeing teaching through a sophistic lens of performing “unrepresented voices” offers more flexibility in imagining the possibilities for teaching and performing writing in the classroom.

### **Metaphor In(ter) Play: Constructing, Negotiating, and Performing**

Throughout this chapter, I have tried to illustrate the value of mixing (or *combining*, in Kovecses’ terms) metaphors as an inventive strategy for composing—one where writers “take up and discard” multiple metaphors as Tomlinson suggests—as well as a method of developing personal theories of teaching and writing and conducting a critical re-examination of those theories. The heuristic value of the multiple metaphors lies in their interplay—their ability to mix

and bring into view how theory and practice, teaching and studenting, and writing and teaching writing blur. The more flexibility writers and writing teachers possess with the metaphors they use, the more possibilities they will be able to adapt to new writing situations and conceive of alternative possibilities for producing effective texts. One of the strongest arguments for the need for multiple metaphors is the partial nature of metaphorical mappings. According to Kovecses, the primary reason this is so is that “since concepts (both target and source) have several aspects to them, speakers need several source domains to understand these different aspects of target concepts” (84).

In her reflections on undergraduate writers in *Writing Games*, Casanave claims that “[t]he key to the students’ survival in academic settings thus involved their ability to figure out what was expected in each class—strategic social and interpretive skills rather than just formal academic writing skills” (52). Like wilderness survivalist Bear Grylls, both undergraduates and new instructors need to be equipped with not just tools or skills but the means to adjust and adapt rhetorical skills and tools to different circumstances. Grylls doesn’t simply *survive*, he performs survival for an audience; meaning that, as a television entertainer, he manufactures scenarios (and has been sometimes criticized for doing so) to demonstrate his prowess in wilderness survival techniques. When we begin to use metaphor to build bridges between our experiences, like that of academic survival and wilderness survival, we may begin to understand concepts anew such as the connections between construction, negotiation, and performance. Competence in negotiating and bringing into coherence multiple metaphors offers writers a way of generating new perspectives and seeing writing as a way of knowing, being and acting in the world.

### CHAPTER THREE: REFLECTIONS AND DISTORTIONS IN WRITING SELF- PORTRAITS

“Metaphor serves as a mirror . . . This metaphor becomes (chameleon-like) and reflects (mirror-like) everyone looking into it, and the looker is thereby enhanced.” –Kuang-Ming Wu, *On*

*Metaphoring: A Cultural Hermeneutic*, 16

In the first chapter of Lewis Carroll’s *Through the Looking Glass*, Alice peers at her reflection pondering what life is like on the other side of the mirror. Soon, the mirror transforms into a mist, Alice climbs the mantle-piece, and she enters her room on the other side. At first glance, everything appears normal (“common and uninteresting,” writes Carroll), but then Alice begins to notice that the “pictures on the wall next the fire appeared to be quite alive, and the very clock on the chimney-piece (you know you can only see the back of it in the Looking-glass) had got the face of a little old man, and grinned at her.” Seemingly lifeless objects—the face of a clock—suddenly become quite alive.

Carroll’s novel is an homage to metaphor and its controlling force in language; specifically, he organizes the book around the metaphor of chess—a game, like language that is constructed, consisting of rules for movement and placement. Some literary scholars argue that the book is an early introduction to semiotics (Mandelker). Quoting Susan Walsh’s “Darling Mothers, Devilish Queens: The Divided Woman in Victorian Fantasy,” Glen Downey claims that “Carroll shows how Alice is ultimately a prisoner of her inability to change the frustrating game in which she finds herself because her only models [or metaphors] of behavior are the helpless but amiable White Queen and the responsible but mean-tempered Red Queen” (n. pag.).

Ultimately, Walsh points out that “[by] the end of both Wonderland books a beleaguered Alice has had enough and summarily shatters the dream worlds by withdrawing belief in the system of relationships they espouse” (Downey n. pag.). Yet Alice, according to Walsh, cannot construct these worlds with anything other than “forms . . . provided by nineteenth-century convention” (34). Like the looking glass, the forms (models or metaphors) given to us (or adopted by us) as part of our culture both reflect and distort the reality we allow ourselves to see. And yet, like Alice, even when we do shatter the framework around us revealing the constructedness of language through metaphor, we may find that the “conventions and conditioning” of language may be too great to alter the forms with which we are most familiar (Mandelker qtd. in Downey n.pag.).

However, in their essay “Metaphor, Science and the Spectator Role,” Sunstein and Anderson suggest that new metaphors are not always necessarily—instead, all that may be required is a *reconceptualization* of the metaphors students have chosen to use to elicit a conceptual transformation (12). In many cases, students in my classes described in this chapter chose to reconfigure, reinterpret, or complicate metaphors they created for writing, rather than identify or create new ones. I want to also suggest that one insight that might be drawn from this study is that as writers and teachers we can work to help students’ reconfigure existing metaphors to re-conceive and complicate their beliefs, assumptions, and attitudes about writing and, more broadly, communication and language. In addition, I want to highlight the embeddedness of metaphor in how students talk about writing and language and how even brief reflective activities involving metaphor can reveal and contribute to a shift in meta-cognitive awareness and mindfulness among college writers.

### **Metaphor as Means for Enhancing Reflection, Mindfulness, and Meta-Cognition**

Philosopher Kuang-Ming Wu claims in his tome *On Metaphoring* that “everyone’s understanding of metaphor reflects everyone’s own understanding more than metaphor” (14).<sup>11</sup> Put another way, metaphor offers us a means of seeing how we perceive the world and how we understand language to work. Metaphor, as Wu suggests in the epigraph that opens this chapter, is central to developing a reflective frame of mind.

Though reflection has been widely used as a pedagogical practice in many different education settings, in *Reflection in the Writing Classroom*, Kathleen Blake Yancey argues that reflection as theory and practice has been ignored by composition theorists until the last decade with only a handful of exceptions. Drawing on Donald Schön’s theory of the reflective practitioner, Yancey posits three types of reflection in composing: reflection-in-action, constructive reflection, and reflection-in-presentation (13). Reflection-in-action is characterized by the “process of reviewing and projecting and revising, which takes place within a composing event;” constructive reflection is “the process of developing a cumulative, multi-selved, multi-voiced identity, which takes place between and among composing events;” and, reflection-in-presentation is “the process of articulating the relationships between and among the multiple variable of writing and the writer in a specific context for a specific audience, and the associated texts” (13). Langer defines mindfulness as the creation of new categories, being open to new ideas, and being able to see and understand different perspectives. Like Langer’s concept of mindfulness, Yancey’s constructive reflection requires a writer to consider different views and

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<sup>11</sup> Similarly, metaphor theorist Klaus Krippendorff views “metaphors as windows into how their users create their understanding of communication” (11).

different voices. Though the terms reflection, meta-awareness, and mindfulness each technically are used to represent different thought processes, I view mindfulness, meta-cognitive awareness (also called meta-cognition and meta-awareness) and reflection as closely intertwined.

In first-year writing, reflection as a pedagogical strategy has become more common as a way to help writing students achieve meta-cognitive awareness. Most prominently reflection in writing courses typically occur as a text (reflection letter) within a writing portfolio (Yancey 13). Reflection, mindfulness, and meta-cognition have been codified in the goals of national academic writing institutions. The Council of Writing Program Administrators, the National Council of Teachers of English and the National Writing Project have established and endorsed a “Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing” that includes “habits of mind” such as “openness, creativity, flexibility, and meta-cognition” (1). In the “Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing,” meta-cognitive awareness represents one of eight “habits of mind” deemed crucial to students’ success in academia (1). Meta-cognition is the “ability to reflect on one’s own thinking as well as on the individual and cultural processes used to structure knowledge” (1). In other words, meta-cognition means thinking *about* our own thinking and, moreover, learning from it. The “Framework for Success” asserts that meta-cognition is “fostered” by four activities: “[examining] processes [students] use to think and write . . . [reflecting] on texts they have produced in a variety of contexts; [connecting] choices they have made in texts to audiences and purposes . . . [using] what they learn from reflections on one writing project to improve writing on subsequent projects” (5).

I argue that metaphor awareness, analysis, and creation—key elements of metaphoric competence—are central to enhancing meta-cognition, mindfulness, and reflection. In her book

*Mindfulness*, Ellen J. Langer claims that analogy and metaphor are a means to mindfulness and creativity (130). She argues that

[i]n making an analogy [or metaphor], we apply a concept learned in one context to another one. *Such a mental operation is in itself mindful*. Architects who can see how one setting, say, a hospital, resembles another, say, a hotel, can come up with designs more responsive to complex needs. Intentionally *mixing metaphors* with an eye toward finding similarities can spark new insights. (130, my emphasis)

Similarly, Yancey notes that one of the common rhetorical moves in end-of-term reflection letters is metaphor (94-95). She provides several examples of students who alter metaphors, indicating a change in their beliefs about writing. Yancey contends that “Like all languages, a student’s native language is inhabited by metaphor and image: this too moves from tacit to explicit through reflection. How we should continue to invite such metaphor is a key question” (19). Both Yancey and Langer’s research support the idea that metaphor plays a vital role in expanding writing students’ mindfulness, meta-cognitive and reflective capacities as described in the WPA Frameworks for Success in Postsecondary Writing.

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the metaphors that students in two of my first-year composition courses during the fall 2010 semester chose deliberately and those they used unconsciously to explain what they believed about their writing. This chapter attempts to answer the following two research questions: What metaphors did students in my writing classes use to describe writing processes? What changes, if any, occurred in these students’ definitions of writing and metaphors of writing between the beginning and end of the semester?

Writing theories in composition studies' history have progressively shifted away from the instrumental to the conceptual. Understanding and tracking changes in first-year writers' conceptualizations of writing and the metaphors that reveal their writing beliefs gain increased relevance as writing scholars acknowledge that the likelihood of drastically improving writing quality is low in the typical two-semester composition sequence, based on what writing scholars know about how literacy acquisition works (see Russell's "Activity Theory"). Writing scholars have continually suggested over the past two decades that because it is impractical (and probably impossible) to prepare college writers for every discipline, every genre, every rhetorical situation they will encounter throughout their academic and professional career in first-year composition, instructors may be better off helping students learn rhetorical principles, how writers acquire literacies, and how to claim the identity of authorship (Wardle and Downs "Teaching about Writing, Writing Misconceptions"; Wallace *Compelled to Write*). Closely related to writing beliefs are writers' attitudes towards writing. Educational research on students' motivations links their beliefs with learners' attitudes and, thus, has an effect on their openness to learning (Schunk, Pintrich, and Meece 6). Metaphor, which acts as an "affective or emotional trigger" according to Charteris-Black, may also provide instructors with clues to students' attitudes and how those attitudes shape their capacity to learn to write in academic settings (251).

In the following pages, I discuss the prevalence of the Conduit Metaphor throughout students' work on assignments devoted to studying their writing processes and trace other prominent and related metaphors through different student texts, including class journals, reading response essays, and their end-of-semester reflection letters. Throughout the semester, what I found in students' writing self-portraits appeared to be more consistent with transmission models



of writing and metaphorical expressions licensed by the Conduit Metaphor, those of “conveyance,” “flow,” “fluency,” “blocks,” and “economy/efficiency.”

