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# Radical Reflection: Toward the Transformation of Everyday Teaching and Learning in English Composition

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RADICAL REFLECTION: TOWARD THE TRANSFORMATION OF EVERYDAY  
TEACHING AND LEARNING IN ENGLISH COMPOSITION

by

Royal Brevvåxling

A Dissertation Submitted in  
Partial Fulfillment of the  
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ABSTRACT  
RADICAL REFLECTION: TOWARD THE TRANSFORMATION OF EVERYDAY  
TEACHING AND LEARNING IN ENGLISH COMPOSITION

by

Royal Brevväxling

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2014  
Under the Supervision of Professor Anne Frances Wysocki

Education is a necessary component in the emancipatory transformation of current capitalist society, with its exploitative social relationships, to one which is based on promoting and supporting human growth and potential. A libertarian education, as Paulo Freire writes of it, “must begin with the solution of the teacher-student contradiction, by reconciling the poles of the contradiction so that both are simultaneously teachers *and* students” (*Pedagogy of the Oppressed* 59).

An additional impediment to developing education useful for this transformation is the separation of thought from action in educational theory and practice. The field of composition studies similarly operates according to its tendency to separate reflection from writing. While I find that compositionists intuitively know that reflection and action are best theorized as inseparable, our practices tend to separate theory from practice, writing from action, teachers from students, epistemology from ontology.

This dissertation is an extended consideration of what might result if we truly took seriously how thought and action (epistemology and ontology) can not and should not be separated and to posit a composition course that can support the conditions of this

transformed (unified) relation between these dichotomized parts of our existence. I ground this consideration in an examination of reflection as conceived in composition studies which, in its theoretical and applied treatments of reflection, often employs the dichotomy.

In order to rethink reflection in composition studies so that it is unified with action and writing, I argue for a deliberate refocusing of the field's attention toward enacting physical/institutional change, attention which is inordinately given to theorizing language and the power of rhetoric. The human agency in our social structures necessary for emancipatory change is enacted through the dialectical linking of this dual attention to conditions/structural change and language/power. My understanding of this dialectical necessity begins with Karl Marx's unified theory of consciousness, which does not separate thinking from action, and traces its development through the 20th and 21st century theorists who have also drawn upon it in efforts to effect emancipatory change.

For Molly, without whom all of this is meaningless,  
and whose support made it all possible

Flawed and Unsaintly since 2010

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Key Terms .....	1
Introduction .....	5
Chapter One.....	33
Notes toward a unified conception of reflection .....	33
Radical Love: On seeing people as people, dialectically .....	39
Chapter Two .....	49
Praxis .....	49
Marx’s unified theory of consciousness: Dialectics and the two forms of <i>praxis</i> .....	56
Critical Literacy, Ideology and Felt Dichotomies .....	73
Reflection as part of our social-being.....	92
Chapter Three .....	95
Reflection: an overview and genealogy .....	95
The missing ontology of the professional model .....	104
Dewey and Schön: Formative theories of reflection .....	108
Yancey’s chief concepts and recent scholarship: three parts of reflection in composition .....	128
Reflection-in-action.....	133
Constructive reflection .....	138
Reflection-in-presentation .....	140
Reflexivity: Working across levels of generality .....	145
A dialectical reflection: Toward the transformation of everyday teaching and learning .....	148
Chapter Four .....	151
A Teacher Study .....	151
Questioning My Previous Study: A Reflection .....	154
Radical Reflection: Reflexivity in College Composition Teaching and Learning.....	169
Respect .....	176
Free association .....	179
Mutual aid.....	187
Care.....	189
Dialogue as educational praxis: The pedagogy of radical reflection.....	195
Notes.....	204
Works Cited.....	215
Appendix A .....	236
Appendix B.....	239

Appendix C.....	241
Appendix D .....	245
Curriculum Vita.....	247

## Key Terms

I begin with a glossary to provide an initial understanding of terms that I return to throughout this dissertation. Because of the *dialectal materialism* (also included here in the key terms) that underpins my approach to my subject, I found it difficult to provide the definition of each term in its full significance as I was first using it. Instead, I rely on a recursive engagement with each term, adding more definition and understanding of its underlying linked concept(s) with each return.

Below, I start with my two main terms, the terms that ground all else in my dissertation; following these most important terms, all the others are presented alphabetically:

### **Radical love**

Radical love affirms (and continually reaffirms) seeing people *as people*, which means accepting them with all their inconsistencies and disparate values, through recognition of, and continual grappling with, their nature as beings-always-in-process in an ever-changing social reality.

### **Reflection**

A trope in composition studies used to bridge the gap between theory and practice; as a trope, its meanings persistently shift and adapt to each theorists' application. My argument builds to my own understanding of how reflection works as a way to enable full human development.



**Abstraction**

The way we think, in both a “common sense” mode and a dialectical one. Because we cannot hold the entirety of reality in our mind all at one time, we necessarily abstract parts “of the world” to work with as mental units. Dialectical abstractions hold a particular function in the way we think, as I initially explain in chapter 1 and return to in chapter 2.

**Anarchism**

Personal, political, and social philosophies of individual freedom acknowledging that all individual freedoms are only attained through the social improvement of all people everywhere. Within an anarchistic framework, a person can only be a free individual within a free society of other free individuals.

**Composition studies/Compositionists**

An educational field either perceived and treated as a “discipline” in its own right, with particular (but contested) scholarly areas of inquiry or as a sub-field of English studies and/or Rhetoric (itself sometimes seen as a sub-field of English studies). As I use the term, *compositionists* are people who contribute to the scholarship of composition studies, but may also be anyone who teaches writing courses regardless of disciplinary identity or academic position. I employ the terms in a *problematic* that allows me to designate a particular field of study to which my

dissertation contributes, and provides a more or less concrete subject from which to expand my perspectives.

### **Critical literacy**

The use of the social practices of reading and writing in the interrogation of other social practices.

### **Dialectic(s)**

A mode of thinking, of breaking the world into constituent parts, and a theory of how the parts interact. There are different forms of dialectics; I call the form I adopt here *dialectical materialism*.

### **Emancipatory Education**

Education that creates the conditions for full human development. An understanding of the emancipatory potentials of education is necessary for any realization of *anarchism*.

### **Felt dichotomy**

I have coined this phrase as a way to pinpoint moments when our feelings, our very bodily presence, do not match our lived reality. For some Marxists, what I mean by *felt dichotomy* might be included within the concept of estrangement or alienation, but I use it toward the development of a pedagogy of *emancipatory education*.

**Praxis/dialectical praxis**

Theory informing practice or vice versa is considered a *praxis*. A *dialectical praxis* is unified theory and practice. My conception of *dialectical praxis* includes the concepts of *radical love* and *critical literacy*.

**Social being**

A shorthand for defining the nature of humans as drawn from the philosophical writing of Karl Marx. Humans, as *social beings*, are constrained by our material reality while at the same time able to alter that reality. I argue in this dissertation that understanding this relationship as dialectical creates the possibilities for full human growth and development, furthering the goals of *emancipatory education*.

**Reflexivity**

For some, this term is synonymous with *reflection*. I use the term to designate a radical engagement with and assessment of the premises/framework of subjects near the end of this dissertation, but ultimately use a renewed sense of *reflection* instead.

**Radical love**

As the continual reaffirmation of people as people, I begin and end both this glossary and my dissertation with radical love.

## Introduction

In dialectical thought, world and action are intimately interdependent. But action is human only when it is not merely an occupation but also a preoccupation, that is, when it is not dichotomized from reflection. – Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (53)

Reflection in and of itself is not enough; it must always be linked to how the world can be changed. We reflect on our teaching so that we can create the conditions under which both teachers and students become aware of their own power of agency. – Stephen Brookfield (217)

We wonder, sometimes, at the end of the day, what we have accomplished, what we are doing here, merely teaching in colleges and universities while suffering surrounds us. But this is where we find ourselves. Through our critiques, our innovations in facets of administration, and our intervention in the lives of those forgotten if not demonized in society, we make a difference. – William Thelin, *Open Words*

Reflection remains an important concept with unstable meanings in the field of composition studies. Whether it is something we ask students to do in examinations of their own writing or learning, a programmatic imperative informing reflective cover letter or reflective essay requirements in portfolios, or used as an assessment tool, “reflection,” as a term with different uses and definitions, has become one of those necessarily uncontested concepts, much like “process” once was. Most often focused on students’ writing, in composition studies reflection becomes a way to understand and improve on student performance. In teacher education, reflection is about understanding and implementing what makes teachers into teachers or, at least, into the kinds of teachers that teacher educators are attempting to train. These are examples of reflection used in a program of technical rationality, or competency-based teacher education, in which the skills of effective teaching are presumed to be discerned and able to be taught.

Held out against various models of technical rationality are the models of the “reflective practitioner.” These are practitioners, teachers, who see that “reflection is less a noun than a verb and an adjective” (Phelps 152); these are teachers who attempt to engage student learning, to enact a pedagogy, by blending the “scientific methods” of their profession with the humanism required for true teaching and learning. Phelps continues: “It is simply the way they approach students or think about classroom designs or talk with other teachers—an inquiring stance or quality in their action rather than a thing in itself. [...] It is, as Janet Emig might say, ‘embodied theorizing’” (152).

Following Louise Phelps’ study of teachers in the writing program at Syracuse and my own at UW-Milwaukee, I would say that reflective teachers enact pedagogy ethically and rhetorically. But, in addition to saying something about kinds of teachers, teaching, students or learning, it is important to also note that reflection is currently an uncontested mantra because it is a tacit way to work the theory/practice split in composition studies and other education fields. As I discuss more fully in chapter 3, reflection is what compositionists use to overcome our dichotomous pedagogical approaches. I contend that how this split is worked—massaged, finessed—informs a disciplinary identity that is detrimental to teaching and learning in composition studies. In this dissertation, I examine the impact this way of approaching reflection has made on composition teaching and learning in numerous ways, which are laid out below.

First, I need to state that reflection for me is indeed the link between knowing and doing, between theory and practice, between students and teachers, between dreaming of something better and ensuring that the changes we can imagine are the ones we seek and work to enact. But I agree with teacher educator Stephen Brookfield and educational

theorist Paulo Freire, that “reflection in and of itself is not enough,” and that if “dichotomized from reflection,” our actions cannot be human, that is, our actions serve the goals of human emancipation. As with my teaching, I have approached reflection as a political act, one that locates the impetus for study in seeking improvements to the human condition.

Writing this dissertation is my attempt to make sense of my teaching and the reflective practices I have come to value both as a reflective teacher and through my writing program administrative work on portfolios with reflective requirements. But I have come to see that *reflection in and of itself is not enough*—and particularly in composition studies, where reflection has been sufficiently narrowed to limit its usefulness in the political acts of understanding *people in society* and has simply become an occasion for examining *a person's performance* in a professional setting. In my review of the major statements on reflection in chapter 3, I focus on certain philosophies of knowledge that form the ground of reflection in educational settings including composition studies, namely, those of John Dewey and Donald Schön. I am interested in exploring how these philosophers already presuppose a narrowed analysis, a constrained sense of what gets reflected on. This limited reflective practice sets up in its purview a narrowed delineation of the educational site (typically, the classroom). The conditions that perdure in college composition, its teaching, and the locations of its teaching, are impacted by more than what takes place in the classroom, in the act of writing or, as some compositionists see it, through the writing process. Yet these writers on reflection ground their references in the certain understanding that “writing is at the heart of education” (Hillocks, *Teaching*, xvii), and that reflective practice is text-based (Yancey,

*Reflection*, 5). Hillocks' and Yancey's claims for written reflection perform a disciplinarity, asserting expertise for compositionists and other writing experts across education fields; and yet, as I will explore in what follows, composition studies' claim-staking efforts not only undermine reflective practice, but they also help to ensure its diminished institutional status. Moreover, the textual claims notwithstanding, we shall see that both the grounds for interpretation of reflection (the philosophies) and the narrowed educational site have come to limit reflection's possibilities.<sup>1</sup>

I write at a historical and political conjuncture in which the de-professionalization of teaching occurs at the same time writing teachers continue their attempts to raise the status of writing in the university and so their claim to professional status. These are times when the U.S. Court of Appeals in Cincinnati has ruled that school teachers cannot make their own curricular decisions.<sup>2</sup> The conditions for classroom literacy learning in primary and secondary schools also obtain in college composition and, at an ever increasing rate, college education is being standardized and corporatized, reshaped in the new image of public education reform of Common Core after No Child Left Behind. Under the aegis of what is often called the "business model" of education administration, all school levels are taken up in large-scale attempts to control educational sites and make them more pliable to the needs of corporations and globalized capital. Unlike the tenured faculty of some now nearly mythologized past, who arguably once balanced research and teaching commitments, it is now adjuncts or "contingent faculty," often without benefits and with barely subsistence wages, who comprise 73 percent of the nearly two million faculty employed in higher education, teaching over half of all undergraduate courses at public colleges and universities.<sup>3</sup>

As Gary Rhodes and Sheila Slaughter make clear, the “political-economic context of higher education—whether global, regional, national, or local—is changing. So, too, the organizational sites, terms of academic employment, and nature of the professional workforce in higher education are being restratified, restructured, and reconfigured” to meet the needs of what they call “academic capitalism” (9). Compositionists are beginning to acknowledge the changes about which Rhodes and Slaughter write and to engage in local struggles against them—sometimes through union organizing. But we also need to develop a theory that links, following Rhodes and Slaughter, the “political-economic context” of composition teaching to the physical sites we inhabit. More than that, we need a method that enables both students and teachers to resist academic capitalism in efforts to ensure that education has as its subject the full development of human potential and not simply the emptied content of skills training for industry and, ostensibly, social and economic needs. In short, we need to pay enough attention, as Thelin says we do in the epigraph, to the “suffering” which “surrounds us.” But compositionists need to better understand how the human suffering and the needs of academic capitalism all work together.

What Thelin sets out for compositionists does not sit easily with those who already acknowledge widespread social inequity and seek large-scale social change, especially when contrasted with such efforts as The International Student Movement’s global education strikes (that began with a “Global Day of Action to Reclaim Education” on October 18, 2012). The strikes were endorsed by over 100 groups in 36 countries. The continuing efforts of the strikers, which were developed over social media networks, are democratic, “meaning direct participation from below as a basis for decision making



processes” (“International”). The demonstrations planned for the strike were meant to draw attention to budget cuts in education (generally part of wider economic “austerity” plans) and to proclaim the right to free emancipatory education for all (versus going further into personal debt to receive a corporatized education based on competition).<sup>4</sup> Efforts like these drawing attention to educational “reform” are also directed toward systemic social change and against the increased class stratification of our society.

Linking widespread economic policy enacted on behalf of a capitalist class to the lived daily experiences of students and the working classes, the position of the strikers stands in stark contrast to Thelin’s reflection on how composition teachers “make a difference”: aware that “suffering surrounds us,” compositionists offer “critiques,” *administrative* “innovations” and “interventions” on behalf *of others*. What this illustrates is how institutional constraints often bound attempts by compositionists (even those considered “academic leftists”) to act on the suffering surrounding us; this is further demonstrated by some prominent recent work in the field, especially in the sub-field of writing program administration (Brown, *et al.*; Rose and Weiser; see also the collection edited by Downing, *et al.*). Thelin’s statements are also indicative of the class position invoked by many in composition, with much of its scholarship illustrating the field’s turn to program administration; Thelin’s statements are also indicative of the stance many of us find ourselves taking in relation to students. This stance is often illustrated by the field’s prepositions: we tend to teach *to* and change things *for*, but less often find ourselves *with* both students and, increasingly, each other.

Looked at from some perspectives, such as Maxine Hairston’s now classic representation in “Diversity, Ideology, and Teaching Writing,” there would appear to be

much “in between” the site of composition teaching and the vast needs of a society and its political economy. Historically, perspectives like Hairston’s on college composition teaching see no correspondence between what goes on in the teaching of writing and what is involved in addressing socio-economic questions. While those adopting this perspective might admit “preparedness” or “improvement” of an individual for some future career goals, the attention to students’ literacy practices goes no further in that direction, instead historically focusing more on character development (Brandt).

Reinforced by notions of methodological individualism,<sup>5</sup> proponents of this view tend to separate their teaching from any clear assessment of our society at large, from, in other words, the wider scene of that teaching and what lies in between our teaching and the society at large.

But many of us teachers—reflective teachers—experience a disconnect between the projected aims of education and our students’ responses to them, between the projected aims of education and our own lived reality teaching them. I call this experience of disconnection a *felt dichotomy*: we understand, viscerally, that our social beliefs do not meet up with our teaching, our professional practice. A felt dichotomy occurs in teaching when students do not perform well in our assessments of their learning (and these assessments may even be premised on educational outcomes with which we may not even fully agree). We also experience a felt dichotomy when students enter into the designated educational space (the classroom, lab or studio) bored, disaffected, uninterested in matters of great interest to us and that we hold out to them as important; or, the mirror image of this response, when students uncritically accept classroom learning as a necessary (but often unwanted) experience, a means to (a socially

acceptable) end and match our enthusiastic gaze, perhaps a bit amused, because they know the “truth” of the game, but are willing to play along. Both of these responses are the curriculum we design and present to students as they actually *live* the curriculum: the first response registers a resistance to our curriculum or to schooling in general; the second a critical response buried underneath layers of ironic attitudes that both acquiesce to the way things are at the same time they resent the status quo. These responses represent some of the moments during which felt dichotomies can be tapped and interrogated; these are moments during which teachers and students feel, in many different ways, the disconnect between their attitudes toward and expectations of education and the actual educational site as they are experiencing it.

I have experienced these felt dichotomies teaching “basic” writing courses at four widely different institutions, from an urban community college and a large public research university to a private university and a fine arts college. While these students in “basic” writing at these different institutions are not different in ability and aspiration from those in general education and other first-year writing and research classes I’ve taught at those same institutions (as well as at another large public university and a for-profit college), these “basic” writing students are nonetheless often marked more by their previous educational experiences. Basic writing, as an institution within the wider institution of the academy, holds out the promise of access to higher education, while at the same time it stigmatizes those students who are tracked into it. Often the stated purposes and goals of basic writing (such as “preparing” students for college-level work) conflict with the wider perception of it and conflict with the attitudes of its teachers and many who are required to enter into its institutional apparatus. Basic writing often

becomes about viewing the students themselves as somehow “basic,” its purposes merely to “remediate” and “correct” both student writing and its writers, incorrectly describing the rhetorical situations such students negotiate with difficulty as “their problems” with reading and writing: “problems” becomes a label that is later ascribed to the students directly. This is a result of wider prevailing attitudes toward writing and learning in general, which rely upon mistaken notions of how writing and writers work, and which do not account for the economic, class and other social factors that typically make some students more prepared for college than others.<sup>6</sup>

In the early 2000s I designed basic writing courses, as an idealistic young liberal teaching three 5-credit courses a term at Minneapolis Community and Technical College (MCTC), located in the downtown of that mid-sized Midwestern city, in what I’ve termed a “curriculum awaiting diversity.” How I understood it at the time, and how I explained it in 2005 to my audience at composition’s largest professional conference in San Francisco, is that the basic writing curriculum supported the efforts of differently- and under-prepared students seeking entrance into certificate and Associate’s programs because it anticipated the needs of area students. The students were of historically (still) under-represented college populations, predominately black American, Hmong American, and Ethiopian immigrant. But there were also non-traditional students from various “white” populations, as well as college-age graduates from area high schools who found (or their parents and guidance counselors found) the tuition costs and completion rates more favorable at MCTC than those in the general colleges at the nearby state universities.<sup>7</sup>

Although many of the basic writing teachers at MCTC were assigned based on experience and demonstrable interest in “basic writing” as a discipline-specific focus, other teachers rotated in and out of these sections to fulfill service requirements and also because, strange as it seems to state all these years later, a 5-credit class frees up space in the intensely tight schedule of community college teachers, especially in terms of prep for those who would otherwise carry a teaching load of five 3-credit upper division writing and literature courses. (Of course, a 5-credit course is, or should be, a tremendous amount of work, but readers who have experienced these kinds of loads will understand where the relief might come in.) The differences in approach to the basic writing course were felt most acutely across these two lines of experience/interest and service/scheduling. This is not to say those teachers of the latter group were somehow unable to teach basic writing or were uninterested in developing useful pedagogy, but this does accurately draw a tension line, one which accounts for particular curricular decisions I discuss below. But in fact, even among experienced basic writing teachers there were profound differences in pedagogy; these differences manifested typically during portfolio assessment at the end of each term.

The curriculum for both the basic writing course and the mainstream first-year writing course were organized around readings about language use and issues of identity in language; these readings were thought by teachers to be of particular interest to ESL learners and speakers of “black English” (variously described as Ebonics, A.A.V.E. and other labels). Aspects of a shared curriculum were developed over time mostly through committee fiat (and the will of various department chairs). One salient feature of the shared curriculum, which perhaps most impacted teacher’s pedagogy, was the choice of a

common text. Often the most argued agenda item at curriculum committee meetings, the shared writing was typically a piece of literature and, in 2003, it was August Wilson's *Fences*.

Wilson's Pulitzer-winning play focuses on issues of race, class and gender. Its dominant theme, however, is how the protagonist, Troy Maxson, illustrates class ambition thwarted by white supremacist social structures in the 1950s U.S.: the play shows how historical realities of that period play out in the family life of a man with an otherwise decent working class job who wanted to be a professional ball player, but for reasons only alluded to, did not make the big transition from the Negro Leagues. Students resisted this text — as they resisted the curriculum at large — and in our faculty meetings it was stressed to us again and again that their resistance stemmed from our asking students to explore identity issues tied to language. This was illustrated to me the first week of class in fall term by in-class challenges from students:

“Why do you have us read characters who ‘speak black’?”

Which was rather the point, although I didn't fully understand its ramifications at the time. Other challenges that first week, however, questioned the curriculum's rationale and the social structure of schooling:

“How come all that we're told to read is by black authors but all the teachers are white?”<sup>8</sup>

“I'm tired of being told about the ‘black experience’ by white teachers and with writing that's supposed to represent ‘the black experience.’”

Within the liberal framework, this curriculum was sound, even progressive. I attempted to augment discussions of *Fences* with readings from *The Skin that We Speak*:

*Thoughts on Language and Culture in the Classroom*, an edited collection from education scholars and linguists with contributions that explored our curricular themes in numerous important ways. For example, the essay by Shuaib Meacham, expressly intended to address how efforts at “recruiting African American students to become teachers [...] will not be successful if the teacher education programs do not examine their attitudes toward Black English” (*Skin* 180), opens with the author directly stating the underlying problems (while appropriately referencing James Baldwin):

According to James Baldwin, the one predictable constant within the considerable chaos of American identity is that those things ‘Black,’ or of Black cultural origin, are at the bottom of the social order. The Oakland School Board’s Standard English Proficiency Program, by suggesting that Black language be used as an educative tool, an enhancement for learning, threw America’s common sense into turmoil. (181)

This “common sense” view holds that classes like those at MCTC are intended to inculcate students in standard, edited American English forms. Even while courses in this curriculum acknowledged the complexities of how students’ identities link with language and asked students to reflect on their own language use while attempting to honor students’ educational efforts to grapple with these complexities, the undeniable end goal was still to have these students demonstrate some mastery in the standard forms.

Much like many of the iterations of the curriculum in Oakland, in which students were instructed in Ebonics to understand standardized English forms (and, in a few of the better instances, some pedagogical approaches would use this relationship as a tool for students to reflect on both languages), the underlying premise was to increase student

understanding of the standard, edited American English. At MCTC, this included developing facility with academic argument and reasoning, again, expressed in standard American English. Students' reflective cover letters on their portfolios addressed their concerns with achieving this facility, with some discussion of how students intend to maintain it in future courses and in other parts of their lives. In essence, the reflective letters functioned as arguments, the writers attempting to convince readers of their accomplishments and encourage the reviewers to read the portfolio contents in positive ways. As Julie Jung notes, "when written and read within contexts of high-stakes assessment, all reflective writing is, in fact, rhetorical argument—discursive appeals targeted to external audiences for specific purposes" (629). These appeals in the form of cover letters at MCTC were also often lacking rhetorical nuance, being rather bald-faced attempts to pass a course, and they did not offer the kinds of demonstrations of growth suggested by the *reflection-as-concept* in educational philosophy, wherein "reflection" is believed to further the actual learning of students in such courses. "Actual learning" in composition, I suggest, is when writers are able to *knowingly* accomplish tasks, such as engaging the rhetorical situation of portfolio cover letters, while understanding why doing so might be important—or not important—and making choices based on a careful consideration of what is at stake for them in doing so. This is not to say the cover letters of "knowing" writers are effective or even "good" in the estimation of portfolio reviewers; it's to state unequivocally that what *matters*—what should count—in the educational scene of a composition class is not the "quality" or "character" of the writing produced in it so much as what the writers understand about their writing and about how writing works more generally.



At MCTC, and across most educational settings, the kinds of reflection requested of students often do not adequately account for their lived reality. The curriculum does not account for the felt dichotomies such attention to language and identity are bound to bring to the fore, and the curriculum fails to account for students' (and everyone's, especially we teachers') human potential. The curriculum at MCTC was buried behind the true power of literacy—of particular literate practices—behind what I call composition's latent idealized perspective on language. This latent perspective is when compositionists reserve a perspective of literacy as an almost inherent good, rather than detail how the material impact of literacy changes from one person to another, from one historical period to the next. I discuss in detail composition's idealized perspective on literacy in subsequent sections. At MCTC, the overarching problem was that the curriculum worked to ignore *how* language is valued among students—and, I argue, the faculty and staff—by focusing solely on students' language use; the intent was to change students' language use to fit academic standards, to the detriment of examining this language use in *dialectical relation* with other uses and in relation with other lived realities comprising students' subjectivities.

These lived realities include the socio-economic concerns which obtain in capitalist society, students' personal uses and values of and for educational achievement, and the complex ways any of this gets represented in language, if at all. Chief among the various reasons why any critical educator's pedagogy might fail in a curriculum such as the one at MCTC (even with attentiveness to students' backgrounds, concern for the encroaching economic changes of *neoliberalism*, and awareness of current scholarship in the field on basic writing) is that conditions necessary for students and teachers to

become more fully human were not met, or even addressed in their full implication.

These conditions are *respect, free association, mutual aid* and *care*.

I believe that attention to these conditions— *respect, free association, mutual aid* and *care*—is necessary for an emancipatory education to flourish.

If we are to create those conditions, I will argue that reflection must be understood as part of a *dialectical praxis*. Dialectical praxis includes (as I will also argue) *radical love* and *critical literacy*.

Because I am an educator and an anarchist, one of my goals in this dissertation is to discuss how these conditions are necessary for emancipatory education. The reason I have organized this dissertation around the concept of reflection is two-fold: 1) theories of reflection within composition's liberal education framework have consistently masked the radical epistemologies necessary for emancipatory education, and 2) reflection, when put into its dialectical relationship with action (practice, writing, etc.), is part of a process of acting to change the world, of reflective practitioners seeking the fullest possible understanding of the world and what it means to be in the world. That is, reflection is a necessary component of emancipatory education, if, following Paulo Freire, it is not dichotomized from action. I think of *emancipatory education* as a model which seeks not only to improve the life-chances of its participants (which for many educators is about job attainment and/or increased citizenship abilities) but that also, in Freire's words, seeks to engage participants "in the ontological and historical vocation of becoming more fully human" (*Pedagogy* 66). Education, in this sense, encompasses the skills training and the credential-getting efforts of both *neoliberal* and more traditionally-oriented liberal education and firmly sets the radical subject of people knowing and fully

developing themselves as the primary subject of all education.<sup>9</sup> To be fully human is “to be the critical and creative producers of our conditions of existence, our societies, ourselves and our destinies” (Allman and Wallis). Becoming more fully human is a never-ending personal and social project; we struggle each day to link our thoughts and our sensuous activity to the creation of a reality which in turn fully supports us (our thoughts and sensuous activity). As the Marxian adage goes, people aren’t only born, we are also made; hence the critical project of emancipatory education seeks to interrogate the social factors which shape people while also increasing our awareness of how seeking to change these also requires us to seek certain changes in ourselves. For my part, I have been slow to change and to seek the social changes which would provide the greatest possibilities for all of us. But I have, over the course of many years as an educator and a learner, made radical changes to become more fully, but never yet entirely, human.

I am partner to a woman with whom I raise three kids: one kid is biologically mine, one hers and another adopted from Guatemala by my partner and her former spouse. We believe in urban public education in Milwaukee, a city with an education system that’s been a fertile testing ground for various privatization models: voucher and choice schools, mayoral takeover attempts and ALEC-written legislation meant to stymie true working-class educational reform and further the business interests of members of the Metropolitan Milwaukee Association of Commerce. My partner and I came of age in the era of Reaganomics and of waning working-class political power, yet we are a product of working-class parents. (Her father was also an academic, a professor of history raised in Louisville by Jewish owners of a hardware store. Their one employee was Cassius Clay, Sr.) My mother and father graduated from high school but never pursued

more education. My father was a cook at the Brainerd (Minnesota) Regional Human Services Center (a state-operated mental institution formerly referred to by people in the surrounding community as “the State Hospital”) and a proud member of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME); I would later become involved in union organizing and was voted co-president of an American Federation of Teachers (AFT) local of graduate employees. My mother worked a slew of low-wage jobs and ran two businesses over the course of her working life. An unpublished poet, she instilled in me *a way to value* reading and writing, which sustained me through my own seemingly endless stream of working-class jobs.

My partner and I were raised without money, but with access to differently valued forms of cultural and social capital, forms now increasingly denied to American youth with backgrounds similar to ours. Certainly, our age and aesthetic sensibilities have contributed to a DIY, “punk rock” ethos which informs our political beliefs and our hopes in a just future for our children, unfettered by capitalist exploitation. But I have also traveled a long road of political birth and rebirth, entering a process of discovery which had me question foundational beliefs (the trappings of American working-class nationalist pride) to further shape other beliefs I long held and knew to be true, and which are now represented in that list of conditions—anarchist principles—I feel necessary for emancipatory education. Here is my brief intellectual history: my earliest ideas of schooling which informed my once burgeoning class consciousness were trampled through years of menial labor; I later returned to college and graduate school in quick succession, where I began a lengthy stay at the intersection of (feminist) rhetorics and poststructuralist thought. This was followed by an even longer engagement with

academic Marxism and then the new birth of working-class consciousness further reinforced by my now fourteen years working as a teacher; this is when the allure of scientific certitude in what passes for historical materialism in scholarly circles was finally dulled. Unlike classical Marxism, which seems content to merely explain the inner workings of capitalism, I seek to locate anarchist approaches within Marxist understandings of consciousness and pedagogy. I call these “working class,” “bottom-up” approaches, “anarchist” being somewhat of a catchall term that I will unpack throughout, but which here stands for anti-authoritarianism and “for the spirit of revolt, in whatever form, against everything that hinders human growth” (Goldman, “Anarchism”).

Others are exploring activist approaches within bureaucracies, in work such as Linda Adler-Kassner’s *The Activist WPA* and Brian Beabout’s piece on “liberatory principals” and administrators. While I applaud such work for what it attempts and for the insights it has provided me, I firmly believe it is misguided, as it comes from “the wrong direction” (being from “the top down” and not “the bottom up”). My own work on the administrative level with activist school board members in Milwaukee Public Schools (elected members like Jennifer Morales and Larry Miller) has been both inspiring and frustrating, challenging me to further refine my own anarchist, working-class positions and further clarifying how management strategies of “working within the system” are simply premised on the wrong ontological ground. To further illustrate these differing premises, I am reminded of the famous feminist scholar who, during my graduate course work, announced to a seminar room that she is “training managers” and questioned the union organizing efforts of the graduate students present. In contrast, I see my work with students, with fellow teachers, with these and all workers, as one and the same. I do not

differentiate between my and their social positions: I see us all engaged in the same processes together. As I discuss in chapter 4, I tap the authority vested in my position as teacher from a different ontological stance, one that grounds teachers and students together. This is the same way that worker education is approached within an organizing framework: information is shared and new concepts are introduced among equals.

I have unabashedly used the phrase “working class” here as a shorthand for my past educational experiences and as a way to suggest a political orientation and philosophical underpinning. For some, such as my professor in a course on class and composition studies (in which we read essays by Jean Anyon, Jennifer Siebel Trainor, Donna LeCourt and David Borkowski, among others) one’s class positions are alluded to in statements such as “I only eat organic” (the professor’s suggestion) which is presumably a way to indicate these matters as expressions at the intersections of economics and taste in a sort of Bourdieu-ian matrix in which the *habitus*, or how we live and speak material differences, somehow says more than what are presumed to be rigid delineations in phrases like “middle class” (organic food eaters?) and “working class.” But I use the phrase politically, rhetorically; the value in such terms is to indicate above all else solidarity among those with similar amounts of social control. As Borkowski states, citing David Harvey, “combining ‘production and distribution in the context of class relations’ [...] determine[s] the amount of temporal and spatial control one has over one’s life and that power, or lack thereof, drives class relations” (121). That Borkowski never maintained this control for himself, at least not until he became a tenure-track assistant professor, is why he considers himself “working class.”

My pedagogy and identity as a compositionist are informed by my long-standing belief and membership in the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), an anarcho-syndicalist union that seeks more than the contract renewals and promises from capitalist owners that the “business” unions seek; the IWW seeks the very “abolition of the wage system,” as its watchword proclaims. Members of the IWW are called “Wobblies,” and they have a storied past of direct action based on anarchist principles and libertarian-communist ideals. As a Wobbly, membership number X370793, I bring certain understandings and values to the educational process which are at odds with current practices and scholarship, particularly in composition studies, where managerial theories and the postmodern primacy of the fractured individual and the “local” have created dystopian conditions stifling to the emancipatory project (see Bousquet; McGee; McNally; Peeples; Scott and Brannon). Looked at from across large scholarly trends, composition has stalled in that moment just past questioning totalizing narratives and is mired in the politically stifling postmodern malaise. While poststructuralists increasingly turn their attention back to theories of class to further explain their insights (Sonu), others who have always struggled to see the dialectical relationship between the personal and the social continue, in the words of Gilles Deleuze, “to love the insignificant, to love what goes beyond persons and individuals [...] and find a language in the singularities that exceed individuals, a language in the individuations that exceed persons” (139-40). As I continue to explore throughout, these postmodern theories are premised on the ideals of liberal education but in actuality work to support neoliberal, *i.e.* reactionary, conservative agendas.

In what follows, I will draw my arguments from a different historical tradition of anarchist thought and education theory; this thought and theory puts people, and their continued development, at the forefront of composition studies at the expense of the “profession” but also at the expense of some of our other dominant tropes, such as democracy and citizenship in a liberal state, and seeking local solutions to systemic problems. In doing so, I propose a radical pedagogy capable of surmounting felt dichotomies in order to “feel the reality of knowledge” freed of ideological valences and the distance of alienation (Hoggart 229, qtd. in Borkowski 117). In this proposition, I locate in “basic writing” the nexus for all that is possible in composition studies, as the ideologies of and on language, as well as those of race, gender and class, are at their most apparent there. In basic writing courses we continue to see a burgeoning “underclass,” those trapped in the “gate below the gate” (Shor, “Our”).<sup>10</sup> Seeking the advantage of the dispossessed and seeing in their eyes the mirror of our professional identity are the surest ways to both advance an emancipatory educational agenda and be certain of some semblance of a touchstone. In my experience, those participants in the institution of “basic writing” have been perhaps the most resistant to traditional language instruction while, at the same time, the most open to radical critique of the authorized uses and values of language. As I explain in subsequent chapters, the scholarship on basic writing, as with its corollary “urban education” (which designates pedagogy most effective for those othered in language identity, race, gender and class) actually presents the only viable approach to emancipatory pedagogy, including (and especially) for the mainstream, so-called “middle class,” white, privileged students. Until the conditions of respect, free association, mutual aid and care are fully reached, teaching practices which do not



reproduce the status quo relations will be counter-hegemonic and subject to scrutiny and challenge not just by those whose interests are often seen as more aligned with this maintenance, but also by the students in many such classes, at least at first—and, importantly, in different ways. As Roger Simon observed, pedagogy “represents a version of our own dreams for ourselves, our children, and our communities. But such dreams are never neutral; they are always someone’s dreams and to the degree that they are implicated in organizing the future for others they always have a moral and political dimension” (372).

### **Overview and further definition of key terms**

This section contains a roadmap that lays out the remaining parts of this dissertation.

Chapter 1 is a conceptual map in the form of notes to suggest the “elsewhere” of my conceptualizing, of the philosophy informing my pedagogy. Deleuze notes that, “You have to present concepts in philosophy as though you were writing a good detective novel: they must have a zone of presence, resolve a local situation, be in contact with the ‘dramas,’ and bring a certain cruelty with them. They must exhibit a certain coherence but get it from somewhere else” (141). Similarly, in chapter 1, I discuss how I treat *radical love* as the source for the coherence of my thinking. Radical love is the beginning and end point in everything that went into this dissertation.

In chapter 2, I set up my assertion that reflection is best understood as a dialectical concept and link it to the critical project, the “vocation of becoming more fully human,” discussed above. I then move to a discussion of *praxis*, and of the distinction between its two forms, reproductive praxis and dialectical praxis. One form reifies the inorganic

conditions of the status quo, “reproducing” how we see and how we are in the world, while the other supports organic conditions and informs changed understandings. I draw on educational theorist Paula Allman who in my opinion has offered the best descriptions of *praxis*. I rely on the concept of *dialectical praxis* as a way of understanding the relationship between reflection and action, theory and practice, epistemology and ontology, through Karl Marx’s theory of consciousness, which sees that the nature of the relationship between all these is best understood as inextricably linked. Theorizing humans in this “inseparable unity” is the basis for Marx’s concept of our *species-being*, a term also defined in chapter 2 and used conceptually throughout the rest of the dissertation. I will also use other terms to signify dialectical praxis, including “revolutionary” and, my preference, “radical” praxis.<sup>11</sup> Many educators may alternatively use the phrases “critical praxis / practices” to describe concepts similar to dialectical praxis; it is my hope that readers will come to see why the revolutionary and radical terms designate concepts which encompass, and lead to better explanations of, what these educators might mean when invoking the term “critical.”<sup>12</sup>

I next provide in chapter 2 a deeper description of the conditions that make emancipatory education possible, and I expand on the three related parts, introduced above, of radical praxis:

1. materialist dialectics
2. radical love
3. critical literacy

Here, because discussion of the *conditions* does not follow description of this radical praxis until the last chapter, I feel it is important to provide some more clarity about my

“mode of presentation.” One might reasonably question why descriptions of human practices are set out before any description of a Burkean *scene* which informs them (as based on the literary and rhetorical theories of Kenneth Burke). I consider this a composing choice. The cause for this difficulty is simple, but overcoming it is not—dialectical conceptions do not allow for any dichotomizing, nor easily provide a point for privileging some parts over others—and the necessity of describing the parts of our social reality in relationship to their totality runs the risk of obscuring the distinctions in both. But I will make every effort to signal what might feel a bit like a sea change when I move from one aspect to the other; I am guided, in this difficulty, by the similar attempts of other writers.<sup>13</sup>

My experiences teaching from an anarchist or libertarian communist philosophy inform my discussions of the conditions for emancipatory education and provide rationale for the education I discuss in this dissertation. While there are many “Marxists” in education (and composition studies is one supposed bastion for principled, left-leaning philosophical positions at least in perspective, if not in actual practice) those who share my particular philosophical underpinnings are sorely missing, at least in public sentiment, from the field. There are many union organizers and other advocates for reforms in educational practice or public policy whose activism looks more like the work of *educators in cultural action*, as I describe this in chapter one, and there are others whose work tends to dichotomize their teaching from their political conviction and any related action. Among this last group, sadly, have been many of my colleagues at numerous educational institutions across two U.S. states: there are those who teach but bracket off any political implication of their teaching and there are also those who teach *and* take an

active role in political or community justice organizations but see these as separate positions requiring different actions. Much of my thinking around reflection in composition has been informed by this latter group of colleagues' dichotomous actions and I hope to address them here with my writing, in part, hoping they will reflectively and reflexively analyze their positions and join me in the transformation of everyday teaching and learning. Others in composition have shown different possibilities to me, such as the experiences of Bill Hendricks, Seth Kahn and Steve Parks, whose published remarks but also undocumented comments about negotiating the stress of making teaching and activism *unified work* have inspired me.

I do not take up distinctions historically made in composition studies between supposed "types" of compositionists, such as the teachers, scholars, researchers and so on that Stephen North delineates or the pedagogical paradigms drawn by James Berlin (*The Making of Knowledge* and "Rhetoric and Ideology," respectively); however, the comments I just made regarding colleagues indicate that I do see certain tensions at work, namely between those who primarily teach and those who teach and theorize composition studies. I address this tension in chapter 4, as linked to my notion of *felt dichotomies*, a concept I develop in chapter 2, and as premised on description of the conditions I believe are necessary for emancipatory education in composition. As introduced in earlier and discussed more fully in chapters 2 and 4, these conditions are:

1. respect
2. free association
3. mutual aid
4. care

These conditions are anarchist principles, created as much by the radical praxis I argue for as they work to support this praxis. This mutuality is a key feature of materialist dialectics, as I hope to make clear in chapter 2. The concept of dialectics, as Marx understood it and as expanded upon by various education scholars, is central to understanding the approach to reflection I argue is necessary for the full realization of emancipatory education in composition studies. Because materialist dialectics examines all of social reality as linked processes, some folks in education fields seem to have difficulty allowing for dialectically constructed arguments, perhaps seeing them as straying too far from their fields of expertise. In addressing this, I am guided by the efforts of Marxist education theorists, such as Stanley Aronowitz, Peter McLaren and Paula Allman, whose work I discuss at length in chapters 1, 2 and 4.-

As I review above, there is a point of conflict between dialectical analysis and its exposition, which continues when I begin discussion of dialectics in chapter 2, as I am immediately presented with the challenge of definition and of separating out a useful history from a philosophical concept 2,500 years old. However, it is important to reiterate that what I am after in chapter 2 is not a full history of dialectics. I set out an understanding of materialist dialectics on which to premise a meaningful discussion of *reflection* and in order to explicate how it informs notions of *critical literacy* and *radical love*.

After the exposition on dialectics and praxis, I continue chapter 2 with discussion of critical literacy, linking all these to radical love as introduced here and discussed more fully in chapter 1. For a fuller understanding of critical literacy, I interrogate a conception

of three literacies I see operating in composition studies (as well as across most education settings), which I describe as basic, reproductive, and critical literacy.

In chapter 3, I examine how composition studies currently approaches reflection, contrasting its understandings with alternatives which would support an emancipatory education—for both students and teachers. I organize my discussion of reflection in the field around the theories of *reflection in the professional domain*, as explained in Kathleen Yancey's *Reflection in the Writing Classroom*, one of the key historical texts from which most theories of and approaches to reflection continue to build upon or detract. Chief among these is the concept of “reflection-in-action” which Yancey developed from Donald Schön's work on reflection. I discuss Schön's work as an extension of John Dewey's, who remains one of the primary theorists of reflective thought drawn on in education studies and the fountainhead for Schön's life-work on reflection.

In chapter 4, the conclusion of this dissertation, I weave current and possible practices together in order to describe “a composition classroom” that is able to draw upon materialist dialectics to create the conditions that support a radical praxis and thus an emancipatory education. This is not a classroom in which I have ever taught (nor has anyone else, that I am aware) although I know many whose pedagogical practice approximates what is necessary for the realization of such a class. What I intend to designate with this “composition classroom” is an open model for us all to access, adopt, adapt and from which to build on the principles for emancipatory education so that together we can transform everyday teaching and learning in composition studies. I use discussion of what I consider the conditions necessary for emancipatory education as the

way to organize my descriptions of this composition classroom. In pulling together possibilities for such a classroom, I draw from many sources inside and outside composition studies, and I also refer back to my discussion of Schön and Yancey in chapter 3. I also embed in chapter 4 a critical reflection on work in an earlier iteration of my dissertation, which had a different title, different premises, and a different expected outcome.

While perhaps not the best example of radical reflection as I hope it might take textual form, my earlier, unfinished dissertation sets the ground for my work here; it set me on a difficult path to rediscover what I think matters in scholarship and teaching.

## Chapter One

In this chapter, I define *radical love*, which is the beginning and end point for me in teaching.

### Notes toward a unified conception of reflection

This dissertation addresses what I, its author, consider “revolutionary composition pedagogy.” Just how revolutionary, or “radical,” or even “critical” it ultimately will be is up for debate, but I write here openly of my intent. As a composition teacher and writing theorist (a “compositionist”) I seek the transformation of everyday composition teaching and learning for the purposes of emancipatory education. I do this as part of the critical project to provide people—all people—the opportunities to express, grow and develop themselves according to their own needs and desires and in accordance with the realization of others’ needs and desires. These efforts are part of a process that Brazilian educator Paulo Freire has described as “becoming more fully human.” I write in an effort to understand the ways in which *reflection*, as a dominant trope in composition studies, shapes writing pedagogy and how to best change the practice of reflection so that it is better suited to emancipatory goals. Within the identity of a compositionist, I have always seen myself as a teacher first. But I also do not encourage, in fact I oppose, any easy and unnecessary distinctions among “teacher,” “scholar/intellectual,” and “activist” (whether as a union organizer, educational “reformer” or some other type).

Following upon my opening Glossary and the work of the Introduction, I can now expand upon my key terms and so offer my conceptual approach to my subject. I begin at



the end, which was also my beginning, and at first glance is seemingly quite far from reflection in composition: I begin with the dialectical praxis of “radical love.” As the impetus and *raison d’être* for my investigation of reflection and for my writing, radical love is what led me to seek change in how compositionists theorize and practice reflection; therefore, I see it as also the beginning and conclusion of this dissertation about reflection. The practice of radical love is drawn out of, and expanded from, the work of Jesús Gómez, primarily in *El Amor en la Sociedad del Riesgo*, in which he describes exercises in communication and dialogue “linking love to equality” (154). Other educators, such as Lilia Bartolomé, have drawn upon Gómez’s work to better “understand the ideological and political dimensions of caring” (“Authentic Cariño” 3). The concept of “care” informs both a mindset and an approach to the educational site as discussed by educators such as Nel Noddings, Angela Valenzuela and Patrick Camangian. As I use it, radical love enables teachers to work through deficit models of education, such as those still dominant in “basic” or developmental writing instruction. And radical love furthers the critical project by guiding us to treat people always as people—but with an awareness of the historical and political challenges which face us all in trying to do so.

In this dissertation, I argue that radical love is a necessary part, with critical literacy, of a *dialectical praxis* that transforms *reflection* as currently theorized and invoked in composition studies. The role of radical love in this *praxis* is informed by a particular form of reflection—*reflexivity*—which has been the subject of numerous scholarly discussions but which has never approached widespread acceptance in the field of composition studies. The self-referentiality of these concepts as I have just laid them out—reflection, informed by radical love, informed by reflection-as-reflexivity—is

rendered more sensible through Marx's theory of social consciousness, which itself informs various iterations of *materialist dialectics* and of *praxis*. Dialectics, as I discuss in more detail in chapter 2, is "an abstraction intended to help explain the messy and sinewy web of concrete social life and to offer a way of overcoming its contradictions" (McLaren, *Che*, 189). Dialectics provides critical frameworks for the analysis of mutually informing phenomena. Even though relational theories, including dialectics, have become quite common in English studies and in schools of education, I specifically adapt the materialist dialectics of Karl Marx to the work on reflection in composition studies (see Harvey, *Justice*, specifically chapter 2; Knoblauch, "Rhetorical"; Au, "Vygotsky" and "Epistemology"). I treat compositionists and composition students in various abstractions of their reality with the understanding that our "concrete" reality is a lot messier and much more "sinewy." Each abstraction is but one slice or segment of the overall reality of composition studies. Marx would describe our concrete reality "not as a chaotic notion of an integral whole, but as a rich aggregate of many conceptions and relations" (*Critique* 293). So, while we all abstract from our concrete reality those parts with which we can work, these parts often only represent a patchwork, something we come to consider "an integral whole" but which in fact is not. I have been using the term "abstraction" here following Bertell Ollman's description, in which he locates in Marx's writing the process of abstraction in three "modes": extension, level of generality and vantage point ("Putting"). In chapter 2, I explain each of these modes in more detail, along with Marx's dialectical theory of consciousness. Here, let me state that Ollman recognizes how Marx's theory begins with the understanding that we all abstract partial understandings from reality in our thinking, but that we often do so without knowing that we are or are

not fully acknowledging the partiality. Materialist dialectics seeks to account for this partiality, to develop better ways of abstracting and of relating the abstractions to each other.

For me, it is important to note that I draw not on “Marxist theory,” per se, but on *my* reading of *Marx’s* theory of social consciousness, because what I have read in my own study of Marx’s texts leads me to an *anarchist* approach to and understanding of human existence. This runs counter to my sense of 20<sup>th</sup> century Marxism in its various forms, such as Marxist-Leninism (with its emphasis on a “vanguard” of revolutionary leaders) and the abomination of Stalinist communism (an authoritarian and reactionary perversion of dialectical materialism). While Mao’s materialism and explanation of contradiction shares some correspondences with my understandings of Marx, his statism and the history of revolutionary China are less than inspiring sources for theories of emancipatory education. Here, I claim a particular kind of lineage which argues for a different trajectory of Marx’s philosophical theories apart from where many others have taken his political and economic writing. Marx’s philosophical writing informs his political and economic writing, and the latter also further clarifies—and demonstrates—the philosophical forms of Marx’s work. In chapter 2, I attempt to focus on the philosophical aspects of Marx’s dialectical materialism as explanations of human beings and our society. Many of the theorists I draw on to help shape my understanding of dialectical materialism would likely not call themselves “anarchist”; however, I read these theorists as extending Marx’s insights to emancipatory education according to their own analyses and in ways suited to our time, and to what seems, at least, a shared understanding of dialectics.

I claim that seeking the *unified* human consciousness of non-dichotomized thought/feeling, epistemology/ontology and so on is the goal of anarchism. In my study, the theory of this unified consciousness within Marx's dialectical materialist framework is quite clear. What might be called into question is whether I am bringing an *anarchist* understanding of social relations *to* my reading of Marx or if I am developing an anarchist understanding *from* elements within Marx's theory of consciousness. And I am not actually certain: it is probably both. This is the kind of question that requires more than the eight years of study I have already put into understanding the materialist dialectic and anarchism, with results of that work discussed in chapter 2, and it would necessarily be the subject of new work on my part. But what I have been able to do in subsequent chapters is bring Marx's unified theory of social consciousness and my anarchist principles collectively to bear on transforming reflection in composition studies. And, while it remains a future project and outside of my scope here, I can offer one more consideration on this point: Although there were hotly contested issues between Marx and the anarchists of his age, Marx's vision for *a human society* had what is called "anarchism" as its goal, even though a great many distinctions and deliberate misinterpretations of anarchism persist.<sup>14</sup> As Alexander Berkman remarks, in *Communist Anarchy*, "the greatest teachers of Socialism—Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels—had taught that Anarchism would come from Socialism. They said we must first have Socialism, but that after Socialism there will be Anarchism, and that it would be a freer and more beautiful condition of society to live in than Socialism" (2). I say *a human society* here because it clearly suggests what anarchism is about and is in contrast with other visions of society that people have proposed, visions represented by phrases such as

*a just society*. The concept of “justice” is premised on liberal visions of social order, which include a system of laws supported by the state and which have historically favored one class in society over the others. Throughout human history to our present point, the state rule of law has served only to support a hierarchical, inhuman, society. At least, this is the anarchists’ view of socio-historical developments. A human society, as I envision it, is not premised upon such conceptions, but on acts of creation: as beings-in-process, humans need to continually develop the conditions most favorable for their continued development. Historically, humans have lived in *inorganic* conditions, inherited dead structures based on tradition and the rule of law which support a view of institutions as unchanging and immovable. Noted anarchist Noam Chomsky speaks directly against such a view in a recent interview:

Any structure of authority or hierarchy or domination bears the burden of proof: it has to demonstrate that it’s legitimate. Maybe sometimes it can, but if it can’t, it should be dismantled. That’s the dominant theme of what’s called ‘anarchism’: to demand that a power structure—whether it’s a patriarchal family or an imperial system or anything in between—justify itself. And when it can’t, which is almost always, we should move to get rid of it in favor of a freer, more cooperative, more participatory system. (qtd. in Barsamian 6)

Composition studies, in my view, resides solidly as an “anything in between” these more oppressive power structures and should continually be questioned, and renewed—or “dismantled”—if doing so furthers the critical project “of a freer, more cooperative, more participatory system.”

From these notes then, I begin again with radical love ...

### **Radical Love: On seeing people as people, dialectically**

Oscar Wilde defines a perfect personality as “one who develops under perfect conditions, who is not wounded, maimed, or in danger.” A perfect personality, then, is only possible in a state of society where a person is free to choose the mode of work, the conditions of work, and the freedom to work. One to whom the making of a table, the building of a house, or the tilling of the soil, is what the painting is to the artist and the discovery to the scientist, —the result of inspiration, of intense longing, and deep interest in work as a creative force.

—Emma Goldman

I write in order to develop composition pedagogy useful for seeing people as people, for seeing in them always the potential for Wilde’s “perfect personality.” Seeking this “fuller humanity,” as Paulo Freire might put it, is the critical project of emancipatory education; in order to achieve it, we need a pedagogy of radical love, which first and foremost involves seeing people as people—and this means, as I explain below, treating people dialectically—that is, with respect to the fact they are always *in process*.

My writing includes a “deep interest in work as a creative force,” which means bringing forth ideas I need to express, just as my carpentry and gardening have been expressions of “intense longing,” just as building a Little Free Library to share anarchist literature (as well as Spanish-language copies of *What to Expect When You’re Expecting*) with bilingual neighbors and caring for the asparagus in my raised garden beds through several seasons until its full fruition have been expressions of “intense longing.” As was just as clear in Goldman’s time, if we unmoor “work” from its capitalist uses, we begin to understand how essential productive labor is to human development. The “freedom to work” that Goldman writes about is only possible when we put at the center of society people and their right to develop fully as persons—a human society. There is, of course, no “perfect personality” as such, both because there are no “perfect conditions” and

because people will never be born fully formed—perfect. For Goldman, to work toward this ideal abstraction involves organizing our mode of production for the betterment of people and nature—and not for profit, as it was organized in her day and as it is hyper-realized today.<sup>15</sup> For me, to work toward this ideal abstraction requires radical expressions of education which seek to reformulate education toward the development of “perfect personalities,” not training workers and managers. “Seeing” people means appreciating their potential to become perfect personalities. Treating people as people in this way requires love, *i.e.*, the ability to overlook “imperfection” and still care, and this needs to be the overriding purpose of all education, with all other educational purposes present and important, but secondary.

We are unable to treat people as people if we see them first through all our other lenses, if we see them as workers, students, as black, as Chicana, even as parents and children. This is not advocating willful blindness to everything comprising our identities—it’s quite the opposite. Being treated as a person means being viewed as a historical process of thoughts, desires, impulses, dreams; it means that neither one’s abilities nor ostensible “flaws” are used to judge them or are held against them. People are more accurately seen as moments in the process of becoming more than an arbitrary sum of social designations, titles, and labels. Seeing people as people means attempting to account for how our present social relationships work to create the people before us while simultaneously acknowledging that these constructions can and do change and that we are all responsible for making them change. When I write here of “imperfections” and “flaws” I am designating a shorthand for all the labels which are merely social constructions affecting our ability to see people as people.

Education plays a necessary, but not a solitary, role in helping us to see people as people. But one who does not approach education first for its emancipatory potential is not an educator but a trainer. Skills training is of course necessary in the development of abilities and toward the construction of knowledge, but is not itself educative. A trainer has a skewed relationship both to knowledge and to oneself as a human being. To approach a writing class as only the space for writing instruction—to only acquire skill or develop facility with writing—is to impose the oppressive relationship to knowledge maintained by the status quo. When Freire wrote of the oppressor/oppressed contradiction in the “banking method” of education, he understood that it meant just this sort of relationship to knowledge. Teachers who control access to forms of knowledge, indeed who control what even counts as knowledge, deny their students’ humanity as well their own. Comparing teachers/students to all oppressive relationships, Freire states that it is only when the oppressor “stops making pious, sentimental, and individualistic gestures and risks an act of love” that they find “true solidarity” (*Pedagogy* 35). For the teacher, this means adopting the changed relationship to knowledge and being that does not dichotomize teaching from learning. It means allowing all participants in an educational process to be students and teachers, to unite these parts of themselves in the creation of knowledge together. Continuing to theorize in ways that allow student agency in composition studies, recognizing and affirming the legitimacy of students’ language and their intellectual capabilities, requires a changed relationship to knowledge and a fully transformed ontology. As Freire wrote, “To affirm that people are persons and as persons should be free, and yet to do nothing tangible to make this affirmation a reality, is a farce” (*Pedagogy* 35). For composition teachers, a tangible action which extends beyond such



affirmation is to be engaged with one's students in an emancipatory educational process, to further the development of everyone's humanity.

As I discuss in more detail in the next chapter, reflection in composition classrooms is often about both demonstrating, through rhetorical performance, certain understandings of the world as they relate to literate practice and about coming to know oneself as a writer (and, often, demonstrating this understanding in writing). This understanding and use of reflection does not enable anyone to completely work toward their full humanity, because the reflections have been dichotomized from this fuller consideration. To say that reflection narrowed to this particular scene and structured by the professional interests of compositionists is dehumanizing may strike some as unwarranted, since, they may say, increased awareness as a writer and increased writing proficiency is *the point* of composition classes. I disagree. The point of education is to create the conditions possible for us all to reach our fullest humanity—composition courses, too. Reflecting on literate practices is only one part of this process. I believe this use of reflection is important, but I do not think it is enough. I expand on this claim in numerous ways in chapters 3 and 4. But in order to get there, I must first expand on how the premises informing my approach differ, which I will continue to do here and in chapter 2.

In order to enact a radical love possible to reach the goals of emancipatory education, critical educators must stop invoking the liberal notion of education as the accumulation of knowledge and skills and as the ability then to demonstrate that knowledge. They need to instead reflect upon and change their professional identity: they need to stop upholding the traditional educational mission so that they stop supporting the

status quo relations that create unreflective power pleasers and fearful credential seekers. In short, critical educators in composition must ask:

*What does it matter?*

What does it matter if students can improve their writing ability, format documents according to MLA citation style properly, and demonstrate an awareness of doing all this, if these only reproduce the social relations we would otherwise wish students critique and work to change? But critical educators must also ask how it matters that the signs of racism, sexism, ableism, ageism, and so on are interrogated, instances in which students reproduce these social forces are identified and reflected upon, if doing so within the conditions which maintain these relationships do not also change? I believe the primary answer to such questions has typically followed a line which skirts seeking substantive change in favor of endorsing deferred, personal change. A dialectical engagement with these questions necessitates that we must work simultaneously, yet perhaps unevenly, with individuals and their conditions.

Some of my teaching colleagues expressed in interviews with me that all we can do is seek to encourage personal awareness, and that with enough personal change will later come new social relations. They point to changed individual power struggles, citing examples of when a person who has critically examined oppressive social relationships later does not laugh at the sexist joke, as a male in a room full of other males, perhaps even vocally objecting. My sense is that these teachers believe that through enough changed individual perspectives and increased understandings, the oppressive social relationships will change.

But this is not enough, nor is it accurate. The *conditions* that create oppressive social relationships persist, because they do not change until people also consciously work to change them for the better. The rape culture presently structuring our society is a series of processes actively working against such individual changed perspectives.<sup>16</sup> A man who worked to change a sexist perspective did so within an ongoing series of his own processes, which are still caught up in the wider processes conditioning his social reality. What informs the perspective I present here is the *dialectical materialist* understanding of *social being*. I will return to this idea with other examples after fuller discussion of dialectics in the next chapter. Here, I will continue laying out other linkages in my claims for radical love.

Emphasis on personal change in composition studies, like that among the teachers in the interview study I will discuss more in chapter 4, is often accompanied by overriding attention to language in a postmodern linguistic idealism. It's necessary to stress this fundamental point, that while it's true that changed perspectives and changed understandings are necessary for changed conditions, it is equally true that changed conditions are necessary for changed perspectives and understandings. To dichotomize one, such as focusing on individual attitude at the expense of social structure, and vice versa, will not fully change our lived reality as human beings. In terms of epistemology and ontology, how and that we know and how and what we are, our *episteme* is in a constant interchange with our conditions. This is what I explain in the next chapter as a necessary dialectical relationship. This relationship explains human consciousness and social (*i.e.*, human) structures. In order to rightly first see and then treat people as people,

all people, we need the radicalized perspective of a unified epistemology and ontology that comes from a radical education.

By “radical” I mean literally, “getting at the root.” An education which is radical seeks the fullest understandings by examining its subject in its entirety, chiefly through shifts in perspectival scale and reflection. Moreover, the radical educator seeks these greater understandings as part of a project to effect change in the subject. And this action I would call revolutionary which is why the radical in popular political discourse in the U.S. has come to designate those political beliefs that question dominant government and economic relations and political positions in order to create substantive change. In short, radicals seek changes to “the status quo.” As such, in our current era radical-as-label is often used to mark others as different and dangerous, if not simply used in a disparaging manner. The reason “radicals” are seen as “dangerous” in this parlance is because they question fundamental social relationships, which is exactly the case, but “dangerous,” which in this discourse means “extreme,” is the result of an incomplete perspective. A recent development in this discourse is the appropriation of “radical” by those on the political right, “Tea partiers” and other proponents of neoliberal agendas, who attempt to suggest that the now-defunct welfare state is the status quo and that these groups’ union-busting actions, fear-mongering and hate speech is somehow a radical critique of this state. These groups are “extreme,” but are not literally, not actually, “radical.”

For my purposes here, radical education consists of people who work individually and collectively toward fuller understandings of social relationships in order to substantively change them—they work *reflexively*.

And here, I attempt to come around to my questions of *what matters* in composition studies and in education more generally. In radical education, the subject matter of a given course is also radically changed. Typically, one would say that writing classes teach writing (that is, its participants focus on their writing) just as a mathematics course focuses on math, but radical education is about people. The subject of everyone's education is actually themselves first and social relationships second. A radical educator would not deny the potential use-value of school subjects to those participating in the educational process, in the exploration of possibilities. Writing classes can support the critical project of emancipatory education *and* develop participants' writing abilities at the same time; in fact, they need to do both, otherwise they are not truly educational, they do not work toward full humanity. A writing class that does both is a result of the changed and linked relationships between individuals and their conditions and the changed epistemology and ontology. In chapter 4, I discuss what it might look like to approach writing classes in this way, as linked instances in the wider educational processes of us all, not only as places to focus on students' writing, which separates classrooms from true education, from seeing education as cultural action and not merely skills training.

“Cultural action,” for Freire, is premised on the idea that educational processes occur everywhere, not only in schools but in all aspects of society. That is, we learn as much from our parents, from television programs, from the social relations present in workplaces and so forth, as we do in official educational spaces. The implications for composition teaching of education being cultural action includes adapting the field's dominant theories and tropes to provide for transformative ontological change, a

recognition of students not only as objects of education, but subjects and co-investigators with teachers. This change is accomplished through a dialectical materialist understanding of consciousness, thus of language. Composition studies has already broached the idea of students having agency and being co-investigators in many ways, although not in the comprehensive ways that would follow from also adopting the dialectical materialist understanding. A composition truism, “begin where students are,” can mean an acknowledgment that students both learn, a lot, outside the classroom and that students bring a lot with them to the classroom. By unpacking the phrase, “begin where students are,” however, and we can see that starting where students are still means you intend to bring them somewhere else, entering educational processes to and for, rather than with them. The expression needs to change in order to acknowledge that teachers and students are in the same place, that teachers are not coming to them like the Messiah bearing the Word; changing this of course involves the changed ontology which is addressed above and throughout this dissertation. At the same time, I believe that no other educational field has focused as much as composition studies on student agency, which starts with such simple, and beautiful, urgings as “seeing students as people” and “seeing teachers as people” (Fox). We have a lot to work with, and a long history of progressive approaches to education, but what prevents the field from attaining the full, radical changes necessary can be further examined by addressing the concepts of liberalism and professionalism in composition studies, both of which are encouraged through the field’s latent idealist assumptions. I discuss this latent idealism in the pages that follow, but on the way to chapter 2 I must state what I consider a central point and use a term to be fully defined later: Liberalism in the teaching of composition works

against revolutionary praxis. Because the ideas of liberal education are continually co-opted, because they do not work explicitly for social change, they become something akin to reproductive practice with a friendly face. In composition studies, liberalism works to simultaneously endorse and undermine social changes that were part of its founding as a field within Rhetoric and English studies. The liberal enterprise of language instruction was prompted to change by radical student movements for open admissions and students' right to their own language (Parks; Ohmann), but this slow revolution is not yet complete.

## Chapter Two

In this chapter, I define dialectics and how and why dialectics should inform critical literacy; I also discuss how dialectics makes revolutionary praxis necessary and possible.

### Praxis

A conception of reflection that is dialectically linked to action is a conception that will fully support the critical project of emancipatory education. “Dialectically linked” here means, in part, “inseparable from.” A dialectical reflection differs from current conceptions of reflection in composition studies because those, as I review in chapter 3, are typically guided by the dichotomizing theories of reflection, which separate reflection from a sense of action. A primary example of this dichotomizing stems from the work of Donald Schön, whose main concepts were first adapted by Kathleen Yancey in composition studies. Schön’s main works focuses on the actions of professionals at work; to help professionals improve their work performance, Schön separates their work from wider considerations that would otherwise have an impact on it (*Educating; Reflective*).

As discussed in the previous chapter, what is needed to work toward a conception of reflection in an emancipatory education is the Marxist notion of “praxis,” which I will further define here as “dialectical praxis” and which joins together two other key practices, *radical love* and *critical literacy*. Again, I see these practices as linked, their full development depending on how well each comes to fruition in an overall project that simultaneously develops the optimum conditions for the praxis.



“Praxis” literally translates from Greek as “action.” Praxis has come to signify practice as *distinct* from theory or vice versa, in which one informs the other; on the other hand, a dialectical praxis *links* theory and practice as the “inseparable unity of active existence with thought” (Allman, *Revolutionary*, 40). For Moacir Gadotti, education theorist and director of the Paulo Freire Institute in Sao Paulo, Brazil, “praxis evokes the radical tradition of education. In this tradition, praxis means transformative action” (xvi). For a conception of reflection in composition studies to contribute to emancipatory education, it must be theorized as a necessary part of this transformative action.

Dialectics, in this case unified thought and action, follows directly from Marx’s theory of consciousness. While most of the basis for understanding this theory of consciousness comes from Marx’s *The Philosophical and Economic Manuscripts of 1844* and, with Engels, *The German Ideology*, and since the latter was not published in English until 1932, the various competing “Marxisms” in the Anglo-Marxist tradition developed, and many continue to this day because of competing understandings of the importance of materialist dialectics.<sup>17</sup> I cannot fully contend with these intellectual histories here, arguing for the “rightness” of my interpretations, since this takes me too far from reflection in composition classrooms; however, since my understanding of reflection is gained through this theory of consciousness, reviewing how its ideas have been recuperated through the work of various scholars is necessary. In addition to my own study of Marx’s texts, which became a concerted focus for me in 2006, I draw mainly from the writing of educational theorists Paula Allman and Peter McLaren, geographer David Harvey, and political scientist Bertell Ollman, all of whom share an understanding

of Marx's theory of consciousness and from whom my understandings have benefitted greatly.<sup>18</sup>

The concept of dialectical praxis I develop in this chapter and extend through the rest of my dissertation extends from the relationship between radical love and critical literacy. One practices radical love while developing a critical literacy; one practices critical literacy to invoke radical love. To create the conditions for the kind of reflection I argue is suited to dialectical praxis (linked as it is to writing in composition studies) involves unpacking a number of related concepts. These concepts include the professional impetus of compositionists, the changed ontology of teachers and students, and dialectical theory of consciousness.

Within the processes of education the acts of teaching and learning are often separated and ascribed to different actors: teaching is what teachers do and learning is what students do. Radical educator Paulo Freire dedicated his life to theorizing the teacher-student relationship, locating it at the center of all educational processes and arguing for a changed ontological status among its members. For Freire, the changed ontology of teachers and students is often indicated by linking the roles together in terms such as educatees-educator/educator-educatee or students-teacher/teacher-student. Cumbersome terminology aside, what Freire was suggesting beginning in the late 1960s remains a departure from the usual way of looking at teacher-student relationships.

Freire was radical in the traditional sense of the word, "getting at the root." A Marxist who was an educational leader in revolutionary governments in the global south, Freire's ideas have received much consideration in composition studies but usually at the expense of their Marxist underpinning. A common occurrence in American higher

education, this dismissal of radical theory's origins has been described as "denaturing" by Patricia Bizzell: In "Marxist Ideas in Composition Studies," Bizzell explores how leading scholars, such as Ann Berthoff, effectively read Freire out-of-history, decontextualizing the importance of his ideas as "criticism of social injustice" and part of a process of "large-scale political action" (63).

This state of Freire's educational ideas "denatured" from their transformational intent have led to a wide range of misunderstandings and complaints, such as Richard Miller's in "Arts of Complicity." I discuss Miller's complaints in the final chapter when I bring some of Freire's ideas back to conclude my dissertation. What is more important to focus on in this chapter are the links that are missed when developing Freire's writings into classroom pedagogy, as many compositionists have, without fully understanding how Marx's theories inform Freire's ideas.

Chief among these is the concept of "praxis" understood as Marx's theory of consciousness, and how this understanding informs Paulo Freire's conception of reflection. For Freire, as for Marx, *praxis* is the unity between thought and action; "thought" and "action" designate not just complementary concepts but two necessary aspects of a relationship.<sup>19</sup> In this *praxis*, thought and action are a dialectical contradiction—which is not the same as a contradiction in formal logic. As Bizzell defines it, "Marxist thought can help us learn to live with contradictions [that] should not be understood simply as hard choices between conflicting values or actions. Rather, contradictions seem to present impossible choices, where neither *A* nor *B* can actually be selected or where choosing *A* over *B* ends up destroying *A* and *B*" (65-66). That is, for Bizzell, *A* and *B* designate the relationship between two mutually-forming subjects, but

further refinements of this description are important for understanding what Freire makes of this relationship in terms of teachers and students.

First, for Marx and subsequently for Freire, Bizzell's *A* and *B* pinpoint *internally-related* aspects of a process; although they designate distinct forms, their "contradiction" is that as separate entities working together in a mutually-forming process, and they are internally-related, or "integral," to the process. If the process being described is education or "learning," then teachers and students are in dialectical contradiction, both necessary to the process—in fact, their relationship *is* the process. But Freire takes this further, as educational theorist Paula Allman explains:

Teachers and learners are a unity of opposites, or, in other words, a dialectical contradiction. Each is what it is by virtue of its relation to the other. [...] With Freire's approach, the idea is to conceive of teaching and learning as *two internally related processes within each person*. [...] Teachers do not cease being teachers but cease being the exclusive or only teacher in the learning group. (*Revolutionary*, 96-97; emphasis in original)<sup>20</sup>

Allman, an American who moved to the United Kingdom, developed and taught a course at the University of Nottingham for fourteen years founded on a Freirean educational model. In that course (referred to shorthand as the "Freire course"), Allman and her co-teacher worked with two student populations: day students (workers released from their jobs for continuing education credits) and students in a Master's program. Allman has written about her experiences teaching this course in two books, *Revolutionary Social Transformation* and *Critical Education Against Global Capitalism*.

As Allman sees it, Freire argues for an ontological shift within each person in an

educational relationship. Both teachers and students need to effect this change, although, as Allman says, teachers “can initiate this change by challenging learners to consider the limitations of existing relations” (*Revolutionary* 97). I think a way for compositionists to get a sense of the dialectical workings of this ontology in the educational relationship is to consider the changed relations that result from contested periods of the field’s history, such as when students initiated challenges to the status quo (*e.g.*, open admissions movements in the 1970s). As Allman puts it, “each person in the group must engage in dialectically reuniting the processes of teaching and learning within his or herself” (*Critical* 173). Students can certainly initiate such changes or, at least, seek them; what teachers choose to do in response has historically been very different.

Within her development of Freire’s educational model for British students, the members of Allman’s learning groups struggled to achieve this changed relationship to teaching and learning, and to one another, often needing each time the group met to recreate that for which what they had struggled. They struggled because the other social relationships in which teachers and students live actively work against changing the teacher-student relationship. As discussed in more detail below and as will be taken up again in the last chapter, all educational processes are just that – *processes* – as their workings taking place again and again. Counter-hegemonic processes (those which run against the grain of dominant processes) need even more time to develop. If students’ primary educational mode is the ostensibly passive receiver of knowledge in traditional lecture courses (or even those organized in an *IRE*, initiate-respond-evaluate, pattern) then entering a space in which participants are asked to shift into another mode can often prove difficult. This example from Allman demonstrates how praxis always exists within

other practices and must always be acknowledged as an ongoing process.

Also key in understanding praxis as Marx's theory of consciousness in the changed ontology of teacher-student and students-teachers is how its ontological shift necessitates a changed relationship to knowledge or the object of learning. As Allman states, referring to Freire in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, "It is impossible to effect the transformation of the teacher-learner relation authentically until both teachers and learners transform their relation to knowledge. In other words, *being or relating differently is inextricably bound up with knowing differently*" (*Revolutionary* 97; emphasis in original). Allman goes on to describe how knowledge is currently conceived, under "bourgeois epistemology," as a commodity and how knowledge needs to be re-conceived not "as a static possession but only as a mediation or tool between people and the world" (97)—in other words, knowledge must be treated as another social relationship. As Allman argues elsewhere, "ontological and epistemological transformations are codependent on one another" (*Critical* 173). Part of what is crucial to my overall argument in this dissertation about reflection is understanding that radical reflection requires these simultaneous ontological and epistemological transformations. I will take up discussion of how to better achieve this difficult work in the last chapter, after reviewing in the next chapter Kathy Yancey's descriptions—descriptions that ground reflection for composition studies—of how reflection works.

A third missing link in developing a Freirean writing class pedagogy involves a view of education that not only acknowledges change but is built around the understanding that change not only happens but is part of the purpose of education. I do not think it controversial to state that education seeks change; however, acknowledging

that education seeks to *effect* change, and to call certain changes as more desirable than others, is a political statement. I will return to this idea repeatedly in what follows. For Freire, these changes are part of an even larger process, in which we effect change in order to become “more fully human.” As Marx stated in one of his famous “theses”: the point to better understanding our social reality is to change that social reality for the better. Understanding praxis is a step toward that better understanding.

### **Marx’s unified theory of consciousness: Dialectics and the two forms of *praxis***

Marx’s materialist dialectic informs his theory of consciousness and is the basis for Freire’s and others’ emancipatory theories of education. For Marx, consciousness is a dialectical praxis which can take two forms, a reproductive praxis and a revolutionary praxis. In this section, I work toward explanation of these two forms of praxis, beginning first with a review of dialectics. I spend some time on the differences between reproductive praxis and revolutionary praxis because they are so important to the arguments I make about reflection in the coming chapters.

Before setting out eleven “principles” of dialectics in the second chapter of *Justice, Nature and the Geography of Difference*, Harvey makes these salient points:

Marx chose never to write out any principles of dialectics for a very good reason. The only way to understand his method is by following his practice. This suggests that the reduction of dialectics to a set of ‘principles’ might be self-defeating. The dialectic is a process and not a thing and it is, furthermore, a process in which the Cartesian separations between mind and matter, between thought and action,

between consciousness and materiality, between theory and practice have no purchase. (48)

Despite this warning, Harvey goes on to offer his readers these principles, in the form of “11 propositions,” ranging from dialectics as an understanding of processes, that various processes “produce” different conceptions of space and time, to the dialectical relationship between parts and wholes, the fundamental—if not radical—accounting of *change*, and as transformative acts in the “search for possibilities.” Keeping Harvey’s admonition in mind, his propositions serve as a suitable way to express what Marx meant by materialist dialectics, and their discussion provides a framework in which to address other theorists’ understandings.

Harvey's first four propositions consider how dialectical thinking consists of processes and relations. Formulating human thought as in relation with material reality alters certain commonsense views of our thinking. What we tend to think of as definite entities or “things” (as Harvey calls them, 50)—elements, parts of wholes, etc., including everything from cities to factories to human bodies—are seen in dialectical thinking as “constituted out of flows, processes, and relations operating within bounded fields which constitute structured systems or wholes” (50). Harvey continues:

A dialectical conception of both the individual “*thing*” and the *structured system* of which it is a part rests entirely on an understanding of the processes and relations by which thing and structured system are constituted. This idea is not intuitively self-evident since we are surrounded by “things” that seem to have such a permanence and solid character that it is difficult to imagine them as somehow in flux. (50; emphases in original)



“Things” are then made up of collections of other things in process (51), an “internalized heterogeneity” which results in what Marx calls the dialectical contradiction. Seeing a “thing,” even a person, as comprised of a set of processes allows for a view quite different from the one to which we are accustomed. Seeing a person as a bounded, yet permeable, set of processes opens the possibilities for how we are in constant interchange with our world. In my opinion, seeing a person as a set of processes also provides a more useful understanding of our human nature. For example, treating a person as both a teacher and a learner (as I argued is necessary in the “praxis” section above) describes that person as two *internally related opposites*. The process of teaching and the process of learning inform one another, and they comprise an individual in a relationship that is internal to the individual. In other words, students are also always teachers. This statement designates a contradiction and it is a *dialectical contradiction* because it: 1) is internal to the person; and 2) is seen as necessary (that is, accurately) describing an inner set of processes comprising the whole. Thinking of a student as a person who is both a teacher and a student at the same time changes the ontological ground of that person and of the teacher-student relationship. Allman defines this understanding of contradiction in comparison to how it’s primarily presumed in philosophy: “Formal, or logical, contradictions reside in people’s thinking and behavior, whereas dialectical contradictions are located in our material reality or, more precisely, in the social relations of our material world” (*Critical* 40).