At the beginning of the semester, I did not recognize the Conduit Metaphor because I had not identified it as a potentially problematic one. Thus, I had little opportunity to intervene with my students and, perhaps, encourage their transitions from transmissional to transactional views of writing. However, in several cases, students did demonstrate evidence that their perception of writing as transmission may have shifted and they may have become more rhetorically aware indirectly through learning about rhetoric from a social perspective and attending to changes in their metaphoric conceptions of writing, though these were subtle shifts and could not be categorized as transactional views of writing. In addition, in several cases, students’ metaphors reflected a more positive change in attitude towards the writing act.

### **The ‘Conduit’ Metaphor and Writing as Transmission**

Arguably the most important paradigm shift in the communication field in the last 40 years has been the emphasis on the socially constructed nature of language; that is, moving from a view of communication as transmission<sup>12</sup> to a view of communication as transaction. Michael Reddy’s 1979 essay “The Conduit Metaphor” was among the first to highlight the extent this metaphor for communication as transmission or transfer is embedded in everyday metaphors. In his essay, Reddy catalogues 140 different instances of the Conduit Metaphor, “built around

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<sup>12</sup> In “Major Metaphors of Communication and some Constructivist Reflections on their Use,” Klaus Krippendorff describes the transmission metaphor, that of encoding and decoding language, as emerging from the field of cryptography (8). The distinctions between the Conduit metaphor and Container metaphor and Transmission Metaphor are notable, but here I consider the three part and parcel as the Conduit/Container Metaphor and the Transmission Model assume a common or shared understanding among the communication participants (8). Krippendorff contends that all three metaphors “clearly make their users into subjects. Their logic does not permit any freedom of interpretation. The transmission metaphor is similarly limited in putting senders in charge of what the receivers of communications must reproduce” (16).

comments written by instructors on students' essays" (Grady 2). The Conduit Metaphor appears in statements such as, "Your concepts *come across* beautifully," "When you have a good idea, try to *capture* it immediately in words," and "The passage *conveys* a feeling of excitement" (Reddy 312-313, my emphasis).<sup>13</sup> These metaphorical linguistic expressions detail the idea that words contain meaning that rhetors package and send to an audience who then unpacks the message (Grady 1).<sup>14</sup>

The consequence of this metaphor, according to Reddy, is that it places the fault of failed communications squarely on the shoulders of the rhetor, which has clear ethical implications—in other words, this view promotes a passive, uncritical role for audiences and, in addition, plays down the constructedness and transactional nature of writing. In discussing metaphors of mass communication theories, Krippendorff argues that the consequences of the conduit and container metaphors for communication are that they "emphasize the production, dissemination and near universal accessibility of contents and requires of its mass audiences no particular cognitive skills" (18). He argues that such a view of communication treats audiences as "[surrendering] to

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<sup>13</sup> Reddy and Eubanks lump the conduit metaphor and the container metaphor together. Krippendorff separates the conduit metaphor from the container metaphor in explaining their entailments, but notes they share a relationship. He explains that Reddy's essay is concerned "only with language" while Krippendorff focuses on mass communications theory (6n. pag.). He writes that the "container/content distinction reappears in the channel/flowing substance (fluid) distinction. The finite amount of information a message conveys (a container can hold) here becomes the throughput capacity of a channel. The conduit metaphor shifts attention from transportation in units to continuous flows but retains the idea that entities or substances are preserved in the process" (68).

<sup>14</sup> Krippendorff also provides a useful history of the Conduit and Container metaphors of communication and their entailments in his essay "Major Metaphors of Communication and some Constructivist Reflections on their Use" (1993). He explains that the Container metaphor has four primary entailments: 1) "*emphasis on the content of messages that leaves language and communication processes transparent, unreflected, and unattended,*" 2) "*contents as entities with objective qualities,*" 3) "*communication as transportation*" and 4) "the acceptance of *sharing* as the logical consequence of if not standard for assessing what 'good' communication is" (3-4, emphasis in original). For instance, he notes that notions of communication as a fluid became associated with explanations for how messages traveled via copper wires via telegraph lines (5). Ultimately, Krippendorff argues that these models taken from technology are limited in their application to human communication as social (14).

media authorities, becoming more and more addicted, dependent, predictable, and hence controllable members of the mass media culture” (18). While obviously on a different scale, the effects of the conduit metaphor are likely the same at the classroom level; that is, possibly preventing students who hold this view of communication from acquiring their own authority in the writing process. Moreover, Krippendorff argues that the conduit/container metaphor for communication emphasizes content over purpose; in terms of mass media he provides the following example: “Indeed, journalists are concerned with the truth and accuracy of *what* is being reported rather than with *why* it is published and how the choice of a particular medium shapes what it becomes to its recipients” (4, emphasis in original). The result of this metaphor is that the rhetorical force of genre is underplayed and style becomes ornamental, reinforcing positivistic notions of communication and writing, such as a singular notion of clarity.<sup>15</sup>

Philip Eubanks notes that the Conduit Metaphor has been widely criticized by language scholars since Reddy’s essay. Eubanks recounts this view in his 2001 essay “Understanding Metaphors for Writing.” He states that,

Almost universally, current language scholars object that language is fundamentally indirect, contingent, and unstable; thus, we never *transmit* a perfect representation of the ‘external’ world through a secure pipeline leading from giver to receiver. (93, my emphasis)

Eubanks contends that Reddy and other language scholars have criticized the Conduit Metaphor based on misunderstandings of how metaphors work. He argues that the metaphor “does not

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<sup>15</sup> In *Style: An Anti-Textbook*, Richard Lanham argues that there are many different kinds of clarity, and he further contends that the metaphor of clarity describes a writer-reader relationship more than it does a textual style. “Style,” he argues, “is familiarity” (50).

impose an erroneously reductive structure upon complex activity but rather grows out of a complex of embodied activity, situated experience, and rhetorical human relationships” (99). He acknowledges that the story scholars tell about the Conduit Metaphor—“writing that *flows* in one direction only, from writer to readership”—is indeed an impoverished view of what reading and writing is capable of accomplishing (170, my emphasis). However, the Conduit Metaphor, he argues, works together with the conceptual metaphor LANGUAGE IS POWER, a metaphor promoted by postmodern theorists of language, to “provide a basis for ethical objectives such as clarity, directness, and accessibility” (113). Furthermore, Eubanks argues that, “we cannot easily, or ethically, dispense with [the Conduit Metaphor]” (115). Eubanks explains that the Conduit Metaphor “is a composite of basic touching, giving, and seeing experience applied to communication. For example, it incorporates the primary metaphor KNOWING IS SEEING, which allows us to see another’s point, to look at problems carefully, and to take a different view of things” (158). Furthermore, he argues that professional writers (those he terms “author-writers”) tell a more elaborate and complex version of the Conduit Metaphor “licensed” through the story of the Imagined Conversation (174).

The idea of writing as transmission or transfer was evident in many of the definitions of “good” writing that students offered at the beginning of the semester in which I taught first-year composition. Good writing, according to my students: “*gets the point across to the reader,*” [in Reddy: 8. *Your concepts come across beautifully*]; “[helps] the reader *get* the emotion you’re trying to portray” [in Reddy: 6. *Your real feelings are finally getting through to me*]; and, “*conveys a point*” [in Reddy: 35. *The passage conveys a feeling of excitement*].

Student definitions of “good” writing also prominently featured instances of Reddy’s “minor framework” of the Conduit metaphor, which includes metaphors of “flow:” good writing “flows and is comprehensible” and “flows and grabs attention” [in Reddy: 98. *Interesting ideas just seem to pour out of that man.*]

Just as in Chapter Two where I described how my conception of writing began to change as I contested my own definitions of rhetoric and metaphors for my writing practices, I want to argue that through reflection on their metaphors students, in several cases, began the process of re-conceptualizing and complicating their understanding of how language and communication works by developing meta-cognitive awareness through reflection on their metaphors of writing and definitions of good writing.

### **Writing as Transaction**

Why does it matter that writers move from a transmissional view of writing to a transactional view? Psychologist Mihaly Csikzentmihaly offers this succinct response: “If the only point of writing were to *transmit* information, then it would deserve to become obsolete. But the point of writing is to *create* information, not simply to pass it along” (131, emphasis in original). At least one study suggests that students produce writing of greater quality when they hold more transactional views of writing. White and Bruning’s research on college students’ implicit writing beliefs suggests that

[students] produced writing of higher overall quality and higher scores on the specific dimensions of writing quality related to idea-content development, organization, voice, sentence fluency, and conventions if they had low levels of transmissional writing beliefs or high levels of transactional writing beliefs. (181)

Their study of 180 college students also suggests that writing beliefs “appear to be related to writing quality and thus are influential in the writing process” (186). Thus, if metaphors represent hidden ideologies, my research is based in part on the assumption that students who use the Conduit Metaphor and its constituent metaphors are perhaps more likely to view writing as an act of transmission rather than a transaction.

For the purposes of this study, I am treating “writing as transaction” as shorthand for the view that writing is a socially constructed relationship between writers, readers and texts. In “Writing and Reading: The Transactional Theory,” Louise Rosenblatt explains writing as transaction in the following way:

Writing . . . is always an event in time occurring at a particular moment in the writer’s biography, in particular circumstances, under particular pressures, external as well as internal. In short, the writer is always transacting with a personal, social, and cultural environment (n. pag.).<sup>16</sup>

Viewing writing from the transactional perspective explains writing not as a way of “transmit[ting] reality” or a process of learning universal (and sometimes ambiguous or unrelated) rules such as “omit needless words” or “be clear” (C. Miller 610; Strunk and White 23, 79); instead, “to write well is to understand the condition’s of one’s own participation—the concepts, values, traditions, and styles which permit identification with that community and determine the success or failure of communication” (C. Miller 617).

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<sup>16</sup> Similarly, Carolyn Miller, who Eubanks cites as a prominent critic of the Conduit Metaphor or as she calls it “the windowpane theory of language,” describes the transactional view this way: “Whatever we know of reality is created by individual action and by communal assent. Reality cannot be separated from our knowledge of it; knowledge cannot be separated from the knower; the knower cannot be separated from a community” (615).

### Context of Class and Methods

In the first-year composition course I taught in fall 2010, I adopted course objectives aimed at helping students see how readers “construct” meaning from texts and how writers “construct” texts. Implicit in these course objectives was the desire to move students from viewing reading and writing as ways transferring information to a view of reading and writing as transactional and constructive acts, involving interactions between readers, writers, texts, and contexts. These objectives, listed on my class syllabus, included “understand how writers construct texts persuasively (or not),” “understand how readers construct meaning(s) from texts,” “understand writing and research as processes requiring planning, incubation, revision and collaboration,” and “conduct research and write about it for an audience.” The auto-ethnography assignment that is a central focus of much of this chapter allowed students to analyze their thinking and writing, reflect on what’s working and isn’t in their writing, and use this knowledge to improve on future writing assignments.<sup>17</sup>

In addition to the auto-ethnography assignment, two other assignments in the course, a rhetorical analysis and study of a discourse community, were aimed at establishing the social and rhetorical nature of writing. During the semester, students in my classes worked collaboratively in groups for peer reviews, group consultations led by me, and were encouraged to visit the University Writing Center for additional feedback from writing consultants. While students engaged in writing as a transaction, it is possible that they simply did not see it as such.

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<sup>17</sup> In *Reflection in the Writing Classroom*, Yancey offers an alternative assignment of process description called a “Writer’s Memo” (26). She notes that such process descriptions allow students to “remember ways in which they generated material,” “have a record to which they can return,” and “continue to develop an authority, an expertise, about their own writing, how it works when it works, as well as about how it doesn’t” (28).

On the first day of class, I asked students to write their definition of “good” writing and share a metaphor for writing. At the end of the semester, I repeated this activity in class and gave students the option of writing an extended metaphor for writing in their final reflection letter. Many students did participate in offering a metaphor in their final discussion even though this was optional. However, since not all students choose to offer a metaphor, I was unable to collect a larger sample of student metaphors.

The first major assignment that students were asked to complete was an auto-ethnography of their writing process. The assignment sheet asked students to do the following:

Carefully record and analyze your writing process using the prompt and methods provided below. Then, create a report using the IMRD [Introduction-Methods-Results-Discussion genre] in which you demonstrate your understanding of the research about writing processes and make claims about what works and doesn’t work in your own process and why that’s the case.

Students were instructed to record a think-aloud protocol on video while composing a short 500-word essay to a prompt<sup>18</sup> on their view of revision, after having read Carol Berkenkotter’s research article “Decisions and Revisions: The Planning Strategies of a Published Writer,” which details the work habits of Pulitzer-Prize winning author Donald Murray, and also read Murray’s accompanying essay titled, “Response of a Laboratory Rat—or, Being Protocoled.” Students

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<sup>18</sup> The following is the prompt to which students responded: “In the Berkenkotter article, the author notes how Murray completely rewrote a huge chunk of his essay. This idea of revising a paper, whether completely or even a little bit, is where I’d like you to focus your attention. Here’s why: A colleague of Berkenkotter, Nancy Sommers, wrote in an article, ‘Revision Strategies of Students Writers and Experienced Adult Writers,’ that ‘Because students do not see revision as an activity in which they can modify and develop perspective ideas, they feel that if they know what they want to say, then there is little reason for making revisions.’ Does this statement apply to you? If so, why do you think you have this mindset? If not, why do you think other students have this mindset? What can be done to change it?”



then coded their think-aloud transcript and analyzed it for patterns. Finally, at the end of the five-week unit, they composed a four- to six-page auto-ethnographic study of their writing process using the form of Introduction-Methods-Results-Discussion. During this unit students also read Sondra Perl's "The Composing Processes of Unskilled College Writers," Mike Rose's "Rigid Rules, Inflexible Plans, and the Stifling of Language," and a series of six short essays on writing by popular authors and essayists such as Stephen King, Anne Lamott, Susan Sontag, Kent Haruf, Allegra Goodman, and Junot Diaz. In addition to reading about writing, students saw a video-recorded example of a think-aloud I conducted responding to the same prompt that they would respond to, were provided with samples of a coded think-aloud from Sondra Perl's "Coding the Composing Process," and practiced coding a think-aloud protocol with their classmates during a class period.

During this unit on the writing process and throughout most of the semester, students wrote entries in a journal at the beginning of every class. At the end of the semester, I simply gave students credit for writing in their journal as long as the response was relevant to the question. At the beginning of most classes during Unit 1, students responded to questions related to their writing process such as "Why should you study writing?", "If someone were observing you as a writer, what would they notice? What would they see or hear?", "What is the biggest influence on the way that you write?", "What is the most difficult thing about writing for you and why?", "What do you want to know about your writing process?", "What are your best memories of writing?", "How would you describe yourself as a writer?"<sup>19</sup> These questions were intended to

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<sup>19</sup> These questions were borrowed from an assignment designed by Traci Gardner for NCTE's web site [readwritethink.org](http://readwritethink.org).

help students begin considering aspects of their writing practices, what factors influenced their writing, and their attitudes toward writing. I encouraged students to use these journals as places to develop content for their Reading Response assignments as well as their Unit 1 major assignment, the auto-ethnography.

From my perspective, one informed by James Berlin's seminal essay "Rhetoric and Ideology in the Writing Classroom," teaching writing and learning to write is always a matter of ideology. What writers believe about writing, what they believe writing is for, and what role writing plays in their lives strongly influences how writing students learn to write in new and unfamiliar genres, their ability to adapt to new rhetorical challenges, and even how (and if) they define themselves as a writer. If writing instructors want students to use writing in more complex ways rather than simply parroting back information, then I argue instructors must ask students to engage in conversations and reflections about their writing beliefs and the metaphors shaping them.

My research approach resembles Lad Tobin's methodology detailed in his essay "Bridging Gaps: Analyzing Student Metaphors for Composition," but consisted of a considerably smaller sample than Tobin's. My rationale for choosing this approach was what I perceived as a useful way to chart changes in student's writing beliefs over a semester. Though not initially intended, the generation of deliberate, overt metaphors and definitions of "good" writing offered a way to examine metaphors that were both consciously chosen by students and, in the student definitions of writing, the tacit, unstated beliefs about writing. White and Bruning contend that studies of students' implicit writing beliefs remain an area of research that has largely been ignored (186). While White and Bruning employ a complex methodology utilizing students

surveys, think-aloud protocols, and statistical analysis, I believe critical metaphor analysis of students' writing can reveal useful, if not rough, approximations of students' writing beliefs as well as changes in such beliefs, particularly for small-scale reflective teacher research projects like the present study.

After the semester was complete, grades had been assigned to students, and I had obtained permission from the university's Institutional Review Board, I sent e-mails to students in my classes seeking their permission to use their final portfolios for my graduate research study.

To analyze students' metaphors, I first conducted a close reading of students' auto-ethnographies, think-aloud protocol transcripts, Unit 1 Reading Responses (three 400- to 500-word reflective essays written in response to class readings)<sup>20</sup>, and journal responses to identify potential metaphors, then catalogued them by categories based on common metaphorical themes I identified such as "flow," "error," "conduit," "journey," and "efficiency/economy." After I identified common metaphorical themes among student texts, I then composed brief summaries and rhetorical analyses of the metaphors used by each individual student.

In total I analyzed the writing portfolios of 14 students from my two sections of ENC 1101.<sup>21</sup> This group includes seven women and seven men: 11 White students, two African-American students, and one Hispanic student. All students in this study were traditional college-age students (18-24). These students represented a cross-section of attitudes toward writing and

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<sup>20</sup> Students were directed to use these Reading Responses as a place to demonstrate they had read the material, reflected on the reading, connected it to their writing lives, and, as they read throughout the semester, synthesized current readings with past readings.

<sup>21</sup> Throughout this study, student names are pseudonyms. Student texts were used with permission.

how students identified with the label of writer taken from an in-class journal response to the question “How would you describe yourself as a writer?” These descriptions reveal a brief look at the confidence levels or apprehensiveness of writers in this study. For example, Brenda, who declared an interest in political science, described herself as an “average writer” at the beginning of the semester; however, later in her reflection letter she claimed she considered herself a good writer at the beginning of the semester. Joseph, an engineering major, considered himself a “good writer” at the beginning of the semester. Brittany, Brad, and Maura represented the other end of the continuum. Brittany, who had not declared a major, claims that she was “hardly what you would call a good writer,” Brad, an engineering major, considered himself an “unconfident writer,” and Maura, a forensic science major, wrote that she was “scatter brained” and “unorganized” as a writer.

In the next section, I describe the conceptual metaphors that students used in writing about their writing.

### **Metaphors of Writing Self-Portraits: Transmission and Flow**

#### *The Conduit Metaphor and Writing as Transmission*

The Conduit Metaphor and the Transmission Metaphor both are closely connected to notions of clarity (transparent or non-figurative writing) in communication as well as the idea of writing as a thought transcribed. Eubanks notes that critics have rightly criticized the Conduit Metaphor because it is a “story of ‘good writing’ in its narrowest conception . . . associated predominantly with values such as factual and grammatical correctness, precision, detachment, and objectivity” (170). Another consequence of the Conduit Metaphor is that when readers read a text believing it only “conveys information,” as Richard Lanham suggests, they are reading

from a stance that only allows them to see “information” preventing them from seeing the exigencies and rhetorical purposes that influence how a text comes to be (139).

One consequence of the Conduit Metaphor in its weakest form is what I refer to as the *factory syndrome* of composition as illustrated by my student Brad, an engineering major. In Brad’s class journal at the beginning of his semester, he described himself as a “very unconfident writer.” He stated that, “it takes me more time to get an essay started than it takes me to actually write the essay.” In his auto-ethnography, he wrote that, “I have always thought of myself as a week [sic] writer. My spelling is atrocious, it takes me hours to come up with what to write, and I almost always get off topic.” Indeed, throughout the semester, Brad’s nonstandard spelling tested the limits of my urge to evaluate students on surface-level error. I made a conscious effort not to grade students’ essay responses to class readings on surface-level errors like spelling or grammar unless it prevented me from understanding what the student wrote. If it did, I noted that in my evaluation comments to the student.

Brad’s auto-ethnography centered on metaphors of economy and efficiency. Eubanks argues that the “Conduit Metaphor promises linguistic accuracy and directness, thus efficiency” (162). This was the framework in which Brad’s writing existed in during high school. In his auto-ethnography he wrote that

In high school I was bombarded with writing assignment after writing assignment that focused on surface level errors such as grammar and spelling. In every one of these assignments there was a common goal to finish as fast as possible, often within an hour time limit. To me, the only hope I had to get a high scoring essay was, to practically pray to God that by divine intervention I would be able to write a Hale Marie [sic] essay.

Brad's metaphor for success requires what in football is the equivalent of a wild, uncontrolled, last ditch effort to score well. In high school, a text in Brad's case appeared as an implement to pass information along—to get the ball down the field as fast as possible and no matter what the results. For Brad, success in writing meant operating within a framework of time constraints, which reify economy and efficiency.

Other students combined the Conduit metaphor and metaphors of FLOW. For example, Desiree wrote that, "I can go more into detail and *convey* a message more *fluently* [when she is familiar with the topic]." Indeed, many of the initial definitions of "good writing" that students in both of my sections of first-year composition shared on the first day mixed metaphoric notions of the conduit metaphors ("Conveys a concept of effectiveness but has as little verbosity and redundancy as possible"; "Something that is interesting and *conveys* a point"), clarity or transparency ("*Clear, easily understood* and uses proper grammar"; "something that *clearly* presents the point or purpose while holding the reader's attention") as well as attributes of economy and efficiency ("*Short, simple and to the point*"; "Flows and is *comprehensible*"). The data I collected suggests that students in my classes came to first-year writing with specific beliefs that reified good writing as having the attributes of clarity, expression (or conveying ideas into words or "getting a point across"), cohesion and coherence ("flowing"), and, to a lesser degree, emphasizes good grammar as well as economy and efficiency of communication.

### *Writing as Transcription of Thought*

One of the most potent metaphors I held as a new teacher of writing was that "Good writing is good thinking." Early in the fall 2010 semester I shared this view with my students, but I do not believe I truly grasped the ramifications of such a claim. In discussing three stories

of writer prototypes (the literate inscriber, the good writer, and the author-writer), Eubanks writes: “For the good writer, WRITING IS THOUGHT has to do with matters of judgment. Good writers not only record their thoughts in writing, they demonstrate their ability to think” (68). One of my first concerns about this metaphor is that it privileged thinking (the cognitive aspect of writing) over the socially situated nature of writing and the cultural knowledge required to turn good thinking into good writing. Eubanks argues that the metaphor of writing as thinking can produce a dangerous line of logic: “College students who cannot think have nothing to write about: Hence they cannot write. Conversely, college students who cannot produce clear, logical, and original essays cannot write: Hence there is a strong suspicion that they cannot think” (68). On the contrary, it is possible to be a very good thinker and not be a good writer or a writer at all. One of the most deeply held metaphors in my repertoire of implicit beliefs was also the most potentially damaging to student morale—one I announced to students in class early in the semester.