As I tell students, we are all nothing but the bundles of our contradictions, the internally related unities of opposites which operate on, through, and in us. With this, students may hear me remarking that they do not always make “logical” sense, but I

emphasize to them that this is a positive description of their “nature” and capacities within the flow of processes which comprise us in our social reality, including our performances in the classroom. Seeing a student as an internal bundle of often conflicting impulses, processes, and attitudes sets the basis for *radical love*.

If I treat student performances in isolation of everything else that comprises them, then I am not treating them with love. For example, numerous attitudes toward education are displayed by students in my classes: poor attendance, perhaps, or not turning in work, perhaps even resistant or aggressive in-class actions, such as an unwillingness to participate or “calling-out” the teacher (like my students at MCTC who challenged the curriculum and my “right” to be their teacher: see the Introduction). I think many teachers understand that these attitudes are never generated from nowhere. But it is another matter altogether not to treat these acts as an “attitude” toward education and instead to see them in their dialectical significance.

Students’ contradictory responses to education are the result of many conflicting processes. These processes do not simply impact them or their performance; students *are* these processes. Many of my “basic” writing students have perfectly legitimate reasons to be angry with an educational system that tests them, finds them academically deficient, and tracks them into “remedial” instruction. Previous educational experiences including lack of resources and instructors ill-prepared to discuss the writing concerns of learners turned away, put-out, and marginalized from educational realms comprise who the student is when she walks into the next classroom. And, as I discuss more at the end of this chapter, students often have different values and uses for literate practices than those that are authorized (or even addressed) in most educational settings. Take these

educational responses together with everything else that might comprise any particular individual (a list here would be never-ending), and one is just beginning to get at what comprises a person. If we picture a person who seeks higher education for what it supposedly offers in terms of future life chances but who also does not understand or who simply resists the academic work of higher education, then we are simply seeing a person accurately in our present social reality. Contradictory responses to, or values for, education are not illogical; contradictory responses are perfectly reasonable, as they are the felt dichotomies of a person grappling with conflicting, socially-created experiences.

Allman gives her definition of dialectical contradiction, as drawn from her study of Marx, plainly: “[Dialectical contradiction] is a single whole comprised of a unity of two opposites, which could not exist as they presently do or have done historically outside of the way in which they are related” (*Critical* 40). This “internal relation” of the inextricably linked opposites is its contradiction, informing and shaping each other and defining the relationship. I say “inextricable” not because the internal relation can never be sundered, but because doing so redefines the relation—and I would add that the “unity” can be between more than two things. Viewing people only as students dichotomizes them from—takes them out of—their full humanity. But we often seem to think in exactly these kinds of dichotomies, by labeling folks in opposing sets of “either / or” choices.

Thinking in dichotomous patterns and thinking dialectically involve different processes of abstraction. Bertell Ollman notes that, “though everyone abstracts, of necessity, only a few are aware of it as such. This philosophical impoverishment is reinforced by the fact that most people are lazy abstractors, simply and uncritically

accepting the mental units with which they think as part of their cultural inheritance” (“Putting” 28-29). Dialectical thinking reorganizes these “mental units,” providing us a way to interrogate beyond the form of something as we initially perceive it to observe it more fully, “to grasp the forms as part of a process, or in their movement” (Allman, *Critical*, 44). Grasping forms “in their movement” involves taking their history and future potential into account as part of what they are; this is the radical acknowledgment of change in dialectics. Ollman clarifies:

[S]tripped of all qualifications added by this or that dialectician, the subject of dialectics is change, all change, and interaction, all kinds and degrees of interaction. This is not to say that dialectical thinkers recognize the existence of change and interaction while nondialectical thinkers do not. That would be foolish. [...] The problem is how to think adequately about them, how to capture them in thought. How, in other words, can we think about change and interaction so as not to miss or distort the real changes and interactions that we know, in a general way at least, are there (with all the implications this has for how to study them and to communicate what we find to others)? (“Putting” 27)

Some of the implications of dialectical thinking involve what Harvey views as “an acute epistemological problem of how to present, codify, abstract, and theorize the vast amount of information of seemingly incomparable status generated” through dialectical praxis (*Justice* 58). This results in difficulties in perception, which is really a matter of scale and abstraction; or, put differently, the conception through which we organize the world, which parts we necessarily choose to focus on (abstraction), and where and how those parts are located (scale) and fit together (relation).

Ollman argues that Marx developed a particular form of abstraction, which begins with the “simple recognition of the fact that all thinking about reality begins by breaking it down into manageable parts. Reality may be in one piece when lived, but to be thought about and communicated it must be parceled out” (“Putting” 27). We all do this while thinking, because we can not take in the world all at one time. But the differences in how we “parcel out” the world and examine its parts, the way we abstract, is what accounts for distinctions in dialectical and non-dialectical thinking. Ollman notes how Marx used the term “abstraction” in three different senses: one “refers to the mental activity of subdividing the world into the mental constructs with which we think about it”; another “refers to the results of this process” because it “functions as a noun as well as a verb”; and the third use “refers to a suborder of particularly ill-fitting mental constructs” (“Putting” 29). This third sense is “the basic unit of ideology” of which Marx makes much of throughout all his writing (Ollman, “Putting,” 29). I will return to Marx’s concept of ideology in the last chapter. How Marx’s abstractions in the first two senses differ from how others abstract is how they “focus on and incorporate both change and interaction (or system) in the particular forms in which these occur in the capitalist era” (Ollman, “Putting,” 30). Ollman poses the question, “how does one study the history of a system, or the systemic functioning of evolving processes, where the main determinants of change lie within the system itself?” (31).

The answer is in how we think about *change*, which continues to be a central problem in the humanities and social sciences, those basic fields which inform composition’s uses of reflection. A recent talk at a local college by Dana Arnett presented its audience with the idea that “Change is Possible.” Arnett, a design professional, “leads

enterprise activities including strategic planning, growth initiatives, people development, and the integration and delivery of [a] diverse set of creative and strategic capabilities” (Arnett). Arnett’s design firm may offer quite creative solutions to business problems, but it’s clear these are compromised within the mindset that simply sees change as possible, and not as fundamental. An example of scholarship which acknowledges that change happens in broad, systemic ways, that it happens all the time and that theorizing change is essential to improving the processes and systems we take as our purview is James Porter, et al’s “Institutional Critique” from mid-2000. However, while theorizing change and certainly approaching change as fundamental, its authors examine possible rhetorical action through “postmodern mapping” and other forms of spatial analysis coming to theoretical dominance in the humanities at that time, thus designating a form and methodology for change—perhaps more pragmatic—but not as fundamental.

Dialectical thinking acknowledges change but also builds around the understanding that not only will change happen—it is in fact inevitable—but that part of the purpose of education is to effect change, desirable change. In the processes of institutional critique, Porter, et al., effectively argue against the dubious notion that human institutions (like universities and corporations) are some kind of monolith that, though “certainly powerful [,] are rhetorically constructed human designs [...] and so are changeable” (611). Instead of this monolithic image, the authors “hope that institutions can be sensitized to users, to people, systematically from within and that this sensitizing can potentially change the way an entire industry perceives its relationship to the public” (611). Yet, people working “systematically from within” and even characterizing their desire for change as “hope,” further designates the institution as a legitimate space for

negotiation, thus still granting it ultimate authority. Dialectically conceived, “the institution” is not only rhetorically and spatially organized, but is in a constant process of actual change—a never-ending result of its forming and informing interactions with the processes of other institutions and of all the people who comprise them. Designating an institution a “human design,” as the authors rightly do, should perhaps entail a much more radical understanding in the perception of institutions. Properly foregrounding the fact that institutions are not only human, that they *only* exist to serve human needs sets different institutional conditions. If these conditions on which institutions operate are not amenable to human need, they not only should be changed, but people *must* work toward changing them for the benefit of us all. For Freire, such institutional critique is a smaller part of our larger, shared critical project of making change so that we all might become “more fully human.” To paraphrase Marx in one of his famous theses: the point to better understanding our social reality, such as how an institution is structured and how it structures our lives, is to change that social reality / institution for the better. In fact, as reviewed in the next chapter, limits to institutional practice are what led Donald Schön to study the boundaries of reflection-in-action within the knowing-in-practice of professional / institutional practice.

An acknowledgment of change as fundamental to all processes and social relations readily accounts for “possibilities” much grander than the idea that some changes are simply possible. These transformative acts, as the “exploration of ‘possible worlds’” are, as Harvey argues, “integral to dialectical thinking” (*Justice* 56). Referring to ecological writer Murray Bookchin, Harvey argues that “*education* (the exploration of possibilities) rather than deduction (spinning out the implications of known truths) or

induction (discovering the general laws regulating what already exist) is the central motif of dialectical praxis as well as the primary purpose of knowledge construction” (56; emphasis in original). Education-as-process-of-change posits a conception of emancipatory education as the “exploration of possibilities” for us to become “more fully human.”

It is through our “focusing on the relationships between processes, things, and systems” as Harvey points out (*Justice*, 57), that lead us to understanding what changes seem likely to occur, and also to how we might effect the changes we seek. This is the pragmatic concern of Porter, et al., in “Institutional Critique,” which can only be part of a larger process effecting change. In a sense, dialectical thinking starts with a choice between “this” or “that,” but not in the reductive sense attributed to dichotomous thinking; rather, it is the choice between “reproductive praxis” and “revolutionary praxis,” two complex processes, each containing heterogeneous relations, as I will soon consider.

And yet, Marx’s focus on “antagonistic” dialectical contradictions, as Allman puts it (*Critical* 41), suggests that any full definition he might have offered includes a positive and a negative opposite in the dialectical contradiction:

[O]ne of the opposites is the ‘positive’ in the sense of trying to preserve the relation—it positively favors and benefits from the relation; the other opposite is the ‘negative’ in the sense that the relation is detrimental or antagonistic to it. Neither opposite can change *fundamentally* while it remains in the relation—what each is and how it develops and moves depends on the other. The only way for the ‘negative’ to end this antagonism is to abolish the relation. (41)



This “negation of the negation” concept is what is at work in Marx’s political and economic study of the social relations between the proletariat and capital. In “the creation of a classless society,” Allman continues,

The proletariat would no longer exist as a separate and exploited class, and thus there would no longer be a capitalist class either, but this does not mean that the people who once comprised these classes would cease to exist. In other words it is the relation that is abolished, rather than necessarily the people that are involved in it, and since it is this relation that has determined and shaped the way that they are as human beings, this negation liberates them or frees them to create new relations within which they can exist differently, thus realign their full potential in terms of their individuality as well as their social identity, or humanity. (*Critical* 41)

Freire based his educational writing on this philosophy of inner relations, which is Marx’s theory of consciousness. How the “antagonism” is understood involves applying a degree of scale to the analysis. There are ways to reduce this antagonism to a simple negation (as might come in an answer to the question, What would free the slaves? Destroy the masters!), but I find that the positive/negative relation in the dialectic contradiction is more about describing the process—how the relation is constructed, where it comes from, and thinking about where it might likely go. Furthermore, formulating a dichotomy such as slave / master might not be inaccurate, but transforming a contradiction is not about personifying the positions in the dialectic, as I will discuss in more detail below.

Similarly, Marx's theory of consciousness for Freire raised the questions, are teachers the "positive" in what is sometimes taken to be a similar polarity? How does this work in terms of the relationships within the educational process? Part of the answers come from the ways theorists phrase the questions. For many years, composition scholars as diverse as Richard Miller and Cy Knoblauch and Lil Brannon have questioned Freire's pedagogical writing in exactly these ways, posing their understandings of concepts such as "false" and "critical" consciousness in attempts to come up with answers. Neither of these concepts is dialectical as I have just outlined it; I take up discussion of each, and a few other concepts common to composition studies, in relation to ideology and critical literacy below.

In my view, the complicated relation between teacher and student does currently function as an "antagonistic" dialectical contradiction. But taking this view does not mean that I think teachers are akin to capitalists and that students must negate the relation. At least, students should not do this alone, because our current educational system does support oppressive social relationships and these do include the teacher /student relation within educational processes. One misrepresentation of such views which fits the dominant ideology is expressed in the phrase, "the student becomes the master," which takes a mechanistic approach to the teacher/student relation and pulls an incomplete understanding of change from the process of human growth and development. As Freire made clear with his banking concept of education, and as I explain in more detail in the final chapter, the teacher/student relation is separated out, dichotomized into different people in situations where teachers, as knowledge keepers, form this "positive" in the antagonistic relation in that they support the relations of status quo education.

Emancipatory education, on the other hand, sees the relation dialectically, and attempts to unify the internal relation of teacher/student within each person in the educational process, thereby abolishing the current relation but not the people in it. Much like a slave/master opposition, dialectically conceived, it is the nature of the relation that needs to be transformed: the relationship is changed not by eliminating the real people who hold these positions (as in the relation between prostitute and pimp) but by negating the relationship. For example, with the prostitute and pimp relationship, while real people have and continue to occupy social locations designated by the terms, by refusing both the reductive atomizing of seeing people *as* or *in* such positions, and by re-seeing the “position” as a process contained in other processes beginning with “prostitution” but including many more, what it means to “negate” the “positive” in this dialectic does not simply mean getting rid of pimps in order to free the oppressed in the relation. This is not an endorsement of pimps; this is instead the beginning of what it might mean to examine people as processes who are caught up, and can affect, other processes.

Harvey explains that there are often two approaches to dialectics which represent “a long-standing debate over whether the world is inherently dialectical or whether the dialectic is simply one convenient set of assumptions or logic to represent certain aspects of physical, biological, and social processes” (*Justice* 57). It is what Harvey calls the “strong version” of dialectics, represented most clearly in Friedrich Engels’ writing, that has drawn “considerable criticism in part because of its association with ideas of teleology and doctrines of emergence and immanence which appear almost deterministic in their evolutionary implications” (57). This criticism, Harvey points out, follows from how Engels “imposed a particular logical and mental conception [Hegel’s thesis,

antithesis, synthesis] on the natural and social world” (57). This so-called teleological impulse of capitalism necessarily giving way to socialist reality has become “Marxism” for many people, both in the academy and in the popular imagination. But as Harvey, Allman and Ollman, among others, take pains to point out, this was not the view espoused by Marx himself. Marx, as Harvey and Allman argue, developed the “radical materialist transformation” (Harvey) of the dialectic from his observations of actual capitalist social reality and “retains [dialectic’s] openness as a system of thinking rather than condemning it to Hegelian teleological closure” (Allman). My own reading of Marx finds no necessary teleology in his writing. He states that capitalism will continue to change and eventually be transformed, but what comes after can only be determined by people in that historical epoch. Where it seems we’re headed now—with the renewal of fascism in Europe, the rise of the surveillance state, and casino capitalism further dividing the haves and have-nots with increased concentration of wealth in the hands of a very few—is an era of totalitarian regimes the world over. But competing visions to this dystopia still remain and rely more than ever on education as a key part of their ascendancy.

I favor a different “strong version” of dialectics as further explicated by Harvey, in which he states that Marx’s radical materialist transformation of the Hegelian dialectic “dissolve[d] the dialectic as a logic into a flow of argument and practices” (*Justice* 57). From this perspective, the mechanistic materialist reading of the Hegelian dialectic is not “strong” but reductive. Dialectical thinking as reinscribed by Harvey is a “focusing on the relationships between processes, things, and systems” that “readies abstract discussion of dialectics as a set of principles for dissolution into a flow of argument” (*Justice* 57).

Understood rhetorically, “argument” in Harvey’s description of dialectical thinking is not merely a discourse practice but more a narrativizing in Jim Corder’s sense, as “not something we *make* outside ourselves; argument is what we are [...] We always live in, through, around, over, and under argument” (18). While Corder sometimes seemed to suggest a postmodern linguistic idealism, in which the narrative is equivalent to social reality (thus, we can change it by changing our story), *argument*, as I use it in this case, is the detailed theorizing which goes hand in hand with the process of abstracting as we use it in attempts to describe, make sense of, and change our reality.

I will restate the points in the previous pages and move through them to more definition: Dialectical thinking reverses our perceptions to help us see that the solid or singular forms that appear to us in our social reality (or what Harvey, drawing on Whitehead, calls “permanences”) are better seen as comprised of changing processes. “Dialectics restructures our thinking about reality by replacing the common sense notion of ‘thing,’ as something that *has* a history and *has* external connection with other things, with notions of ‘process,’ which *contains* its history and possible futures, and ‘relation,’ which *contains* as part of what it is its ties with other relations” (Ollman, “Putting,” 32; also qtd in Harvey, *Justice*, 48). Ollman continues elsewhere:

Nothing that didn't already exist has been added here. Rather, it is a matter of where and how one draws boundaries and establishes units (the dialectical term is “abstracts”) in which to think about the world. The assumption is that while the qualities we perceive with our five senses actually exist as parts of nature, the conceptual distinctions that tell us where one thing ends and the next one begins both in space and across time are social and mental constructs. However great the

influence of what the world is on how we draw these boundaries, it is ultimately we who draw the boundaries, and people coming from different cultures and from different philosophical traditions can and do draw them differently. (*Dance* 13)

In my classroom practice, in my first-year composition as well as cultural studies and education courses, students read the term “relation” and understand it as a relative connection or more permanent link between things. In the specialized languages of philosophy and physics, “relation” is meant to describe interacting processes. It’s a noun, yet it suggests more, even in standard uses. As such, “relation” can be a vexed term. The phrase, “dialectical relation” is used to signify that what we take as a “thing” (static conception) is actually a relation (fluid / in flux) that “contains as part of what it is its ties with other relations” (Ollman, “Meaning,” 43). This is an important principle in Marx’s theory of consciousness, stressed repeatedly by Allman, Harvey and Ollman, among others. When we seek to understand relations as dialectical, we seek to grasp the interchange of verb-like nouns or noun-like verbs. Treating human relations as processes or “flows” (Harvey, *Justice*, 57), Marx’s materialist dialectics is capable of examining “objects” in motion to appreciate how they change and that that change is a fundamental part of what they are and can become. “Object,” here, needs to be seen as momentarily fixed processes, as well. Ollman and Harvey, as well as Marxist biologists and physicists, call these “crystallizations” (Ollman, “Putting,” *Dance*; Harvey, *Justice*).

Here is an example at one level of generality: the chairs in composition classrooms at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee are made by Badger Industries, which employs prison labor. Each chair is a set of changing processes, including the forces and processes that comprise and created its material, and also its past manufacture

by prisoners in Wisconsin state penal institutions for students and staff at state institutions of higher learning, its sale at considerable savings to the state over furniture manufactured by people making a living wage (and even more than by people who would choose freely to make such furniture for exchange outside the circuits of capital, which is difficult to imagine anyone doing). “Crystallized out,” which again is viewed as momentarily static, these chairs are the things sat on in composition classrooms; to be fully understood, the chairs need to be seen as part of the processes which comprise them. Not everyone, for instance, would consider the fact of prison labor as integral to understanding the Badger Industries’ “chair” at work in the state universities nor in our society. The chair is part of a process of exploitative labor and the labor is a part of the finished chair.

The example of students above is on a different level of generality. Students are comprised of different processes and contribute to larger processes: Any one student might be the recipient of knowledge presented in a lecture and may also be an active participant in a service-learning program that, say, has her explaining concepts about writing to a group of elementary school children. Different processes are at work in and through the student and all these processes (and the student) are part of wider abstractions, “the processes of education.”

“Things” are thus constituted by internal contradictions in larger processes through which they are a part but that they also define. Here, I cite Harvey at length for another example of the relationships between “part” and “whole”:

To say that parts and wholes are mutually constitutive of each other is to say much more than that there is a feedback loop between them. In the process of

capturing the powers that reside in those ecological and economic systems which are relevant to me, I actively reconstitute or transform the system from which those powers were initially derived. [...] I breath [sic] in, I reconstitute myself by virtue of the oxygen I gain but in the process transform the atmosphere around me or, I take in ideas and thoughts through listening and reading. I gain a sense of selfhood thereby but in the process reformulate and transform words and in projecting them back into society change the social world. (*Justice* 53-54)

The previous example of prostitution is a crystallization of complex social relations, in one sense revolving around the nexus of the prostitute/pimp contradiction, but in a more detailed (and useful) beginning to the description of reality, it is important to first designate the prostitute and pimp as processes in relation with each other, and with other processes within and through this relation. These include law enforcement, the system of law itself and also of social services, “johns” (customers), media and other people generally affected in the close environment of the prostitution relation, from family members to others in proximity but who are not directly involved. Most important, for my purposes, is the nature of a person within this relation, such as a prostitute, who is her/himself comprised of other processes and relations, such as parent, etc.

In the sections that follow, I refer back to the terms which I have only begun to examine and explain here. Each term’s slipperiness becomes easier to grasp through its use in relation to other concepts necessary to emancipatory education. I examine ideology and expand on Marx’s understanding of consciousness in relation to a powerful trope in composition studies, critical literacy. I then attempt to examine these in relation to each other as I make fuller descriptions of “praxis.”



### Critical Literacy, Ideology and Felt Dichotomies

[C]ritical literacy is reflective and reflexive: Language use and education are social practices used to critically study all social practices including the social practices of language use and education. Globally, this literate practice seeks the larger cultural context of any specific situation. —Ira Shor, “What is Critical Literacy?”

Critical literacy, the intent of a critical reading and writing pedagogy, entails an understanding of the relationships between language and power together with a practical knowledge of how to use language for self-realization, social critique, and cultural transformation. —Knoblauch and Brannon, *Critical Teaching and the Idea of Literacy*

This brings us to the action dimension of critical literacy [as] praxis-oriented pedagogy [that] bridges the gap between critical knowledge and social practice. This involves bringing theory into the streets. It includes organizing and mobilizing students, parents, and teachers at the community level, and linking their struggles to larger national and international struggles. —Peter McLaren, *Life in Schools*

Critical literacy is premised on concepts of “literacy,” the practices associated with reading and writing and with recognition of the weighted significance—values—attached to the practices. What sociolinguists call the “ideological” understanding of literacy has come close to a dialectical materialist conception of language use, but the phrases are not synonymous.<sup>21</sup> The ideological approach links literacy’s value for humans to its social uses or effects. As linguist James Paul Gee stresses, “Literacy has no effects—indeed, no meaning—apart from particular cultural contexts in which it is used, and it has different effects in different contexts” (*Social* 59).<sup>22</sup>

Compositionist Ira Shor describes *critical literacy* as the practices of “questioning received knowledge and immediate experience with the goal of challenging inequality and developing an activist citizenry” (“What is Critical Literacy?”). Shor goes on to say that critical literacy is a social practice used “as a tool for the study of other social

practices”; by defining critical literacy as a “tool for the study of other social practices,” Shor wants us to hear that critical literacy is necessary for fully understanding the social practices being examined, and, I would argue, for changing these social practices (which Shor partly suggests with the phrase “developing an activist citizenry”). Shor follows this with the meta-explanation, cited in the section epigraph. Within this explanation, Shor draws a distinction between “reflective” and “reflexive”; the former indicates reflection as it’s typically known in composition studies and the latter term locates a practice in which questioners examine how the social practices they invoke further shape what can be examined and how they might come to know it.<sup>23</sup> But “reflection,” as Shor uses it here, would in the non-dichotomized sense be better joined with “action”: whether in Shor’s “activist citizenry” or in a more general sense of “doing.” The continued dichotomizing of reflection from action is one reason the concept has not reached its full potential in the field. Writing is the action for compositionists and the reflection that is done on it/to it/with it is treated as a separate process from it. As I discuss in chapter 3, most models of reflection locate it happening after the action, which is a problematic worth exploring not only in its implications for composition class practice but for what it suggests is the purpose of education.<sup>24</sup> But here let’s continue to focus on how the relationship between “reflection” and “action” is packed into notions of critical literacy.

For Kathleen Yancey, “Reflection does not always produce activism – unless (and this, in my view, is unless writ large) we see understanding itself as a form of activism” (*Reflection* 199). As I explore throughout this dissertation, seeing “understanding” this way is not “activism,” nor does the stated relationship about reflection “producing” activism accurately suggest the relationship. If examined through Marx’s theory of

consciousness we see reflection and action already linked, in a dialectical praxis. By “activism,” Yancey means acting to effect change in the world, such as direct action in a workplace; this sense of activism has direct political connotations. But, through Marx’s theory of consciousness, I read “activism” in Yancey’s statement as both effecting change in the world *and* as any kind of action, as change. “Understanding” is *not* action. Understanding can lead to action; it can inform action. Similarly, in the processes of writing we already reflect; writing and reflection are distinct, but mutually informing processes.

Approaching the relationship between reflection and action/writing in this way is to engage a dialectical praxis, which will lead to different understandings of the relationship between writing and reflection. Not treating writing and reflection as linked social practices discourages “activism” of the sort Shor and Yancey point out, and also infuses the educational processes of growth and learning with a sense of distance—a disconnect within the very educational process—what I call a “felt dichotomy.” With this criticism I make two points, which I will further state: one, compositionists’ current conception of reflection cannot lead to revolutionary praxis, as I describe this praxis above and further explain it below but, two, this conception also does not lead to what its proponents wish for it. I will discuss these two points at length in subsequent chapters, but first, in this section, I set out to delineate what I firmly believe are composition’s idealist assumptions, one barrier to a radical invocation of reflection in the field as well as hindrance to the field’s conception of critical literacy. I state this strongly, because saying composition somehow suffers from “idealist assumptions” is a large, blanket claim. But, at the particular level of abstraction that the “field” of composition operates, the claim is

accurate; these idealist assumptions will continue to inform work in composition until compositionists radically transform our work to meet the ends of emancipatory education.

From this wider claim I next work through more specific, yet still abstract, examples on my way to further concretizing what emancipatory education in composition studies might look like (the focus of chapter 4). I look at how *literacy* and *critical literacy* function as a dichotomizing pair, and how the “field” of composition studies operates according to a third, *idealized*, form of literacy. Lil Brannon, Cy Knoblauch, David Borkowski, Jean Anyon, and Patrick Finn help delineate the nexus of these terms, situating some of the ways to think about literacy and critical literacy. I use the concept of “powerful literacy,” as Finn describes it, in contrast with other scholar’s definitions of critical literacy to illustrate what I intend by linking critical literacy to radical love in a dialectical praxis.

For many in composition studies, “critical literacy” connotes the alternative to a standard, the modifier designating that something “more” is done in addition to “typical literacy.” Critical literacy leads to “critical consciousness” (Brannon; Shor), which is a human state argued to be superior because the people who are critically conscious *know* but also “know that they know” (McLaren, *Life*, 51).

But composition studies is often caught up in or structured by continued support of a supposedly neutral conception of literacy on which both “critical” literacy and its antithesis are premised. Basically, this conception views the practice and habits of reading and writing as somehow inherently good—literate practice functions as an ideal. None of this is to say that composition teachers, themselves, necessarily conceive of literacy in this way, nor would many have composition studies serve this function;

however, over 14 years of composition teaching I have noted this effect in the workings of (and on) composition studies (the *field* being more than the scholarship compositionists produce; see the “key terms” above). The ideal value that is placed on literacy is from both the “outside” in the form of corporate or government stakeholders, as well as often from “inside” in the form of student attitudes as well as classroom practices that remain premised on the idealist assumption even if teachers may not value literate practices this way. Thus, composition studies can seem to project a conception of three literacies in which there is a

1. basic (conventional?) literacy;
2. some “reproductive” (functional?) literacy;
3. and a “critical” (problem-posing?) literacy.

With the three conceptions operational, “critical” would not modify “literacy” in ways that have transformative impact. In terms of reproductive and revolutionary praxis, “critical literacy” should work to unify the felt dichotomies of a praxis in which uses and values for literate practice are not the same as the standard, “official” or authorized—often school-based—literate practice. But some of the relations currently shaping composition reserve from scrutiny the conception of an underlying literacy which somehow neither reproduces a problematic of social relations nor works to understand and change them, thus reducing the idea of “critical” to only certain uses, such as critique. “Relations,” here, again, mean *human* processes, *i.e.*, those in composition whose actions maintain such views but also those whose do not, yet by simply being “compositionists,” are still involved in this reproduction. But here lies the difficulty with “relations,” as what I’ve just written may suggest the field somehow works to maintain itself and these

dominant forms, regardless of everyone's consent. While it may indeed feel that there is a "machine" or "invisible hand" at work, the institution of "composition studies" is little more than the sum of its human relations, which is a lot, but in order for emancipatory education to take hold, composition studies must always be seen as human and, as such, that humans can change it. If any classroom practices operate to reinforce idealist assumptions about the "good" of reading and writing, then they need be interrogated as such and either discarded—or transformed through the practices of critical literacy.

As the ideological reading of literacy in the scholarship of the critical literacy theorists makes clear, there is no neutral form of literacy. Drawing on the concept of "discourse communities" and referring to the fiction of an "autonomous model of literacy" in the work of James Paul Gee, Finn remarks that,

[I]f you teach students to read as well as, say, the average fourth grader, all of the knowledge, wisdom, and culture in print is available to them, and they will just naturally pursue them in the style of Abe Lincoln. If they don't it is because there is something unnatural about them. Of course, it's not so. [...] Nothing happens automatically when a person learns to read and write at a performative or functional level. (126)

I return to the idea of levels of literacy below, but what Finn is drawing on in this passage is the ideological understanding of reading and writing, the theory that there is nothing inherent about reading and writing: these practices do not lead us to become better citizens or people. And, even though reading and writing were often believed necessary to human development, they have also historically been used as methods of social (human) control (see Brandt; Gee; Graff; Weis, *Working*). Yet this "literacy myth," about

the power of literacy to improve our lives and make us better and more fulfilled people, remains pervasive. Much has been researched and written about the literacy myth in composition studies and, even if my assertion about students and teachers of composition is unfounded, the general attitudes regarding the powers of reading and writing persist in society and inform composition studies. I believe it is also the case that the three operational literacies continue as a result of composition's professional impetus, guided by some compositionists' efforts to self-interestedly raise the institutional status of writing (see Perdue; "Portland"), and tends to work in tandem with the notion that school-based reading and writing alone carry some inherent good. Although not often seen as connected, the idealist assumption is what informs liberal politics and leads to "good," or at any rate well-intentioned, understandings of literacy that inform pedagogies that ask students to look for "the pleasure of reading" (Perl and Schuster). The detached, disembodied pedagogies informed by liberal politics see school, and thus school-based literacy, as having some inherent value; they hold that reading and writing help develop people and lead to "better citizens" (or whatever the particular goal in each of the various liberal discourses). Liberal pedagogies refuse to interrogate the ways in which schooling is thoroughly caught up in capitalist social reality and not separate from it. These liberal pedagogies include those argued for by folks like Maxine Hairston, but are also more progressive, such as those argued for by Lisa Delpit. Because philosophies, policies and perspectives which follow from liberal viewpoints do not explicitly work to foster social (human) change, they ultimately serve to reproduce the status quo of capitalist exploitation and thwarted life potential. Reading and writing do inform our consciousness, but since human consciousness is inseparable from our social being, the uses and values

of our literate practices directly correspond to it. Withholding some aspect of literacy as an ideal good only reinforces reproductive praxis and yet reserves this aspect from critical analysis.

Value is actually assigned to our literate practices as a result of our sensuous experiences reading and writing in the world. Literate practices are *critical* literacy practices to the extent that these experiences support the changed conditions necessary for our transformed relations; otherwise, literacy helps to shape reproductive practice: there being no neutral form of literate practice. Even within some of the stories compositionists tell themselves, usually couched in some working-class narrative of the “bookish child” who leaves what he or she knows behind for scholarly pursuits or the “life of the mind,” we actually find heartbreaking details of the real felt dichotomies, the results of an idealized literacy. In what follows, I turn to Borkowski’s review, and curious response, to some of these narratives in order to further delineate the various stances toward idealized literacy in our field. I will then return to the definitions of critical literacy in the epigraph to posit a more radicalized understanding of critical literacy consistent with the dialectical praxis I described in previous sections.

Writers from Richard Rodriguez, Victor Villanueva, Keith Gilyard and Mike Rose to Linda Brodkey, Janet Zandy and Karen Fitts tell stories of the “scholarship boy / girl,” about academic stardom and both metaphoric and literal flight from working class (*i.e.*, capitalist) reality through books. Borkowski, in reviewing these tales, notes how their authors “being bookish in childhood, along with the ancillary gifted label, rescued them from the material conditions of working-class life” (104). And Borkowski also notes that their “deep passion for reading,” while a “double-edged sword,” also “imparts



to the working-class child a view that the culturally alien and economically restraining world of the working class can be overcome” (104). As a “double-edged sword,” literacy’s supposed effects created cultural distance (as well as dissonance; see Lu) in those academics that haunted them through most of their careers, until a point when some of them fully grappled with the felt dichotomy of literacy use and value and tapped their pasts in what Borkowski calls the “theme of ‘the return’” (110). Focusing on a handful of literacy narratives which document this “return” to working-class roots, Borkowski explains:

However metaphorical the return was for [Sharon] O’Dair, [Carol] Faulkner, and others, it typically influences teaching practices by spotlighting class inside the classroom rather than concealing it. In fact, Faulkner believes she has become a better teacher as a result of her “return”; perhaps it has even helped her negotiate the typical conflicts of academics from the working class. [...] Once that cartoon light bulb popped over my head, I thought more and more about ‘the return’ explaining how I practice my own intuitive working-class pedagogy, maybe even allowing me to ‘become more myself as a teacher.’ The return concept revealed the value of working-class roots for a teacher negotiating his own class identity crises. (110)

Borkowski, for his part, has never felt this estrangement because, as he says, he has always been a “gift-less working-class academic” (113). “Despite the differences—of being gift-less and feeling neither especially estranged from my past nor terribly conflicted about my class identity—the importance of the return as a trope in teaching was the thing I most understood from the narratives” (111). Borkowski takes comfort in

the idea of “the return” because he never left his working-class roots, did not especially like books as a younger student, and “never developed an antagonistic attitude toward my students or sought to erect a wall, [...] wedge a book between me and any [student]” (116). In both the narratives of working-class academics and in Borkowski’s review of them persist static conceptions of both literacy and class, despite the rather long footnote in the latter which suggests the author is drawing on a dialectical understanding of class (120-21). “Working class,” if it designates anything, should be a term used politically, to encourage the broadest possible solidarity in our present class-based society; Finn uses the designation in a more-or-less traditionally Marxist way when describing why and for whom “powerful literacy” should be taught, and I believe Borkowski also means to invoke this understanding. But class and literacy understood as a place in society and a way to move out of it, as Borkowski and the literacy narrative authors seem to understand them, create serious conceptual and political difficulties. Foremost, for me, these understandings are not dialectical; I apply my description of dialectical praxis to the literacy narratives and Borkowski’s reading of them below. First, I want to trace the assumptions embedded in the narratives and in Borkowski’s essay.

I believe that Borkowski is actually right in his assessment of so-called “gifted” working-class academics’ narratives of estrangement, and in how he didn’t believe “that school learning was transcendental, socially or spiritually, or that books offered salvation or compensation” (120). At the same time, Borkowski’s talk about his approach as a teacher, as premised on how he “didn’t have to reach far back to return to [his] students because [he] didn’t go that far ahead or away,” doesn’t really account for his pedagogy, either. That he sees an easier identification with his students than those other working-

class academics doesn't go far enough in explaining the very real dichotomies that the others did feel, nor does it account for how his students might actually be feeling the same dichotomies in their own educations. A critical literacy should be, frankly, critical of this relationship to books and reading and pay attention not only to what feels like the causes which lead to such estrangement, "the weight and significance of class" (Faulkner; qtd. in Borkowski 110), but also to the complicated relations of value which circulate among literate practices. I think Borkowski senses an elitist thread in the other working-class academics' narratives that he doesn't pull out. Being labeled "gift-less," and therefore not able to identify with the equally objectionable labels of "bookish" and "academically talented" placed by teachers on the other future compositionists that later endows them with more cultural capital, Borkowski, in his own way, is simply unwilling to "relate" to their stories. Borkowski concludes his essay by sharing that Gary Tate says he "found himself" in the stories he read in *Strangers in Paradise* (one of the collections of working-class academic narratives) and then responds, "I can't say that about any of the narratives I've read, especially about the countless descriptions of gifted, bookish, children who escaped their working-class conditions" (120). Being able to identify with others, to relate to their stories, as my students often put it, is one of the purposes of critical literacy. In fact, some might say that's altogether the point of reading and telling stories; the problem with this being, of course, that the stories have different effects on different readers, as the working-class narratives had on Borkowski. If we return to Shor's definition of critical literacy, "a tool for the study of other social practices," we have an inroad to a radical understanding of class at work in the working-class academics'

narratives and Borkowski's reaction to them, and how critical literacy is essential to disrupting the harmful effects of these felt dichotomies. Borkowski believes that,

Books train working-class kids in the cultural practices of the elite, equipping them with information and discourses not circulating in their daily lives. Books, and their association with elite literacy, can sometimes provide upward mobility, the very real escape from a working-class environment seemingly at odds with the bookish child who has been singled out for being different from others in her class.

(103)

But as the working-class academics stress in their narratives, “leaving behind” their roots in this upward mobility had them feeling uncomfortable and dissatisfied. This is a felt dichotomy: The estrangement of the “working-class academics” from the people with whom they grew up (parents, siblings, other people in their home neighborhoods) after tapping these other, “elite,” literate practices. But this is an illusion: dialectically, it's the surface appearance, the effects of literacy and class, of much more complex relations which must be understood as part of wider social operations. No matter how invidious, how damaging, how real the *material* effects are, the social constructions of literacy and class are not “real”—that is, not inherent parts of what literacy necessarily “is”—and must be overcome through emancipatory education. Much like how the notion of biological race is a fiction, but one with very real material consequences that value and rank people according to attributes of racial groups in order to support the social position of some people over others, hierarchizing literate practices (suggesting that some are the property of an “elite”) clouds what is at work by dichotomizing literacy from people.

In Jean Anyon's classic text on education and social class, the cultural practices taught (rather, reinforced) in what she terms the "executive elite schools" are not somehow the exclusive property of an "elite," nor are these practices necessarily preparing students to take their place among the ruling class with their parents—that was already their "birthright" in our society. Drawing on some of Anyon's work, Patrick Finn characterizes the effects of "working-class discourse communities" as tending "toward implicit communication and absence of negotiation skills" which he contrasts with those of "affluent discourse communities" which "are characterized by collaborative exercise of authority, less conformity [than working-class discourse communities], feelings of power, and a society of strangers [resulting in] a tendency toward explicit language, negotiation skills, and a willingness to negotiate" (257). Negotiation is a key characteristic of what Finn regards as "powerful literacy," the highest order in a literacy scale he designates with four "levels," and which is typically associated with affluent discourse communities. Finn is working from Gordon Wells' concept of four levels of literacy (the "highest level" in Wells' formulation is termed "epistemic literacy"), which Finn regards as equivalent to Gee's "essay-text literacy" (Finn 274; Gee, "Orality and Literacy"). These levels range from the "performative level" (the lowest), to the "functional," which is "the ability to meet the reading and writing demands of an average day of an average person" (Finn 124), to the "informational" (reading and "absorbing" school-based knowledge as represented by tests and reports) to, finally, "powerful literacy." Finn argues for an understanding and implementation of this "powerful literacy" among the working class, defining it as

the ability to evaluate, analyze, and synthesize while reading and listening and to persuade and negotiate through writing and speaking. It is literacy used to understand and control what's going on around you. It is the literacy of persons who are conscious of their own power and self interest. (124-25)

This is the literacy of the “elite,” then, whose school-based literacy practices mirror those of their lives away from school, lives of power, prominence and promise. Finn, continuing to draw on both research in socio-linguistics and in Anyon's essay, concludes that “basic literacy does not lead automatically to higher forms of thinking” (123) and that working-class students are surrounded by a discourse community which practices literacy at the “functional level.” This level does not provide its users access to power, to abstract ideas designating the concepts “creativity and reason” (Finn 124).