As part of the auto-ethnography assignment, students were asked to conduct a think-aloud protocol, talking out their thoughts while they composed. A majority of my students initially balked at the idea of speaking aloud to compose. Many of them argued in first drafts that such a methodology was awkward and uncomfortable. Marlon, a writing student in my class, wrote in his autoethnography that “thinking out loud and writing a paper is an extremely hard task for me and it greatly hindered my writing.” However, other students like Maura gravitated to the method, finding it to be a useful process as she already “talked to herself” when she wrote. Other students surprised themselves by discovering that the think-aloud process freed them of concerns over error. Paco wrote in his auto-ethnography that,

When writing a normal essay I would have a differently [sic] approach. First I would just make a basic outline of what I have to do. Then I would slow *fill in the blanks*. When I was writing the think-aloud I was just writing and writing without even caring about the *look*. I was able to *generate* four pages in one sitting. (my emphasis)

In Paco's case, being able to transcribe his thoughts in almost stream of consciousness or "free write" permitted him to forgo the outline/template approach he had been taught and attempt to discover what he wanted to say in a more flexible way. Moreover, he is no longer concerned about the "look" or surface features of the text as he writes, so that he focuses on production. As an inventive strategy, writing as transcription of thought can be useful, allowing writers to disconnect from their own critical self-monitoring. But, of course, what most instructors consider effective writing in academia does not typically stop at simple transcription.

Eubanks argues that "write like you talk" can be good advice, with some qualifications. Writing like you talk means "conversational writing, unpretentious writing, rhetorically sensitive writing, particular sort of good writing" (Eubanks 113). While I had wanted to encourage students to revise their work multiple times, the think-aloud process gave students a false impression that an essay was simply a voice transcription of their thoughts "poured" onto the page in stream of thought. In the Conduit/Container Metaphor, texts or media serve as a place to insert content into a form; the notion of thoughts as being "poured" out originates with the use water metaphors to provide theories for explaining the movement of electricity and information along telecommunications wires (see Krippendorff 3-5).

For my students, I did not actually draft a Reading Response from my sample think-aloud protocol and show them a complete view of my process in composing a similar essay, which



likely would have taken longer than the half-hour think aloud I produced for this short essay (as evident from the multiple drafts and free writes used to compose the 500-word essay analyzed in Chapter 2). Moreover, my Reading Response would likely not have been an actual transcript of what I said. As Eubanks points out, “written composition almost always differs from speech” (104). Even in a transcript of a broadcast, he argues, “speech is diligently written down, but the transcript can never capture the nuances of cadence, timbre, pitch, and more” (105). The consequences of the WRITING IS THOUGHT and WRITING IS SPEECH metaphor, coupled with the brief writing assignment, in some cases resulted in a short-circuiting of the revision process for many of my students and resulted in frustration for me over why students performed such minor revisions. In several cases, students turned in near transcripts of their think aloud as a Reading Response essay. The underlying metaphors of this assignment had clear consequences for reifying a particular oral approach to composing. My own writing beliefs as well as the metaphors underlying this particular assignment contributed to a view of writing that, without meta-cognitive awareness, resulted in student writing that did not allow them to “take back what they said” and revise their writing.

### *Flow, Speech, and Writing Performance*

At the beginning of Erasmus’s *On Copia*, he writes that watching men speak when ideas and phrases pour out “like a golden river” is a “magnificent and impressive thing” (295). Like Erasmus’ description of experiencing a good speaker (or writer), good writing is often said to simply flow forth. The metaphor of flow also can be traced back to early Buddhist practitioners who have used the metaphor of a stream as a way of describing consciousness; later, the term

“stream of consciousness” was coined by psychologist and rhetorician Alexander Bain and psychologist William James popularized the term; (Wikipedia, “Mindstream”). Pasanek’s online corpus of 7,830 metaphors compiled from literary works from early Greeks to modern day lists 376 “liquid” metaphors related to the mind (“The Mind is a Metaphor”). In *Metaphor and Writing*, Eubanks suggests that the metaphor of flow is among the writing metaphors that have received scant attention in metaphor and writing studies scholarship (194). The metaphor of flow appears to be a widespread, cultural metaphor for the movement of thought and consciousness, a focused state of performance as well as an ideal for positive writing experiences, and a term used to describe the concepts of unity and coherence in textual cohesion. Yet some critics contend that like the Conduit Metaphor it can also contribute to problematic beliefs about writing.

Just as Eubanks claims that the conduit metaphor coheres to the LANGUAGE IS POWER metaphor, Tomlinson (relying on Reddy as a source) links the metaphors of “flow” and “writer’s block” to the Conduit Metaphor (129). Tomlinson allows that “writer’s block” has real consequences for writers—even admitting she falls victim to the problem and metaphor—but she “[objects] to its primacy, first because it implies overwhelmingly that the opposite of blocked writing is fluent writing, writing that *flows forth*—a very limited notion of successful composing” (130, my emphasis). Indeed, one of my students, Andrea, proudly noted her fluency as a writer by producing 258 words in 10 minutes of her essay, spending a total of 30 minutes drafting the 400-500-word Reading Response assignment. Such a view privileges metaphors of production—economy and efficiency—over the substance of the text.

Tomlinson contends that she must frequently “vaccinate” herself against such “analogic diseases” or “weak” metaphors like that of the flow metaphor, particularly since her interest lies

in “controlling” writing processes (130). She further argues that, “emphasis on sudden and dramatic insight does not reflect adequately the network of relationships established in ongoing writing and thinking activities” (21). I share Tomlinson’s concern for this myth, because I believe it engenders in many writing students the fatalist belief that writers either have talent or they don’t and that writing abilities cannot be altered. However, this is not to discount the role that intuition may play in writing; I hesitate to argue that writing scholars can explain every act of creativity or reduce it to an explainable and reproducible phenomenon. Though Tomlinson has a valid point that simply writing fluently and unobstructed is arguably a relatively low bar to set for writing, for some students who are apprehensive or struggle with the experience of writing being able to simply write uninterrupted for even a brief period might help them experience writing as a pleasurable activity.

### *Types of Flow*

Flow not only exists as a metaphor, but also as a psychological and physiological condition of heightened awareness, concentration, and enjoyment during the performance of an activity. Psychologist Mihaly Csikzentmihaly describes the concept of flow in his book *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience* as a state of enjoyment that includes the following elements: “a challenging activity that requires skills, the merging of action and awareness,” “clear goals and feedback,” “concentration on the task at hand,” “the loss of self-consciousness,” and the “transformation of time” (48-70). In *Writing in Flow*, Susan Perry uses Csikzentmihaly’s research to examine how the mental state of flow occurs in composing, as described by poets, short-story writers, and novelists. Many of these writers describe this state through metaphors, she explains. “Flow,” she argues, “is such a complex psychological process that it’s impossible

to describe it fully using straightforward, literal language” (21). Perry describes a range of images and metaphorical phrases used by novelists and poets to describe the flow state, from water to movement to telephone switching terminals (21-25). Flow, according to Perry, is a characteristic state of being that novelists, poets and other professional writers tell about their most positive experiences composing.

Flow also exists as a metaphor for coherence and unity in a text for both the writer and the reader; like Lanham’s suggestion that the metaphor of clarity suggests a writer-reader relationship, so does the metaphor of flow (50). Nancy Kelly-Martin claims that writers should reject the metaphor of “flow” as it “is a tantalizing but ambiguous word” and replace them with more “appropriate terms and complex definitions, the metalanguage of grammar and rhetoric” (6). Employing her students in two writing classes at Southern Illinois University-Edwardsville as researchers, Kelly-Martin and her students each asked six other high school or college students the question: “What is the definition of *flow*—in composition or writing?” and compiled the results. Kelly-Martin’s informal study revealed four common definitions of flow:

- 1) “. . . smoothness, unity, or connectedness—that is, having good transitions between sentences and between paragraphs.”
- 2) “. . . associated with orality—that is, rhythm and even word melody.”
- 3) “spontaneity in the act of writing: in addition, flow is naturally occurring, neither deliberate nor planned, effortless not labored.”
- 4) “metaphysical essence, illusive and indefinable.”

Kelly-Martin suggests that the ambiguity of “flow” is less helpful than other terms such as coherence and unity. However, I do not believe that we should rush to abandon the metaphor of

FLOW. Indeed, Kelly-Martin admits that not all her students were ready to abandon it. Instead, the results of her own study seem to suggest that interrogating the metaphor of flow provided students with a means to understand the latent attributes of a popular and pervasive metaphor for writing (including its different contextual uses) and its implications when writers write. Unraveling the entailments of a metaphor like FLOW demonstrates that it does function as a generative tool for understanding an abstract and elusive concept. What the metaphor of FLOW requires to be generative, as Perkins and Salomon suggests, is “elaboration and qualification” (para. 20). This ability to decompress a metaphor or interpret its meanings, I contend, is another key element of metaphoric competence in the first-year classroom.

#### *Flow in First-year Composition*

The readings in my class may also have reinforced metaphors of flow and fluency, which also licensed metaphors of efficiency and economy. For instance, students read Sondra Perl’s “The Composing Processes of Unskilled College Writers” which presents a case study of Tony, who Perl presents as a “basic” writer. One of the implications Perl arrives at based on her study is that writers like Tony focus so closely on correctness that it prevents him from writing fluidly because he continually attends to minor grammatical and syntactical features of writing instead of using writing to develop ideas in the initial stages. Both Perl’s study as well as Berkenkotter’s study of Donald Murray used think-alouds as methods for observing writers, which emphasized an oral mode of composition unfamiliar to my students. Mike Rose’s study “Rigid Rules, Inflexible Plans and the Stifling of Language” emphasized the opposite of “flow” writing—writer’s block.

The metaphor of flow did not appear isolated to my course alone. One such example of the flow metaphor beyond my students' work appeared in a published auto-ethnographic study by an UCF student featured in the fall 2010 volume of UCF's first-year writing journal *Stylus*. Because it was selected for this journal by a committee that includes graduate students and instructors in composition, I believe that this essay represents a model student essay from the program, and the student, Zachary Talbot, participated in a study and writing assignment virtually identical to the one I asked my students in ENC 1101 to participate in. Though I did not assign this essay as required reading for students, I did encourage students to look at *Stylus* for examples of auto-ethnography, which may have influenced their use of the term in their writing.

The use of "flow" as a metaphor and writing concept is central to Talbot's auto-ethnography and observations of his writing behaviors as evident in the title, "My Writing Process and the Importance of Flow Writing." Talbot's essay relies on a constellation of performance-related metaphors for writing that cohere with the concept of flow as an ideal mental state.

His essay examines how different environments affect his writing. He compares his writing process in two locations: a soundproof room in the library and his dorm room. Talbot's research revealed to him that, "a college student's natural environment is infested with distractions that cause a disruption in the *flow of thoughts and ideas*, subsequently altering their [sic] writing" (24, my emphasis). Talbot describes "flow" as an ideal state of composition. He writes:

As I wrote I maintained a rhythm and constant *flow* of ideas that I *pour* on the page as long as I stay on track. These writing bursts may not be perfect, but they maintain

spontaneous-originality that creates a unique argument. I call this tool *flow writing*. (25, emphasis in original)

Here, the page is a container to fill with ideas (“pour on the page”). Talbot uses Perl’s term “writing bursts” to describe flow (as if pressure has built up from a temporary block). Still, while the term might appear to be at odds with the idea of flow as something that is a continuous stream, during floods and storms flows of rivers can surge.

For Talbot, “flow” as a concept also is connected to the phenomena of distractions. Even when Talbot moves from his dorm with “outside distractions” (Facebook, a roommate watching TV in a nearby room, his cell phone) to a soundproof library study room, he cannot escape internal distractions or “*stray thoughts*” (24). Stray thoughts appear to be perceived as mental errors or flotsam and jetsam causing the stream of thought to back up. When a block is surpassed, a rush of thought flows forth. The ideal performative experience of flow, according to Talbot, was difficult to regain once distracted. He writes:

It surprised me how difficult it was to be able to jump back into *flow* writing after being distracted and away from my actual writing environment. I would compare it to an actor who is completely *submerged* in a role for a blockbuster movie. Even off the set most of the time they will remain in character, for once being in character—or flow writing, in my case—is disrupted, it is often hard to pick it back up right away. (26, my emphasis)

The method actor analogy reflects the level of concentration associated with flow states (see Csikszentmihaly’s *Flow*). Even though this state is elusive for Talbot, it appears to be a useful analogy—one that allows writers an opportunity to consider themselves as performing a role and adopting personae different from their conscious self. While Tomlinson and Kelly-Martin

contend that uninterrupted writing or the metaphor of “flow” may not be the best measure of good writing because of its connections to the container metaphor for communication, it is possible that the metaphor still maintains useful applications.

On the other hand, some other compositionists argue that flow can also have negative consequences for writers who adhere to this metaphor, particular when they become meta-cognitively aware of their writing practices. In “Coherence On and Off the Page: What Writers Can Know about Writing Coherently,” Colomb and Griffin argue that the “ideal of flow—fluency—is not aided but undermined when a writer attempts to intervene consciously in the unconscious aspects of the process” (293). Indeed, some writers claim that identifying one’s self as a writer is a detriment to writing.<sup>22</sup> If we take this to be the case at least some of the time, then the process of becoming aware of your writing processes (becoming more reflective) could have troubling results for some writers. Perhaps, in the process of learning to write differently (in new contexts such as academia), the growing awareness of one’s abilities (and limitations) as a writer may create persistent mental unease and require instructors not only teach students how to gain greater awareness of their writing, but also how and when to *unlearn* meta-awareness or shut off their self-awareness.

During my classes’ Unit 1 on the writing process, students read Anne Lamott’s “Shitty First Drafts” and Allegra Goodman’s “Calming the Inner Critic and Getting to Work,” both of which discuss strategies for quieting internal voices, particularly “inner critics.” Both Lamott and Goodman appear to take a view that the “inner critic” is almost always a detriment to

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<sup>22</sup> Novelist and travel writer Pico Iyer argues that, “The less conscious one is of being a ‘writer,’ the better the writing” (“The Writer’s Almanac with Garrison Keeler” Feb. 11, 2011).



writing. By the end of the writing process unit, one of my students Desiree appeared to begin to come to terms with the “painstaking, frustrating tasks” of writing for school. In her third Reading Response essay she reflects:

[These readings have] made me think of writing as less of a chore and more of a challenge. ... I have learned writing is a skill—it needs to be practiced persistently, even when I can’t stand to do so. ... The term ‘skilled writer’ does not imply flawless papers and perfect sentences whenever pen is put to paper ... The ability to turn off the analytical mind and unleash the creative process—*that* is the prevalent difference between the untalented and the talented writer ... If there is one thing I am happiest to have taken away from these readings, it is the knowledge that I am allowed to write a horrible first draft. No one needs to see that the first draft of this reading response was abysmal. I can mess around with ideas, fix things and tidy-up later on, then buff out the rough edges before anyone reads it. (her emphasis)

In this passage, Desiree reconfigures her metaphor of writing as tedious work (a chore) to an opportunity (a challenge) that provides elements of competition and potential reward. A challenge is something you accept; parents typically assign a chore. In this case, Desiree’s reading of Ann Lamott’s “lengthy, boring, terrible first drafts” appears to allow her to imagine a new role for herself as a different, more flexible writer, one where transgressing or playing (“messing around”) with the text may be part of her writing processes. Her attitude towards the notion of revision appears to have changed. However, Desiree also continues to cling to the notion of flow in this passage; she argues that what distinguishes “untalented and talented writers” is not skill but rather a state of being—“turning off the analytical mind and unleash the

creative process”—a mixed metaphor of shutting off the tap of critical thought and letting the creativity run wild, or in Csikzenmihaly’s terms, being in a state of flow. Csikzentmihaly contends that “in flow there is no room for self-scrutiny” (63).

However, I would argue as I have suggested in Chapter 2 that internal dialogue (even critical self-talk or the metaphor of negotiation) is a generative strategy that allows writers a way of negotiating with themselves and their texts. Rather than always trying to silence these internal conversations or *bottle* them up as Lamott suggests, writers might be just as successful learning to engage the inner critic to shift to more productive dialogue and like Lamott begins to hint at the ability to “turn the volume” up or down on the inner critic when it suits their writing (304).

Other scholars, however, have argued that self-dialogue and its concomitant self-reflection (an imagined audience or conversation) is a critical notion attached to the idea of authorship (Ong; Tomlinson; Yancey; Johnson; Eubanks). Johnson argues that “by deliberately imagining this experience of dialogue as we compose . . . we can begin to lay claim to a sort of temporal power, a momentum, something like the sheer spontaneity of thought, that our readers can perceive and experience as well” (30). However, Eubanks notes that the internal voices that author-writers use to imagine conversations with characters and audiences is paradoxical: “the writer both imagines a likely audience and imagines that the audience does not exist” (180).

Such dialogue may begin simply by re-reading aloud one’s own texts, something the think-aloud protocol encourages. Maura’s think-aloud was a pattern of constant re-reading of her writing. Her 12-page think-aloud in 10-point type began with her re-reading a sentence, then re-reading the first paragraph, then re-reading the first and second paragraph, and so on, until she had composed the entire essay. She noted this habit in her auto-ethnography:

I would write a sentence then go back to the beginning of the paragraph and read through it to make sure that it *flowed* and made sense. Before and after rereading I would pause to ensure that my sentences *flowed* nice and smoothly. Providing that the sentences *flowed smoothly* I would continue and write another sentence and repeat my pattern all over again.”

The flow Maura attempts to achieve does not come through any continuous stream of thoughts, but rather a recursive pattern of what amounts to two steps forward, three steps back, two steps forward, four steps back. Flow, in Maura’s case, is *constructed* through writing. The initial writing is not *smooth* to begin with, but rather is *created* through what appears to be a rather time-consuming process.

The experience of writing the auto-ethnography appears to have had a positive impact on Maura. One possible reason for Maura’s positive view of the think-aloud methodology is that she already claimed to be comfortable with this self-talk process. In her in-class journal, when asked what someone would observe her doing as a writer, she wrote that, “[they] would notice that I tend to talk to myself. I do this to hear how my writing would sound if someone else was reading it.” Tomlinson claims that this kind of self-talk is invaluable for the authors she studied: “When writers talk to themselves, to their texts, to their characters, and they find that all of these sources and an entire text talk back to them” (74). Maura concludes this piece by highlighting that she is “aware of all the actions I take while writing.” Yet, her awareness does not result in any evidence that she intends to alter her writing process, suggesting that awareness alone may be insufficient to transform a writer’s performance in writing.

Maura's story exemplifies three key points about the potential generativity of the metaphor of FLOW: 1) flow, as in the coherence and cohesiveness of a text, is constructed by both writers and readers as they read and write, 2) the connection between writing as "flow" and orality; and, 3) flow, as in the experience of composing while reading or writing, offers students access to what T.R. Johnson calls "authorial pleasure" (xi).

Flow, argues Johnson, can be manufactured through concrete means, including "stylistic devices" (100-104). Basing his theory of authorial pleasure on Gorgias' rhetorical theory, Johnson argues that, "before students can learn how to persuade an audience of anything, the student must first learn to experience composing itself as a kind of pleasure-charged performance" (2). Johnson contends that "by deliberately imagining this experience of dialogue as we compose and thus stylizing our sentences with distinctly rhythmic figures of various kinds, we can begin to lay claim to a sort of temporal power, a momentum, something like the sheer spontaneity of thought, that our readers can perceive and experience as well" (30).

By experiencing a composing method that elicits the metaphor of flow or fluent writing, students were able to experience and study composing as an oral performance; for instance, Joseph compared his experience of self-observation as a golfer might study his swing or a boxer might watch a fight to learn how to improve her footwork—to watch themselves in practice. Moreover, had I been more conscious of the Conduit Metaphor and "flow," asking students to unsettle the metaphor of flow might have contributed to discussions of the relationship between writing and speech, how a text achieves this notion of "flow" (in the sense of its unity and coherence), and helped students consider in more depth how affect, attitude and physiology contributes to the performance of writing.

While I can't claim that my version of a "writing about writing" pedagogy using the think-aloud protocol gave students in my classes ready access to "authorial pleasure," a number of students as illustrated below appeared to express positive "change[s] of attitude" toward writing and did view writing from a more rhetorically oriented perspective after studying how they composed (Johnson 81).

The notion of pleasure or engagement in writing connects to writers' beliefs, motives, and attitudes towards writing addressed at the beginning of this chapter. The first task of first-year composition teachers, then, perhaps is to ask students to consider how their beliefs, motives, and attitudes influence their interest and capacity to learn new literacy practices.

### **Changes in Definitions of "Good" Writing and Metaphors of Writing**

#### *Metaphors 'More than True'*

One of the more unsettling discoveries as a novice writing instructor is how challenging it is to encourage students to alter their beliefs about writing: as Lakoff and Johnson point out that, ". . . it is by no means an easy matter to change the metaphors we live by" (145). For instance, while Ellen's view of good writers and readers appears to become more complicated, she becomes more emphatic about the strength of her beginning-of-semester metaphor for writing. Ellen, a public relations major, claims in her end-of-semester reflection letter that her metaphor of "good writing is like baking a cake" is now "more than true." She explains that "if you forget one ingredient, like considering your audience, or providing credibility, the cake won't turn out as delicious." Metaphors of baking, or more generally cooking, have been derided in composition for licensing prescriptive notions of composing. However, Ellen's metaphor

indicates an understanding of good writing as contingent on interrelated factors. Though Ellen continues to rely on key phrases that indicate a transmission view of writing (“what the audience . . . is *getting out* of it” and “*convey* different ideas”), her conception of writing appears to have shifted toward a more rhetorical view of writing. While writing still remains a way to transmit ideas to readers, her conception of writing is one that is beginning to consider the *who* of writing.

In her end-of-semester reflection letter, Ellen notes a change in her definition of what it means to be a good writer and reader. She states:

I think that one ‘writing goal or objective or skill’ that influence [sic] my perception of what it meant to be a good writer and a good reader was the idea that you have to consider who your [sic] writing to, why your [sic] writing it, and what the audience or readers is [sic] *getting out* of it. In the past, I had only thought about why I was writing it, what I as writing, and *how soon I could finish* it. This semester learning about rhetorical analysis caused me to think deeper into the purpose of writing, and when to use different *tools* to *convey* different ideas. [italics, my emphasis]

Ellen’s mention of initially seeing writing as a rush to finish is not surprising given the emphasis many school environments and placements tests put on timed writing assignments. However, it is important to note that Ellen appears to be acknowledging the value of audience awareness for being a good writer and reader—an important step toward thinking about writing as a transaction and that different audiences might require different “tools” or strategies for effective communication.