Powerful literacy is not quite critical literacy, then, as defined in this section's epigraphs, but perhaps it is the “stuff” of critical literacy and what makes critical literacy *critical* is its application. Or, powerful literacy *is* critical literacy, but what the proponents of critical literacy encourage is powerful literacy *and* a politics. If powerful literacy “is the literacy of persons who are conscious of their own power and self interest,” as Finn maintains, then it is in line with a literacy which examines “the social practices of language use and education” (Shor, “What”) and of combining “language and power together with a practical knowledge of how to use language for self-realization” but not necessarily for “social critique, and cultural transformation” (Knoblauch and Brannon 152). Finn's argument in *Literacy with an Attitude* is to teach powerful literacy because it is “the literacy that will enable the majority of poor and working-class children (who will no doubt continue to leave school at the end of high school or sooner) to become better

able to exercise their civil, political, and social rights” (197). As a “self-interested literacy,” one that empowers, powerful literacy is the one Finn believes will lead its users to social justice—but I do not believe this is necessarily so.

Critical literacy as dialectical praxis, for McLaren, “bridges the gap between critical knowledge and social practice” (*Life* 51). Bridging this gap acknowledges the dialectical interaction of human and social world, of epistemology and ontology. McLaren goes on to say that bridging this gap also “involves bringing theory into the streets. It includes organizing and mobilizing students, parents, and teachers at the community level, and linking their struggles to larger national and international struggles” (51). “Bringing theory into the streets” is a political act, in the same way teaching “elite” literacy practices to members of a ruling class and teaching functional literacy practices to “working-class students” is political. What may not be apparent in the literacy narratives of the academics from the working class as reviewed by Borkowski is that their supposed move from one literacy to another doesn’t account for the *internal relations* at work within themselves and across their social sphere; these relations encompass both the “elite” discourse practices they took up and the “functional” ones of their working-class roots. Rather than view literacy along four levels—which means maintaining some kind of ideal understanding of literacy, that its practices have some kind of inherent power outside of the ways people use them—literacy as social relation sees these levels (or, perhaps more accurately, “forms”) of literacy as always able to be accessed.

That more powerful literate forms are *not* accessed has to do with the political and economic organization of our society than with any form literacy supposedly taught or ostensibly favored in different social class designations. The effects of literacy, as social

relations, have nothing to do with “levels” of literacy, then, but with the politics of education. Approaching the effects of literacy from within the framework of the two forms of praxis, it is clear these *effects* have material consequences, but they are registered solidly within the felt dichotomies of people experiencing these consequences. In reproductive praxis, people do not attempt to work through the felt dichotomies toward their transformation. There are all kinds of reasons for this: some have to do with our social views on literacy, ranking its forms according to levels, other reasons have to do with how people value literacy in their lives. These different values operate both within the framework of our continued insistence that some forms are “better” than others, and according to other value systems. The role of *radical love* here is to help us step out of our value system and appreciate others. It is also to help people along as they grapple with their own understandings of the effects of literacy whether engaged in a reproductive process or a revolutionary process. The very real felt dichotomies people experience as they grapple with all this become useful locations to explore the true possibilities of education:

We are mystified when working-class children learn to read and write but do not progress to informational and powerful literacy, and so we try to teach them the basics of reading and writing *better*—back to basics again and again in the vain hope that if we make them literate *enough* they will do what’s natural and become logical, scientific, technological, explicit and on and on. (Finn 127)

But this isn’t “natural,” because their literate practices correspond to the rest of their sensuous experience living a working-class life.



A critical literacy, as I want to understand it, has teachers and students questioning the uses and values of all literate practice. In order for deliberate teaching of “powerful literacy” to working class students to be effective, that is, transformative, it must involve attention to the processes which construct the different “levels” of literacy and, moreover, the reasons for this social construction, and also provide a framework for understanding how these relationships are social and political functions. I build on this understanding of critical literacy in chapter 4, as I propose a composition classroom for emancipatory education.

*Praxis* becomes “critical” (*revolutionary*, to Allman) when we become aware of the constraining nature of our relationships with each other and our world in *reproductive* praxis. This “critical consciousness,” a phrase used frequently in composition studies, is not a state one reaches and then never retreats from; it is not a possession or fixed thing we hold, but it is necessarily a process or relation, as are all “things” in dialectical thinking; otherwise, it is something that takes place in thinking only and it is simply a “mental act” and still not fully connected to our species being. When we talk about achieving human potential in terms of *praxis* which, when understood as the “transformative action” of Gadotti, is a concept that grasps the internal relation between consciousness and sensuous human experience, we treat action/theory, teacher/student, reflection/writing each as an internally related unity of opposite processes which reciprocally shape and determine the others. Again, an “internal relation” designates that the processes in the pair can not exist as they are outside of the relation. In addition to the pairs already listed, women/man is an example of an internal relation, as is, famously for Marx, labor/capital. Just as the social structure of capitalism is actually a human structure

(Allman, *Critical*, 44), all these are not “inherent” but social designations, made by humans, which means they can be changed by humans. Being “made by humans” further suggests that such relations are the product of social forces and are not fixed biologically. Thinking specifically of “woman/man,” for example, there are obvious biological differences and then there are what have been suggested as fundamental differences which point to what appear to be “natural” dialectical relations, such as “feminine/masculine” but what has historically been ascribed to these terms, “weak/strong,” “dark/light” and so on, are social constructions and not biology at all. In most, if not all, of the world’s earth-based religions, these pairings are viewed as life’s essential make-up. It’s important to reinforce the understanding that these pairs attempt to describe a necessary unity and are always present together. When thinking of real people in the actual world, qualities that are meant to be described with “feminine/masculine” are treated as pre-existing categories into which people fall, but, if accurately designating anything at all, they are actually present in every person regardless of biological gender and do not exist prior to or outside of people and our social relationships. Thus, with this theory of consciousness, Marx demonstrated the inner connection between ontology and epistemology—which are typically dichotomized—even in the relational theories which would otherwise eschew such separations, as discussed in the next chapter. In Marx’s formulation, knowing how-and-that is actually entirely interdependent with being how-and-that. This is our “species-being.” Marx, drawing on Aristotle, states,

The human being is in the most literal sense a [“political animal”], not merely a gregarious animal, but an animal which can individuate itself only in the midst of society. Production by an isolated individual outside society [...] is as much an

absurdity as is the development of language without individuals living *together* and talking to each other. There is no point in dwelling on this any longer.

(*Grundrisse* 84; emphasis in original).<sup>25</sup>

### **Reflection as part of our social-being**

Treated dialectically, thought neither follows nor precedes action; similarly, for our purposes in composition studies, reflection neither follows nor precedes writing. Yancey states that it doesn't matter if writing or reflection comes first (*Reflection* 23-47). In part, she is suggesting something about the actual relationship between writing and reflection, correcting what earlier process theorists turned into a step procedure, but at the same time Yancey still treats writing and reflection as separate processes. At first glance, it may not seem to matter whether reflection has a linear correspondence with writing, especially if it's stressed that one doesn't necessarily come first. Looked at in its dialectical significance, however, we see that approaching reflection thus is part of larger perspectives with far-reaching consequences, as discussed in the next chapter. Treating reflection in its dialectical relation with action stresses both the unified activity of writers thinking and composing and pinpoints a location from which to work out to different perspectives. Reflection in its dialectical relation provides a glimpse of the changed social relations that will both cause and result from the changed conditions of respect, free association, mutual aid and care, as discussed fully in the last chapter. The necessary attention given to these conditions is an idea "based on the recognition that authentic and lasting transformations in consciousness can occur only when alternative understandings and values are actually experienced 'in depth'—that is, when they are experienced sensuously and subjectively as well as cognitively, or intellectually" (Allman, *Critical*,

170). In other words, human (social) consciousness is inseparable from our species-being, our social being; we think through our actions and perform certain actions through our consciousness, but we also have our thoughts because of our continuous interchange with the world. Being in the world and in our social forms, our thoughts are “naturally” shaped. If the conditions of our reality are such to encourage reproductive practices, then we unreflectively do just that. But we are also capable of revolutionary praxis, which is praxis that works to change our conditions and our thinking, because it approaches these changes together, as necessarily linked. It’s important to stress that we act to change our conditions which change our thoughts and that changed thinking changes our actions—but not our conditions. More often, such as in composition studies and other educational fields, the focus is on only changing thinking, which is theorized to perhaps result in changed conditions at some future point. But these relations are actually simultaneous, albeit uneven, and are part of the same processes. Current educational praxis continues to separate thought and action, and focus alternately on the individual or on social change, but real change will not occur until this dichotomizing ends.

Theorizing reflection as a separate action from writing results in a felt dichotomy, alienating one aspect of our being from our full humanness. Similarly, if we treat teachers and learners as a unity of opposites in the educational process, that each aspect of the process is what it is because of the other, which is saying a lot more than simply teachers can’t teach without students (which isn’t exactly true anyway), we begin to overcome a felt dichotomy and move with transformational power toward our fullest human potential. For Freire, “the idea is to conceive of teaching and learning as *two internally related processes within each person*. [...] Teachers do not cease being teachers but cease being

the exclusive or only teacher in the learning group” (Allman, *Revolutionary*, 96-97; emphasis in original). What coincides with this changed ontology of teacher-student and students-teachers is necessarily a changed relationship to knowledge. But until such a day when educational processes are truly transformed, the efforts to effect these changed conditions will be counter-hegemonic—and difficult. Understanding the two philosophies of praxis, reproductive praxis and revolutionary praxis, in Marx’s sense clears the way for the political work of reflection in composition studies, radicalizing reflection in composition enough to include in its scope the wider scene for teaching and learning and the relations in between.

As I discuss chapter 3, those in composition drawing on some understanding of the wider social forces structuring their teaching might remain aware (if not attentive) to outside social forces as they teach, but they still tend to turn inward by focusing on language (as a function perhaps of compositionists’ professional impetus to increase the status of writing). They thus take on only part of the critical project.<sup>26</sup> In composition scholarship, reflection centers on the relationship between “knowing” and “doing.” It’s premised on a theory of consciousness which separates reflection from writing, students from teachers. In the next chapter, I take up discussion of two of these informing philosophies on reflection in composition studies.

### Chapter Three

In this chapter, I demonstrate where the professional model of reflection used in composition studies began, how it became composition's primary approach to reflection, and why we should reconsider it.

#### **Reflection: an overview and genealogy**

In *Reflection in the Writing Classroom*, composition's foundational statement on the uses of reflection, Kathleen Yancey locates the attention scholars in the field have given to reflection, and her own work, within an overview of composition's history with process theories. During the 1970s and 80s, when compositionists were engaged in much process research, what later came to be called "reflection" started as an "often undervalued and little understood method of identifying what we know and of understanding how we come to know" (Yancey 5). Compositionists working on a more recent development in composition scholarship, the writing-about-writing curricula, make the distinction that in "reflective pedagogies [the] main feature is [to] have students write about their own writing processes" (Downs 2). Yet, as Yancey argues, "[r]eflection has played but a small role in this history of composing" (4), the one Downs suggests for process theories, and she maintains that the pedagogic role of reflection is to promote "growth of consciousness" and greater understanding (5, 200). In short, Downs downplays the role of reflection overall, locating it to an early moment in the process movement in composition studies; Yancey also locates a *form* of reflection in early process research, a form "defined behaviorally as *pauses* and *rescannings* (5; emphasis in

original). Yancey goes on to argue that there has been a great deal more done with reflection in composition studies since the process researchers.

I reference the distinctions these two compositionists make as they offer different conclusions from the same history, because they suggest the difficulties compositionists have tracing a genealogy of reflection and illustrate two of the ways compositionists predominately use reflection. But, contra Downs' claims for the writing-on-writing movement, there is much overlap with what reflective writing proponents in composition claim. Downs states that in writing-on-writing curricula, "Students write a variety of genres that facilitate reflection on their literacy experiences and help them put readings in conversation with each other" but do not necessarily reflect on their own writing processes (1). Yet Yancey holds this out for the work of reflection, too, for seeing reflection "as a means of going beyond the text to include a sense of the ongoing conversations that texts enter into" (5). In practice, the two approaches may only differ in the readings in a writing-on-writing course, those being texts on writing that are written by compositionists themselves and used by students to "conduct original research on their own questions about writing" (Downs 1), but in the scholarship the distinction seems to remain.

Downs' comments help pinpoint some of the various distinctions within the concept of reflection. Often, reflection is meant to signify a personal act: typically a process of thought or an engagement with a task. In composition studies, reflective acts are often taken to be text-based and either represent thought processes or can be seen as the location for the processes themselves (working something out "through writing"). Louise Phelps finds that, "for teachers, [reflection is] a useful term precisely because it

collects together and connects so many of the activities and attitudes that they want to teach” (“(Re)Weaving,” 143). These definitions offer a good starting point and suggest how treatments of reflection for teachers and for students tend to differ in composition studies. In what follows, I will continue to unpack the various uses and meanings of reflection, focusing on the larger patterns of—the philosophical approaches to—reflection in composition studies. This examination will move from individual scholars’ work to the larger patterns and then, in the final chapter, I will attempt to reorganize these patterns in discussion of a composition classroom which deliberately employs dialectical reflection.

A meta-overview of reflection is available through examining the dichotomous patterns I discussed in the introduction, where we see that reflection is often invoked in two particular ways: to shore up disciplinary knowledge or to deconstruct it by employing reflection to massage those splits of theory/practice, reading/writing, student/teacher, and so on.<sup>27</sup> In educational studies, reflective practice has often been suggested as a counter to the program of technical rationality that follows scientism’s sway over professional and disciplinary knowledge, in part during the formation of the modern university in the late nineteenth century, but especially as the professional schools became affiliated with or housed entirely within universities in the twentieth century. In teacher education programs, this scientism is typically represented by the two tracks of theory courses and methods (practicum) courses which comprise pre-service teachers’ educations.

There are two moments worth noting when tracing the genealogy of reflection: an era of concerted scholarly production, and a subsequent period during which reflection



has become almost a “given,” its presence further shaped and sometimes critiqued, but always with the assumption of its importance as premised on the earlier period of research. Specific historical moments influencing the theory-building moment of reflection include the American Educational Research Association conference in 1986, the Conference on Reflection in Teaching and Teacher Education in Houston, October 1987, and the NCTE Conference on Reflection in Montreal, June 1997 (with follow-up workshops and professional conferences in Florida and New Orleans in subsequent years serving as sites to extend this moment). In addition to Yancey’s influential work for composition, some texts offering general overviews of reflection include Virginia Richardson’s “The Evolution of Reflective Teaching and Teacher Education,” which came out of the aforementioned conference in Houston, and *Reflective Teaching*, by Kenneth Zeichner and Daniel Liston. Robert Tremmel’s essay published in *Harvard Educational Review*, “Zen and the Art of Reflective Practice in Teacher Education,” provides a particularly useful articulation of reflection’s junctures within English education and teacher education. These texts are representative of the scholarship on reflection in education and provide useful links to the prominent scholarship in composition. Other influential texts on reflection during the height of scholarly production include, in English education, George Hillocks’ *Teaching Writing as Reflective Practice*, and, in composition, Donna Qualley’s work in *Turns of Thought*, as well as work by Louise Phelps, Barbara Gleason and Chris Anson. But the primary focus in composition has always been Yancey’s work, in which the concept of “reflection-in-action” as drawn out of Donald Schön’s work was developed with a new focus on textual production. Although work on reflection in composition draws on work in education, it

develops its own particular textual focus, and scholars in both areas draw on the same host of philosophical and theological texts.

I would argue that reflection as a topic of concerted scholarly production “ended” around 1998. Unlike those dates tossed around for the “beginning” of composition studies, such as 1963 or 1967, there are no events linked to the end of scholarship on reflection proper.<sup>28</sup> But reviewing the literature at this time presents one with what can only be described as a shift from theory building (scholarly efforts to formulate the concept of reflection) to an *assumption* of reflection and its usefulness in scholarship that occurs sometime after the late 1990s. In composition studies, Julie Jung points out that reflection, more specifically reflective writing, “has become one of the field’s sacred pieties” (628) and Phelps notes that reflection is another “ubiquitous term” in course syllabi (“(Re)Weaving” 143). This assumption regarding reflection, that it is a necessary component, alone indicates the influence the scholarship on reflection has exerted. There are certainly “trends” in scholarship that might account for the perceived drop off in activity (a kind of academic consumerism), and educational theorists Zeichner and Liston even noted the presence of a “reflection bandwagon” around 1996. But Zeichner and Liston also further reinscribe the bandwagon as the “reflective teacher movement” (*Reflective* 7), and go on to describe the problems that they claim attend it (among these is a confusion about what it all means) and then argue for their “pointed and defensible view of reflective teaching that is distinguished from other views” (8). Zeichner and Liston’s view is comprised of Dewey’s three “attitudes [...] integral to reflective action: openmindedness, responsibility, and wholeheartedness” (10), augmented by Schön’s framing and reframing process and the “practical theory” of teachers as discussed by

Gunnar Handal and Per Lauvas, or the “contextual knowledge” of teachers’ ideas within specific classroom and social constructs (37).

Zeichner and Liston’s “movement” label is useful, as the intense feelings and close scholarly scrutiny which accompanied reflection have continued in less pronounced but more diffuse ways. In fact, there would seem to be more references to reflection now, as it remains the case that “one can hardly read an article about teaching without mention of reflection” (Richardson 3). Nevertheless, a distinction can be made between the time reflection was clearly being “theorized” and an elusive moment when it seems to have stopped being a focus of theoretical activity and became more an assumption in theory and practice. The continuing textual references to this shift should be taken as an indication that something called “reflection” has become a necessary part of the theory-practice landscape. The “vagueness and ambiguity of the term,” as well as “misunderstanding of what is entailed in reflective teaching,” persist (Zeichner and Liston 7), but with an acceptance of its general importance conceptually.

In composition studies, reflection has received particular attention in devising writing curricula, and work on reflection that pertains to prompting student reflections develops concurrently with scholarship on assessment. Yancey’s work started here, too, in essays such as “Portfolio as genre, rhetoric as reflection” and “Teacher Portfolios.” Concerned with validity and reliability in numerous domains, from teacher response and grading to programmatic change, assessment researchers have also seen the usefulness of reflection. Particular discussions within the discourse of assessment suggest that students, through reflection, can supply valid responses and valuation of their own work; put in concert with an instructor’s or a team of instructors’ assessments, such as those in

portfolio review, then the overall reliability of the assessment is said to improve. Program assessment, particularly as discussed in the scholarship of writing program administration, grew in part out of Yancey's and others' work on reflection and assessment of student writing. It is also related to the scholarship in both composition and education on teaching portfolios, electronic and "traditional," in that a prescriptive criterion for these is inclusion of the teacher's reflection, a seemingly self-directed gloss, on the portfolio contents. (I write "seemingly" here because these reflections are, after all, written for administrative review and for prospective hiring departments, thus for evaluative purposes, but they are written from the standpoint of self-reflection.) The current scholarship on program assessment combines the domains of self-reflection and assessment as teachers' portfolios are increasingly deemed a valid way to gauge a writing program. As Schendel and Newton note, "because teaching portfolios provide glimpses into a writing program's values," through teachers' assessments of their own work in the program, these portfolios "can contribute to ongoing discussions aimed at improving a program's curriculum" (122).

A set of assumptions about reflection in composition have become the focus of various and repeated discussions but not to the extent of the so-called "bandwagon" era. I have come to believe, as I mention above and argue more directly below, that perhaps the primary reason for its continuance as an assumption in these fields is that reflection often serves as an uncontested way to work the theory-practice dichotomy. This is apparent in Zeichner and Liston's view of reflective teaching, as drawn from Dewey, Schön and social constructionists, and even as they argue for a contextually nuanced view of teachers' practical theories, suggesting that actual teachers do not fit into neat categories

and maintain a host of differences which are often difficult to delineate. They point out how the “educational literature produced by academics in colleges and universities has tended to describe these differences among teachers in terms of bipolar opposites such as traditional versus progressive teachers, teacher-centered versus learner-centered teachers, and so on. In fact, we began our book with a conception of the reflective versus the technical teacher” (Zeichner and Liston 37). In composition studies, too, are similar categorizations, from Berlin’s adherents to traditional or epistemic rhetoric to North’s eight “methodological communities,” both of which have sometimes functioned as unavoidable taxonomies for us. The reason for these conceptual reductions is that, even through acknowledgment of the complexity of actual people involved in real social processes, the uses of reflection are in this way already circumscribed in order to cut across the conceptual difficulty of describing where theory and practice meet and how one informs the other. It’s not that these conceptions are necessarily wrong, but they are misleading and are not as useful as a more complex formulation might be. As I have been arguing, such a formulation is materialist dialectics, informing a dialectical reflection.

In what follows, I delve deeper into our disciplinary history to develop a longer version of reflection’s genealogy through discussion of two primary theorists of reflection—Dewey and Schön—in order to later contrast their work with the deliberately dialectical form from Marx. In four subsequent sections I locate Yancey’s use of Schön’s work within her formative text on reflection in composition studies.

While I remain attentive to the nuance and more limited scope of reflection as it relates to work in composition, I continue to reference other (in)formative texts, such as Stephen Brookfield’s *Becoming a Critically Reflective Teacher*, Jack Mezirow’s

*Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning* and Michael Polyani's *The Tacit Dimension*, among others; these are texts to which other compositionists are also attentive and use in their own formulations. The breadth of philosophical and educational treatments of reflection is quite astounding, but I have a more pointed purpose here. Discussion of references to work on reflection that other compositionists treat more centrally necessarily occurs in my endnotes. My years of thinking about how reflection is used in composition classrooms has taken me down many divergent paths, each filled with its own histories.

Since my purpose here is to examine how dialectical reflection can be further developed by tapping composition's current assumption of reflection, and because reflection in- and on-action are the dominant concepts in composition, I focus most closely on Yancey's model, more specifically on how she describes her adaptations of Schön's concept reflection-in-action in *Reflection in the Writing Classroom*. What my narrowed focus on Schön and Yancey leaves out in terms of offering the fullest conception of all possible uses of reflection in composition studies consists of, primarily, the theological approaches (including meditation and mindfulness in addition to those from metaphysics, rather, idealist dialectics), those in educational philosophy which separate themselves out from critical theory and Marxist dialectics (ostensibly in pursuit of liberal, "objective" knowledge) and those which develop through other philosophies, namely phenomenology (Heidegger; Sartre) and rhetorical hermeneutics (Gadamer; Ricoeur; Mailloux; Crusius). I would count the materialist rhetorical theories of Kenneth Burke as part of this second philosophical approach. In the chapter's final section, I further argue for a conception of reflection that is better informed by materialist dialectics

and critical theory, thus setting up my exploration of a composition classroom informed by dialectical reflection in the final chapter. While Schön and others discuss Dewey's treatment of human thinking in *Logic* (published in 1938), in addition to the two Deweys of *How We Think* (the 1910 original and the 1933 "restatement"), I focus exclusively on these two earlier texts, finding that what scholars developed from Dewey's later, more explicit pragmatism chiefly informs uses of reflection in composition's sub-field of writing program administration.

All the approaches just listed run counter to what I see as the emancipatory work of a radical reflection in composition and, while worthy of attention for what they may offer, remain outside my scope here. In what follows, I extend my argument for a changed ontology for teachers and students through a review of Dewey's, Schön's, and Yancey's work.

### **The missing ontology of the professional model**

The review of scholarship on reflection in the subsequent sections is conducted in such a way as to foreground what I argue are the two primary impediments to developing dialectical reflection in composition studies: the use of reflection as a way to work the theory/practice dichotomy structuring the field, and the effects of professionalism—with its accompanying attempts to increase the status of writing, thus of compositionists—to the detriment of pursuing the goals of emancipatory education, goals discussed in the first two chapters of this dissertation. In this brief precursor section to the scholarly review, I provide an overview of what follows, further expanding on the just mentioned

“impediments,” in order to circle back to these ideas once the information necessary to provide my argument has been properly laid out.

There are two prominent issues in Schön’s treatment of reflection as they get taken up in Yancey’s development of his ideas for the writing classroom. One is that, in Schön, the overriding concern is how “professionals” think, even though Schön is fully aware that not every one needs (or wants) to think like this, even if they are members of these professions; and the other aspect arises when Yancey adopts Schön’s model of reflective practice as the “framing” and “aligning” of her teaching practices with students but does not account for, nor really draw attention to, the problems which obtain when adapting a model of how professionals *come to know* to the writing classroom.

In *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action*, Donald Schön bases his major concept, reflection-in-action, on an analysis of professional fields, including architecture, psychotherapy, town planning and the “hard professions” of engineering design (74) as well as other “science-based professions,” such as medicine, agronomy, dentistry, optometry, meteorology, nursing, management, forestry and the like (168).<sup>29</sup> Schön himself is quick to caution against what he calls “the model of technical rationality” which holds sway over much professional thinking—and which is, in fact, the foundation of the professions—the belief that all social problems can be solved through the development of technical expertise and rational application. (This becomes a “scientism” in its orthodoxy, often as extended to personal issues outside of the professional domain.) As I discuss in the next section, Schön believes there is an artistry at work in professional practice which needs to be acknowledged, when such practice is not typically approached or, at least, not *taught* as technical problem solving; this artistry



is achieved through a reflective engagement with a situation in the actual practices of professionals.

Yancey says she “re-theorized” Schön’s concepts of reflection-in-action and reflective transfer “specifically for work in the writing classroom” (200) with the belief that these have “the power to change the face of American education” (201).<sup>30</sup> Her three concepts of reflection-in-action, constructive reflection and reflection-in-presentation are presented as ways to develop “habits of mind/spirit/feeling” (201) that are treated *only* as an epistemological practice rather than as a set of interrelated human actions in their entirety; that is, as goals for reflective practice summarized by phrases such as “habits of mind,” in Schön and Yancey, as well as in Phelps’ and Qualley’s work, actually speak to an ontology, a way of being that is reflective and, if fully developed, could work the dialectical, that is, necessary, inner-relationship between epistemology and ontology. However, whereas Schön’s conception of reflective practice does not ignore this relationship, and his understanding of theory and practice appears fundamentally dialectical (without drawing explicitly on that concept; at times he describes reflective practice in relational terms, such as a “dialogue of thinking and doing through which I become more skillful”),<sup>31</sup> his models do effectively *narrow the scene* for reflection, excluding anything perceived as an outlier within a field’s knowing-in-action (which might consist of foundational beliefs, received knowledge, current practices and lore). For most fields, such outliers would include most socio-economic factors or issues of “race, class, and sex” (Schön, *Educating*, 335; in the passage he presumably means “gender”) or what, I contend, necessarily structures a field’s received knowledge, current practices and lore. What is more interesting than this fact, or even that Schön

acknowledges it but does not fully account for it in his conception of reflection, is how Yancey carries it forward in her reworking of his concepts for the writing classroom. I believe this is because Yancey cannot fully assign the effects of “race, class, and sex” to professional practice, as such; to do so would undermine the profession-building activities of compositionists, the history of which she draws upon to theorize reflective practice in the classroom (*Reflection* 199).

Of course, none of this is to suggest that Yancey does not see the damaging effects of harmful social relations on teachers and students and in composition pedagogy. In her last chapter, entitled “Reflective Texts, Reflective Writers,” Yancey takes reflection back out of the writing classroom, devoting passages to attempts at describing how the very uses of reflective practice can be seen as (or in) “texts that work *both* inside and outside of the academy, that suggest and echo and resonate in multiple worlds, that point us in directions we think are worthy” (188; emphasis in original). Reviewing the writing of two authors, one piece published in *Harper’s* and the other a student’s essay from a composition course, Yancey explains how what she values, “multiplicity and community,” when woven into text, “enables us to *make sense*” (187; emphasis in original). The writers “make sense” of different things, both surrounding cancer: a surgical pathologist “weaves multiple narratives” into a story about his encounters with a breast cancer patient that teach him about being a better physician, about human compassion and ultimately, like the student writer who faces her grandfather’s death from complications of lung cancer, about life; and more importantly, these encounters expose aspects about the writers to themselves. Yancey points out that both texts take up what all “classroom reflection-in-presentation” does, the question “what have I learned?” (192-93;

197).<sup>32</sup> Yancey feels that what her student writer has learned is “how to make a tentative connection, a tenuous resolution” which Yancey then relates to Chris Anson’s “qualities of reflective writers” (198). These qualities, abilities to *make sense* from the “chaos of diversity” which characterizes our lives in order to draw tentative yet “logical, sensible and well-supported” conclusions from this ambiguity (“relativism of the world”) result in “writing we are familiar with as professionals—balanced, informed, reasoned” (Anson; quoted in Yancey, 198). In these final pages comprising the book’s conclusion, Yancey seems to mark reflection as both *a part of* the writing and “apart from the writing” (198) while distancing its professional qualities from action. “As I’ve presented it here,” Yancey continues, “reflection seems devoid of action, and I want to correct that impression,” an impression given to her by early reviewers of her book pre-publication, and which point clearly to a different understanding of reflection; that is, one that does not separate it from action (200-201).

I turn next to Dewey as I continue to review the professional orientation to reflection in composition studies. I then briefly introduce Schön’s extensions of Dewey before returning to how Dewey’s and Schön’s theories play out in Yancey’s work.

### **Dewey and Schön: Formative theories of reflection**

Dewey’s Five Distinct Steps in Reflection:

1. a felt difficulty;
  2. its location and definition;
  3. suggestion of possible solutions;
  4. development by reasoning of the bearings of the suggestion;
  5. further observation and experiment leading to its acceptance or rejection.
- from *How We Think* (1910)<sup>33</sup>

Reflective teaching models typically follow from work by John Dewey or Donald Schön; both have been adapted to teaching and learning in composition studies, but, through Yancey, Schön's has had the greatest impact on shaping reflection in composition. There are two primary differences between Dewey's and Schön's concepts, which overlap in interesting ways to mark as a chiasmus what each misses in focusing on aspects that the other does not.

One line in the "X" follows how Dewey's concept includes the moral aspects of teaching and how his methodology stresses step-procedures that—although he later refined his understanding of how reflection works and deemphasized somewhat this procedural view—work to rationalize reflection as a way to technically understand and implement a moral view. Whereas Schön's concept lacks almost any acknowledgement of what takes place outside the reflective moment—thus the why and how, necessarily, reflection might matter in addition to improving professional competence—his concept denies linearity and emphasizes the interrelatedness of reflection and action, and so we have the other line in our "X," the counterpoint to Dewey's understanding. What these theories mark is two different ways to approach reflection that end up with a similar understanding of how reflection works. In Schön's celebrated model of professionals, emphasis is placed on "reflection-in-action." Emphasis is not just on the particular object of reflection in this model *per se* but on the "when," in this case "in the action." This is treated as distinct from models of reflection in which the process is enacted in relation to the object before or after the action involving this object has occurred (such as Dewey's); Schön calls this after-the-fact form *reflection-on-action*. Schön suggests that his reflective practitioner "does not separate thinking from doing, ratiocinating his [*sic*] way

to a decision which he must later convert to action” (69). This is a way to avoid the dichotomizing moves of “technical rationality,” Schön claims, in that what professionals know, or have come to know through education and experience, is often finessed or improved through a reflection of which the practitioners might even be unaware. Schön calls the stockpile of practical knowledge and resources available to professionals *knowing-in-action*; he argues that professional knowledge is already improved through reflection, but that professional practice can be augmented even further if professionals are made aware of their artistry, these reflections.

There seems an obvious importance to whether emphasis in reflection is placed after, during, or *before* (there are models which are explicit about this; for example, Boud, et al’s) the action to be reflected upon. But emphasis is just as important “away” from these distinctions and the debates surrounding them. Most, but not all, discussions of reflective practice position a “reflective practitioner” as the thinking subject, an agent capable of considerable deliberation and one that Yancey argues has agency, which through reflection is “agency doubled” as “agency and the witnessing of agency” (201). Of course, teachers and students are who get positioned most often as the reflective practitioners in the discussions of reflection in composition studies.

Schön’s reflective practitioner is always positioned as a “professional” (gendered male). Sometimes this includes conceptions of teachers, more often it is medical doctors, architects and engineers (graduates of professional schools). Considerable, yet often implicit, emphasis in Schön’s model is placed not just on the “when” but also on the “who.” So, while Schön’s model is very effective for this tacit specificity of the practitioner, it is also necessarily limiting because of this very specificity and therefore

open to considerable debate. As I will make clear in the pages which follow, Yancey's adaptation of Schön's concept of the reflective practitioner, while restated as teacher and student, remains theorized as a predominately male, professional, problem-solver.

Let's circle around again before getting into the details of these two theorists' views on reflection. At their root, most of the discussions of reflection begin as arguments against formulations of positivist science that shape professional and disciplinary knowledge and inhibit practice. This is quite clear in education studies, with its long history of reflection linked to developing curriculum and instruction (Zeichner and Liston 14). The generally agreed upon scholarly fountainhead for reflection in this field is Dewey's philosophical analyses of cognitive processes in *How We Think*. Dewey's work on reflection is generally held out against the instrumentalism inherent in "a positivist, linear conception of the educational and teacher education process" (Richardson 13), although Dewey himself has been accused of instituting such instrumentalism (Karier). It appears somewhat ironic that John Dewey, who is often referred to as the "founder of progressive education" and cited for his insight on reflective thinking, is also a referent in depictions of how educational psychology is accused of being a "scientism" informing education studies since its inception. Tremmel claims that Dewey's model "has over the years become misinterpreted as a narrow problem-solving formula" (439). Tremmel's remark makes a great deal of sense and reveals a tendency in scholarly work toward this kind of development, particularly if placed alongside my own review of Marx and later misinterpretations throughout the twentieth century by "Marxists." If there are such persons as "Deweyians" then Tremmel's work on Dewey can be read that way, too, but it also suggests the ever-

present and purposeful co-optation of liberal philosophy to purposes which run counter to the original more radically-minded intention. Reviewing the section epigraph, we can see how these opposing references to Dewey's work might make sense: "A felt difficulty" leads the practitioner through steps to scientific investigation and conclusion. Dewey's model "could be reduced to a merely instrumental question about the means best suited to achieve one's ends," as Schön describes positivist doctrines of practical knowledge in general (*Reflective* 33), and which for some theorists is in line with Dewey's statements regarding social change (or his brand of progressivism as informed by his pragmatism), as the "intelligent perception of ends...and effective selection and orderly arrangement of means for their execution" (Dewey, "A New Social Science"; qtd. in Karier 91).

My own position is that Dewey was a liberal reformer, among the first in a long series of education reformers, an American Pragmatist whose primary concern was the management of society through the scientific rationality of an education system "committed to flexible, experimentally managed, orderly social change that included a high degree of manipulation" (Karier 93). This is not to say that Dewey's theorizing of reflection is somehow mechanistic; in fact, his treatment of the general human capacity to think, which I review below, contains forms or "senses" of thinking familiar to any modern reader and Dewey, in his attempts at description, seems to both privilege rational thought and acknowledge other modes of thought. And, as Zeichner and Liston point out, "Dewey makes an important distinction between action that is routine and action that is reflective" (9), which is broadly commensurable to the understanding of how ideology impacts human thinking as discussed by Marx and Freire. The problem I read in Dewey is twofold: he does not extend the potential insight of how ideology impacts everyday

thinking in his analysis so that it becomes the necessarily fundamental part of theorizing “how we think” and his analyses tend to hierarchize thinking in ways he may not even intend. While Dewey stresses relational concepts, they are by no means dialectical (see my discussion of the difference in chapter 2), and they are therefore less likely to enable the reflective practitioner to understand all the social relationships which impact the situation being reflected upon.

In both the 1910 original and 1933 “restatement” of *How We Think*, Dewey outlines four senses of “thinking” and “thought.” The first, “its loosest sense,” is anything that “goes through our minds” (182; 1910); the second is what occurs to us but is not the result of direct perception (story telling, for example); the third “denotes belief resting upon some basis, that is real or supposed knowledge going beyond what is directly present. It is marked by *acceptance or rejection of something as reasonably probable or improbable*” (183-84; emphases in original, 1910). Dewey further divides this into two “degrees” of thought, rather, belief, ones which have their “grounds” examined and others not. Dewey continues, “Thoughts that result in belief have an importance attached to them which leads to reflective thought” and this is Dewey’s fourth sense (185; 1910). Any of the first three senses of thought may lead to this fourth sense, but it is to “establish belief upon a firm basis of reasons” through “conscious and voluntary effort” that is truly reflective (186; 1910). Dewey argues that one forms the reasons for such belief through the collection of facts and ideas in the movement from “a doubtful to a settled situation” (99; 1933). “Facts” are what a person perceives in a situation, takes stock of; “ideas” are “suggestions,” possible ways to grapple with the difficulty in the situation (103; 1933).



Thus, for Dewey, reflective thought is purposeful, requires collecting “data” (facts) about a situation in which one is experiencing difficulty, and is linked to action but is not some mere muscle response, some unthinking activity. Dewey gives the example of someone encountering a ditch on their way from point A to point B: “The most ‘natural’ thing for anyone to do is to go ahead; that is to say, to *act* overtly [...] to jump the ditch, but the perception of conditions inhibited that suggestion and led to the occurrence of other ideas” (107-108). Because the walker perceived a difficulty in jumping the ditch (it may have been a bit too wide and the slope on the opposite bank appeared slippery), the jump was not undertaken but reflected upon. Reflection thus informs action, its function is “to transform a situation in which there is experienced obscurity, doubt, conflict, disturbance of some sort, into a situation that is clear, coherent, settled, harmonious” (100-101; 1933). Dewey continues: “Some inhibition of *direct* action is necessary to the condition of hesitation and delay that is essential to thinking. Thought is, as it were, conduct turned in upon itself and examining its purpose and its conditions, its resources, aids, and difficulties and obstacles” (108; 1933, emphasis in original). Here, as at many places throughout both versions of *How We Think*, readers need to consider how the “thought” being discussed is distinctly “reflective,” in Dewey’s fourth sense or if it is thought in one of his other three senses. He does state that “genuine thinking” is reflective in so far as it brings about a change in the thinker’s situation (99-103; 1933). Reflections deal directly with difficulties in situations and are not anything that might go through one’s mind (Dewey’s first sense) which could presumably also “inhibit direct action.” Fear of the jump, being also “natural,” or a simple “wait” said to oneself before jumping without also assessing why would still similarly stop the direct action. But, for

Dewey, the fear or felt difficulty would still remain and the walk still interrupted.