Like Ellen, Marlon used a similar “more true” phrase to describe his beliefs toward his beginning-of-semester metaphor for writing. In his class journal toward the end of the fall

semester, Marlon wrote that his definition of writing had not changed: “I still believe short and sweet is the way to go when writing.” Marlon used the refrain of “even more true now” when describing his metaphor for writing at the end of the semester reflection letter. For Marlon, his experience and understanding of writing and readers creating meaning appeared to confirm the “truth” of the metaphor he established on the first day of class. Yet later, in his reflection letter, submitted as part of his final portfolio, he explains how his metaphor changed:

In the beginning of the year I made a metaphor for writing which involved the idea of a painting. In the beginning on [sic] this course I simply meant a piece of paper is like an empty canvas and as you write you are creating the picture with words. However I feel this metaphor is even more true now as I now understand depending on the person they can see very different things in both paintings and works of writing and all get different meanings from the same work.

In Marlon’s case, he reconfigured his existing metaphor to work within the ideology of the course. Reading rhetorically, to Marlon, seemed to mean that multiple meanings might emerge based on the person doing the reading or viewing. Marlon, an engineering major, wrote in his reflection letter that as a writer, “Before this course, I would have simply assumed those reading knew what I was referring to or talking about in the paper but now I understand my readers might not always be my teacher and thus they don’t automatically know what I am talking about.” A new metaphor wasn’t necessary for Marlon to make this realization of the social construction of language. Instead, he viewed his metaphor not simply as a way to create images, but as a way to create images for someone. While this view of writing remains a one-way transmission of information, I would argue that Marlon’s recognition of audience and the

possibility of multiple interpretations brings him into a more rhetorical view of writing and, perhaps, a step closer to seeing writing as transactional.

### *Adding to Definitions*

Despite her negative self-perception as a writer early on in the semester, Christina ended the course “more comfortable with writing.” In addition to her apparent attitude change toward writing, Christina also added to her definition of good writing. She wrote that initially her definition was that “good writing is helping the reader understand what you are trying to portray.” To this she added in her reflection letter that good writing was “. . . trying to portray through persuasive language, imagery, and descriptive vocabulary. A good writer doesn’t necessarily need to change the reader’s opinion, but be able to make them think about their opinion.” Christina’s initial definition was basically a transfer of information. The writer is a performer “portraying” meaning to the reader. In her second definition, her addition provides a means for achieving this portrayal as well as acknowledging that such transfer may not achieve its goal. In this second definition, she allows for the possibility of failure to communicate—that writing might not achieve its desired goal of “chang[ing] the reader’s opinion,” but instead put the reader in a reflective state of mind. Christina’s definition ultimately remains one of transmission—sending an image to a reader. However, this admission of potential ‘failure to communicate’ suggests an awareness of power on the part of an audience, just as Eubanks suggests the metaphor of LANGUAGE IS POWER is connected with the Conduit Metaphor.

Another notable change in a student’s view of writing was Daniel’s conception of good writing in his end-of-semester reflection letter. He wrote that,



In the beginning of the semester I believed that ‘good’ writing was just something that appealed to the readers senses and *captured* the readers attention. I still believe it should do that, but also think it should be somewhat sophisticated. When I use the term *sophisticated*, I mean that the writing should have some kind of *deeper* meaning to it than what the reader *sees* in the text. (italics, my emphasis)

That Daniel refers to writing as containing “deeper” meaning suggests a container metaphor of language; that is, the text must be mined for meaning or decoded, rather than a reader constructing meaning from the text. The metaphor of writing as a container for ideas, as previously discussed, is closely associated with the Conduit Metaphor. Daniel’s reflection letter contains traces of indicators that he may be moving toward a more transactional model of communications. He explains the concept of rhetorical reading as “looking beyond just the text,” suggesting an emergent understanding of the role of context and the motives of writers. However, later he writes that, “good writing should make the reader think and not just let them be a slave to its text.” One interpretation of this statement might suggest that Daniel believes readers still play a passive role where the text frees the reader to think. Ultimately, while Daniel appears on the verge of conceiving of writing as transactional, he appears to continue to view writing a way of presenting information.

In both Christina and Daniel’s cases, the reader gains slightly more power in the writer-reader relationship: Christina and Daniel both acknowledge that good writing can have a liberating effect—encouraging readers to consider their own views or to be reflective readers. One way in which writers who are on the cusp of understanding writing as a transaction might be encouraged to move closer to this perspective is to imagine themselves as different kinds of

readers of their own works—not simply reading their writing for information, but re-reading their writing in the guise of different characters. In the “Phenomenology of Error,” Joseph Williams suggests that a teacher’s stance as evaluator exerts a powerful influence over their ability to read student texts from anything other than one of error hunting. Through metaphor, students may be able to re-imagine the different kinds of relationships or stances they might assume when reading and writing to understand writing as not simply a literal transaction, but a figurative one as well.

### *Abandoning Metaphors and Definitions of Writing*

Another important strategy for working with metaphor is rejecting or abandoning those that are no longer generative. Andrea’s initial metaphor of writing as party planning also held promise for promoting the social interaction which social constructionists argue is a key to understanding writing as a transaction. However, Andrea abandoned this metaphor by the end of the semester for one that was consistent with the less positive attitude she expressed toward writing.

In her end-of-semester reflection letter, Andrea wrote that, “I now see writing more as a lemon. It is sour at first taste, but with the right ingredients and some sugar it can be very refreshing.” Andrea revealed during class discussion that after her time in my first-year writing class she felt that writing was more difficult for her than in high school and that her confidence in her writing ability declined. Initially, I was taken aback by Andrea’s discovery that writing was now more difficult for her. The last thing I wanted, as a writing instructor, was to discourage writers or make them dread writing. Her metaphor had less to do with how writing happened and more about how she felt about it. However, Andrea’s end-of-semester metaphor is not

completely negative. The metaphor she uses is one of struggle; she initially acknowledges the challenges of writing, but also acknowledges that given “the right ingredients” writing can ultimately be satisfying.

Leslie’s perception of writing through her metaphor changed in dramatic ways at the end of the semester. A computer science major, she wrote in her reflection letter that,

I can no longer say that writing is like an algebra equation for when I first came in I thought all papers had steps that you had to take in order to get to the end result. Now though I know that you don’t have to take the steps in order to get to the end result you could switch the equations backwards, skip some steps, or even just write down the answer; it all depends on the way you want your paper formatted. To me now writing is like a river there is some bumps you have to get over, there are some easy parts to get through, but either way in the end you will be happy that you made it.

Leslie’s initial metaphor for writing was challenged by the suggestion that rules and algorithms (as she had read in Mike Rose’s “Rigid Rules”) may be a source of writer’s block. In this passage, Leslie discards her previous belief of writing as following linear steps to completion. Still, she continues to focus on a surface-level concern. For me as a teacher, her reference to the writing process depending on the “way you want your paper formatted” is not the perspective I wanted to students to take from my class. I had emphasized in class that students should be concerned first with global issues, their argument and its support, the overall structure of their writing, and to be aware of their audience and the purpose of their writing. Leslie’s math metaphor is discarded for a nature-based metaphor, a river that is not always smooth, but also includes some discomfort on the journey. Similarly, Leslie writes in her last entry in her class

journal that her “thinking about writing has changed over the course of this semester by not so much thinking of it as a chore.” Leslie’s metaphor of writing as a journey over a bumpy river—one that might include flow—is perhaps arguably a more realistic view of the challenges many writers experience when composing in new genres and unfamiliar rhetorical situations.

Brad’s four hours to write a 500-word essay and his revelation of how he spent his time led him also to reflect that the “times I gave my self a day to digest what I had written, was [sic] the times I found myself being much more proactive.” Brad’s recognition of the “painful” process he used to write seemed to result in a positive change in his beliefs about writing. Near the end of the first unit, Brad wrote in a reading response that he saw a common thread among writers in the class readings: “Just as these writers knew their weaknesses they knew their strengths. That is what being a good writer is all about, self awareness . . . Writing is not cut and dry, it is a complex puzzle with an infant [infinite] number of ways to solve it. . . .” In his final reflection letter, he wrote that “For as long as I can remember I have thought of a good writer as someone who can just sit down and write any essay or paper quickly with good organization. I now see that such writers are very hard to come by and this does not accurately portray a good writer.” On the surface, Brad’s writing in the course did not improve noticeably throughout the course. He continued to misspell commonly used words, misuse citations, and sometimes write in fragmented sentences. However, his experiences of writing during the semester appeared to help demystify writing as something other than a Hail Mary toss of desperation; instead, writing for Brad became an activity that, at least conceptually, requires multiple drafts and feedback for a successful writing experience. Brad’s description of writing as a “complex puzzle” and “not cut and dry” suggests writing as something more than a fixed entity that can be easily mastered.

### **Social Distortions in Writing Reflections**

Figures of speech, including metaphors, are said to distort the literal meaning of language. While distortion has a decidedly negative connotation of twisting meaning, I want to suggest that metaphor's role is distortion as a kind of cognitive dissonance, one that focuses our attention on a problem. While few of the students in this case study demonstrated strong awareness of writing as transaction, in many cases, their rhetorical awareness and attitudes toward writing appear to be changing shape through reconfiguration of metaphors.

Writing about undergraduate second-language writing students in Japan, Casanave contends that, “[i]f we follow Lave’s and Wenger’s work, a key sign of undergraduates’ developing expertise in academic literacy games is their changing relationship to the texts they read and write” (79). Indeed, that was the case in several of the students in my classes as described above. For example, in Marlon’s case, the change from viewing writing as something that could be interpreted in multiple ways suggests a new relationship with the texts he read in class and an awareness that his readers might not always be experts. In Daniel’s reflection letter, he suggests that he now sees writing as providing the capacity to free readers to think for themselves. Brad’s discovery of writing as something that requires incubation and reflection, not simply a rush to completion, is an important conceptual step in understanding one’s identity as an academic writer and how that contributes to improving as a writer. Desiree came to the realization that she must practice writing “even when she can’t stand to do so.”

In *Writing Games*, Casanave provides six “games” she suggests are important for undergraduate students to learn to survive in academia, including, “Learn to Love Writing (or at Least to Become Fluent)” (62-73). Indeed, a handful of students wrote in their reflections letters

that simply being required to write a great deal provided them with greater confidence. Marlon wrote in his reflection letter that

In the start of the course I was greatly intimidated at the 4-6 page requirement of our first major paper and my lack of writing skills can be seen that the paper itself as it leaves a lot to be desired. When compared with my final assignment, the discourse community paper, I personally see a great bit of improvement in terms of flow of the paper and conveyance of ideas and now the 4-6 page requirement seems easy.

While the idea of fluency perhaps ranks low among the goals that composition theorists might want first-year composition students to aspire to and understand, Casanave argues that “becoming a fluent, nonhesitant writer is a goal that some of us continue to carry with us into our gray-haired years even if we have given up hope of every begin able to say we love writing” (69). As Casanave suggests, learning to become a fluent writer is no small thing; gaining fluency offers writers a source of what Johnson describes as authorial pleasure, where writing is no longer solely associated with apprehension and frustration.

Most students cannot be expected to abandon deeply held and culturally embedded models like that of writing as transmission in a single semester. Such a process, it seems to me, requires a much longer period of enculturation and experience in writing in more social and collaborative settings. Moreover, it seems to me that helping students explore their identities (which include their beliefs, motives, and attitudes) as writers in academic and non-academic settings is a crucial step in learning to write. Casanave claims that, “[l]earning to write in academic settings is about change in ways of thinking, using language, and envisioning the self” (36). Metaphors for writing help reflect who we believe ourselves to be as writers and what we

believe about writing, thus encouraging meta-cognitive awareness in college writers and writing instructors.