Thought is only reflective when it helps settle the felt disturbance in a given situation, when it is acted upon.

In his “restatement” on reflective thinking, Dewey changes the five *steps* of reflection to five “phases, or aspects”: 1) suggestions, 2) intellectualization, 3) hypothesis (the guiding idea), 4) reasoning, and 5) testing the hypothesis by action (107-14). These are “states of thinking” which Dewey declares “do not follow one another in a set order” (115; 1933). While presenting richer, more descriptive aspects to reflection in his restatement, it remains unclear whether Dewey truly reformulated them or if they are but re-presented with the caveat that they are not to be followed in a set pattern. This is particularly unclear when readers consider how he discusses these aspects in three linear examples, or “cases,” of 1) “practical deliberation,” 2) “reflection upon an observation,” and 3) “reflection involving experiment” (91-94). The first case indeed regards the very practical matter of choosing the quickest mode of public transportation among several options to make an appointment within a 40-minute timeframe (would we to have that many options from which to choose today!). The second case is about determining the function of a pole on a ferry and the third involves determining the reason for bubbles escaping an upturned glass. The outcomes of these cases are not important (the disturbances are all satisfactorily settled) but, in focusing on the claims Dewey makes for each, readers can begin to pull out the familiar patterns which critics have described as instrumentalist.

Dewey states that the “three cases have been purposely selected so as to form a series from the more rudimentary to more complicated cases of reflection,” which clearly

indicates a hierarchy (94; 1933). I find it difficult to imagine conceptualizing of levels of thinking from lower (but still more complicated than reactionary, or what Dewey calls “rude thinking”) to higher-order thought, when the operations involved in all interact with each other and are drawn on in determining the case or again, as Dewey puts it, “settling” the “perplexing situation” (95; 1933). The first case is solved through reasoning and past experience with the modes of transport; the second involves making inferences and drawing conclusions from observation; and the third, “involving experiment,” relies for its satisfactory conclusion on previous knowledge of scientific facts. Dewey states clearly that each case involves inference which “goes beyond ascertained and known facts, which are given either by observation or by recollection of prior knowledge” to “a jump from the known to the unknown” which is *tested* in one of two ways: in thought and in action (96-98; 1933). The inferences in the first and third examples were tested first in thought and then in action; the person who inferred the mode of transportation was proven correct by arriving on time and the third proved the inferences correct through a series of tests based on previous scientific understanding of cold and heated air. The second person only proved the inference by engaging in what Dewey considers “acting in imagination,” in which all the possible uses of the pole are tested by gauging them against what is empirically “known” and not through joining theory to actual physical experiment such as in the third case (98; 1933).

Dewey marks his findings in two ways which lead in different directions. He concludes the discussion of the five aspects of reflection with a new example, in which Dewey favors the experiential education reminiscent of his arguments in *Experience and Education* and wages that, “Probably the most frequent case of failure in school to secure

genuine thinking from students is the failure to insure the existence of an experienced situation of such a nature as to call out thinking in the way in which these out-of-school situations do” (99; 1933). He offers the example of three students failing in different ways to locate the correct decimal place through abstract textbook example but each one arriving at the correct answer when sent to a lumberyard to figure the same problem as the cost of their purchases for the school’s shop (100). But Dewey also suggests that, “The original pattern of reflective action is set by cases in which the need for doing something is urgent, and where the results of what is done test the value of thought. As intellectual curiosity develops, connection with overt action becomes indirect and incidental. Yet it persists even if only in imagination” (98; 1933). “Imagination,” here, indicates *abstraction*, privileging the very kind of reflective pattern called to task in the arithmetic example of three students, unable to arrive at the correct textbook answer in abstraction, successfully demonstrating the math at the lumber yard. The issue here is not that Dewey attempts to maintain this practical nature of reflective thought *and* develop intellectual curiosity in students, which is to both insist that “genuine thinking” is only when reflections are taken back to and affect a situation and to argue that intellectual curiosity is necessarily furthered through abstraction in application to even more difficult, perhaps complex, situations. The issue results from suggesting a hierarchy, privileging one mode as somehow more advanced while continuing to value the ostensibly lesser forms rather than seeing the same aspects of reflective thought present across all examples, “cases” and situations. This perhaps simply states a particularly Modernist problem but also, more importantly, suggests the presence of dialectical understandings in the relational conceptions that are just outside the educational philosopher’s grasp.

The dialectical understanding would account for the five aspects as linked, each necessary to the reflective practice in all of the examples. As Dewey further emphasized from 1910 to 1933, the aspects do not need to follow any order. I think this can be stated further: dialectically, all the aspects are seen as present at the same time and working together to solve the difficulty. Examining the five aspects in three linear examples from simplest to more complex obscures this interactivity. Is this a problem? Well, perhaps not, but Schön does go on to change Dewey's description of reflection to account for a higher degree of interactivity in Schön's concept of reflection as artistry.

There is more to discuss about Dewey's treatment of reflection, particularly how he fixes thought as "genuine freedom" outside of ideology and within an internal psychologism (90; 1933), which will be discussed below in tandem with Schön. But first, let's briefly run through Dewey's final restatement of his relational philosophy in which he transforms the notion of five steps (in 1910) into the five phases of reflection (the 1933 restatement). These are, again, 1) suggestions, 2) intellectualization, 3) hypothesis (the guiding idea), 4) reasoning, and 5) testing the hypothesis by action.

The suggestion phase is "a substitute for direct action. It is a vicarious, anticipatory way of acting, a kind of dramatic rehearsal" during which different and competing ideas are considered as alternatives to the first action, also a suggestion, such as the one to jump the ditch (107-108; 1933, and below). Intellectualization further locates and defines the difficulty in the situation (108). "It is becoming a true problem, something intellectual, not just an annoyance at being held up in what we are doing" (109). Here, Dewey separates intellectual reasoning from the affective, suggesting that intellectualization is a "process" which changes "merely an *emotional* quality of the whole situation" (109,

emphasis in original). The intellectualization of the initial affective response to the situation grows qualitatively so that suggestions become a hypothesis, the “leading idea.” (110). Dewey offers the example of physicians and “expert mechanics” who draw, in addition to their observations and experiences, from “the methods, the techniques” of their fields—basically, from what constitutes their professional practice. The fourth phase is “reasoning” which Dewey modifies with the parenthetical, “in the Narrower Sense” (111). By this Dewey means links in chains of association in previous knowledge and experience which “depends, of course, upon the store of knowledge that the mind is already in possession of” or the professional stockpile of learned information (111). The final phase, “testing the hypothesis by action,” takes the now more formalized leading idea back to the situation for application where the results of the reasoned-out hypothesis are either confirmed or they fail. Dewey stresses that “a great advantage of possession of the habit of reflective activity is that failure is not *mere* failure. It is instructive” (114, emphasis in original).

The final three sections of Dewey’s analysis of reflective thinking offer a number of important considerations. One is Dewey’s reiteration that the phases of reflective thought do not need to be in any order, that the structure of reflective thought changes in response to each situation, and that “in complicated cases some of the five phases are so extensive that they include definite sub phases within themselves” (116). Dewey then goes on to note that reflective thought “involves a look into the future” as well as “reference to the past” (117). Whether either of these are done deliberately depends, again, upon the particular situation. The two main points to carry forward into our discussion of Schön’s work are 1) the distinction Dewey forces upon kinds of reflective

thinking and 2) the lack of interactivity between his modes of reflection. Here, I will quote Dewey at length:

There is [...] an important difference between test by overt action in practical deliberations and in scientific investigations. In the former the practical commitment involved in overt action is much more serious than in the latter. An astronomer or chemist performs overt actions, but they are for the sake of knowledge; they serve to test and develop his conceptions and theories. In practical matters, the main result desired lies outside of knowledge. One of the great values of thinking, accordingly, is that it defers the commitment to action that is irretrievable, that, once made, cannot be revoked. (115)

This separation of practical and academic action is unwarranted, and is emblematic of the pattern of dichotomous thinking structuring a field of education such as composition studies, followed by both its practitioners as well as its detractors. I find that this dichotomy is informed by another of Dewey's assertions in which he, somewhat oddly, separates out what appears to be the wider domain of moral thought which very clearly impacts our actions. Dewey states that,

[I]n matters of practical deliberation where the object is to decide what to do, it may be well to undertake a scrutiny of the underlying desires and motives that are operating; that is, instead of asking what ends and means will best satisfy one's wish, one may turn back to the attitudes of which the wish is the expression. It is a matter of indifference whether this search be listed as an independent problem, having its own phases, or as an additional phase in the original problem. (116-17)

I argue that accounting for these underlying “attitudes” is exactly the point of reflection. That Dewey marks their importance with “indifference,” and does not discuss them at length preferring to focus on forms of “genuine” and correct thinking, clearly follows from how pragmatic concerns to efficiency in thought and action are often joined with the liberal conceit that education trains habits of mind which are themselves natural and right without accounting for the wider social structures, including education, shaping our conception of what is “right.” The lack of engagement with ideology continues in *How We Think* as Dewey goes on to review other differences in thought and to argue that reflective thinking in education is “the business of cultivating a thoughtful attitude” (261; 1933). I will not make the space to quibble with Dewey’s ideas regarding how to make “recitation” the moment of engagement with reflective thinking in classrooms or with his remarks on the “evils of passivity.” For now, let’s just note that Dewey’s challenges to the dominant modes of instruction and the thinking characteristic of teachers at the time sadly carry through to our present day, but what he offered simply attempted to expand them, to make them more “thoughtful,” yet remained the corrective dictates of a liberal reformer.

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The work of Donald Schön, predominately in two books, *The Reflective Practitioner* and *Educating the Reflective Practitioner*, is often held out against the models of technical rationality which took root in schools of education and the professions. The concepts of knowing- and reflection-in-action that he develops in them are often treated as key to valuing “practitioner knowledge” in a way quite distinct from Dewey’s. In *The Reflective Practitioner*, Schön makes his position clear:



It is striking that the dominant model of professional knowledge seems to its proponents to require very little justification. How comes it that in the second half of the twentieth century we find in our universities, embedded not only in men's [sic] minds but in the institutions themselves, a dominant view of professional knowledge as the application of scientific theory and technique to the instrumental problems of practice? (30)

In "The Theory of Inquiry," published five years after Schön's second book *Educating the Reflective Practitioner*, Schön claims his position is distinct from Dewey's more intentional orientation to reflective processes, in such a way that he extends Dewey's conception. Schön describes how, beginning with his dissertation research in the mid-1950s, he remade "Dewey's theory of inquiry"—reflective thought—into his "reflective practice" ("Theory" 123). But Schön's debt to Dewey is also quite clear; the heritage of experiential learning from Dewey is evident throughout his work. But what is also intriguing are the relational understandings that inform Schön's work:

Doing and thinking are complementary. Doing extends thinking in the tests, moves and probes of experimental action, and reflection feeds on doing and its results. Each feeds the other, and each sets boundaries for the other. It is the surprising result of action that triggers reflection, and it is the production of a satisfactory move that brings reflection temporarily to a close. (Schön, *Reflecting*, 280)

I believe that seeing "doing" and "thinking" as "complementary" works more toward a dialectical understanding of what people, as *species being*, are doing when they reflect. Treating people as "species being," as I discussed previously, is seeing their thoughts as entirely caught up with their sensuous activity (and vice versa). While not grounded

conceptually as the operations of humans in Marx's *species being*, Schön throughout *The Reflective Practitioner* extends Dewey's work by complicating it, filling Dewey's conceptions with the uncertain and accounting more for an interactivity between the *steps* or *aspects* in Dewey's reflection. Schön's next book, *Educating the Reflective Practitioner*, is comprised of numerous "real world" applications of his insights—but they focus almost exclusively on professional practice. As I hope is evident in this dissertation, I am not arguing with the entirety of Schön's and Yancey's work. I have a great deal of respect for, and employ many, of their concepts in my own teaching and learning. But, to reiterate once more, I have come ultimately to see their premises as incongruous with my understandings and uses of reflective practice. I hope to build on this statement throughout.

The chief concept in Schön's reflective practice is reflection-in-action; it is a not-fully knowable art form that informs professional practice. What later in Yancey more simply becomes the "reflective practitioner," began for Schön as a professional attending to the *art of managing* professional knowledge (*Reflective* 241). Professional knowledge is distinct from reflection-in-action. Reframed in Schön's concept "knowing-in-action," or knowing-in-practice, it is the host of pre-set knowledge a practitioner draws upon in a given situation. These situations are constrained by professional practice: knowing-in-action often sets limits or boundaries to the action and it also sets up the moment of "surprise" to the situation that often spurs reflection-in-action. Both Dewey and Schön emphasize surprise and novelty as important in reflection—how to handle the unexpected when it arises in a given situation.

Schön also describes his concept of reflection-in-action as a “reflective conversation with the situation” that has “special features of its own” (*Reflective* 242). But it is the “phenomena of organizational life” that give this reflective conversation its scope and direction (242). Schön continues, acknowledging that, the “manager’s reflections-in-action are strongly influenced, and may be severely limited, by the learning system of the organization in which he practices” (242).

I have briefly discussed how Schön’s extensions of Dewey complicate reflection; I continue to bring out more from Schön below when locating his concepts in Yancey’s work. I focused more here on the professional orientation in Schön’s work in order to highlight its prominence in his work. I continue to take up the effects of this professional orientation in different ways below.

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In sum, Dewey moves through all intellectual development and states moral reasons for the importance of instilling reflective thought in education. Schön examines how reflective thought more accurately works *in practice*, extending Dewey’s insights while stripping away the suppositions of his idealistic moralism (inherent in anyone’s attempts to prescribe thought, whether they are seen as a “pragmatist” or otherwise). Even though he more fully explains the reflective situation, Schön does not go on to fully interrogate why reflection might matter outside the narrowed scene of improved professional performance. Even though both Dewey and Schön argue against empiricism, while at the same time valuing the powers of individual observation and agency, their concepts are prone to being co-opted, folded into programs of technical rationality supporting the status quo (albeit the mostly liberal version). This remains true even

though Schön's concepts of "knowledge-in-action" and "reflection-in-action" are explicitly meant to work against technical rationality, when this rationality is understood in the way Schön does, as demeaning (by attempting to ignore or dismiss) "artistry" in "practice" in order to make all decisions conscious, rational and, therefore, ostensibly easier to implement. Here we encounter an interesting contradiction in Schön, in that he argues consciousness, as one's awareness of decisions, can be tapped, theorized, *and* remain only tacitly understood. The concept of knowledge-in-action attempts to describe how a practitioner's past experiences and implicit understandings interact with conscious knowledge in any situation, moreover making the point (against technical rationality) that this artistry need not be described. "When we attend to what we know already, appreciating the artistry and wisdom implicit in competent practice, believing that by reflection on that practice *we can make some of our tacit knowledge explicit*, we take a 'reflective turn' that leads us to see students and teachers (at their best) as participants in a kind of reflective practice" ("Theory" 123; my emphasis). I will return to this idea of a partial yet still fully accessible consciousness to explore its compatibility with dialectical thinking and the conditions and themes necessary for emancipatory education in chapter 4.

I earlier brought up the notion of chiasmus, or the "X," in helping to describe how I see what Dewey and Schön doing as following different lines but in complementary ways. The chiasmus of Dewey's and Schön's work marks the limits of reflection when conceived as professional practice and the necessity for understanding reflective moments as in dialectical relation to wider social reality (currently, how we live within and in opposition to capitalist social structures). Dewey theorizes his reflective thought as

a naturalized process of “how we think,” arguing that only “genuine thinking” is reflective and vice versa. Dewey further dichotomizes thinking in two forms, sometimes privileging practical deliberation and other times the development of an abstract intellect. If there is an actual separation between practical and academic action, and I do not believe there is, then they would function as two necessarily interactive states. Theorizing these dualisms has taken many forms; in education they have developed into formalized concepts such as multiple intelligences and Moll, et al’s “funds of knowledge,” and many in composition studies have similarly privileged academic knowledge while also attempting to value “practitioner knowledge.” Such is the case, for example, with Stephen North’s taxonomies in *The Making of Knowledge in Composition*. Other approaches to this dichotomization include Mike Rose’s *The Mind at Work: Valuing the Intelligence of the American Worker*, which follow up attempts to surmount the privileging of one ostensible mode of thought which attends the theory-practice dichotomy with demonstrations of all kinds of thought in the trades, or practice-based activities. As Rose points out, “For a very long time in the West, there has been a tendency among intellectual elites to distinguish between physical work and technical skill—labor, the mechanical arts, crafts and trades—and deliberative and philosophical activity, which emerges from leisure, or, at least from a degree of distance from the world of work and commerce” (*Mind* 100).<sup>34</sup>

Rather than rehearse these divisions, even while attempting to trouble them like Rose does, it would be best to dispense with them and theorize the capacities of a person unified in thought and action, albeit always at different moments in development, on the way to becoming more fully human. Dialectical reflection accounts for the staggered and

contradictory development of human-beings-in-process who are nonetheless whole, identifiable, collections of processes rather than the fractured, dissolvable persons of postmodernity (see chapter 2.)

Schön's theory of reflection seems dialectical, but the main constitutive, missing element is that it divorces what very well may be a dialectical description of reflection from dialectical descriptions of social reality, thus its usefulness to a revolutionary praxis is greatly diminished. This can be compared, for example, to how "theory" and "methods" courses have historically been divided in schools of education. But what remains in Schön is an overriding focus on professional situations, learning how to better perform as a "professional," which brackets off wider understandings of one's actions and any consideration of them outside of professional efficacy.

We are now left with the fact that Schön's books are the typical jumping off point for studies of reflection in composition. I think this is largely due to its emphasis on professional performance; an emphasis my treatments of reflection do not share (see the Introduction, above). Before extending my review specifically to composition studies, I will reiterate that Schön's work, which Robert Tremmel calls "the liveliest center of action" in "help[ing] shape views of what reflection in teacher education is and might be" (435), and outside of supplemental references to Stephen Brookfield's work and a handful of others in adult education, was for many years often the *only* reference to this "lively action" in education that is cited in composition studies. This is due in large part to the success of Kathleen Yancey's work on reflection, predominately but not exclusively in her book, *Reflection in the Writing Classroom*.

The remainder of this chapter acknowledges Yancey's book as the centerpiece to discussion of reflection in composition studies, linking other composition texts to it as extensions, interrogations or rebuttals to its main premises. There are certainly other treatments of reflection in composition, and I reference a number of them in what follows. But Yancey's work draws almost exclusively on Schön (therefore, by extension, Dewey) and because of this I see it as the leading statement conferring importance on professional orientations to reflection.

My work here is meant less as a rebuttal of Yancey, Schön, and Dewey than as a wrangling with the professional orientations, as these come from very different premises than my own philosophical approaches to reflection. Moreover, rather than engage the impossibility of arguing for a complete reinvention of reflection in composition studies, I seek to interrogate those correspondences between our approaches so that the important work we have already accomplished as a field on reflection can be extended to the emancipatory goals of a radical education.

### **Yancey's chief concepts and recent scholarship: three parts of reflection in composition**

My interest in reflection did not spring from an interest in theory. It developed in the ground of practice: as I watched students work, as I began to appreciate how little I knew without asking, to learn from my students when I did ask, to understand ever-so-gradually that the teaching of writing, like the writing of text, is a social process, an interaction, an exchange, and finally, that to learn from these experiences what they had to teach, I needed to structure them, to find several means of framing and ways of aligning them. — Kathleen Blake Yancey, *Reflection in the Writing Classroom*

I've always appreciated Kathleen Yancey's attempts to begin where students are, which—now a commonplace in composition studies—is an important change in how we

think about teaching and learning. Yancey attributes much of this shift to process researchers in the 1970s and 80s who, “in crediting *students* with knowledge of what was going on inside their own heads and in awarding it authority, [...] did something very valuable and very smart. These students are the ones who have allowed the rest of us, the teachers, to investigate, to understand, *to theorize our classroom practice*” (5; emphases in original). Yancey approached reflection initially from her work in portfolios where, she points out, reflection (particularly in the form of a reflective essay) does not always have its potential for demonstrating student learning fully realized (15). But Yancey takes care to also mention that demonstrating student learning is a responsibility shared between students and teachers, even suggesting that, “if I as teacher knew more and knew better, I could be more useful to students” (42).

Composition studies has a venerable history of acknowledging and defending the status of students, as such. This is one of the field’s founding motivations, perhaps best represented with *Students’ Right to Their Own Language* (SRTOL), the 1974 resolution of the field’s professional organization, the Conference on College Composition and Communication. Yancey’s book illustrates how compositionists acknowledge and respect students’ subject positions; throughout *Reflection in the Writing Classroom*, Yancey’s focus is on students and, just as importantly, their agency. Yancey believes student agency is accessed by enacting *reflection-in-action*, through which students can treat the classroom as a rhetorical situation, one in which students voice their own subject positions *as subjects*. As Yancey puts it, “The rhetorical situation, then: please tell me as teacher what’s going on” (42).



Yancey emphasizes that through reflection “students do know more and know better—about their thinking, their processes, their practices. We’ve assumed this in our research, but we haven’t always assumed this in our classrooms” (42). But just as Yancey’s model for reflective practice begins to take what students know and what they can say into serious consideration, it also stops short of the full ontological shift necessary for engaging in the “epistemology of practice” that is reflection-in-action (Schön, *Reflective*, 278). An examination of this shift, as possible in each of the three parts to reflective practice Yancey has laid out, is offered below. But first, it’s important to point out where, referring to the work of Louise Phelps, Yancey first states that, “Reflection brings with it an underlying promise; that it can provide a means of bringing practice and theory together. In so doing, it makes possible a theorizing of practice based on practice, a means of extending and differentiating earlier practice, and then of theorizing anew” (7). Yancey in many ways draws upon reflection in an attempt to work the theory-practice binary that founded the field of composition (and which has been present in education fields more broadly since the inception of the modern university).- And as Yancey writes about these necessary relationships, between theory and practice, reflection and action, teachers and students, she does so in ways wherein one aspect of the “pairing” is rent and treated separately from the other.

“In method, reflection is dialectical, putting multiple perspectives into play with each other in order to produce insight” (6).<sup>35</sup> Here, it doesn’t really matter what Yancey means by “dialectical,” for what remains as the problematic to be explored is her description of how reflection works in the writing classroom. She continues:

Procedurally, reflection entails a *looking forward* to goals we might attain, as well as a *casting backward* to see where we have been. When we reflect, we thus *project* and *review*, often putting the projections and the reviews in *dialogue* with each other, working dialectically as we seek to *discover* what we know, what we have learned, and what we might understand. [...] Reflection, then, is the dialectical process by which we develop and achieve, first, specific goals for learning; second, strategies for reaching those goals; and third, means of determining whether or not we have met those goals or other goals. [...] Accordingly, reflection is a critical component of learning and of writing specifically; articulating what we have learned *for ourselves* is a key process in that learning—in both school learning and out-of-school learning (although I'm not sure the two can be—or should be—separated). (6-7; emphases in original)

Yancey is right: the two can't be separated, but not only can we not separate the various locations where learning takes place: we cannot separate theory and practice, teaching and learning, or teachers and students. We can isolate and one of those terms to examine them scientifically *as if* it were a singular phenomenon, but never truly separated.

Without putting things back into the concrete, necessary relationships which comprise them, the potential for complete understanding and the possibilities for change, which is at root the purposes of all educational activity, are lost.

Yancey wants to ask her students, following the composition process researchers, what they know, she wants to *learn from* her students and to understand how teaching “is a social process,” in other words, how it's an “interaction” and “exchange.” As Yancey states in the section epigraph, “as I watched students work, as I began to appreciate how

little I knew without asking,” Yancey is nodding toward a changed relationship I know is at the heart of her teaching practice. This represents a changed stance for the teacher, once ostensibly held out to be the only one who possesses knowledge in the teacher-student relationship. Yancey offers the possibility of a changed epistemology, a different relationship to teacher knowledge and how it is created. But, while admirable in its attempt, Yancey does not go far enough: To more fully accomplish what she wishes to achieve in her reflective practice, Yancey—and all teachers who take her stance seriously—need to adopt a new ontological basis for being a teacher. I believe Yancey wants to be *with* her students, engaged in the teaching and learning process that not only acknowledges that students *know*, and that teachers also *don't know*, but ultimately transforms the teacher-student relationship in equitable ways that work toward even wider social change. To be *with* students means teaching is not done *to* or *for* students but is part of a process that acknowledges how teachers and students are dialectically—that is, necessarily—inner-related parts of a larger process. While it's obvious that without students there are no teachers, even though some teachers don't seem to acknowledge that much, this is only one initial aspect of the changed relationship between students and teachers necessary to accomplish the goals of reflective practice.

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In developing a concept of reflection useful for the writing classroom, Yancey draws out two of Schön's concepts, reflection-in-action and reflective transfer, which she says “form the philosophical backdrop to [her] book” (13). From this philosophical basis, Yancey develops “three discrete but inter-related concepts and [applies] them to the teaching and learning of writing”: reflection-in-action, constructive reflection, and

reflection-in-presentation (13-14). I briefly review these sections below, using this review to put the discussion of Schön above in more direct conversation with Yancey's work.

### **Reflection-in-action**

Reflection-in-action tends to be embedded in a single composing event, tends to be oriented to a single text, its focus squarely on the writer-reader-text relationship and on the development of that text. We can invite it in several ways. (Yancey 26)

For Yancey, reflection-in-action develops from Schön's concept of knowing-in-action which, again, he defines as an internalized understanding of how we perform. "When we have learned how to do something, we can execute smooth sequences of activity, recognition, decision, and adjustment without having as we say, to 'think about it'" (*Educating* 26). But when faced with an element of "surprise," something not accounted for in our typical way of doing things, or our "spontaneous knowing-in-action," Schön says we can either ignore it or "respond to it by reflection." The way we respond, according to Schön, is either by stopping the action to "reflect on" it or by maintaining the course of events in what he calls the "action-present": "a period of time, variable with the context, during which we can still make a difference to the situation at hand—our thinking serves to reshape what we are doing while we are doing it. I shall say, in cases like this, that we reflect-*in-action*" (*Educating* 26). Schön follows this description with an example of when he, an amateur carpenter, worked out a problem making a wooden gate square. Faced with the "surprise" of his gate not being square, and also given to wobbling, Schön describes a process that others might suggest is "trial and error" in order to fix his gate true, thus accomplishing his task.

But, just as Dewey before him, Schön goes on to say that “trial and error” suggests a somewhat random series of tests and in his process, “the trials are not randomly related to one another; reflection on each trial and its results sets the stage for the next trial.” This is akin to the “trained inquirer,” Dewey’s reflective thinker, who builds upon the errors made in any situation and can call them up again. Through reflection, Dewey’s trained thinker is capable of surpassing that which “merely annoys and discourages a person not accustomed to thinking, or what starts him [sic] out on a new course of aimless attack by mere cut-and-dry methods”; rather, these become “a stimulus and guide to the trained inquirer” (115-16; 1933). What Schön now reinscribes as a “pattern of inquiry” he insists is “better described as a sequence of ‘moments’ in a process of reflection-in-action” (27). This process is subsequently laid out in a five-point bulleted list (28-29). It is this list which Yancey cites, thus locating a procedure she adapts for reflective practice in writing.

Drawing on Schön, Yancey states, “[M]uch of writing, as we know [...] calls for novel responses [Schön’s “surprise”] based on new ways of seeing the situation, the purpose, the audience, the genre, and hence the material” (24). The process that wasn’t working in Schön’s gate building situation can thus be reflected on in a rhetorical situation as well. For Yancey, focusing on what is novel while composing follows composing process work in composition, wherein writers were asked to describe what they’re doing while composing (24). Yancey likens reflection-in-action to the series of retrospections and projections described by Sondra Perl in “Understanding Composing.” Yancey begins with Perl’s work “dividing composing into two components, almost like two selves” and adds the work of Nancy Sommers, whose suggestion that “dissonance,”

marking one distinction between novice and experienced writers, is also what's being sought through reflection-in-action: "a detachment that makes possible another perspective on the text" (25-26). Following Sommers' suggestion that there are "two actors working together within a single writer," this detachment describes the internal dialogue writers have while looking at their own text as readers might. Same text, the same set of eyes looking at it, but when the writer reflects on her text—successfully—Sommers and Yancey say she tends to do so as a reader.

We now see how reflection-in-action as described by Yancey in the section epigraph focuses on the writer-reader-text relationship within the rhetorical situation of one composing act and that, for Yancey, it is important to stress that a writer's reflection-in-action "focuses on *both*: the relationship between the writer and the text; and the relationship between the reader and the text" (25; Yancey's emphasis).

In terms of "inviting" this reflection-in-action from students, Yancey offers three ways (but suggests there are likely many more). Process descriptions are the first (26); a companion piece, asked for after the primary text is composed, which Yancey also calls a "talk-to" (31); and the third way to invoke reflection-in-action from students is what Yancey calls the "talk back" (37). When Yancey asks for process descriptions from writers, she is asking them to speak for their work so they might come to understand it. Process descriptions create records through which "students begin to *know* their own processes, a first and necessary step for reflection of any kind" (27; Yancey's emphasis).

The talk-to asks "students to think about their text quite explicitly from diverse perspectives," including Yancey's, as their teacher. Developed from Elbow's "believing" and "doubting" games in his book, *Embracing Contraries*, students write a talk-to first

from the perspective that the primary text being reflected upon is the best they've ever written and then write from the perspective that it isn't "any good at all." Yancey then asks for writing from a third perspective, "*predict* Yancey's take on this paper" (32; her emphasis). This third perspective, Yancey feels, acknowledges that student papers aren't fixed commodities, waiting to be appreciated or denigrated by an expert reader and exchanged for accolades and credit: that their meanings and uses are, indeed, social and negotiated.<sup>36</sup> The three perspectives provide a "set of stances," believe, doubt, predict, agree/disagree (with Yancey, with the writer's own assessment, too), which are a heuristic that Yancey says "provides a basic template to which other questions [...] can be added" (32).

Yancey suggests that the "doubting" stance taken up in their talk-to's is the first critical one for many students, at least in school-based writing, and that reflections-in-action with this stance contribute to a later viewpoint of "committed relativism," within William Perry's conception of intellectual development. In Perry's model, students begin "recognizing the ways that context influences what was previously regarded as right and wrong" (Yancey 33). Here, Yancey refers to Chris Anson's work in "Response Styles and Ways of Knowing" in which he calls "the dominant epistemological view" of Perry's committed relativism *reflective* (Yancey 33).

Yancey calls a third possibility for invoking reflection-in-action in writing classrooms the "talk-back," which is a way "to continue the nominal dialogue that the text and a response create" (37). Yancey invites her students to "talk back" to the comments she makes on their essay drafts, thus creating a textual conversation about the writing.

Yancey doesn't outline the only ways she thinks it's possible to invoke reflection-in-action in the writing classroom; she feels there are likely many more (42). Yancey's descriptions of her own teaching practice offer three ways to conceptualize reflection-in-action mostly, as she sees it, in order to ask "student writers to do what experienced writers do: think and talk about their work" (42). Yancey clearly marks reflection-in-action with the work of its forebears, composition process research of the 1970s and 80s.

But what Yancey also holds out for reflection-in-action is changed teacher practice. By asking students for descriptions of their processes, Yancey believes students are both contextualizing and theorizing their own writing practices. For Yancey, students being authorized to describe their own context necessitates changed teaching practices. Yancey describes four changed practices for teachers: one is that teachers are less likely to read students' papers against an "ideal text," the "one in [we teachers'] heads," because students have supplied, through reflection-in-action, their own contexts for understanding what they're attempting to do (42). Other changed practices include "[issuing] an invitation" to (student) writers *as* writers; in other words, authorizing writers to view themselves as such, which Yancey stresses has not historically been the case in teaching practice; "linking the personal perception with the public activity" of writing (43), which "allows the composer to narrate his or her own development" as a writer (44); and, finally, identity formation.

Yancey describes this identity formation as students being able "to record their observations as one of several moves toward knowing their practice" (43). The recording enables writers to "discourse" with other writers about their practices, which is key to



*understanding* those practices. But identity formation here also indicates something wider, as practices not only surrounding text production, and Yancey hints at this as well.

### **Constructive reflection**

Yancey's notion of *constructive reflection* calls upon Schön's notion of "reflective transfer," which extend the insights of reflective practice. In many ways, the cumulative effects of reflection are what matter to Schön: his notion of "reflective transfer" is what accounts for the artistry he sees in professional practice. Reflection models for composition contain an often narrowed focus: on the writing, in the classroom. This is especially true for Yancey's model of *reflection-in-action*, which she knows, and which she attempts to correct with her second concept, *constructive reflection*, by "developing a cumulative, multi-selved, multi-voiced identity, which takes place between and among composing events" (200).

What impacts students is often what's outside the (current) classroom, including their previous educational experiences, which affect what and how they're writing as much as what's involved—directed or suggested—in the narrowed focus to the rhetorical situation of any particular classroom. I take up this claim in the next chapter as I build upon a notion of dialectical reflection in imagining possible emancipatory classrooms for composition studies. Yancey also acknowledges this idea, at least in how constructive reflection is intended to extend reflection-in-action over the course of an academic term. She describes it this way: "1. observe and examine our own practice 2. make hypotheses about successes and failures there, as well as the reasons for each 3. shape the next iteration of similar experience according to what we have learned, when 4. we begin the

cycle again” (126-27). Here, reflective transfer is defined as steps in a process of “gathering and application” of reflective insight in one rhetorical situation to subsequent rhetorical situations (51). Yancey believes that constructive reflection “also involves invention—of the self, the writer who moves from one rhetorical situation to another” (51). For Yancey, the creation of an identity as a writer through the effects of examining multiple instances of writing (the process of cumulative reflection) also massages another dichotomy Yancey observes in composition studies and describes as a “question of whether our purpose in the classroom is to help students write better *or* to develop writers—whether our purpose in responding, for instance, is to evaluate the text or reply to the writer” (51; emphasis in original). Yancey characterizes this as an “either/or proposition” that constructive reflection recasts as “relational, as *both/and*” (51; her emphasis).<sup>37</sup>

Yancey’s concepts of reflection-in-action and constructive reflection offer a lot to compositionists. I will argue in the next chapter that constructive reflection is perhaps the key concept for adapting the current work in composition to emancipatory goals. Reflection-in-action and constructive reflection, if placed in a dialectical framework, can inform the concepts of critical literacy and radical love. I will return to this idea below, but first, I discuss what reflection-in-action and constructive reflection currently inform: reflection-in-presentation, Yancey’s third concept.

Reflection-in-presentation reinscribes the professional orientation to reflection by focusing on reflection as *demonstrations of reflection* in public, written performance: the purview of composition studies. I discuss Yancey’s third concept by reviewing two recent composition essays: the first, by Cathy Leaker and Heather Ostman, builds on

reflection-in-presentation and argues for its efficacy in work at their university; the second, by Julie Jung, makes a very different claim. Jung suggests that all reflective work in composition studies is reflection-in-presentation, as these reflections are often required written statements. She offers a way to adjust the field's uses of reflection to acknowledge, really, that all reflection is rhetorical. I locate my own argument for dialectical praxis in Jung's claims for reflection. I follow my work with Jung with discussion of *reflexivity*, a concept that I believe links new assessments of reflection in composition studies, such as Jung's, to my overall arguments in this dissertation for a dialectical reflection.

### **Reflection-in-presentation**

We believe that because reflection-in-presentation demands a self-conscious and public representation of the learning self, students are more likely to successfully claim their learning when they are given structured opportunities to reflect on what it means for them to be knowing subjects and to perform such subjectivity in their writing. (Leaker and Ostman 697)

In their 2010 *CCC* article, Cathy Leaker and Heather Ostman argue for reflection as a sort of “affective bridge between experience and the multiple domains of writing” for adult students writing portfolio essays to request PLA (prior learning assessment) credits from institutional reviewers (697). Leaker and Ostman state that Yancey provides “a useful framework for thinking about how students might present their learning as learning and avoid representing it as ‘only’ experience” (697). For adult education credits to be granted for life experiences, the experiences must be described in ways that demonstrate how the writer learned from them, that they were indeed, “learning experiences.” In doing so, Leaker and Ostman argue, along with Yancey, that reflection is rhetorical and

they further suggest that students they mentored who “most effectively used and performed reflection were more successful in discovering and claiming their learning” (698). In other words, these students often not only convinced reviewers to grant them university credit for life experience through their writing, but Leaker and Ostman also observed the students coming to *understand*, in addition to have validated, their experiences *as* learning.

This coming-to-know and the credit for demonstrating it were both accomplished through what Yancey calls “reflection-in-presentation,” which “is linked to public ways of knowing, [and] typically associated with evaluation, with the judgment about the writing and the writer made by a reader” (*Reflection* 15). As public performances, reflection-in-presentation takes the form of end-of-term essays, portfolio cover letters or any other writing in which writers are tasked with demonstrating that they’ve learned something and also how they came to learn it, including the PLA essays at Leaker and Ostman’s university.

Leaker and Ostman thus claim that “reflection-in-presentation demands a self-conscious and public presentation of the learning self” which leads students to understand themselves as, in addition to being able to perform, a “knowing subject” in their writing. Yancey believes the understanding that comes through reflection is possible through reflection-in-presentation, which is always a public act, as well as through reflection-in-action, which is when a writer focuses on a single composing event in order to understand it.

Julie Jung makes a different observation about reflection in a recent essay: stating that reflection—all mandated reflection, that is, such as PLA essays—are rhetorical

performances. Jung further argues that Yancey's concept of reflection-in-action is also reflection-in-presentation, "rhetorical arguments delivered to external higher-ups for purposes of persuasion" (Jung 645).

In her 2011 *College English* essay, Jung focuses on the process descriptions present in many reflective essays, which take two forms. In one, writers are asked to account for their development as writers, over many drafts of one text or perhaps over the course of many years and numerous writings; in the other, writers are asked to describe what they're doing while composing a single text. Both of these are meant to have the writer learn how they write, making any changes necessary to become more accomplished. For Jung, these descriptions are deemed as working or not working according to how well they correspond to the teacher's sense of what "should" have happened (637). Correspondingly, Jung believes student writers are in effect composing historical narratives about themselves as rhetorical arguments, composing themselves through their narration *as* writers in ways the student writers think their readers expect. Examining the published reflective essay of "Maria," Jung suggests its "process description is persuasive because [Maria's] explanation legitimates the pedagogical assumptions of the reader who required her to write it" (637).<sup>38</sup>

Drawing on Hayden White, Jung says process descriptions in reflective essays such as Maria's are written in the "synecdochic mode," in which the writer's composing event, described, represents "one part of a development that leads to a whole, and the event's explanation – why it happened as it did – is the whole itself" (637). Jung explains that the synecdochic mode "naturalizes the work of writing, thereby making it difficult for teachers to interpret 'bad' process descriptions as anything other than unsatisfactory

demonstrations of student learning” (629), rather than as evidence of something else, even of learning, just not as a description meeting a synecdochic imperative.

Questioning, but still following the line of reflection in composition as laid out most prominently by Yancey, Jung is suggesting that the third component to reflective practice in composition studies, students’ “reflection-in-presentation” (which for Schön would follow knowledge-in-action and reflection-in-action), is actually a rhetorical act, a conscious acknowledgment of the wider material reality for student reflections. Jung would have us reexamine the rhetoricalness of reflection-in-presentation as constitutive of deep myths compositionists hold firm. Open admission of such a reality would constitute *reflexivity*; if the field were to pull at the threads exposed by the reflective act of students meeting teachers’ expectations, accounting for composing choices as if they were one’s solely while fully knowing otherwise—that is, as if these reflections were understood, rightly, as yet another felt dichotomy in one’s social being—it would start to unravel the weave of disciplinary knowledge.

Jung states, “[B]y critiquing commonplace assumptions about process descriptions, I mean to mystify the concept of *reflective writing* so that we might gain some critical distance from our current and very strong disciplinary beliefs about it” (641). This begins to make a reflexive move, but what does it accomplish? By “mystifying” our concepts, I believe, Jung means to “make strange” our understandings, to freshly examine the familiar. But, unpacking what “naturalizes the work of writing” (the “synecdochic mode,” for Jung), is better achieved through a dialectical praxis which locates these naturalizing elements within the wider processes of which they are constituted, to reflect not only on one’s performance in a given situation, but to reflect on

what comprises the situation (social relations), the past attitudes, feelings, how they've come into a temporarily fixed existence and how they are linked to future performance and potential, not just of the person reflecting, but of the set of processes as they work dialectically. This reflection, of the material reality of writing, seeks explanations of composing choices not as dichotomized nor as isolated from wider understandings of the work of writing, of how these processes necessarily come together, "work through" and are worked *by*, the writer. In order to begin effecting such reflection, there needs to be emphasis in composition studies placed on the materiality of writing, which accounts for composing choices as necessarily comprised of the processes of all social relations, including ones that teachers of writing may not currently see or like very much when they do. That means, for a student like Maria in Jung's example, open and continued reflection on the actual work of composing a text: which includes writing to reproduce the social forms characterized by reflective writing in our institutions and which Jung reads as operating through an attempt to meet teacher expectations. As Maria writes to "legitimate the pedagogical assumptions of her readers," these readers' evaluations also serve to legitimate Maria's writing practices. Reflection in revolutionary praxis would have Maria and these teachers working together to make clear these effects of institutional, reproductive praxis, to acknowledge and interrogate both Maria's attempts and the reasons her writing is read in these ways, which means teachers need also read it in different ways.

### **Reflexivity: Working across levels of generality**

The issues which attend Dewey and Schön and as are extended to composition studies through Yancey stem from the level of generality on which the compositionist locates reflection; that is, when the reflection is on a personal level or on a broader, more social level, and on the lack of conceptual interactivity between these levels. Dewey's and Schön's concepts focus on one level of abstraction. Here, I draw on my discussion of dialectics in chapter 2, in which I argue that a dialectical conceptualization is capable of accounting for different levels of generality in its abstractions from material reality. I earlier noted how Schön's extensions set out to complicate Dewey's theory and provide for some interaction between Dewey's *steps* or *aspects*. But, while Schön provides a way to look more carefully at what people are doing within the reflective moment, he also effectively limits the uses of reflection to the scene of that moment. An interactivity between scenes is present in Schön's account of *reflective transfer*, but still within professional practice.

All of Dewey's, Schön's, and Yancey's work acknowledges, in different ways, the level of generality but also cannot fully account for it. This is so because, in short, none of their theories are explicitly dialectical and thus cannot account for this interactivity. However, the concept of "reflexivity" in composition studies does account for levels of generality in ways that "reflection" does not. I will move through discussion of these two concepts here and at the beginning of the next chapter in ways that I hope bring out how this level of generality differs.

Although the terms "reflective" and "reflexive" are sometimes used interchangeably, with the latter sometimes being simply a British variant spelling, what is



typically meant by “reflexivity” tends to differ from the use of “reflective” in discussions of reflection.<sup>39</sup> Being “reflexive” often involves examining how knowledge is constructed within the domain one is working and on the personal level can hold different meanings than those processes described as reflective. On the personal level in other fields across the humanities and social sciences (this level is also where most compositionist’s understandings of reflection stay), use of the term “reflexive” often indicates self-awareness. The “radical” form of this reflexivity is being aware of one’s self-awareness (Rennie). Reflexivity is also used to designate critical investigations or even disruptions in “received thought” or practice. An example of this sort of disciplinary reflexivity are the now classic studies in sociological methodology by Harold Garfinkel, in which the very aims and purposes of sociological inquiry, in addition to its methodologies, were systematically questioned.<sup>40</sup>

In composition studies, Janet Emig offers one of the earliest uses of the term “reflexive,” her usage focusing entirely on a mode of composing in which writers explore their thoughts and write primarily for themselves (4). This use of “reflexive” to indicate personal exploration is common in other fields, although not necessarily occurring only in writing, and tends to be referred to more often as both “self-reflexive” and “self-reflective.” In *The Composing Processes of Twelfth Graders*, Emig examines the reflexive mode of writing as distinct from a mode she calls “extensive writing” which “occurs chiefly as a school-sponsored activity” (91). Reflexive writing is “committed” and “exploratory” (91); most often written for “the self,” reflexive writing may involve more revision and “contemplation,” which she measured as pauses during composing (91, 93). Reflexivity, in Emig’s study, is what Doug Downs claims the writing-on-writing

curricula theorists hold out as all “reflection” in early process research (2; see genealogical overview above).

In another use, extensively different than Emig’s, Donna Qualley and Elizabeth Chiseri-Strater examine “reflexivity” in their proposal of collaborative inquiry as an answer to Kurt Spellmeyer’s call for “a pedagogy that is ‘conducive to dialogue,’ that encourages a way of knowing ‘deeper than reason’” (“Collaboration”). What they concluded through the analysis of “several hundred collaborative inquiry groups” is the need for “reflexive dialogue,” which “may lead to the construction and examination of one’s own position” (“Collaboration”). This personal examination is the result of what the authors call “two recursive moves: a dialectical encounter with an ‘other’ (a person or idea) and a reflexive engagement with the self” (“Collaboration”). As Qualley expands on three years later in her book, *Turns of Thought*, “Reflexivity involves a commitment to attending to what we believe, think, and feel while examining how we came to hold those beliefs, thoughts, and feelings” (41). This examination is in direct engagement with an “other,” but still in service to our continued understanding of both self and other in a process Qualley terms “authentic learning” or “learning that deepens and expands our understanding of both our subject and ourselves” (40). Reflexivity for Qualley, then, is both personal and social and requires a “bidirectional movement of thought” (42). Qualley’s use of the personal essay form in her pedagogy demonstrates this bidirectional movement. Making the distinction between personal essays meant for public consumption and journals or diary writing “which are written primarily for the self and not intended for other readers,” Qualley argues for writing “for and about the self” that is also “about a subject other than the self that is examined in relation to the self” (42).

### **A dialectical reflection: Toward the transformation of everyday teaching and learning**

In order to transform everyday teaching and learning in ways that support the underlying purpose of the educational process, that is, for people to become more fully human (Freire, *Pedagogy*, 66), radical educators must work against the debilitating effects of dominant social relations in and out of education by first adopting, then adapting, an understanding of reflection different from that currently standard in the field. The work of reflection in composition needs to both transcend and renew both its traditional textual focus and its more recent focus on postmodern discourse theories by bringing together composition teachers' and students' concerns about their wider lived reality with a sustained "demystifying" of the work of composing.

The just mentioned debilitating effects blocking full human development, characterized by the competitiveness and divisiveness of capitalist social relations, combined with composition studies' overriding emphasis on "professionalism" (seeking professional status for the field and focusing on the training of professional communicators), need to be countered with notions of radical love. These notions can be achieved through a dialectical praxis in which re-theorized reflection is a key, inseparable, part. As I have just reviewed above, the currently standard ways of conceptualizing reflection limit imagination and the full growth of composition teachers and students within disabling myths of both professionalism and composing in which are often posited understandings of reflection dichotomized from action. These myths sustain the status quo and are the fairly uniform fibers of composition's fabric. There have always been

compositionists pulling at the frayed edges; some occasionally unravel entire rows. But the work for radical educators in composition remains challenging the field's maintenance of the status quo, which does not seek the emancipation of all people but rather the reproduction of the social relationships conducive to the needs of academic capitalism. Working toward this transformation, composition teachers need to: 1) refuse to dichotomize conceptions of reflection from action, in part by also refusing the role of teacher as dichotomized from that of student; 2) work against the concept and dictates of professionalism and develop another way of being, a changed ontology, in part because professionalism relies on maintaining the social roles of "experts" and students/novices; 3) invoke a radical love, which can be used to oppose and eventually dismantle the dominant social frameworks in which people are hierarchized: categorized and sorted, tested and dismissed; 4) develop with students a concept of critical literacy in order to thoroughly examine, and continually reexamine, literate practices, both reconstructing and further developing them as ways to understand other social practices.

In the next, final, chapter, I build from this list and further describe Karl Marx's dialectical praxis discussed in chapter 2 and ascribed to by radical educators such as Paulo Freire, Peter McLaren and Paula Allman that defines a reflection inseparable from action. As discussed throughout the previous two chapters, the prominent scholarship on reflection dichotomizes reflection from action, thus focusing a great deal of attention on whether it matters if reflection is conceived as taking place before, during or after action. As we saw, Schön's work on reflection posits a thinking agent reviewing *his* actions to improve performance, while also maintaining that reflection happens during the action as well. While Schön's acknowledgment of reflection before, during and after the action

works toward a more dialectical understanding, his framework of *professionals* improving professional performance within their narrowed scope does effectively continue to limit the uses of reflection in the full educational process. A dialectical conception of reflection almost renders moot the *questions* of when reflection happens, as it demonstrates the impossibility of dichotomized human being. Seeing that we cannot have reflection without action and that changed conditions change human thinking, it remains important to link these questions to the professionalizing motives of compositionists who would put their energies toward answering such questions. Our collective emancipation cannot be achieved while scholars debate when reflection happens within the exploitative relations of professional models. Contra Schön then, it is against these models of liberal professionalism in the field and toward the transformation of everyday teaching and learning that I apply dialectical reflection.

Hence, the next chapter describes what needs to happen so that dialectical reflection might work—for both students and teachers—in composition classrooms. Such reflection is a *praxis*, a dialectical practice which encompasses the understandings in composition studies of critical reflection and *reflexivity*. As developed from philosopher Karl Marx's theory of consciousness, dialectical praxis relies upon theories of both *change* as a fundamental reality and of *exploitation* as a hegemonic social relation. Because it accounts for the interactivity of these perspectives, dialectical praxis demonstrates a way to achieve the underlying purpose of education which is, again, full human emancipation.

## Chapter Four

In this chapter, I offer an idealized classroom in which radical love and dialectics inform reflection in order that emancipatory education is better supported.

### A Teacher Study

It will depend upon the uh, the activity but, for me, as a teacher I'm always reflecting on the methods of my teaching and the engagement of my students, and an example where I've reflected on activities in the classroom, then on my reflection on those activities and then determining whether or not my adjustments or my new strategies are successful come down to the point where you look into your students' eyes and they have those "ah ha" moments, they're getting it.

I interviewed 22 composition teachers at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. The interviews were conducted over several months in 2008 (as part of a larger study from 2006 to 2008). Interviewees included short- and long-term contingent faculty, and MA and PhD graduate students teaching composition to offset the costs of their education. The graduate students were in several areas of study, including Composition and Rhetoric, and Professional Writing, though most were in the Literature and Creative Writing tracks in the PhD program.<sup>41</sup> Working within a composition program that values and supports reflective teaching and whose undergraduate writing students put together end-of-term portfolios with reflective components, the interviewees provided me a useful cross-sample of attitudes toward reflection, awareness, or lack, of scholarship on reflection in the field, and general engagement with teaching.

In the passage above, one of the teachers in my interview study, Paul Kennedy,<sup>42</sup> focuses in on the scene for reflection in an analysis of his teaching performance, demonstrating what in Schön's theory becomes the concepts of "reflection-in-action" and

“reflective transfer.” Examining performance in the moment (“you look into your students’ eyes”) and using what you note to adjust present and future performance is the common practice and the focus for Schön in *The Reflective Practitioner*. As I discuss in the previous chapter, Yancey draws on these two concepts to formulate the chief concepts in her theory of reflective practice.<sup>43</sup>

In responses to other questions, Kennedy acknowledges that the purpose of education is to “help make better the students’ chances in the material world,” which could mean a number of things, but he further delimits his view by stating, “I qualify that as their primary goal is to get a better job.” In subsequent statements, Kennedy links material chances as job procurement to helping make students “citizens of the world,” which expands upon what he sees as the purpose of education. Without further explaining what it means to be a citizen, Kennedy states he believes becoming one can take place in students’ professional lives. This puts “citizenship” back in line with getting a better job, which puts the purposes of education in its current capitalist framework. Kennedy does not question this wider reality or its justness; he also does not name it.

In contrast, to understand reflection dialectically, one must focus on the everyday actions of teachers and students in particular places and see how these actions and these places relate to their wider scene. A more “total” understanding of the social relations of teaching and learning would move along a scale of explanation and interaction that necessarily accounts for what lies *in between* the personal event (such as reflecting on the “ah ha” moment) and larger society. But my initial research study had different premises.

I discuss the study and its theoretical premises in the next section in order to examine how I rethought those premises and came to my current conclusions. First those

conclusions: My research now suggests to me that reflective teachers of composition are habitually aware of the wider implications of and for their teaching, even as these conditions work to habituate them. Put another way, many teachers are aware of the wider socioeconomic conditions as they impact their teaching, but these conditions for teaching shape teachers' reflections in ways that make giving adequate attention to our wider social reality seem daunting, imposing, somehow out-of-bounds. The composition teachers in my study had come to instinctively narrow the focus of their reflections to the scene of their teaching in exactly the ways Dewey and Schön have described as useful reflection.

A new analysis of my research suggests that through a dialectical praxis we can better understand the relationships between composition teaching and society, particularly as they get taken up by composition teachers and students in their reflective work. By locating the approach to reflection on philosophical premises that not only acknowledge *change* but theorize educational processes *as* they change, a dialectical praxis not only works to uncover the hidden assumptions and considerations in the classroom but can also provide insight into how these are not fixed and what they might possibly change to. But I did not always think this way. In fact, my earlier attempt to make sense of my research, from different premises, resulted in my inability to extend my work toward my goal, which was to construct an understanding of reflection for the purposes of guiding portfolio grading. I questioned whether an understanding of composition's reflective practices could be developed on a local level that could account for hidden assumptions in teachers' thinking. Yet these assumptions about students and their abilities impacted teachers' assessments of the portfolios, and for this reason



remained important to me. The assumptions were registered not just through teachers' responses to grammatical issues in the texts as teachers read them, but were drawn from complicated responses the teachers had to students' social positions (such as class, race, and gender) and the purposes of education as teachers saw them, which I was starting to see extended all the way down to teachers' purposes for portfolios and even the idea of portfolio review.

### **Questioning My Previous Study: A Reflection**

We cannot impose any worldview we like and hope that it will work. The cycle of perception and action cannot be maintained in a totally arbitrary fashion unless we collude to suppress the things we do not wish to see while, at the same time, trying to maintain, at all costs, the things that we desire most in our image of the world. Clearly the cost of supporting such false vision of reality must eventually be paid.  
—David Bohm and F. David Peat (qtd. in Harvey 68)

An earlier form of my dissertation exists in an unfinished typescript, *A Culture of Reflection: The Writing Program at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2006-2008*. Its 100 or so pages were formed around a number of research questions about reflection, an analysis of the writing program at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, and the teacher study I conducted in 2008. I have referenced the interviews from my teacher study somewhat in this dissertation so far, and I continue doing so below while proposing a radical reflection suitable for an emancipatory composition classroom. But I will not be drawing on the interviews in quite the same way I would if I had drawn them to a conclusion based on the original premises of the study. Instead, I review the theoretical premises that informed the study, and I offer a critical reflection on these premises and on the work they informed. My difficulty working on *A Culture of Reflection* informs my notion of *radical love* and my (re)turn to dialectical materialism. I reflect on my earlier

work in this section in order to further refine *radical love* and put it into subsequent conversation in this chapter with the conditions necessary for emancipatory education: respect, free association, mutual aid, and care.

George Hillocks concludes the presentation of his research study of writing teachers, *Ways of Thinking, Ways of Teaching*, with the remark that there is “much still to learn about the nature of teacher thinking” and with a call for more research “that provides greater insight into how teachers become reflective about their own practice” (137). My research project was in part a response to that call. The initial research questions for my study were as follows:

Can an understanding of composition’s reflective practices be developed *as* an understanding of its own practices? In other words, how might practice “be theorized” through practice, as commonly dichotomized? How would composition teachers’ reflective practices be theorized by the practitioners themselves? What might reflection understood in this way offer understandings of reflection as currently theorized? Would it alter the discourse of reflection?

Like this dissertation, my initial research questions were informed by a “ground-up” perspective rather than a “top-down” organizational model that I read at work in composition studies, but the questions were by no means extensive enough to allow for such a perspective, as I explain below. Two observations informed, and troubled, my ground-up perspective: 1) There seemed to be a disconnect between the scholarship informing reflection in the composition program and the teachers’ knowledge of reflection and, 2) I believed there was an individualism inherent to a professional orientation to practice. I believed at the time, and still believe, that this individualism

works hand-in-hand with notions of meritocracy and of “disciplinary identity.”

Meritocracy is the belief that reward and recognition are achieved through one’s own hard work alone, and the corresponding belief that others’ failures are a direct result of no hard work on their part. On the local level of the composition program within the English department, “disciplinary identities” were formed around the distinct tracks in the graduate programs, the tracks themselves informed by various faculty interests and areas of expertise. This notion of disciplinary identity has always perplexed and frustrated me, but I used to think of it differently. I write more specifically about this frustration below and I make a connection between being an experienced writing teacher, mentoring other teachers who are new to a program, and being a labor organizer in higher education. How I changed my thinking about this identity and its corollary, professionalism, is ultimately why I could not finish *A Culture of Reflection*. I first review in more detail aspects of my teacher study on my way to being able to explicitly address the change in my thinking and my changed research premises.

I titled my study after the “culture of reflection” remark I had heard made by new instructors, like those I mentored in the program for two years, as well as by visiting scholars and educators.<sup>44</sup> This sense of the program has developed over time in part because many of its rhet/comp faculty have been active in Writing Program Administration, which has made certain of the programmatic principles more well-known, such as the reflective writing component instituted shortly after Alice Gillam assumed administrator duties in 1992. But I think the sense of this program’s reflective culture comes more from the interactions of visiting scholars with its teachers, and because many of these teachers have experienced an extensive mentoring relationship with other

teachers in the program, relationships that have provided places *to be* reflective about one's teaching, and about the work *of* reflection in teaching and in the curriculum. In examining this culture, it became increasingly important for me to locate the reflective practices of a particular group of teachers within a description and analysis of the material conditions for those practices, in this case, the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee (UWM) composition program as it relates to other organizational structures within the university.

It also became apparent that examining the reflective practices of composition teachers from a "composition perspective" would be a limiting approach, particularly in the sense that these teachers' practices are not formed in isolatable instances of "training" or even "study in composition" and that they never develop apart from the cultural and social forces which always shape teachers' identities and may have little to do with composition studies as a discipline with field-specific content and concerns.

Many composition teachers are not trained compositionists; in other words, they do not earn degrees in rhetoric, composition, or English education and literacy; they do not often take classes in pedagogy or literacy studies or spend much of their own time as students thinking about pedagogy, at least not in the formalized sense of pedagogical study in composition, the humanities discipline often assumed, as Louise Phelps has suggested, to have "set out to reform teaching by grounding it in theoretical knowledge" ("Practical," 864). Many composition teachers at UWM and elsewhere earn (or are working toward) literature or fine arts degrees. Others focus on journalism, communications or seemingly unrelated fields, such as urban studies or anthropology (as in the writing program at Rutgers), while many receive methods training in, and may

have even worked in, primary or secondary education. Still others receive training as linguists and/or undertake graduate study in ESL or TESOL (English as Second Language and Teaching English as a Second Language). All these composition teachers transfer those disciplinary understandings to their teaching of college English composition. And it can simply be said that composition teachers are “working.” In other words, they are people who teach writing for a living, “practitioners,” in one sense of Stephen North’s use of the word.

At UWM, all composition teachers in my study were *working* in the English department, teaching their way through degrees in literature or modern studies (formerly, an interdisciplinary American Studies-like program); many were creative writers, and many more, as a group, lecturers or adjuncts—long-term contingent faculty who most clearly are teaching for a living.

In my study, as I stated earlier, I wanted to focus on the everyday teaching of composition and what impact reflection may have on this teaching, especially as this teaching is located within a place often seen as having a particular culture and commitment to reflection. Seeking an understanding of actual classroom English composition teachers and their reflective practices, I organized interviews with teachers in the program who represented a cross-section of the differently positioned instructors teaching English composition at UWM. I conducted these interviews over a six-month period; each interview was two or more hours in length, and some were followed up with additional discussion (less formal than the interviews) and others with email. On many occasions, interviewees contacted me with more information; it would seem that probing

instructors thoughts on teaching and reflection is itself a reflective activity that spurs more thoughts on reflection.

I employed a grounded-theory conception of qualitative “three-pass” interview analysis as one of two primary methods. This is a “person-based” approach to research, which Paul Anderson maintains is one of two dominant forms research takes in composition studies. The second primary method is what Anderson calls “text-based” analysis; in *A Culture of Reflection*, this second analysis is of teaching documents (course descriptions, assignments, and student writing, as well as snippets of classroom dialogue recorded in journal entries) and composition scholarship.

I had formed my research questions with the assumption that there are linkages between teachers’ cultural identities, their consciousness of socio-economic context, and their teaching practice that remain un- or under-examined in composition studies; I did not assume to understand these linkages in all their complexity or that any connections between teaching practice and consciousness are straightforward, apparent for all to see; however, I did have certain anecdotal observations which is what led me to pursue this research in the first place—I reference how some of these observations grew out of end-of-term portfolio review in the previous section. Certain educational theorists have explored these linkages, invoking reflection in more depth than those in composition (*e.g.*, Kincheloe, referenced below), and there still remains much work to be done, particularly as the unique formative experiences of composition teachers specifically have not been primary areas of enough research.<sup>45</sup> I thought my study would contribute to just that sort of work. I considered my approach unlike the many influential texts on reflection, including Hillocks’ study already mentioned, in that I believed my research should

attempt to account for the political and historical conditions informing my subjects' understandings of reflective practices, just as my research subjects' reflective practices are often attempts at grappling with these conditions. Pushing Hillocks' call a bit further, it became closer to Joe Kincheloe's study of teachers, in which he attempted to "contextualize teacher thinking, to examine the social and historical forces that have shaped it, and to understand who benefits and who is punished when it is defined in particular ways" (1).

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It is axiomatic of researchers in the humanities and increasingly the "hard" sciences that "All research is based on assumptions" (Neff 128). There follows such an axiom the injunction to "closely examine those assumptions" as well as continue to question how they may influence the research process or, even, change throughout the process (Neff 128). I believed these assumptions also existed in the ways I could perhaps fully, objectively quantify my research participants' responses to their own teaching and extrapolate these to comment on reflective practices more generally. As I continue to explore here, I have come to question this belief, but it is what set me off in search of a method that could account for assumptions in my research and in the interpretation of my interviewees' responses.

Following Joyce Neff's argument for a grounded theory approach to research in composition, I adapted the qualitative interviewing method of grounded theory as expounded by sociologist Kathy Charmaz and educational theorist Irving Seidman. Charmaz describes four "guidelines that aid the researcher" in this approach: "to study social and social psychological processes [...], to direct data collection [...], to manage

data analysis [...], to develop an abstract theoretical framework that explains the studied process” (675). These guidelines are valuable for composition studies research, as Neff would further claim, because they do “not require the researcher to simplify the complex acts of teaching and learning or to choose between description and theory” (126). The guidelines for the method are informed by specific strategies for doing grounded theory research. Here are Kathy Charmaz's definitions of these six strategies:

(a) simultaneous data collection and analysis, (b) pursuit of emergent themes through early data analysis, (c) discovery of basic social processes within the data, (d) inductive construction of abstract categories that explain and synthesize these processes, (e) sampling to refine the categories through comparative processes, (f) integration of categories into a theoretical framework that specifies causes, conditions, and consequences of the studied processes. (677)

Irving Seidman describes the “three-pass” interview model as “phenomenological interviewing.”<sup>46</sup> The “primary way a researcher can investigate an educational organization, institution, or process is through the experience of the individual people” (4). Seidman finds that, “People’s behavior becomes meaningful and understandable [to researchers] when placed in the context of their lives and the lives of those around them” (11). This is certainly true, but I see now that it needs to be extended even further.

Explanations of a grounded theory approach based in the experiences of the research participants further informed my questions regarding the possibilities for developing understandings of practice from descriptions of that practice. But as I was writing *A Culture of Reflection* I slowly realized certain contradictions present in my research (and here, I write more of logical and not dialectical contradictions, although there are



certainly more than a few of the latter here, too). In overcoming these contradictions, I eventually abandoned my earlier dissertation, redoubled my study of dialectical materialism, and completely transformed my identity as a compositionist.

I first began to question my initial premises when, conducting my interviews, it became apparent to me how there is a politics of scale at work in all research that intends to explicate the lived reality of people within cultural institutions. As I discuss in previous chapters, there is a politics at work when choosing the level of *abstraction* in any analysis. Anna McCarthy has called this the “politics of scale,” a phrase I adopt here. Each level of generality present in every abstraction involves a politics of scale; that is, there is a politics at work in what accounts for each abstraction. I found that grounded theory research methodology, as explained in the six strategies above, did not adequately account for this politics of scale. In coding my interviewees’ responses to questions about reflection (see Appendices A and B), I found strategy “b,” my “pursuit of emergent themes” at odds with strategy “(d) inductive construction of abstract categories.” Although attention is given to the interaction of researcher and data, there is no adequate attempt in grounded theory to account for a politics of scale as a necessary consideration in the construction of any abstraction. As I reviewed in chapter 2, dialectical forms of conceptualization are useful for explaining the relationships of people at the junctures of broad social and economic processes with those that seem to operate as more localized processes. Research that is organized to include “inductive construction” is set out to “discover” laws structuring what already exists; what is inductively discovered can only function on one level of abstraction—at least, it can only function on one level at any given time. Multiple passes along different levels can account for much that is missing,

but in grounded theory nothing guides the examination, and accounts for the interaction, of what is “discovered” in each pass.

A methodology, as a system of methods used in a particular area of study, presumably provides some overarching understanding of why one should choose *those* methods for *that* study. When I returned to my research several years later, the methodology I drew upon is a dialectical conceptualization of grounded theory as “critical research” (Gibson; Kincheloe and McLaren). Critical research is defined here as research that leads to emancipatory actions and involves “self-conscious criticism—self-conscious in the sense that researchers try to become aware of the ideological imperatives and epistemological presuppositions that inform their research as well as their own subjective, intersubjective, and normative reference claims” (Kincheloe and McLaren 140). For the most part informed by “critical theory,” which, according to Barry Gibson, is “explanatory in that it aims to provide, no matter how diverse, a comprehensive perspective of society” (440), critical research according to this definition foregrounds the politics of scale that permeate any research project. I realized, after coding my interviews, that even through the multiple-pass interview process I was not going to arrive at what accounts for the interaction. Furthermore, I also realized that I questioned the usefulness of inductive premises, in general, and more specifically I did not believe I had arrived at an assessment of interviewees’ views on reflection in ways that were useful to a local construction of reflection to be invoked in portfolio grading. Although their answers were truly fascinating and did *teach* me a great deal, it was not possible for me to learn anything about how composition teachers in the program viewed reflection; it did

not allow me to relate that to wider understandings and purposes that would have any effect on portfolio review without a theory of interaction.

While my understanding of grounded theory research as discussed by Neff, Charmaz, and Seidman is that it sets out to avoid positivist orientations, the inductive premise ensures a positivist response to the research data in the strategies outlined above. Without a theory of interaction, each pass can only be treated in (scientific) isolation. If the point of a research project is not to “impose any worldview we like and hope that it will work” (Bohm and Peat from the epigraph above), then the “emergent themes” in grounded theory research are meant to guide theoretical construction. But even understanding this, I was unable to adequately explain the “basic social processes” supposedly “discovered” through the process of developing emergent themes. The main theme I “discovered” is what composition teachers didn’t know about reflection (or *that* they didn’t know about reflection). Recall in chapter 2 that I cited David Harvey as arguing that “*education* (the exploration of possibilities) rather than deduction (spinning out the implications of known truths) or induction (discovering the general laws regulating what already exist) is the central motif of dialectical praxis as well as the primary purpose of knowledge construction” (*Justice* 56). I had already been rethinking the plausibility of locating “general laws” that seem to “already exist” in teachers’ understandings of reflection within the framework of grounded theory “knowledge construction.” I realized that I was looking for ways to be *with* my research subjects, my teaching colleagues, in an examination of our views on reflection in order to improve on our responses to students’ portfolios together. I was nearly halfway through my study of Marx’s texts when I read Harvey’s thoughts on dialectics (of which his argument for the

educational possibilities of dialectical praxis are a part). I began linking Harvey's understanding of education to my search for the research premises that would allow my colleagues and I to be co-investigators.

The dialectical conceptualization of these premises sufficiently addresses the politics of scale in order for us to begin the "exploration of possibilities." This exploration could have eventually been our joint construction of knowledge about students, and about our readings of students' portfolios. Upon further consideration, I decided that grounded theory strategies a, b, and c are more conducive to dialectical premises and, if taken as a relational concept, the "integration of categories into a theoretical framework" (strategy "f") can supply a method for working with the data generated by qualitative interviewing alongside that coded from representations of the interviewees' "conditions," their space for work and reflection. As discussed in chapter 2, while a dialectical examination generates a large amount of data it is also the methodology to guide the "integration of categories" of that data.

Gibson suggests, in "Accommodating Critical Theory," that there are "implications" for grounded theory to make an "accommodation" for critical theory in a research agenda that "avoids technical mastery of the world" and seeks to develop a form of social inquiry that gives "inquirer" and the researched participants "equal standing in the inquiry process" (441). Gibson claims that experience, although accused of often having a positivist orientation, "could provide the ground of critical grounded theory" (447). Referring to arguments made by feminist epistemologists, Gibson puts forth the idea "that people, because of their specific experiences, are better placed than researchers as a source of a theory about their conditions" (448). This is where my interest in grounded

theory methods originated. I feel it is likely that all efforts at theorizing reflective practice begin with a similar idea, just as Yancey's theorizing of student agency caused her to more fully appreciate what student writers had to say about their own writing, their own learning. And certainly, feminist standpoint theory had previously informed my designation of reflection in the writing program as the location for collective knowledge construction with my teaching colleagues. As Irving Seidman remarks, "Social abstractions like 'education' are best understood through the experiences of the individuals whose work and lives are the stuff upon which the abstractions are built" (4). I was a part of the same writing program and working within the same constraints, so I believed that I could make recommendations based on my study and subsequent understanding of their experiences. After all, I lived those experiences, too. However, I came to believe that through my interviews I could "tap" the knowledge in the experiences of my teaching colleagues on reflective components in their pedagogies, spinning them out into my own associations with my understanding of reality.

I intended to use my understanding of composition scholarship on reflection and colleagues' knowledge of teaching and of their experiences *for* them. Even if approached from the standpoint of mutual benefit (and the improvement of portfolio reading outcomes, therefore for the benefit of the program's students, as well), I now believe these are unacceptable both in premise and outcome, as based on my anarchist principles. Seeking to work together with others positioned in similar social locations, as my union organizing should have taught me, demanded a different approach. I firmly maintain that what is useful to know *can be generated* by teachers acting locally *together* toward a *wider understanding* of what impacts local action. But doing this necessitates a changed

relationship to knowledge. Collective understanding, and struggle, demands the full transformation of epistemology and ontology I have discussed here throughout, and this means giving up parts of ourselves. At least, it means that working together we transform the aspects of our identities that *we think* individuate us and embrace those aspects we all share as humans, in “the individuations that exceed individuals,” as *species-beings*.

An early contradiction to overcome was in how I saw my research “connected to an attempt to confront [...] injustice” in the experiences I was researching (Kincheloe and McLaren 140). Namely, injustice in the outcomes of my students’ portfolios at review. But I didn’t realize the full implications of this connection until much later, that what it fully means to make research *critical research* is connecting it to “the empowerment of individuals” (Kincheloe and McLaren 140). I refer to the introduction and chapter 1 of this dissertation for discussion of what else accompanies such a realization. This was closely followed by a second realization that, regardless of my own experiences in the writing program, approaching my teaching colleagues as research subjects causes a damaging separation in what might otherwise be the knowledge we are capable of constructing through our shared experiences and acting in the world together. Seeking to learn from my colleagues could, and I argue now should, have shaped my research project in different ways.<sup>47</sup> I would characterize these ways as resulting from the fully changed epistemology and ontology that I discuss in chapter 2. Deciding to work with my teaching colleagues’ knowledge from a researcher standpoint reinforced the epistemology I now seek to transform. I was initially unable to see, and have only much later been able to seek, my own broader transformation because I first had to overcome “disciplinary identities” informed in part by my own impulse to professionalism.

It's not that anyone had to tell me that, in order to be a "compositionist," one is necessarily immersed in institutional histories and old disciplinary fights, such as the formation of identities around "composition studies" within literature departments. The disciplinary identities are already there, and slight reminders prevail.<sup>48</sup> But what one does have to tell oneself is that these identities are not encompassing and, further, inhibit our full emancipation. The difficulties of working through these and similar identities toward emancipation with others is perhaps most frustratingly demonstrated by speaking to a tenure-track assistant professor of molecular science, who runs a lab fully staffed by junior researchers, about the importance of union organizing, and wading through the sundry arguments of meritocracy from his perspective as they are laid out against other university workers. The junior researchers in the biologist's lab are also caught up in similar attitudes: refusing to see themselves as workers, they internalize the systemic oppressions of the ostensible meritocracy in which they labor. I have known many graduate student workers who, when their lab research does not pan out or the supervising professor abandons a project and they cannot finish their degrees, assume the mantle of personal failure perpetuated by the exploitative system structuring their work.

What informs such exploitative systems are the divisions of fractured identity and subsequent celebration of the many "roles" people assume in their daily lives: parent, teacher, sibling, researcher, scholar, citizen, animal rights activist, etc. These words should not designate "*also / or*" relationships but mutually informing "*and*" relationships within a unified consciousness. These "roles" designate different processes but are internally heterogeneous relationships within the same person, not autonomous identities substantiating the capitalist schizophrenia of, say, the corporate CEO whose company

damages the environment in the search for increased profits but who interacts with the environment differently at home.

### **Radical Reflection: Reflexivity in College Composition Teaching and Learning**

Thinking reflexively is one of the grounds of human freedom, in part because it reveals to us that we are both subject and object of our own knowing, of our culture, or our world. We are not just products, objects of our world, nor are we just subjects existing in a void. We are free subjects whose freedom is conditioned—not determined—by a world not of our making but in many ways open to the effects of our actions. —Elizabeth Minnich (qtd. in Qualley 14)

Reflection in and of itself is not enough; it must always be linked to how the world can be changed. We reflect on our teaching so that we can create the conditions under which both teachers and students become aware of their own power of agency. – Stephen Brookfield (217)

Taking up reflection as part of a process seeking to understand (theorize) change, as well as help determine which changes are better than others (emancipation), is a key part of a critical praxis to transform our teaching and learning. As I reviewed in chapter 3, “critical reflection” is the term most often used by those in composition and education to designate a form of reflection that steps outside of the self to include consideration of wider social reality in its purview. But my review of reflection in composition studies has led me to view reflexivity as a more encompassing concept that better gets at the goals of emancipatory education. I begin explaining that point of view below, but quickly move from the understandings and uses of reflexivity back to a renewed sense of reflection—what I call *radical reflection*—that encompasses both reflection and reflexivity through a dialectical understanding of the human self as Marx’s *social being*.

What composition scholars intend when modifying reflection with “critical” is perhaps best understood in the expanded sense of *reflexivity*, a sense acknowledged by



Yancey, Phelps and other key theorists of reflection in composition, but its implications largely ignored. In the previous chapter, I introduced some of the work of Donna Qualley, who theorizes what she sees as a personal and social reflexivity that resembles what others regard as *reflection* but also seeks to clarify the object of reflection. Qualley believes that reflection, “Is adequate for monitoring our conscious beliefs, but [...] reflexivity is needed to call up our unconscious, epistemic beliefs” (13). To tap these unconscious beliefs, Qualley’s formulation emphasizes what she calls a dialectical engagement with “an other” to better understand both self and subject, be that subject person, discipline or world. It is through interrogating one’s interactions with an “other” that provides a more deeply reflective, in this case reflexive, view of the self.

For Qualley, then, reflexivity, or “encounters with the other,” shift the subject / object relation of reflection to an important engagement outside of the self—but only in order to further the critical analysis of self. This reflexive return to the self would help the reflective person to also examine aspects of the world, but I do not think this goes far enough since it does not hold *self* and *world* together in a dialectical relation—at least, in the dialectical relation I discuss in chapter 2. Qualley also applies the concept of dialectics in her formulation of an engagement with “an other,” but she seems to hold it to a smaller scale—or level of abstraction—one that focuses on personal transformation and thus the interaction of other subjects through textual investigation.

Regardless of the “other” that is encountered throughout, Qualley’s *Turns of Thought* seems to remain focused on *personal* transformation. Much like Yancey’s comments on action and understanding at the end of *Reflection in the Writing Classroom*, at the conclusion of *Turns of Thought* Qualley states, “Although my emphasis in this

book is on learning, such a focus should not imply political muteness. Understanding always involves application, and application enlarges understanding. [...] The act of turning back on ourselves to examine our own assumptions, to my way of thinking, *is* a political act, as well as an ethical one” (160; emphasis in original). It is important to always acknowledge these claims, and Yancey’s similar ones, that attention to personal transformation through language use is important, if not necessary in part, for emancipatory education; however, it’s clear through reviewing composition scholarship on reflection and reflexivity that “action,” in Qualley’s case the “application” of understanding, has always a certain *political* connotation separate from action taken up in words or self-analysis alone. The latter action, words and self-analysis, are taken as the purview of composition studies, whereas what I read as this other “political act” or application is action taken toward widespread social transformation (revolutionary praxis). Political acts in composition scholarship are then those that are repeatedly reframed, narrowed, to the field’s attention to language and against working toward social change. In general, I do not think compositionists see the dichotomizing of reflection and action this way. Many compositionists expend a great deal of energy arguing that what we do *is* political, *is* taking action of some kind, and this is but one, prominent, product of our professional identity crisis, creating an anxiety over whether we “do” enough, as Bill Thelin noted in 2011, shared earlier in an epigraph, and which is a direct result of the full denial, as Patricia Bizzell noted in her 1991 essay “Marxist Ideas in Composition Studies,” of the revolutionary nature of and source for many of our pedagogical ideas. In her book, Qualley makes much of philosopher Elizabeth Minnich’s comments, also shared above, which mirror Marx’s understanding of the relationship

between humans and society, noting how our conditions shape and (in)form us yet do not fully make us who we are. For me, the difference Qualley perceives between her statements on “learning” and what she believes readers might infer as “political muteness” typifies a common concern among compositionists. In emphasizing learning through an engagement with an other outside the self, her book is indeed political, but perhaps Qualley senses it is not political enough. This personal/professional/disciplinary anxiety, and the confusion which attends it, marks the final dichotomy that drives compositionists to scholarship on reflection. We feel this anxiety because our liberal bias in composition, and in English studies more broadly, traditionally separates out our scholarship, and by extension our teaching and learning, from our otherwise political convictions.