As a new writing instructor reflecting on these metaphors and the way they operated as hidden ideologies in students' writing, the texts I taught, and my own pedagogy, I see missed opportunities in the auto-ethnography assignment for raising issues with my students about notions of orality in writing, bringing to light the performative nature of composition, and unsettling an embedded conceptual framework about communication (the Conduit Metaphor) by making it the subject of dialogue with the *social perspective*. In the next chapter, I address future implications for integrating these aspects more fully into the writing classroom.

## CHAPTER 4: ‘MIXING THE UNMIXABLES:’ A CASE FOR METAPHORIC COMPETENCE IN THE FIRST-YEAR COMPOSITION CLASSROOM

“Metaphorical imagination is a crucial skill in creating rapport and in communicating the nature of unshared experience. This skill consists, in large measure, of the ability to bend your world view and adjust the way you categorize your experience.” – George Lakoff and Mark Johnson,

*Metaphors We Live By*, 231

“Novel formulation comes by linguistic impropriety, mixing the unmixables, as the situation demands. And that is metaphor.” – Kuang-Ming Wu, *On Metaphoring: A Cultural Hermeneutic*,

36

My 18-month-old son, Will, sits on my lap in the living room of our townhome as he plays with his Playskool shape-sorting cube. He grasps an orange cylinder and tries to force it through the space where a triangle shape goes. He begins to grimace and fuss, frustrated that the shape he manipulates won’t go through the hole. I turn the blue cube for him and point to the round hole. He awkwardly slides the cylinder inside, holding on to it as he places it through, as if trying to remember the feeling or perhaps as if refusing to let go of his brief accomplishment.

Then, he grabs a green, crescent-shaped block and begins to cram it through a square hole. This time, I let him become frustrated and he throws the block and begins to yell. I pick the block up and show him how I can slide it through the rectangle shape (how I game the system). He opens the cube and dumps out the pieces he’s inserted. He grabs the rectangle block, a shape that he’s already become rather adept at inserting into the cube, and begins searching for the



hole. A few months later, I proudly watch him as he manipulates and slides the crescent shape through the rectangular hole.

The shapes of knowledge often change when we enter new situations; sometimes, they change in situations very familiar to us. If writers have only been equipped with a rectangular sort of knowledge of writing, then when they enter a situation that demands other shapes or forms of knowledge they are bound to become frustrated unless they can learn to “bend their world view,” as Lakoff and Johnson suggest in the epigraph above; that is, to see how the theories, assumptions, and attitudes they are holding need to be manipulated in different ways or discarded for new ones that fit the situation. In the absence of such strategies, we may simply revert to those forms of knowledge that we find most comfortable and most familiar. This is the situation in which many first-year college students and graduate students find themselves: They find the rules for writing they have lived with for most of their lives have changed and they must learn to adjust their worldview if they are to succeed.

At its essence, metaphor is about “mixing the unmixables” (Wu 36). When we create metaphor we synthesize old concepts into new combinations—these new combinations create new perspectives, new realities.<sup>23</sup> In *Writing Games*, Christine Pearson Casanave uses the metaphorical frame of games to discuss how various aspects of writing such as convention, power, expertise and writing as a social practice can be explained through this frame (2). She argues that, “frames of many different kinds and styles can help explain the same phenomena” (2). As discussed in Chapters Two and Three, learning to mix and manipulate metaphors gives writers access to different views of abstract concepts, particularly those in writing studies.

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<sup>23</sup> Wu quotes Nelson Goodman in *On Metaphoring*, stating that, “metaphor is ‘teaching old words new tricks’” (25).

Metaphors highlight and hide attributes of a concept (Lakoff and Johnson 10-13); that is, metaphors have latency—the capacity to move particular attributes of a concept into the background of meaning depending on the emphasis a writer or reader gives to a particular metaphor and the context in which it is used or interpreted. Metaphors also work as systems: thus, multiple metaphors are always at play in thinking and writing (Kovecses 121-141). The systematicity of metaphors supports the idea of mixing concepts and that the interwoven strands of metaphors form a web of meaning.

While some might argue that metaphor already plays a prominent role in composition classes (and I would not disagree with the claim in the sense that metaphor is a part of everyday language), I would argue that despite the significant attention the fields of linguistics (in particular, second-language teaching), philosophy and psychology have given to metaphor's role in knowledge making, the most recent scholarship elucidating the ways in which metaphor operates has yet to filter down to writing studies in a significant way. Interestingly, and perhaps ironically, the most prominent metaphor scholars in the field of writing studies are science and technical communication theorists (see Baake's *Metaphor and Knowledge* 2003; Giles' *Motives for Metaphor in Scientific and Technical Communication* 2008; and Eubanks' *Metaphor and Writing* 2011). These science and technical communication scholars' studies suggest that metaphor's value stretches beyond the literary and offers new college writers a way of making sense of the range of technical languages they encounter across the disciplines.

The purpose of this chapter is to argue that teaching toward metaphoric competence in first-year writing classes contributes to “habits of mind” deemed desirable in college writers, which include mindfulness, openness to learning, creativity, and meta-cognitive awareness

(“Framework for Success”). Metaphoric competence provides ways to operationalize these habits of mind and, thus, contributes to transfer of learning. As Kelly Gallagher writes in *Deeper Reading*, “when we teach students to think in metaphorical terms . . . we are also providing them with cognitive underpinnings they can use to make sense of the world . . . critical thinking skills that stay with them long after they have read the last book of the school year” (145). New college students are not the only ones to benefit from metaphor; more experienced writers also benefit from engaging and expanding their understanding of metaphor. As suggested by the case study in Chapter Two, my increased attention to understanding how metaphor works allowed me to better understand the problematic beliefs I held about college learners and added complexity to my conceptions of writing, teaching and learning.

### **Defining Metaphoric Competence**

A number of metaphor scholars have argued that writing instructors for various reasons have not allowed undergraduate students the same access to metaphor’s generativity that academic professionals have, in large part because they have a traditionalist view of metaphor; that is, they understand metaphor only as a product and not as a process, as a noun and not a verb, as a figure of speech not a figure of thought (Tobin; H. Miller; Peterson; Seitz; Low; Wu; Eubanks). As noted in Chapter Three, Hildy Miller’s study of college students’ uses of metaphor revealed that only a small percentage were even cognizant that they were using metaphor in their writing. A secondary issue is that college learners and their instructors often possess limited repertoires when it comes to metaphoric competence. Because many perhaps assume metaphoric competence to be a natural skill (one that cannot be taught), few students or teachers engage in

metaphor's full range of pedagogical possibilities. I contend that mindfulness, reflection, and mega-cognitive awareness are pre-requisites for transfer of learning. Metaphoric competence gets learners to mindfulness and meta-cognitive awareness. Research regarding meta-cognition supports this theory. Perkins and Salomon claim that the strategy of "bridging exploits the high road to transfer. In bridging, the instruction encourages the making of abstractions, searches for possible connections, mindfulness, and metacognition. . . .The instruction thus would emphasize deliberate abstract analysis and planning" (para. 33).

Most discussions of metaphoric competence primarily focus on second-language learners or learners with cognitive disabilities; few address metaphoric competence for its relevance for engaging disciplinary cultures and languages. As discussed in Chapter 1, scholars of metaphor have demonstrated that metaphor offers language learners a means of seeing the social constructedness of language. Without awareness of the underlying metaphors within particular disciplinary communities and their concomitant theoretical frameworks, it is my contention that writers are likely to struggle more with understanding, navigating and enacting a new disciplinary dialect and belief system.

In 1979, Howard Gardner and Ellen Winner suggested a number of strategies that might define metaphoric competence, including "the capacity to paraphrase a metaphor, to explain the rationale for the metaphor's effectiveness, to produce a metaphor appropriate to a given context, to evaluate the appropriateness of several competing metaphoric expressions" (126). More recently, in the 2008 edition of the *Cambridge Handbook for Metaphor and Thought*, Graham Low elaborates on the notion of metaphoric competence in second-language teaching. He lists

several strategies that he argues, “language learners need to do, but which they are rarely taught or exposed to in a classroom” (221). Low argues that these include the following:

- 1) Productively, speakers need to know how to use non-specific metaphor to ‘decouple’ from a narrative or conversational topic, in order to summarise it, evaluate it, withdraw gracefully from the argument, or simply change the topic.
- 2) Receptively, listeners need to be able to pick up on the previous speaker’s metaphor, use the knowledge of the target culture and discourse practices to guess what the speaker is implying, and choose to ‘run with’ the metaphor, extend it, or even close it down. *They need moreover to be aware of the implications of the strategy they themselves adopt.*
- 3) They need to recognise where style jumps take place, where speakers stop being metaphoric. They need to recognise where the speaker is extending or elaborating beyond conventional language and why.
- 4) Learners need to recognise where the speaker is avoiding a topic, or refusing to take responsibility (Lerman, 1983).
- 5) Lastly, they need to recognise when texts or speakers are operating simultaneously on multiple levels. (221, my emphasis)

Low acknowledges that the list above emphasizes “receptive” practices, as he is primarily interested in second-language learners. Understanding how to recognize metaphor and how it works represents critical steps in understanding the twists and turns of language.

However, I would argue that for college students learning in their native language, in particular, the emphasis should be more balanced between productive and receptive practices of metaphoring, gaining greater practical experience with how to employ metaphoring as a

rhetorical strategy and be mindful of the metaphors they use and their implications for their writing and communications. Even native language learners face difficulties in understanding ways of learning to communicate in new contexts, often because they bring already established ideologies about learning and communicating. In analyzing my use of metaphor as a graduate student in Chapter Two, I initially discovered that I employed several generalizable metaphoring strategies to compose in academic genres, which are consistent with theories of metaphoric competence. These tacit strategies included 1) identifying metaphors used by theorists; 2) unraveling the logic of a metaphor (in other words, identifying inconsistencies between the source and the target of the metaphor); 3) offering alternative interpretations of a metaphor; 4) extending a metaphor by offering additional entailments; and 5) generating, abandoning and obscuring metaphors. I contend that the metaphoring practices I engaged in mentioned in Chapter Two—for example, testing, elaborating and qualifying metaphors—were essential for enhancing my meta-cognitive awareness of my beliefs about writing. In my case, my meta-cognitive awareness about my writing beliefs and practices emerged from metaphoring. That is not to say that other practices or pedagogies might not encourage the habits of mind such as meta-cognitive awareness; however, because metaphoring requires interpretation, I argue, it readily encourages meta-cognitive reflection. More importantly, as Charteris-Black points out metaphor works best when it is a choice. Instructors empower students when we help them learn metaphoring as a strategy for discovering metaphors that align with their own experiences, rather than providing them with metaphors they may have no connection with.