Adopting a Freirean phraseology, I can say that what Qualley’s *reflexive* person accomplishes is perhaps a better understanding, over a *reflective* person, of her being *in* the world, but she still does not achieve the widest possible understanding of self *with* the world. What this means for me, and for my understandings of the purposes of emancipatory education, is that the dialectical engagement of self and world foregrounds their necessary interactivity or dialectical contradiction. In other words, the clearest understanding of one’s self through reflection is actually achieved through reflexively locating oneself in the world, examining, defining, describing, naming our world in order to do so. Again, as dialectical praxis, this means our social being cannot be separated from the world and still be *human*. We reflexively identify and interrogate aspects of our individuality only by defining that individual self *in* and *with* our definitions of the social world.

Understood this way, reflexivity can be seen as the radical form of reflection—getting at the root of our relations with the world—to consider how our conditions shape us *and* the reflections we make. *This radical form is dialectical* (which is not necessarily the same as “critical”) reflection: it is more like what educational theorist Patrick Camangian calls “social reflection,” if linked with the reflexive moves of those who would question far-reaching systemic relations, such as those that shape academic disciplines. A concept like Camangian’s social reflection, coupled with reflexivity, is unlike Qualley’s reflexivity or Dewey’s reflection, as these always circle back to the self in ways that seem to preclude this farther-reaching extension. It is because of this that I often find myself going back to Stephen Brookfield’s realization that “reflection in and of itself is not enough.”<sup>49</sup> Brookfield continues, saying that, “Critically reflective teaching means something only if it leads to the creation of classrooms and staff rooms that are crucibles for the learning of democratic habits” (217). I discuss Camangian’s ideas in detail below, putting them into a relationship with similar work in education on *caring* and making their connections clear to work in composition pedagogy.

But first, I want to state that we should hesitate abandoning the term *reflection*. It’s possible, as I began to demonstrate in previous chapters, to see the significance of various theories of reflection, such as Yancey’s and Schön’s, and of reflexivity, such as Qualley’s and Garfinkel’s, to recuperate their personal and pedagogical insights while necessarily bracketing off the liberal underpinnings of their perspectives. Doing this “recuperative” work is itself reflexive, and it acknowledges the important contributions of others while necessarily interrogating their perspectives and philosophical foundations. The form of this interrogation is dialectical, as it seeks the fullest possible understanding

of what shapes a person and how that person's work impacts its subject; this is a key aspect of emancipatory education as I have outlined its parameters as the project of becoming more fully human and as I have detailed its dialectical praxis of radical love and critical literacy. In order to secure these goals of emancipatory education, to maintain the critical project of becoming more fully human, dialectical reflection in composition studies needs to be supported by the conditions of respect, free association, mutual aid, and care. These conditions are informed by the reflective acts of people and they work to support radically reflective thinkers.

I discuss each condition below in multiple passes in order to both give description and to set up, with each subsequent pass at the conditions, a fuller understanding of how each works in relationship with the others. Each of the conditions is developed from my own anarchist philosophy, first introduced to readers in the introduction. Although it doubtless informs my teaching practice in ways that I cannot currently express, I have been able here to distill this philosophy to a few somewhat easy-to-discern, yet prominent, principles. Discussion of the conditions begins with respect, followed by free association, mutual aid and, finally, care. Through description of the conditions I intend to unfold possibilities for a new composition classroom that supports the emancipatory methods of radical love, dialectical praxis and critical literacy. This, bottom-up, rank-and-file if you will, classroom runs counter to the dominant teacher-led and professional-oriented conceptions of composition classrooms, in that I see the teacher setting out with the students on a semester-length process of inquiry with the radical epistemological and ontological transformations of teacher-student and students-teachers at the outset. I understand that these transformations, in my own experience, feel strange to both

teachers and students and are even somewhat subversive for some students before the full impact of the changed ontological positions begins to set in. I believe, again through personal teaching experience, but also through conversation and the formal interviews of my teaching colleagues, that developing a student-centered pedagogy is a goal for many teachers in composition classrooms. It is also important to remember that student-centered pedagogy is a method toward an educational outcome, not an end in itself (Breuing 12).

In her own interview survey of self-identified “critical educators,” Mary Breuing found that, “Student-centeredness, which some participants perhaps oversimplified as constructivism, was mentioned most often as a central aim of critical pedagogy” (12). Drawing on Deborah Britzman’s study in her book *Practice Makes Practice*, Breuing suggests a necessary complication of such an aim, noting how “methods” tend to become “ends” in some educational approaches to the ignorance and danger of “larger educational purposes” (12). This methods and ends confusion is quite familiar, as it is similar to the issues in grounded theory. So, with this kind of warning in mind, I dialectically consider the conditions I lay out here as both grounds for emancipatory education and as educational goals / purposes that the methods presented in this chapter are designed to reach. In other words, I expand on what I take constructivism in education to mean—that people construct their own knowledge in response to their experiences—by applying Marx’s concept of social being as a “dialectically constructivist” approach. Emancipatory education seeks the creation of the conditions necessary for the full development of human beings by working toward the development of those conditions. Teachers and students need to experience the conditions they are

working toward before they can fully understand their necessity. This is the glimpse of the changed social relations, as I argued in chapter 1, that is “based on the recognition that authentic and lasting transformations in consciousness can occur only when alternative understandings and values are actually experienced ‘in depth’—that is, when they are experienced sensuously and subjectively as well as cognitively, or intellectually” (Allman, *Critical*, 170).

### **Respect**

Respect is a necessary component to radically reflective practice and thus in emancipatory education. We hear of respect in composition scholarship through numerous synonyms and corollaries, beginning perhaps with the field’s statement on *Students’ Right to Their Own Language*—yet a more direct notion of respect needs to coalesce in the field in order to become a condition useful for emancipation. This coalesced notion of respect is about truly working to recognize the differing subject positions-in-formation of students and teachers in our everyday learning and teaching. I write “truly” here because nothing I will write about *respect* has not been uttered in one form or another in composition scholarship before, but what has followed in practice has varied a great deal. Respect includes changing such instances in which students are treated dismissively because their ideas do not match the teacher’s or, more often, when an antagonistic relationship plays out among teachers, represented by complaints of “students these days” when teachers talk to one another and with members of the wider public (almost all of them former students or teachers themselves). Respect includes acknowledging students’ and teachers’ prior ontological and epistemological

commitments, recognizing that these have changed and will change again, and respect includes structuring our classes fully for such subjects-in-formation. *Reflective activities then are the very elements of such classroom structures.* Providing such structures creates the fullest possibilities for educational attainment that meets students' and teachers' short-term goals (skills-based knowledge acquisition for transfer to other educational settings and for employment); providing such structures also moves us toward the goals of emancipatory education, which treats its subjects as humans-in-process and which lays the groundwork for the continued development of "critical thinkers": free, caring individuals who are committed to open and spontaneous creation and who refuse the inorganic conditions which status quo education suggest can change only very slowly, if at all.

Yancey states, "I understood that for students to write a reflection-in-presentation that satisfied, they would have to write more than that single reflective text, on the quick, at the end of the term" (15). Reflection needs to be "integrated within the curriculum" (15) and be "woven into" it (17). For reflection to be effective, it has to take place in all aspects of the course: a reflective writing assignment might prompt an "actual reflection," but if reflection is not sufficiently "woven" throughout the course such assignments may only reproduce the status-quo feelings and attitudes students have already been trained to offer, which is exactly what teachers in my study complain. What most teachers want to occur is a change within the writer; what that change is or constitutes may vary widely, but *change* is the very purpose of education. To charge education with this task is to make clear how teaching and learning are political acts, even if "change" alone is stripped of any particular ideological striping. This change is, preferably, both



represented in the writing while also a substantive event in the actual lived existence of the writer, the student; the writing adequately represents the change while it may also have contributed to it. This of course is a lot to ask of any component in the educational process—if not only from some piece of writing—but it is what we expect and work toward. Yancey’s concept of constructive reflection is meant to get at this change. Yancey states that, “Ultimately, if reflection is valuable, it’s because—as reflection-in-action, as constructive reflection, as reflection-in-presentation, as reflective text—it enables us to *make sense*” (187; emphasis in original). This “making sense” takes place over multiple reflective moments.

Respect works with radical love together to help us understand what it might be like for students first entering a new educational process—as when Sarah Cook, the writer of “Room 219,” a reflective essay written for portfolio review for a class I taught, enters that titular room for the first time, the classroom in Curtin Hall where I met my “basic” writing students at UW-Milwaukee:

It was Monday morning, 10:50, and the first day of the spring semester, and the class that I had been dreading all day was only ten minutes away. As I began my journey to what I like to call ‘hell’—my legs began to tremble, my palms began to sweat, and my heart began to beat so hard that the girl next to me could have heard it. I tried to prolong the situation as much as possible, but before I knew it, I was walking through the main doors of curtain hall. DING! That was the sound I heard as the elevator reached my floor. As I reluctantly stepped out into the hall, I quickly noticed something, it was room 219. (Cook 1)

Although Cook goes on to state that, “I may have over-dramatized the actual event that occurred,” she also states, “I was honestly scared. I did not know what to expect or what was going to happen throughout this semester.” Influenced, one might suspect, by her feeling that “English has never been one of my favorite subjects” (1), Cook goes on to describe, “honestly,” again, how her “writing skills were not too good” and how this impacted her own sense of what was possible as a student (2). Respecting Cook’s perhaps typical hesitation, within a group of fellow students-teachers with their own concerns, is key to acknowledging her humanness. Respect involves more than planning a course according to the composition adage, “meeting students where they are,” which tends to mean including course readings that identify different subject positions and starting instruction from students’ previous level of educational attainment or level of written proficiency (as was my teaching experience at MCTC, discussed in the introduction). Respect, as approached through radical love, first involves the suspension of these categorical assumptions, which are the stuff, the very structure, of status-quo education; second, respect involves the sharing of everyone’s personal consciousness followed closely by the collective interrogation of the categories underlying our assumptions.

### **Free association**

Anarchism stands for a social order based on the free grouping of individuals for the purpose of producing real social wealth; an order that will guarantee to every human being free access to the earth and full enjoyment of the necessities of life, according to individual desires, tastes, and inclinations. —Emma Goldman

This condition has its roots in various Marxist and anarchist/libertarian-communist philosophies. Fully historicizing free association (and its corollary mutual

aid) from its anarchist roots is not central to laying out these conditions in composition.<sup>50</sup> I will explain *free association* primarily through the composition studies phenomenon of the required first-year writing course. First, however, I do think it's important to historicize some of the different approaches to the concept, including how many writers continue to treat concepts such as free association and mutual aid only in their economic sense, and how this differs from anarchist understandings.

The economic sense comes from what I take to be the debate arising after Marx and Engels' *Communist Manifesto*, in which Democratic Socialists and Marxist-Leninists claim different versions of an intermediate stage between capitalism and communism in which the state owns the means of production until such a time when capitalist relations in society are sufficiently transformed. This follows from what I believe are now familiar misreadings of Marx and Engels' statements regarding the right "course of development" away from capitalist social relations (the teleology of historical development from capitalism to socialism and finally to communism). The relevant point to make regarding Marx's view occurs first with Engels in the *Manifesto*, "In place of the old bourgeois society, with its classes and class antagonisms, we shall have an association, in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all" (31). This statement concludes the section "Proletarians and Communists" that various anarchists (chiefly, libertarian communists, such as Rosa Luxemburg) rightly read as setting out a "communist platform," a political polemic. As such, this section, and the *Manifesto* as a whole, omit theoretical nuance (in this case, materialist dialectics of social relations) in favor of making strong, pointed statements laying out Marx and Engels' positions such as those depicting how "bourgeois marriage" is "in reality a system of wives in common,"

the result of a system that produces “prostitution both public and private” and should be abolished (28). As Stanley Aronowitz states, also referring to Marx and Engels’ *Manifesto* in his treatise on social class, “A manifesto is a call to action and, for this reason, must operate at a fairly high level of abstraction. The long historical perspective inevitably varies from how events are played out in a particular situation” (93). Even though the transformed relations of society are this “long historical perspective” for anarchists, there is no correspondence to some necessary time and place for direct action: for acting on the current conditions toward the transformation of society. As Goldman states, “Direct action against the authority in the shop, direct action against the authority of the law, direct action against the invasive, meddlesome authority of our moral code, is the logical, consistent method of Anarchism.” The correct time and place for action is here and now.

All affinity groups form around the idea of free association: “social aid and pleasure clubs,” such as those which organize as Krewes in New Orleans for the purposes of joining the Mardi Gras parades, and the free association of people under various Occupy groups in recent history, are two disparate, but equal examples of the concept actualized (see Lewis; Graeber, for introductions and overviews of social and pleasure clubs and the Occupy Movement, respectively). From an anarchist perspective, the free association of individuals occurs prior to, during and after changing the means of production. People forming their own collectivities and freely working together to further change or refine them is the point of the concept of “free association,” which designates real people in historical and future actions and not utopian relations.

My use of free association is meant to indicate that teachers and students need to come together freely, with mutual consent, to investigate themes and inform each other's development on the road to emancipation. Thus, at first blush, free association may not seem to be an achievable condition in composition. In fact, it may only seem to be fodder for the "abolition debate," those arguments regarding requiring first-year writing courses (Crowley; Bamberg; Brannon; Goggin and Miller; Roemer, Schultz and Durst; Moghtader, Cotch and Hague). It seems accurate that the arguments for and against requiring first-year composition courses would revolve around the ideas inherent in "free association," but I find that compositionists rarely make a distinction separating their possibly alternative take on the issue from the professional orientation in such debate. In what follows, I would like to make just such a distinction, one that allows for compositionists' ideas to have a new mooring.

Following Goggin and Miller's discussion of this "Great Debate," Bill Hendricks provides an overview of the variety of abolition arguments, organizing them according to four categories:

*Pedagogically* [...] it has been said that required first-year composition must be abolished because of the twin barriers to its efficacy brought about by insufficiently trained teachers and insufficiently motivated students. From an *ideological* perspective, it has been claimed that required first-year composition must be abolished because it tends to inculcate political quietism and cultural conformity in those forced to undergo it. *Instrumentally*, required first-year composition must be abolished because it does not well serve either writing in upper-division courses or the writing that students must/will do when they

graduate. *Ethically*, required first-year composition must be abolished because it has often tended to create and maintain unjust working conditions and compensation for writing teachers (86; emphasis in original).

From the “ideological perspective,” Sharon Crowley’s nascent argument in “A Personal Essay on Freshman English” against requiring first-year writing courses comes closest to reflexively questioning composition’s disciplinary assumptions and underlying orientation toward professionalism, but her claims also belie an unwarranted position, that simply mandating students’ presence necessarily leads to conformity in curriculum and pedagogy. From some perspectives, such as Lynn Bloom’s in “Freshman English as a Middle-Class Enterprise,” Crowley’s position makes sense: “Composition is taught by middle-class teachers in middle-class institutions to students who are middle class either in actuality or in aspiration—economic if not cultural” (Bloom 656). My own historical position, affiliations, and current location within composition studies contradict this claim; however, I regard Bloom’s essay as making an initial, if overstated, point about the middle-class, professional orientation of composition studies’ supposed mainstay, the first-year writing course. While my anarchist perspective challenges the notion that composition courses only serve as testing grounds for working-class students’ “new,” middle-class discourse practices, thus as gatekeepers for those students who do not acquiesce, others, such as Donna LeCourt, question the “presumptions that academic discourse is aligned with the middle class in structure/style (Bizzell) and values (Bloom)” (30).

Drawing on the same set of narratives by working-class academics that I discussed in chapter 2, as well as on her own “self-labeled” perspective as a working-

class academic (30), LeCourt argues for what she calls a pedagogy of textual practice that supports working-class students' abilities to achieve (or perform) multiple selves—"a multiple identity that need not demean one subjectivity in favor of another" (43). These subjectivities are "classed," in part, but LeCourt, drawing on Bourdieu, emphasizes that class works as a nexus of relations and is not a fixed identity. I read LeCourt as acknowledging the perspective of unified consciousness, even though she does not use those terms, as I discuss this consciousness in chapter 2 and above in this chapter. The key in adopting LeCourt's pedagogy of textual practice is that students' various subjectivities are seen as working together, as internally heterogeneous processes within each student. The performance of "multiple selves" in academic discourse would not privilege standardized, edited American English forms. The performance of an internally heterogeneous self through writing in a composition class would need to work toward examining how, when and why standard forms are useful and when the performance of other identities makes more sense. I attend more directly to these ideas in the section on *care*, below.

Composition courses that demand standardized forms *only*, that work at flattening the possibilities for the expression of internally heterogeneous selves, are the unreflexive, status-quo writing courses described by Crowley, Bloom, Borkowski and LeCourt. There are still plenty of these in existence, but even the liberal orientation to composition allows for a much wider conception of pedagogical approaches that adopt a more open, questioning stance, as Bloom herself points out in her apologia for being a "middle-class" teacher (668-72). It is actually compositionists' anxiety over our own existence in the academy which informs the positions that would eliminate part of our field's *raison*

*d'être*: the fact that in some instances composition courses have played “gatekeeper” and “cultural cop” is not a reason to abolish them. Composition courses, while more often than not designed from within the liberal framework and outlook, hamper emancipatory educational efforts—but they don’t *have* to. Composition is, in effect, an ideological battleground, and compositionists can be well-suited to grapple with the complexities of these contradictions inherent in the history of the field.

My point is that the wider socio-economic considerations of the abolition of required first-year composition courses, especially as seen through the categories in which Hendricks puts the debaters, are already sufficiently limited by the liberal orientation of compositionists framing the question. I would like to partially reframe the pedagogical argument, and the assumption, of “insufficiently trained teachers and insufficiently motivated students” by changing the supposed emphasis from instilling certain cultural values in and through the writing of students in composition courses to courses that are approached from the changed subject positions (the changed epistemology and ontology) of teachers and students working together to explore themes that enable one to become more fully human. Such emancipatory courses, having a different *modus operandi*, still exist in relation to traditional courses, being dialectally defined in relation to them, but they also remain counter-hegemonic. The pedagogical question of “efficacy” actually mirrors the “instrumental” concern in the abolition arguments, and both are only pertinent to a perspective which sees composition as offering service courses subordinate to other classes furthering a capitalist agenda, classes in which the need for correct expression in the demonstration of acquired knowledge is all that is demanded of writing.



Hendricks' "ethical" category of arguments remains, but not in the way Hendricks (accurately) summarizes compositionists' ethical positions. In other words, there are of course ethical considerations, but I would like to reframe compositionists' positions in response to them. Compositionists who isolate the "unjust working conditions and compensation for writing teachers" call into question the status of all compositionists, increasing that ingrained disciplinary anxiety. The actual labor practices of universities impact all faculty, not just the marginalized contingency, and eliminating the composition course, that is, the people who often staff the course, only temporarily pushes these problems away from the profession. From a labor organizing perspective, this suggestion is akin to the decision of Teamsters' leadership during negotiations with United Parcel Service when they made agreements to protect their membership, delivery drivers, at the expense of the thousands of other workers, marginal, part-time, who load the brown trucks (Schwerdtfeger; Solomon). Considering some composition workers as marginal and expendable while protecting the work of others, tenure-track scholars, thus ignores the wider socio-economic reality of workers everywhere in capitalist society, and perpetuates the divide-and-conquer mentality that has inhibited all forms of collectivism since the beginning of capitalist social relations. Eliminating the majority of compositionists (and many math instructors, following this same logic) does not address the wider, more important, ethical issue. Sure, these teachers can leave their university teaching positions and take their Master's and Phd's to Walmart or another service-economy stalwart and be exploited there, and maybe also continue working to change an unjust system; or, they can stay in their economically marginalized (yet functionally necessary) positions and continue the ideological struggle in colleges and universities.

Introducing the concept of free association does not ignore these debates in composition, but it does require adjusting the field's orientations—underlying philosophies—to properly see the concept at work. Ethically, “free association” needs to be one of the conditions to be worked toward in a project of emancipatory education. Certainly, there is a degree of spontaneous activity implied in an idea such as “free association,” but it is also a key component to any organizing activity, which is an ethical, rhetorical task. That is, people do and will continue to come together on their own accord over mutual interests, but the ethical process of putting mutual commitments in front of people for their consideration also remains. The effort of getting everyone “on board” with an idea and an approach is already an educational one. In an officially recognized educational setting, it makes even more sense. Simply because the first-year writing class is required (leaving students feeling forced to take it, in order to complete the requirements for graduation) does not mean that students and teachers are incapable of coming together in the class and working toward mutual emancipation. Complicated, yet good, examples of a teacher engaging forthrightly with this idea exist in Ira Shor's written reflections of his teaching, particularly *Empowering Education*. While Shor does not present the only possibilities for how to achieve the condition of free association in emancipatory education, his work presents a good starting point.

### **Mutual aid**

In our mutual relations every one of us has our moments of revolt against the fashionable individualistic creed of the day, and actions in which people are guided by their mutual aid inclinations constitute so great a part of our daily intercourse that if a stop to such actions could be put all further ethical progress would be stopped at once. Human society itself could not be maintained for even

so much as the lifetime of one single generation. These facts [are] mostly neglected by sociologists and yet are of the first importance for the life and further elevation of humanity. —Peter Kropotkin<sup>51</sup>

Mutual aid requires the kinds of “meta-commentary” that can be provided by critical literacy, which informs reflection and provides insight to our sociality. An understanding of social relationships, as premised on cooperation and in contradistinction to the competitive views commonly expressed in U.S. society, is necessary in order to freely give aid, and reflection of the kinds argued for here lead to this understanding. Politically, mutual aid “means to be able to give freely and take freely: from each according to her/his ability, to each according to her/his need. Mutual aid is only possible between and among equals (which means among friends and trusted long-term allies)” (Sprout 3). Pedagogically, mutual aid must be seen as possible among *all* participants in a course, between all students and teachers, even while those participants may not likely see each other as “trusted long-term allies.” The foundation of the course sets the stage for its members to treat each other as co-investigators, as equals. Often, coursework is approached not as a location for collaboration and co-investigation of themes but rather as a competitive space in which students vie for teachers’ attentions, extracting the knowledge from teachers they feel most useful to achieve personal goals (while often also ignoring all kinds of “knowledge” teachers would prefer students took away from their classes).

Offering (and accepting) mutual aid is a necessary component in becoming more fully human: it is the lived expression of the changed epistemology and ontology I have discussed here throughout my dissertation. It is not at a complicated relation, and I do not feel it needs any further definition. It is, however, for all its simplicity, difficult to enact,

requiring a continual renewal of epistemological and ethical commitments from everyone who seeks to become more fully human. In education, one way to both work toward the state of changed people in a changed society and demonstrate, provide a lived example, of this state on the way, is through *dialogue*. I take this idea up again in this chapter's final section.

### Care

Reflection theorized and practiced as meta-commentary leads to understanding the wider relations between people and the social structures we create. To enact reflection in this way in our pedagogy is to practice what composition and education scholars have alternatively called “caring” (in Nel Noddings’ work), authentic *cariño* (genuine fondness, love and affection) in the work of Lilia Bartolomé and Angela Valenzuela and what Patrick Camangian has called “critically caring literacies.”

For some educators, “care” designates a standpoint from which they can better support students, aiding them both in achieving their academic goals and in being somewhat responsive to their needs outside of academics. A more critical standpoint than simply “loving children” for primary and secondary school teachers, care is still just that, a standpoint, until they have undergone the more radical epistemological and ontological transformations of engaging in dialectical praxis. As one of the necessary conditions for emancipatory education explored here, “care” is meant to designate physical locations and the human relationships that the pedagogical approach of radical love sees as possible and sets out to create. As Camangian states, “Teachers can nurture caring relationships with and among students by creating a curriculum of concern for their lives

outside of the classroom, tapping into social emotions rarely shared in academic spaces” (182). Camangian contrasts these authentic relationships with those of teachers “who exhibit ‘aesthetic’ caring for their students,” relationships noted by Valenzuela in *Subtractive Schooling*, which are “concerned first with form and non-personal content and only secondarily, if at all, with their students’ subjective reality” (Valenzuela 22; qtd. in Camangian 181). This idea of “aesthetic” caring is similar to those kinds exhibited in the composition program at UW-Milwaukee, as evidenced in my qualitative research discussed earlier.<sup>52</sup> It also contributed to conditions undercutting what was an otherwise progressive curriculum at MCTC, discussed in the introduction, which maintained that the ultimate purpose of the curriculum was to inculcate standardized, edited American English forms in students’ written expressions—and in students themselves.

Noddings’ *The Challenge to Care in School* is perhaps the formative work on “care” in education; however, the connections subsequently made by critical pedagogues between care and ethics and wider political thought enhance teachers’ understandings of what it means “to care.” This is the direction that develops in Camangian’s work, but it is also important to my work to note the correspondences between his recent scholarship on caring and the longer-term commitments to ethical human relationships acknowledged in anarchistic and libertarian communist philosophies. Composition and education scholars theorizing caring relationships between and among students and teachers have much to draw on in such work, which already presupposes these relationships as desirable, if not actual, in educational relationships.

Camangian develops critically caring literacies with students through writing autoethnographies, which is writing about the self “necessarily as a member of a larger

social group” (183). Drawing on Bryant Keith Alexander’s work “performing” autoethnographic research, Camangian assigned autoethnographies “less as an academic obligation and more as a strategy for healing” (184), which is part of a pedagogy premised on *cariño*. Camangian’s self / social-group construction reveals to writers themselves what I earlier called “felt dichotomies” as well as demonstrates, in a “critical engagement with an other” (Qualley), how each writer struggles to understand these dichotomies, let alone to negotiate them. Further, sharing the writing in the classroom setting and dialoguing about what the other writers are reading and how they are reading it is necessary, for it is through this extended activity that the importance of making individual struggles apparent to other students occurs, and that is a key concern for both Camangian and in any critical pedagogy. As Camangian states, “Sharing humanizing narratives creates collective healing processes whereby students learn from one another’s lived experiences” (201). Students learn that they are not alone in experiencing the dehumanizing effects of capitalist social relations, and they learn also to trust one another on the basis of such collective realization—and from this they can learn how to work individually and together to combat these damaging effects.

Autoethnographies are similar to the literacy narratives often assigned in first-year writing courses, but with critical reflection built into the assignment. Literacy narrative assignment prompts, particularly those I have assigned in “basic” writing courses, tend to ask the writer to reflect on their experiences reading and writing, often in an attempt to get the writer to acknowledge some importance of literate practices. Readings which accompany such assignments tend to be narratives as well; *e.g.*, Jimmy Santiago Baca’s “Coming into Language” and selections from Mike Rose’s *Lives on the Boundary*, such

as “I Just Wanna Be Average.” In an effort to embed writers’ experiences within their thoughts on wider society, my assignments further ask writers to probe what they feel are the uses and values of their literate practices and to suggest other practices, and why their values for these may differ (if they do). Another essay I have assigned asks writers to select a mundane object or make an observation about an everyday activity and write about its significance to the writers. This cultural studies approach includes similar language to the literacy narrative in the prompt: asking the writer to consider the reasons why this object might be overlooked by others and to carefully interrogate the writer’s reasons for assigning it some significance. The assignment tends to move from analysis, through a research process, to academic critique as based on the analysis and research. Because “[c]ultural narratives that lack critical reflection have potential to be more about amusement than analysis, telling without understanding, summarizing instead of meaning making” (Camangian 183), the reflective moments are threaded throughout the composing process. Writers dialogue over any accompanying readings, including drafts of each others’ essays, in addition to research notes. The dialogue is key to the reflection, offering moments for writers to consider from others’ perspectives that extend well beyond taking input back to their drafts. As Camangian explains, “Autoethnographies, as I have used them, were constructed as cultural narratives embedded with critical reflection on the interconnected set of conditions that made up their differences” (183). Drawing here on Alexander again, Camangian describes how autoethnography plays out pedagogically: “[T]he evidenced act of showing in autoethnography is less about reflecting on the self in a public space than about using the public space and performance

as an act of critically reflecting culture, an act of seeing the self through and as the other” (Alexander 423; qtd in Camangian 184).

If we compare Camangian’s work with Jung’s insights about the rhetorical nature of all composition-class based reflection, we see how the dialectical exchange between the writer’s exposition of self and written analysis and critique of literate practice / other cultural artifact begins to extend the reflection through the sometimes trite, oftentimes navel-gazing moments that bog down many of the reflective pieces required for composition classes. In other words, following the discussion of Jung’s work in chapter 3, we see the true rhetorical nature of the reflective act in many required written reflections as simply, but appropriately, writers performing reflection to what they believe are their audience’s expectations.

Writing primarily about his pedagogy for and experiences with urban youth of color, Camangian asserts that critically caring literacies “account for dehumanization, internalized oppression, and consequential collective division that result from cultural self-hate [through channeling] students’ individual frustrations and social dissatisfactions against social forces that undermine their existence” (180). While not disregarding urban educators’ focus on students of color, it’s important to stress the connectedness of all students’ experiences of dehumanization and internalized oppression, as such. Being attentive to how students are differently impacted by capitalist social relations is a necessary part of any critical pedagogy, but the insights offered by Camangian on urban youth of color are just as significant with other student populations, and match my own experiences with “basic” writing students across social, cultural and ethnic difference and



across urban, suburban and rural backgrounds. Camangian explains the impact of dehumanization on urban youth of color:

As dominant corporate narrations of urban struggle have limited youth of color to the celebrated criminalization of men, the hyper-sexualization of women, and the glorification of social vice as viable means to cope with everyday life, urban educators must counter these narratives by offering young people opportunities to construct humanizing stories about life's significant struggles. (201)

Camangian's insights for urban youth of color are joined by considerations of the cumulative effects these "dominant corporate narrations" have on all of us: the barbie-doll-ization of young women; the accompanying intellectual belittling and forced stupidity of seemingly white women in corporate media; the narrowed gender assignments and expected social roles for all men, women and the non-identifying; the "training in irrational jingoism" (to use Chomsky's apt phrase) of competitive sports and sports fandom, forced on almost all males and, increasingly, women (not to mention the irrational drive forced on young black men to excel in sports as both an acknowledgement of worth and a misleading way to climb out of systemic social oppression). My point is that pedagogical approaches designed as particular to urban youth of color should not be "alternative" pedagogies. As I suggested in the introduction, these pedagogical approaches should be treated as normative. If not, dominant forms with majority white populations are assumed to be neutral and standard, which they are not, but they do support maintenance of the status quo. This is an answer to the question Lil Brannon posed 24 years ago, "What does a liberatory pedagogy look like which serves to liberate those who have the most to gain by maintaining the status quo?" ("Is" 18). It

looks like the pedagogy that serves those who are believed to have the most to gain by dismantling the status quo. From an anarchist perspective, students are clearly shaped by the same social factors within the overall capitalist system, but in markedly different ways. Because pedagogies designed for work with urban youth of color, and in basic writing courses for an “underclass” (Soliday; see the Introduction and note 10, below) openly acknowledge systemic oppression and are designed to overcome it, they must be the same pedagogies adopted in mainstream courses.

### **Dialogue as educational praxis: The pedagogy of radical reflection**

Love is at the same time the foundation of dialogue and dialogue itself. (Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy*, 89)

About reflection, we know better: we look at our general culture, filled with racial tension, with hate crimes, with poverty and hunger. We look at our schools, often as unreflective as the culture from which they cannot be divorced, and we see that if we want students to be reflective, we will have to invite them to do so, may need to reflect with them. (Yancey, “Portfolio as Genre,” 60)

I close my dissertation with an argument for dialogue as educational praxis. My understanding of dialogue for use in classrooms has been informed by Paula Allman and Australian educator Michael Newman, as well as by numerous students-teachers in all my various classrooms who have attempted dialogue with me. Allman developed her use of dialogue in her “Freirean course” at the University of Nottingham, referenced in chapter 2. I also first discussed the term “students-teachers” in chapter 2, linking it to the conception of a changed ontology I feel necessary for emancipatory education. Below I move to a discussion of my use of dialogue as educational praxis in more detail, but first I provide some background on why I am closing with dialogue and I will also suggest what

else might be necessary for the idealized composition classroom proposed here but will be left out.

I had considered further developing my own critical autoethnography assignment to share here, based on my reading of Camangian's work (above) and culling other examples from teachers I know who have attempted similar assignments. I had also considered compiling various writing and other in-class assignments that could fill the space of my idealized composition classroom for emancipatory education. I would have offered these assignments for critique and in the spirit of collaboration. Ultimately, I decided that the assignments in an emancipatory classroom do not matter *as much as* what I have come to see as the transformative power of dialogue. (An important caveat or two to my claim about other assignments will be registered below.)

I also feel that I have been reading strategies for emancipatory classrooms as laid out by critical pedagogues for many years and that very few of them have addressed dialogue as a key component. "Freirean" pedagogues certainly reference dialogue, but few focus the full attention on dialogue that I feel is warranted. I refer to some of these pedagogues below, but most of my discussion focuses on Allman's description of dialogue and how it has impacted my pedagogy.

It is incredibly difficult to challenge the liberal expectations of U.S. colleges and universities, couched in the gendered, classed and racialized discourse of meritocracy. It is even more difficult to challenge this discourse and present an alternative conception to a room full of people who themselves feel they need—and at the same time may despise—these expectations. This contradictory push and pull toward and away from education is a *felt dichotomy* that can, and should, be addressed in composition

classrooms. Dialogue is the way I have addressed these felt dichotomies in all of my classrooms since 2006. Creating a space for challenging liberal expectations, and then asking students to willingly enter this space, involves interrogating one's own teaching practices and suspending those practices which merely serve to reproduce the very relations that radical praxis seeks to change. These include grades and almost all teacher expectation as traditionally thought of in conceptions of liberal education in the humanities. Ira Shor has discussed negotiating grades with students (*Empowering Education*). Reading student text *as text*—as full of contradiction and possibility (rather than with the expectation of error)—in an emancipatory education has been the subject of basic writing scholarship almost since its inception, from Shaughnessy's *Errors and Expectations* to the work of Mike Rose and Glynda Hull and beyond.<sup>53</sup>

Indeed, compositionists have often designed critical practices and partially created the conditions necessary for emancipatory education. These include assignments to support critical literacy practices, albeit somewhat undercut by what I call composition's latent idealized form of literacy (see chapter 2) and classroom practices that approximate the full conditions I describe above. Part of what's at stake in re-conceptualizing reflection as a dialectically linked relation with writing/action on the part of both students and teachers is involved in creating the conditions I discussed earlier in this chapter: respect, free association, mutual aid, and care. These conditions create the possibility of transformed social relations, just as working to change these relations designates the possibilities for these conditions. The transformed relations become intelligible through the changed ontology and epistemology of Marx's *species being*. For me, as for Freire, "dialogue is 'the seal' of the transformed relations" (Allman, *Critical*, 175).

Invoking Freire has a long history in composition studies, which as a field has grappled with its self-image—its claim to professional status—since its inception.<sup>54</sup> Richard Miller once suggested that “Freire’s name and his writings have signified our brightest hopes about the importance of what we do” (10). In “The Arts of Complicity” (first referenced in chapter 2), Miller goes on to (what I claim is) a misreading of Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* in order to argue for a pragmatic pedagogy that acknowledges how “very well positioned [we teachers are] to assist our students in acquiring the skills necessary for persisting in the ongoing project of navigating a bureaucracy” (27).

Miller’s remarks remind me of the time an aspiring assistant professor, on a job visit to the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, explained his pedagogy to me by first saying how he used to follow a Freirean pedagogy as a graduate student/teacher but had somehow “grown out of that” (his exact words), as if the concerns taken up by Freire are simply youthful distractions along a road to more mature thinking. This seems to be a thoroughgoing malaise within the field of composition, which I have argued repeatedly in this dissertation is a product of the field’s professional orientation. Compositionists’ sense of discomfort arises, according to Miller, from seeing themselves as “liberatory teachers” when they’re really mere functionaries (in Miller’s view) who push along the dominant ideology, ultimately more akin to Lynn Z. Bloom’s description of “middle-class teachers in middle-class institutions [teaching a course that] promulgates the middle-class values that are thought to be essential to the proper functioning of students in the academy” (656). Indeed, Miller’s own retelling of how he, as a more idealistic teacher early on in his career, began to question his implementation of a Freirean

pedagogy involved realizing that Freire was attacking the professional identity of educators as such: as Miller writes, “[W]hat puzzles me is why [Freire’s] vision of teaching and the rhetoric that surrounds it should appeal to teachers, particularly teachers of reading and writing” (15).

Miller’s comments are a fairly good representation of the professional orientation I have been arguing against in this dissertation. Freire’s “vision of teaching” is one informed by Marx’s concept of *species-being* and theory of consciousness. Freire’s work has been explained by many educational theorists and compositionists; among the many found on my works cited are Antonia Darder, Peter Mayo, Moacir Gadotti, Ira Shor, and Cy Knoblauch. Perhaps the most influential exponents of Freire’s work are Donaldo Macedo and Henry Giroux. But the most influential to me remains Paula Allman, because in her work she first clearly explicates and then extends Freire’s theories and further grounds them in Freire’s Marxism. I referred to Allman’s work with Freire in many previous sections. Here, I would like to discuss the handout I have used in all of my classrooms for a number of years (see Appendix D). The passages on the handout are from Allman’s *Critical Education against Global Capitalism* (175-77). I have edited these passages (removing a few concepts not fully explained in those sections and some references to Marx that might initially trouble a few members of a new class).