Based on previous scholarship discussing elements of metaphoric competence for second-language learners (Gardner and Winner 1979; Lakoff and Johnson 1980; Kovecses 2002;

Holme 2004; Littlemore and Low 2006; Low 2008; Littlemore 2010), I have attempted to synthesize their findings into the abilities that I believe constitute a more comprehensive list of metaphoric competencies. These include the abilities to:

- 1) Identify metaphor in a variety of contexts and genres
- 2) Find the shared attributes of the target and source of a metaphor and locate hidden attributes that the target and source do not share
- 3) Interpret and analyze a metaphor's possible meanings and provide reasonable justifications for such meanings
- 4) Evaluate the aptness of potential metaphors for a particular rhetorical situation; i.e., when and how a metaphor may be appropriate or inappropriate for a target audience(s)
- 5) Develop a metaphor and provide reasons explaining the connection between target and source
- 6) Extend, elaborate, question and combine metaphors (see Kovecses 47-50)
- 7) Locate ideologies and beliefs suggested by a metaphor and be able to describe the metaphor's implications for action
- 8) Reflect on metaphors and evaluate and explain how they do (or may) influence or limit possible action(s)

Like many lists of competencies, the tasks included above might appear rather straightforward; tasks such as the matter of identifying a metaphor might seem simple though such an act is far more complicated. Low points out that “identifying a metaphor may not be simple or straightforward . . . [e]ven with adults, it is no easy task to arrive at a meaningful understanding of terms like ‘literal’ with language learners who are not budding linguists” (223). Moreover, it

requires writing instructors gain familiarity with metaphor beyond simplistic composition handbook definitions, which rely on a tradition comparison view of metaphor as a simple figure of speech.<sup>24</sup>

Though this list of metaphoric competencies is ordered numerically, I do not mean to suggest that these competencies develop in a stepwise fashion or are hierarchical. Moreover, the list doesn't take into account how well or how fully developed a competency might be for a particular writer. For example, a writer may be able to produce a metaphor and an explanation for it, but that explanation may not be well reasoned based on the relationship between the source and the target of the metaphor. The writing students described in Chapter Three were all able to produce metaphor and, in many cases, offer explanations (albeit often limited ones) for the metaphor they developed, with very little direct instruction (see Competency 5 in the list above). And, indeed, several of the students reflected on their metaphors and appeared to understand the limitations they entailed: for example, Brad's rejection of writing as a Hail Mary toss suggests he recognized that this view of writing prevented him from the time he needed to incubate ideas and receive feedback on his writing; Desiree's shift from writing as a chore to accepting the messiness of invention suggests that she had reconsidered the implications of her metaphor for her writing practice (see competency 8).

This competency list only begins to suggest the types of pedagogical activities and assignments that might be drawn from such competencies. For example, to operationalize competency number 7 (testing the aptness of a metaphor), one means of revealing metaphor's

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<sup>24</sup> Kovecses' *Metaphor: A Practical Introduction* provides one of the most comprehensive and most up-to-date overviews of conceptual metaphor theories. The text also includes practical exercises for learning metaphoric competencies described herein.



meaning-making function might be to identify a document and attempt to remove traces of metaphor. In his text titled *Deeper Reading*, Kelly Gallagher provides an example of a poem in which he removes key metaphors and compares a version of the edited text (with metaphors removed or written in less figurative language) with the original (128-129). The same approach might be accomplished by asking college writers to identify metaphors in a literacy narrative, a common first-year writing genre, that they have composed and ask them to replace them with alternate metaphors and testing its effects on readers (see Bronwyn William's "Heroes, Rebels, and Victims: Student Identities in Literacy Narratives" for analysis of student metaphors in this genre). Such an activity might help students begin to see the rhetorical choices writers make to appeal to a target audience and how particular metaphors might also exclude other readers. Moreover, it is an exercise in strategic revision.

In their essay titled "Metaphor, Science, and the Spectator Role: An Approach for Non-Scientists," Sunstein and Anderson provide a sequenced assignment involving metaphor analysis and creation in a technical writing environment. In this assignment, students identify a metaphor used to describe a scientific topic and analyze its efficacy for the concept being described. They provide an example of a student who was researching the problem of whether she should remove her son's tonsils and the battle metaphors physicians used to talk about the function the tonsils. Because of the analysis regarding the metaphor, the student ultimately decided against her initial impressions, which were to have her son's tonsils removed; this they claimed was based on her analysis of the battle metaphor used to describe the role of the tonsils. Such an example is suggestive of the type of meta-cognitive awareness that may develop as students evaluate the

assumptions and values they have made through the metaphors they and others choose to rationalize beliefs and decisions.

Fleckenstein also suggests that for writing teachers, metaphor is an effective pedagogical strategy for addressing substantive issues with radically different writing personalities—what she calls the “freestylers” and “formulizers” (110). In the case of Sue, the formulizer, Fleckenstein suggested she generate a metaphor for her paper topic (“getting braces is like going to jail”); then, she suggested she examine the relationships between the source and target of the metaphor (112). This allowed Sue to focus on developing ideas, instead of focusing on surface concerns. Fleckenstein described her second research subject, Karen, as a “freestyler”—a writer who treated the writing process as stream of thought, moving from topic to topic in her text. Fleckenstein suggested metaphor as an organizing strategy. She offers a four-item heuristic for developing, testing, and employing metaphor in a writing assignment (113).

Baake suggests that metaphor can yet play an instrumental role in translating the increasingly disciplinary and technical language of writing and rhetoric studies that instructors use to teach rhetorical concepts. He offers multiple metaphors for explaining the role of a thesis statement to students with different interests and backgrounds in a writing center context (14). In his essay “Metaphor in the Writing Center: How to Place Enthymemes in the Solar System,” Baake’s production of multiple metaphors supports the idea that both students and writing instructors need a cache of metaphors to help explain and understand concepts from a number of angles.

Finally, a list of competencies also suggests a means of assessing knowledge. In *Metaphors & Analogies: Power Tools for Teaching*, Rick Wormeli claims that metaphors might

also serve as an alternative mode of assessing the complexity of a student's understanding of a particular concept. Wormeli argues that, "when students create their own metaphors regarding content, they reveal what they understand about that content, often in a manner that expresses their level of proficiency more clearly than they could through other forms of assessment" (26). Wormeli provides an example of how a simple prompt can be altered to allow for metaphorical thinking and be designed to promote higher levels of cognition such as synthesis and evaluation (28). He also argues that assessments using metaphor are particularly useful for regular formative assessments (cf. Tobin; Burnham).

This list does not suggest a new battery of responsibilities placed on instructors; indeed, some students are likely to be competent in many of these areas already. As Catron suggests in "The Creation of Metaphor: A Case for Figurative Language in Technical Writing Classes," writing instructors should not think about metaphors or other figures as just another slot to fill in the curriculum or an added burden, but something that can be "incorporated" into the teaching of rhetorical concepts (70). A list of metaphoric competencies offers writing instructors and students is a way to identify gaps in competence and suggest pedagogical approaches that can be linked to more abstract goals of encouraging desired habits of mind such as openness to learning, flexibility, creativity, and meta-cognitive awareness.

### **Areas for Future Inquiry and Potential Research Applications**

One of the most intriguing aspects of this study, which almost appears as an aside, involves the idea that metaphors may reflect perceptions but not actual writing practices. The present research study suggests in small ways that this is unclear. One potential area for further inquiry would be

to address the following question: To what extent do metaphors shape writer's thinking and their writing practice? Low argues that, "people use conventional expressions because they exist and are used, not because they believe them" (224). For example, he suggests that just because a teacher uses the Conduit Metaphor, does not necessarily mean they believe that language works in the way it suggests, they are merely using a linguistic expression because of its commonness. However, some scholars such as Ellen Langer suggest that metaphorical conceptualizations do indeed influence beliefs and behaviors (see her text *Mindfulness* for examples from psychological studies of metaphorical framing and its affect on actual practice). The few studies that do exist on writing beliefs do not address the connection between metaphor and beliefs directly (White and Bruning). More studies need to examine whether metaphors do indeed reflect writing beliefs and whether those beliefs directly affect writing practice.

At the very least, the present study supports previous scholarship by reinforcing the potential transformative value for students (both undergraduate and graduate) when they reflect on their writing-related metaphors. Even in relatively brief writing activities, the students in this study demonstrated evidence that their conceptions of, their beliefs about, and their attitudes toward writing did become more complicated. Whether metaphor only serves to reveal such changes or serves as the catalyst for awareness of conceptual change is unclear.

Moreover, the present study also suggests that novice writing teachers may activate meta-cognitive awareness by analyzing the metaphors they use to describe themselves as writers, the metaphors they use to characterize students, and how they conceptualize what is possible in a writing classroom. Metaphor has been used extensively to study teacher's conceptions about teaching including pre-service teachers (see Gillis and Johnson; Efron and Joseph; Fischer and

Kiefer; Patchen and Crawford; de Guerrero and Villamil); however, only a small body of research examines student's beliefs and attitudes about reading and writing through metaphors (Tobin; Burnham; Paulson and Armstrong; B. Williams). Furthermore, metaphoric competence has been studied primarily as a means to understanding conceptual knowledge (Armstrong). Few studies examine whether metaphoric competence is connected to writing practice and writing quality. Researchers might ask the following: How much metaphoric competence do first-year writing students bring to the college composition classroom? To what extent does metaphoric competence shape a writer's practice? Or, more pointedly, does metaphoric competence affect or improve a student's writing quality?

Beyond examining students' metaphorical conceptions of writing, metaphor analysis might provide a useful methodology for comparing the ideological basis of writing programs with metaphorical linguistic expressions used by writing instructors in the classroom. In other words, what is the relationship between departmental outcomes for meta-awareness among college writers in first-year writing courses and the way writing instructors frame and operationalize these outcomes? For example, are students using metaphors of social construction to conceptualize writing at the end of a semester? Do they describe writing as a negotiation or as a conversation or as an interaction? By linking students' conceptual knowledge of writing concepts as revealed by their metaphoric conceptions with their writing quality, writing program administrators may be able to better understand the relationship between declarative and procedural knowledge.

Finally, more scholarship might be done to pinpoint pedagogical best practices incorporating recent conceptual metaphor theory. One of the most frustrating aspects of

researching metaphor in the present study was identifying best practices aimed at using metaphor to operationalize the habits of mind such as metacognition, openness to learning, creativity, and flexibility that the Framework for Success emphasizes for college learners. It is my hope that this thesis, at the very least, helps to begin suggesting resources for scholars and teachers interested in tapping into the transferability of metaphor to help their students and themselves find alternate approaches to learning and teaching academic writing.

APPENDIX: IRB APPROVAL LETTER



University of Central Florida Institutional Review Board  
Office of Research & Commercialization  
12201 Research Parkway, Suite 501  
Orlando, Florida 32826-3246  
Telephone: 407-823-2901 or 407-882-2276  
[www.research.ucf.edu/compliance/irb.html](http://www.research.ucf.edu/compliance/irb.html)

### Approval of Exempt Human Research

From: **UCF Institutional Review Board #1**  
**FWA00000351, IRB00001138**

To: **David T. Dadurka**

Date: **February 01, 2011**

Dear Researcher:

On 2/1/2011, the IRB approved the following activity as human participant research that is exempt from regulation:

Type of Review: Exempt Determination  
Project Title: Metaphors in FYC: Identifying Ideology through the Conceptual  
Metaphors Instructors and Students Use in the Composition  
Writing Classroom  
Investigator: David T. Dadurka  
IRB Number: SBE-11-07388  
Funding Agency:  
Grant Title:  
Research ID: n/a

This determination applies only to the activities described in the IRB submission and does not apply should any changes be made. If changes are made and there are questions about whether these changes affect the exempt status of the human research, please contact the IRB. When you have completed your research, please submit a Study Closure request in iRIS so that IRB records will be accurate.

In the conduct of this research, you are responsible to follow the requirements of the Investigator Manual.

On behalf of Joseph Bielitzki, DVM, UCF IRB Chair, this letter is signed by:

Signature applied by Joanne Muratori on 02/01/2011 03:06:31 PM EST

IRB Coordinator



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