In the handout, I show how Allman explains what she sees as the difference between discussion and dialogue in educational settings. She describes discussion as “a sharing of monologues that often bear no relation to one another except that they address the same topic or question” (Appendix D). In the educational setting, teachers “are responsible for the ordered and managed communication of monologues.” In contrast,

dialogue is used in a way that “deepens everyone’s understanding of what they are seeking to know—that is, some aspect related to the development of their critical understanding of reality” (Appendix D). Dialogue accomplishes this through participants sharing “their thinking about the theme or issue that they are investigating.” Dialogue participants “scrutinize” or collectively interrogate a “knowledge object.” During some dialogues, the knowledge object is a published text; in others, a text written by a member of the group (by a student in the class, in the more traditional parlance). The knowledge object is the collective focus for the group and can indeed be anything that helps the group to rethink, “unpack,” deliberate, etc. For example, in the composition classroom, concepts useful to the revision process are offered to the group, but not only by the teacher. Since the teacher (in this case the teacher-student) is one among many co-investigators (the students-teachers in Freire’s and Allman’s awkward, but I feel necessary, phrasing), her understanding of the knowledge object is offered to the group for the same consideration and deliberation as the understanding offered by anyone else in the class; the students-teachers’ conceptual knowledge is also offered to the group. In the example of a revision concept, students-teachers draw on their past experiences with writing, sharing the knowledge they already possess of this writing. Of course, many students-teachers do not feel they know *anything* about writing (perhaps as a result of their previous experiences in which someone never authorized them to feel that they did). Returning to the principles of dialogue here is key: everyone shares what they know as part of collective focus on the knowledge object. “In the dialogical form of communication,” Allman states, “the objective is to *use* the knowledge or thinking of each member of the group, together with the knowledge of people who are external to the

group [...] in order to investigate” the knowledge object (Appendix D).

The teacher-student’s knowledge is not central to the investigation of the knowledge object. Believing and acting upon this understanding is a necessary part of achieving the transformed relations to which dialogue contributes. The successfully changed ontology results in a changed relationship to knowledge—and vice versa; this is the dialectical interchange of unified ontology and epistemology. Knowledge “external to the group” is also questioned and folded into the thinking and deliberation of the group’s dialogue as well. “External knowledge” is anything that does not derive originally from the thinking of members in the group. Examples of external knowledge include expert opinion (such as from composition rhetorics and grammars), guest speakers in the class, or a source a member of the group is using to corroborate a claim during dialogue or referenced in the member’s essay that is the group’s current knowledge object.

Dialoguing over a knowledge object with these principles in mind results in “deeper and more critical knowledge and sometimes even the creation of new knowledge” (Appendix D). This is because the dialogue participants have collectively designated the importance in or of the knowledge object, often extending it to new uses and understandings. This knowledge creation is dialectical constructivism, as I have come to understand it and as I have designated it earlier in this dissertation. As Allman writes about such knowledge, “Because it has been acted upon and explicitly related to each person’s previous understandings as well as the theme being considered, it tends to be acquired at a deeper level and is thus more readily accessible for future use” (Appendix D).

I have begun my classes each semester by first playing an “ice-breaker” game to



enable the members of the class to get more comfortable with one another on their way to becoming participants in dialogue as educational praxis.<sup>55</sup> I distribute the handout (Appendix D) and we “dialogue about dialogue” (the handout about dialogue becomes the group’s first knowledge object) for a few class meetings: we unpack fears, address participants’ concerns, and develop some facility with dialogue. As participants share and build on each others’ understandings, the impact of this form of classroom management slowly materializes. (And it is “classroom management,” serving continually, although not exclusively, as the basis for most class meetings.)

In *Teaching Defiance*, Michael Newman describes “three- or four-stage exercise[s]” that he has used to “discourage people from sharing monologues and to nudge them into dialogue” (113-116). To my surprise upon first reading this book by the Australian educator, Newman concludes these exercises by distributing to dialogue participants what seems to be the same three pages of Allman’s book that I use in my handout (115). At the end of the “third phase” of exercises, Newman discusses Habermas’ “ideal speech situation,” providing “an excerpt from Habermas himself” to initially form the knowledge object (116). Divided into smaller groups of eight, the dialogue participants next respond to Newman’s act of “symbolically placing an idea in the center of the circle [in which dialogue participants sit] as an object of interest” (116). Participants “conduct a collective inquiry mediated by the idea” and “redeem three validity claims in every utterance they make” (116). Validity claims are what Habermas says people seek within “ideal speech situations.” For Newman, that means each dialogue participant “makes every effort to say only what she or he believes to be true, to speak only when she or he has the right or the authority to speak, and to be sincere in everything she or he says” (112). It can be a

challenge to approach such an ideal, but, in my experience, dialogue participants in most educational settings are more than up for the challenge. This is because the participants are often already seeking authentic speech in their educations; they are also seeking a place to be *heard* as making authentic claims.

I offer dialogue as educational praxis as a conclusion to this dissertation and as a beginning to what I hope will be a reconsideration of reflection in composition studies on the part of readers. In my experience, apparently shared by Allman and Newman, dialogue participants are able to radically transform their ontological and epistemological positions in the space of one composition classroom. The reflections of dialogue participants on their social relationships with knowledge, with education, with writing, are capable of attaining a radical, reflexive form: the reflections further participants' understandings of how these relationships work at root level and account for felt dichotomies in the contradictions of their lived reality. As Allman notes, dialogue "is not easy to achieve" (Appendix D). Like the wider social transformations to which it contributes, the principles of dialogue must be renewed again and again. Dialogue "is a process that must be struggled for on each occasion the group meets because the transformed relations that the group is trying to achieve will exist only in the learning group" (Appendix D). At least, these conditions will exist only in the space of the classroom *at first*—until the wider transformation of the everyday conditions for teaching and learning are achieved.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Donald Schön's and John Dewey's are the chief formative theories on reflection in terms of the privileging of professional knowledge, which from my anarchist perspective is a leading problem in reconciling the dichotomizing effects in composition studies. There are other theorists of reflection whose work compositionists draw upon, and some come from different premises (*e.g.*, theological), but most are taken up in similar uses throughout the scholarship. I address this issue throughout subsequent sections.

<sup>2</sup> *Evans-Marshall v. Board of Education of the Tipp City Exempted Village School District.*

<sup>3</sup> "Contingent faculty" is Eileen Schell's phrase for part-time and full-time teachers who are off the tenure track. See *Gypsy Academics and Mother-Teachers: Gender, Contingent Labor and Writing Instruction*. The percentage is taken from the U.S. Department of Education National Center for Education Statistics and compiled by John Curtis, director of research and public policy for the AAUP. For adjunct faculty statistics consult [insidehighered.com](http://insidehighered.com), [aft.org](http://aft.org), [neatoday.org](http://neatoday.org) and [adjunctproject.com](http://adjunctproject.com). Our own pasts become mythologized as we continue to point back to rosier times, even when studies such as Steve Parks' and Robin Varnum's and reminiscences by Adrienne Rich and Mina Shaughnessy describe how early composition work was also often done by untenured faculty.

<sup>4</sup> Groups involved are multifaceted and include All in the Red, a New York City-based student activist group, the Progressive Democratic Students' Federation in India and the *Coalition Large de l' Association pour une Solidarité Syndicale Étudiante* in Quebec, Canada.

<sup>5</sup> Methodological individualism is Weber's sociological doctrine that seeks to demonstrate social phenomena as the result of individual's actions and explain them through individual's motivations. Certain forms of methodological individualism persist in the psychologism within some social sciences and across the humanities, including in the theories of analytical Marxism. For Weber's view, see *Economy and Society*.

<sup>6</sup> But this notion of "preparation" in the discourse of basic writing is also a misnomer, one which I will address in the detail it deserves in subsequent sections, along with the "attitudes" and the idea of "how writing and writers work" referenced above.

<sup>7</sup> Namely, the University of Minnesota and Metropolitan State University; the latter, as part of the same system (MNSCU), later came to share MCTC's campus. Although transfer rates were high to U of M, I also believe my time at MCTC saw the beginning of increased two-year college enrollments in the face of rising tuition costs; the stigma of attaining a general education at the two-year school certainly being offset by economic realities which have only intensified since then. Black American youth are no more (or less) "African" than Ethiopian immigrant students are (and are not) "American." "Black" was the preferred term of my "African American" students at the time and has remained

an important signifier to me, revealing an important aspect of the true nature of racial tension in this country. Following Theodore Allen and others, we can understand “race” as little more than a fiction in biology, yet its very real material consequences an increasing handicap over others of culture and class in capitalist societies. Unlike racialized fears and positionings of many who have been historically “othered,” including those “white” immigrants from Italy and Ireland in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century U.S., which rely mostly on cultural and ethnic signifiers of difference, black Americans’ primary difference remains skin color. The compounding effects of visible “difference” with other cultural and socio-economic markers is one aspect of educational low-achievement in white supremacist U.S. society. However, sociologist John Ogbu’s concept of “castelike minorities” in reference to black Americans adds another level of complexity, providing a somewhat interiorized explanation to the educational resistance of black youth. These complexities will be brought out further in subsequent sections.

<sup>8</sup> Part of the answer to that question comes from posing a related one: How come there aren’t more teachers of color in English composition classrooms? Although there was one black teacher in the department while I was there, “one” is certainly not the beginning of a counter-argument.

<sup>9</sup> “Neoliberalism,” here, suggests those educational models that seek to “prepare” students for certain jobs, and increasingly, as a profit-making enterprise. It is a model premised upon economic development. The more traditional focus of liberal education seeks “human development,” but frames this development with notions of “citizenship” and in ideologies of “individualism” and even “justice” but which do not extend critique adequately to the operations of our social systems themselves. As a personal, political, and social philosophy based on justice and equality, certain ideas of *liberalism* are commensurate with *anarchism*; others, such as free trade or free market ideology and, to an extent, the ideology of private property, are incommensurate. The anarchistic (and generally, socialist) critique of liberalism is two-fold: equality becomes an *ideal* not recognized in actual practice, particularly in economic and, what’s most germane here, educational domains; and the form justice takes within liberalism is the rational rule of law as enforced by state authority. *Neo-liberalism* is a renewed conservatism in the humanism, politics and pedagogy of liberal education exploiting the idealism of *liberalism* to emphasize its tendencies toward free market capitalism. See also Martha Nussbaum, “Education for Profit, Education for Freedom,” *Liberal Education* 95.3.

<sup>10</sup> The concept of an “underclass,” according to Mary Soliday, “can be ideologically damaging if we assume that cultural attitudes represent class difference. This happens when ‘underclass’ becomes synonymous with ‘working class,’ because the former expresses attitudes about urban experience rather than about a specific class experience” (132). Soliday argues that in both neoliberal and conservative discourses, “underclass” signifies cultural difference, offering a “reason” to liberal educators for underachievement and remedial education. I use “underclass” here to denote *a way* of sectioning off segments from the working class population (the majority of people in American class society), people who are increasingly unaccounted for in anyone’s

discourse, including that of mainstream labor organizers' and mainstream educators'. While the differences are false and the conflation indeed dangerous, the *material effect* of designating an underclass as such persists. See Note 7, above.

<sup>11</sup> I will explain why radical praxis is my preferred term in subsequent sections; and see note 20, below.

<sup>12</sup> Use of the modifier “critical” often suggests a tradition of marxist theory that comes through the Frankfurt School of “critical theory,” but, as discussed above, I locate the development of Marx’s theory of consciousness through a different engagement with dialectical and historical materialism. As discussed in the second chapter, conceptions of reflection across all scholarly locations—from composition studies to curriculum and instruction to nursing education and other professional training—focus on self-awareness, improvement of the self and of one’s performance through better understanding of one’s actions. Thus for some a “critical reflection,” if premised on this understanding of “reflection,” would still focus on the self, albeit with additional attention to the social forces also operating on the self, but still in a focus on one’s performance. As I discuss below, the materialist conception I develop here comes from an understanding of humans as a “species-being” whose consciousness is linked to its nature, that is, its conditions or social reality; therefore, separating performance or solitary attention to the self dichotomizes what should be linked in order to achieve better understanding.

<sup>13</sup> See, for example, David Harvey’s similar remarks in both *The Limits to Capital* and *Justice, Nature and the Geography of Difference* (particularly in chapter two); Paula Allman’s comments in this regard in her books *Revolutionary Social Transformation: Democratic Hopes, Political Possibilities and Critical Education*, *Critical Education Against Global Capitalism: Karl Marx and Revolutionary Critical Education* and *On Marx: An Introduction to the Revolutionary Intellect of Karl Marx*; and Bertell Ollman’s “Putting Dialectics to Work.”

<sup>14</sup> Common uses of “anarchy” in popular culture make the term synonymous with violence and chaos, but these are not “anarchist” principles nor are these associations very useful in designating what anarchism is to a majority of the people who refer to themselves as “anarchists.” As a point from which to begin working toward a useful definition and understanding, anarchy is defined in this dissertation as a non-dogmatic yet highly organized system of collective action and mutual aid, comprised of free individuals who seek the dissolution of systems based on class, racial and gender oppressions. Anarchism originated in class struggles against capitalist and colonialist oppressors in the 19th century (Fontenis 4). Since that time, there has also been a “humanist” streak in historical anarchism which links it to libertarianism, often regarded as a philosophy of individual rights against government intrusion. Current libertarian organizations, as the term seems chiefly adhered to in the U.S., seem to favor free-market capitalism and privatization and are against nearly any kind of collectivism. This is suggested by the political platform of the Libertarian Party ([www.lp.org/platform](http://www.lp.org/platform)). Whatever the case, something referred to as “libertarianism” may have many disparate followers who may hold different tenets, but libertarianism as a political philosophy

shares little in common with anarchism, as libertarians in my view dichotomize the individual from society, a necessary human phenomenon. In keeping with the focus on unified human consciousness here, it might help to modify “anarchism” with other terms, such as “anarcho-syndicalism” or to think of it blatantly as a contradiction in terms such as “libertarian communism,” which are attempts to highlight and overcome the dual structure of our human thinking and impulses in anarchy’s philosophy. Anarchy sees humans as free individuals within our collective social context. In other words, to think of an “individual” as separate from her historical and social context and as apart from other people is not to think of a human at all. We are all in this together.

<sup>15</sup> The circuits of capital are sped up at ever-faster rates and the accumulation of capital hyper-realized. In Marx’s theory of realization this refers to periods of overproduction and of larger crises in what are considered “natural” cycles of boom and bust. The “Great Recession” of 2007-2008 is an example of such a crisis, as well as the “technology bubble” that burst in 2000-2001. What I mean by “hyper-realization” is that surplus value is extracted from workers at increasing rates and capital remains often only among capitalists (those who own the means of production). Capital is not consumed and exchanged (circulated) at the same rate it is being produced. What this means on the human level is people are working longer hours, often for less money (and other material reward; this is “surplus value,” the source of all capitalist wealth, according to Marxists).

<sup>16</sup> “Rape culture” designates the systemic conditions of our society that tacitly endorse attitudes of violence toward women (see Steffes). It does not suggest, as some critics claim, a national “hysteria” which “poison[s] the minds of young women and lead[s] to hostile environments for innocent males” (Kitchens, n.p.).

<sup>17</sup> The form of dialectics that follows from and includes Karl Marx’s extension of both Hegel’s dialectics and Feuerbach’s materialism has been called *dialectical materialism* at different times, and with different intents, by Josph Dietzgen, Frederich Engels, Karl Kautsky, Georgi Plekhanov and Joseph Stalin. Marx never used the term but actively worked on *the materialist dialectic*; Engels used the term *historical materialism* when describing Marx’s application of *the materialist dialectic* to understanding history. *Historical materialism* has come to designate Marx’s “method” (the way he applies his theory of dialectics). But, for me, *historical materialism* is too narrow a term, as I want to emphasize *dialectics* in how I understand humans as *social beings* and how to achieve the goals of *emancipatory education*. *Materialism* in philosophy emphasizes that the “world” (material reality) outside of human consciousness is the basis of human thinking. There are forms of materialism that are not dialectical. Marxists would view these forms as “mechanical” or “vulgar materialist” (this is Marx’s critique of Feuerbach’s materialism, in part; see the “Theses on Feuerbach” in *The German Ideology*). And there are forms/treatments of Marxism that are certainly materialist but are not dialectical, such as Analytic Marxism and Critical Realism. What I have come to call *dialectical materialism* informs my *anarchism* and vice versa; it is not the theoretical forms of Dietzgen, Plekhanov, Stalin, or others. I explain the basis for my understanding of *dialectics* in chapter 2. In short, I treat both *dialectics* and *materialism* as equal root-terms that together designate the concept I am exploring. There are unavoidable grammatical

constructions that force me to join the terms in different ways, but I at no point wish to invoke any historical understandings of the terms in ways other than those I explicitly bring into my dissertation.

<sup>18</sup> Additionally, I have found writing by Karel Kosik, Moacir Gadotti, Adolfo Sanchez Vazquez and Rosa Luxemburg useful in strengthening the formulation of dialectics and praxis presented here, and Emma Goldman's writing and anarchist thought shapes my ideas of social constructionism, as well as of human beings' potential. To a lesser extent, my work has been informed by other "critical educators," such as Jean Anyon, Lois Weis, Michael Apple, Henry Giroux and Julie Kailin, whose book *Antiracist Education* detailed the difficulties in practicing antiracist pedagogy without a wider grasp of the socio-political complexities of education as informed by a Marxist understanding, which was useful for me in formulating problems of perspectival scale (see chapter one). However, the differences between the "Marxism" of these educational theorists and my anarchism as informed by dialectical materialism are too numerous and complex to enter into in any detail here. They will remain the subject of a future study.

<sup>19</sup> As Antonia Darder notes, Freire would later stress their "alliance" rather than unity ("union" was the term he used), so as not to suggest a "collapse" of the terms into each other "or dissolve the two distinct, although connected, moments of knowing into one another and lose the significance of each dialectical contribution to the ongoing construction and remaking of knowledge in our lives" (83).

<sup>20</sup> A "learning group," for Allman, is a classroom full of co-investigators. No longer students and a teacher, "learning group" designates the changed ontological positions that I continue to describe in this chapter.

<sup>21</sup> There has been no adequate treatment of a "dialectical materialist theory of language," despite attempts by people as far-ranging as James Aune, in *Rhetoric and Marxism* and Jean-Jacques Lecercle in *A Marxist Philosophy of Language*, as well as David McNally's *Bodies of Meaning*. This likely remains a central difficulty because of the persistence of the literacy myth throughout the humanities and sciences, including some corners of composition studies, despite critical efforts in English education and literacy studies. James Paul Gee clarifies that "the literacy myth—the idea—that literacy leads inevitably to a long list of 'good' things—is a myth because literacy in and of itself, abstracted from historical conditions and social practices, has no effects, or, at least, no predictable effects" (42). Classical Marxism, somewhat ironically, has often posited a rather transparent theory of language in which truth can be reached through philosophical precision while remaining outside the effects of propaganda and other uses. Critical pedagogues in composition have been more wary of such easy assessments, but can nonetheless fall into such idealized thinking about language, while some Marxist writers still attribute difficulties in explaining ideas to lack of "rigor" or "conciseness" in the language used; these seem to me rather peculiar abstractions of the material force which is human language.

<sup>22</sup> Distinguishing literacy from critical literacy can be used as a way to “read” the field of literacy studies. At any rate, this is the focus in what has come to be known as the “critical” studies of sociolinguistics, beginning perhaps with Brian Street and certainly extending through Gee, Gore, and others to the New London Group, which builds on, responds to and adapts, in many instances, earlier work by Ong, Heath, and others. While acknowledging this work, I develop a definition of critical literacy through a reading of *class* as it operates in both the scholarship and the narratives of compositionists.

<sup>23</sup> I will review the major statements in composition studies on *reflection* and *reflexivity* in subsequent sections. My pointing them out, and pulling them apart, in Shor’s definition of critical literacy demonstrates an interesting circularity when thinking about all these concepts (that in defining a critical understanding of literacy one invokes notions of reflection and when thinking about *critical reflection* one tends to draw on understandings of critical literacy as a *reflexive* move), but it would be tangential to my immediate discussion of critical literacy to further delineate the different uses of reflection and reflexivity here. Yet, the reasons for this circularity is exactly the point of thinking about these concepts *dialectically*, as in previous sections of this chapter and it is where I am heading in subsequent sections.

<sup>24</sup> For “problematic” here, I draw on its meaning in French philosophy, as first explained by Gaston Bachelard and as also drawn upon in a marxist vein by Louis Althusser. A problematic frames questions when thinking about a subject but also, more importantly, “initiates a critique of the subject-object relations in the explanation of thought in general and of science in particular” (Maniglier 21). In its application in French philosophy, “problematic” designates the range of concepts at work in discussion or analysis of a given subject, issue, or problem. As such, it is a framing device, a way to delineate the parameters of a subject (and exclude others). I do not use the term in its more common sense as a difficult or unpleasant person, situation, or action.

<sup>25</sup> A “political animal” (the phrase is in the original Greek in Marx’s *Grundrisse*) is a social animal; for Marx in this instance, political activity is the social, it *is* human activity.

<sup>26</sup> To deliberately work the dialectic of our structuring terms, to overcome the dichotomy of word / action is part of the never-ending project for compositionists. Is the word separate from action? I think rhetoricians would agree with a Marxist understanding that words have material force, their agency and efficacy resulting from the combination of use, social meanings, valences, etc. Where composition and rhetoric, as a field, might part from a Marxist understanding of language (if developed from Marx’s theory of consciousness) is an *overemphasis* on words, a dichotomization from physical being in a yet idealized form masked by the mechanistic materialism which supports treating linked concepts as linear (rather than dialectic): writing/reflection, teaching/learning, theory/practice.

<sup>27</sup> The collection *Farther Along: Transforming Dichotomies in Rhetoric and Composition* provides an overview of the theory-practice binary and other forms of dichotomous thinking shaping composition’s founding.



<sup>28</sup> The events linked to those dates are the publication of Braddock and company's *Research* for the former and the Dartmouth conference for the latter. Composition, of course, has actually been a subject of scholarly inquiry much longer, as work by Varnum and Brereton have shown.

<sup>29</sup> Schön seems himself wary of such distinctions as “soft” and “hard” professions as he draws on a taxonomy by sociologist Nathan Glazer (in the 1974 *Minerva* essay, “Schools of the Minor Professions”) to complete his list of scientific professions. For Schön, these professionals are not only the technical problem solvers (within the model of technical rationality which founded such professions) but, when they “choose to address new or unique problems which do not fit known categories, their inquiry [becomes] a design process artistic in nature” (170). Schön nonetheless continues to draw on these distinctions throughout his career (see his “Theory of Inquiry” and Leonard Waks’ overview in “Donald Schon’s Philosophy of Design and Design Education.”)

<sup>30</sup> Yancey also thinks her concepts “apply [...] in any space where literacy and text and curriculum are topics of inquiry” (200).

<sup>31</sup> *The Reflective Practitioner*, 31. As I’ll explain in more detail, Schön’s conception of thinking and action posits an interconnected, necessary, relationship: in many instances, you cannot have one without the other. This is distinct from John Dewey’s procedural (even at times being described as a step-by-step approach to) reflection, in which the timing of reflection for Dewey is after the action. For Schön, reflection and action are *necessarily* linked; if not exactly happening simultaneously, Schön still insists that there is often reflection *in the* action; hence, the name for one of his chief concepts.

<sup>32</sup> One way Yancey defines reflection-in-presentation is “the process of articulating the relationships between and among the multiple variables of writing and the writer in a specific context for a specific audience” (200). In other words, describe and illustrate, in writing, one’s learning processes in reading and writing and the uses and values one has (and maybe others have) for reading and writing.

<sup>33</sup> As cited by Robert Tremmel (“Zen” 439). According to Tremmel, Dewey’s “steps,” first published in 1910, later (in 1933) become “aspects,” as Dewey attempts to work against “the potential dangers of such a deceptively simple formula” (440). In what follows, I will include the publication date of *How We Think*, along with the page reference where appropriate, as I draw my understanding of Dewey’s views of reflection from both versions of his text. In my view, also stated in the section following this epigraph, Dewey sought the rational management of society, even while his positions on “thought” and “reflective thought” seem correct in terms of the general human capacity for thinking. Thus his pragmatism unnecessarily limits the true revolutionary, that is, *human* potential of educational processes.

<sup>34</sup> Rose takes up the view from classical Greece that this kind of thought follows from leisure; it’s not a leisure-time activity in our modern sense, but comes from the ability of

having *the time* to devote to such study (often because slaves and others who were not citizens devoted most of their time to manual activity). Others have theorized this idea more exclusively, accounting for different historical periods, including Evan Watkins in *Work Time: English Departments and the Circulation of Cultural Value*.

<sup>35</sup> What Yancey is getting at here might be better described as “dialogical,” but functions of naming the concepts that terms may represent is not what is at stake here. It is where Yancey extends this conceptual framework to the classroom and, more importantly, to the roles she assigns teachers and learners.

<sup>36</sup> This solitary expert reader of student texts indicates what has been described in the “connoisseur” model of assessment. See Allan Luke, “Babies, Bathwaters and Benchmarks: Literacy Assessment and Curriculum Reform” and James Elander, “Student Assessment from a Psychological Perspective.”

<sup>37</sup> Yancey’s emphasis on “bothness” occurs repeatedly throughout her work and marks her overriding concern to massage the theory-practice dichotomy in the field.

<sup>38</sup> “Maria’s” account is published in Reynolds and Rice.

<sup>39</sup> Finlay reviews some of this overlap. See also Fook, White and Gardner, as well as McLaren (*Life*, 51) for further statements on the distinctions between “reflection” and “critical reflection.”

<sup>40</sup> See Garfinkel, Harold. *Studies in Ethnomethodology*. Cambridge: Polity, 1984. Print.

<sup>41</sup> UWM English Department by numbers (2008):  
 44 faculty (none of whom taught required first-year composition courses)  
 57 lecturers / contingent faculty  
 74 graduate employees, subdivided by field of study:  
     literature, 15  
     rhet/comp, 14  
     creative writing, 21  
     linguistics, 4  
     modern studies, 16  
     professional writing, 4

<sup>42</sup> All names of composition teachers in the study have been replaced with the names of Milwaukee service-industry workers.

<sup>43</sup> Yancey, *Reflection in the Writing Classroom*, 12. “More specifically, I take [Schön’s two concepts], re-theorize them as three discrete but inter-related concepts and apply them to the teaching and learning of writing” (Yancey 13).

<sup>44</sup> One of these visiting scholars was Cynthia Selfe, who very pointedly told a seminar room of graduate students that the kinds of reflection she witnessed in the UWM program were quite rare in her experience.

<sup>45</sup> In a sense, though, because of the impulse in composition scholarship to always connect research to the classroom, it could be said that *all* composition research has something to do with teachers' formative identities. To the extent that pedagogy is always to some degree personal, proposals for the classroom can be seen as extensions of teachers' identities. But there is a handful of more direct research on teacher identity in composition studies, among them edited collections such as the one by Betty Pytlik and Sarah Liggett, and collections of personal stories, such as the one edited by Diana George. There are numerous studies of teachers' identities in education, including Joe Kincheloe's *Toward a Critical Politics of Teacher Thinking*. I point to Lilia Bartolomé's edited collection in particular, as many of its contributions discuss individual identity with the forces that impact identity in the wider social reality.

<sup>46</sup> The three-pass model suggests taking three distinct looks at the interview subjects. The interview process I designed began with a meeting of all the research participants, gathering an initial assessment of their views on reflection from that meeting, and two subsequent, individual interviews, as represented by the questions in Appendices A and B.

<sup>47</sup> I only realized much later that action research in education contexts begins with similar premises, and participatory action research can be treated as a particularly Freirean approach.

<sup>48</sup> Examples abound from all across my teaching and graduate experiences: Such as when the department chair, a literature professor, refers to rhet/comp graduate students as "you people" at a department forum. Or when introducing yourself to a creative writing professor as a "writer" and being met with consternation when you reply "rhet/comp" to the question of which degree you're seeking. Patronizing attitudes among rhet/comp faculty and graduate students toward colleagues with different disciplinary identities have been evidenced everywhere I've gone over 14 years, as well. Written examples are nearly too numerous to mention as the anecdotal, but some include contributions to, Trimbur, John, Richard Bullock, and Charles Schuster. *The Politics of Writing Instruction: Postsecondary*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1991. Print.

<sup>49</sup> I frequently return to Brookfield, specifically to this passage, which I have used twice as an epigraph in this dissertation, as somewhat of a reminder, if not a personal touchstone. It keeps me going, and keeps me oriented to what I think matters. I have adopted Roger Simon's view of epigraphs as he wrote of them at the beginning of *Teaching Against the Grain*: "Introductory quotations, or epigraphs, are often taken as emblems. If they assert a set of principles that seem to prick one's conscience, such quotations run the risk of being taken as symptomatic of a discourse of authority and arrogance. Rather than emblems, I like to think of introductory quotations as notes attached to a refrigerator door; reminders of things I too easily forget as I go about the business of everyday life" (n.p.).

<sup>50</sup> There are a number of excellent historical databases through which readers can attempt this kind of tracing, but the ideas are already readily apparent in a number of other communist philosophies of education. Some databases for consideration include libcom.org, anarchism.pageabode.com, The Anarchy Archives (dwardmac.pitzer.edu), the now-defunct online Spunk Library (archived at spunk.org), and the Emma Goldman Papers Project at Berkeley. Many anarchist writers who are also considered Marxist have work catalogued at the Marxist Internet Archive (marxists.org; little is done by the site's editors to connect particular themes in their encyclopedia with writers in their archive, but it can be useful for easily accessing the work of particular writers—if one has their names). Readers might also find useful the anarchist publication *Fifth Estate*, published quarterly in Detroit.

<sup>51</sup> Kropotkin further asserts, in *Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution*, “Although the destruction of mutual-aid institutions has been going on in practice and theory, for full three or four hundred years, hundreds of millions continue to live under such institutions; they piously maintain them and endeavour to reconstitute them where they have ceased to exist.” Kropotkin lists such institutions as unions, Oddfellows organizations, “the village and town clubs organized for meeting the doctors' bills, the dress and burial clubs, the small clubs very common among factory girls, to which they contribute a few pence every week, and afterwards draw by lot the sum of one pound, which can at least be used for some substantial purchase, and many others.” This spirit continues to this present day and allows us to see correspondences in a similar list of Knoblauch and Brannon's: “The activist teacher must work, not only with other teachers in a spirit of solidarity, but also with activist parent associations, activist school board members, supportive state education officials, supportive funding agencies, local churches and community groups, union educators, the local gay rights or feminist organization, the activist publisher, like-minded public policy advocacy groups, and other sympathetic citizens” (153). When reviewing what one has been told about Kropotkin, as well as other anarchists, readers are encouraged to consider Stephen Jay Gould's remarks in “Kropotkin Was No Crackpot,” linking Darwin, Thomas Huxley and the competitive version of “natural selection” as “founded upon a line of British thought stretching from Hobbes through Adam Smith to Malthus: “we must reverse the traditional view and interpret [Kropotkin's] work as mainstream Russian criticism.” In modern U.S. society it is often easy to forget that we are all in this together, and quite likely that evidence for other ways of looking at the world are right alongside the things to which we're told to pay attention.

<sup>52</sup> Many of the interviewees grounded their approaches to reflection in their assessment that the writing program's goals and outcomes for portfolio review privileged the goals for academic clarity and properly formatted essays. In 10 years teaching in the composition program I never noted such a privileging in the language of the goals, but I did note it in the attitudes of some of the instructors. Again, it was anecdotal observations like this that led me to conduct my interviews and design my research project as I did.

<sup>53</sup> “‘This Wooden Shack Place’: The Logic of an Unconventional Reading.” Other somewhat foundational texts in basic writing include, Bartholomae, Del Principe, Fox

“Basic Writing,” Harris, Horner, Glynda Hull’s “Acts of Wonderment” and Rose’s “Narrowing the Mind and the Page,” among many others.

<sup>54</sup> See Stephen North, *The Making of Knowledge in Composition: Portrait of an Emerging Field*. Portsmouth: Boynton, 1987. James Berlin, *Rhetoric and Reality: Writing Instruction in American Colleges, 1900-1985*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1987. Susan Miller, *Textual Carnivals: The Politics of Composition*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1991. Robin Varnum, *Fencing with Words: A History of Writing Instruction at Amherst College during the Era of Theodore Baird, 1938-1966*. Urbana: NCTE, 1996.

<sup>55</sup> My favorite such game is to have class members draw a self-portrait with their eyes closed. I then collect the portraits and walk them around the room until the class members figure out whose portrait belongs to which artist. Once determined, the artist speaks briefly about themselves, answering questions of interest to other members of the group (questions they already determined before beginning the game).

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## Appendix A

### Composition Teachers' Reflective Practices: First Interview

- 1) Name, position, personal information, interview location:
- 2) Do you consider yourself a reflective practitioner? What does this mean to you?
- 3) Please define “reflective practices.” How might you describe one in action? Where does the kind of reflection you describe show up? In what kinds of documents, artifacts, and so on?
- 4) What is your current sense of the reflective practices taught in composition classrooms [nationally, as represented in scholarship/professional discussion]?
  - a) How do you see these practices intersecting with your work teaching composition here [at UWM]?
  - b) What is your professional opinion of the reflective goals for student writers in the English Department's Student Guide?
  - c) What in your pedagogical approach [teaching philosophy/teaching practice] do you draw on to enable students to reach these reflective goals?
  - d) Can you talk a bit about how you implement your pedagogy in relation to these goals?
  - e) What, if anything, do you find are the strengths/weaknesses in your approach?
- 5) What is your view of the purpose of education? How have you come to hold this view? What is your sense of your role in this, your, view of education?
- 6) Do you feel that you enact certain reflective practices in your own analyses? Analyses within your professional activities? Within your daily living? [Different scenarios were discussed here in relation to the interviewee's responses; with in general, the interviewer looking for the interviewee to address any correspondences/divergences between statements offered at the initial meeting of composition instructors (see the accompanying email soliciting participants for this meeting) and responses to questions 4a-c, 5, 5a above. The questions asked for number 6, here, were open-ended and may have take different forms with different interviewees; the sub-questions, below, remained the same.]
  - a) What are the reflective practices you feel you engage in? How would you describe the way(s) they operate? Is there a pattern/method to how you enact them? If so, how did you come to this method? If you do not feel you enact any particular pattern/method, how have you come to see your reflective practices? What structures them/gives them shape?

How are they used (useful) if you do not follow any given pattern? Do you feel this is a benefit? How so?

b) What are the benefits and limitations to these practices, as you use them? How else might you engage in them?

7) What lets you know that any given reflective practice is successful? Can you share an example?

8) Is there a connection between your use of reflective practices and those you ask students to try out? If so, can you describe it? If not, what are the differences/how are they different?

9) Given your sense of the program documents which structure your teaching here [in the Composition Program at UWM] do you feel constrained in any way(s) in your teaching of reflective practices?

a) [If such feelings exist] Can you describe what shapes these constraints?

b) [If such feelings do not exist] What do you think works particularly well between this representation of the program [the program documents] and your teaching?

[modify] is there anything that works well or do the constraints overwhelm?

10) Can you describe the distinctions, if any, there might be between students' reflective practices that you feel are valuable and your own reflective practices? What might account for these distinctions (if any)?

11) How often do you think about the relationship between your teaching and the education of undergraduates as a whole—to their entire educational process? Can you characterize your thoughts on this relationship?

12) What do you suppose is the relationship(s) between what you teach and what you feel students need to learn? What is the role, if any, of reflective practices in this?

a) Do you feel that students are required to learn something that you do not personally value [within your own teaching and the teaching of undergraduates elsewhere (other courses, departments)]? Is there anything that you feel you can/should do about this?

b) What do you suppose professionals in other disciplines think about the teaching that is done in composition programs? About the kinds of work you do? Why do you think that is?

13) Where does any given use-value for reflective practices begin and end? In other words, do you find that reflective practices, or certain ones, are useful for some purposes and not others?

- a) How would you describe the relationship you see between a reflective practice you ask from students and any given purpose for this practice?
- b) How would you define the relationship between a reflective practice that you use and its (your) intended purpose?

## Appendix B

### Composition Teachers' Reflective Practices: Second Interview

#### Overview:

The second interview is intended to operate more as a discussion, with the researcher/interviewer and participant/interviewee focusing on the interviewee's responses to questions posed in the first interview and the participant's subsequent thinking and writing (if any) as a result of being a participant in this research project.

Questions will arise out of shared reading of both the program's documents related to reflective practices and the interviewee's documents related to the teaching of these practices, such as any course assignments and statements of teaching philosophy that the interviewee shared (see Interview One, question # 3). Some of these questions are the same as those in the first interview; correspondences/divergences among the two sets of responses will be aggregated and analyzed. Some of these questions are meant to elicit projections from the interviewee; projections as prompted by being a participant in this research project and arising from the particulars of the participant's responses to more open-ended questions. Locations, within the scope of the second interview, for this latter kind of question are noted, with some description of the range of questions, in brackets [ ] below.

#### Questions:

- 1) Let's return to a question asked at our first interview: Is there a connection between your use of reflective practices and those you ask students to try out? If so, can you describe it? If not, what are the differences/how are they different?
  
- 2) Again, given your sense of the program documents which structure your teaching here [in the Composition Program at UWM] do you feel constrained in any way(s) in your teaching of reflective practices?
  - a) [If such feelings exist] Can you describe what shapes these constraints?
  
  - b) [If such feelings do not exist] What do you think works particularly well between this representation of the program [the program documents] and your teaching?
  
  - c) Have your thoughts/approaches to the program, to the teaching of reflective practices, to your own reflective practices changed in any way since the first interview? Since the first time we met as a group to discuss this topic?
  
- 3) What might you do differently in your teaching of these practices, if you could?

a) [Questions will follow that attempt to get the interviewee to describe in as much detail as possible what it is that she/he would do differently and why. In order to get at this detail, the questions will need to build directly off the particulars of the different actions as stated by the interviewee.]

b) [If the interviewee would do something different] What do you feel constrains you or limits your ability to enact this different [emphasis, approach, pedagogical strategy, programmatic function]? In other words, why haven't you made this change already?

c) [If the interviewee would not do anything differently] Why would you not do anything differently? How are you thinking about your use of these reflective practices/how they get enacted by students that satisfies you?

4) You ask students to [reference to a teaching document]; can you describe how you see this working for students and/or the ways that certain students did what you've asked of them?

a) How do you feel this teaching approach relates to the reflective practices you enact for yourself?

5) What do you value about the reflective practices you enact?

[Have you ever considered the relationship between the reflective practices you ask of students and...]

What do you think is the impact of these reflective practices?

What do you feel they enable/accomplish? What do you believe they *should* enable/accomplish [may be received differently than what the interviewee feels they actually enable]?

a) If there's a difference here (actual/possible) Why?

b) If there isn't any (attributed) difference, what might account for that?

## Appendix C

Responses from four interviews (2 graduate employees; 2 lecturers) to two questions (see Appendices A and B for the full question sets). All names are pseudonyms (see note 39, above); references to schools other than UWM have their names omitted and replaced with descriptions:

### **What is your current sense of the reflective practices taught in composition classrooms [nationally, as represented in scholarship/professional discussion]?**

Trish: My sense is that reflective practice is that it's something important to talk about in terms of the discipline—so people ask “what is a good comp teacher?” and people would say “well, they're reflective”—I don't have a lot of experience with comp programs other than the one here—so, I see that this one gives us time and space to reflect—but I wonder if this time is given generally in other programs? How does the scholarship work out in practice? If this is seen as a good thing in theory, are people doing it? I really think this is one of the strong things about this program—I've been mentored to think with that aspect in mind—I'm not just saying this, when there's an incentive for classroom practices to actually change, then there's value to do reflection.

This wasn't the case at my undergraduate institution, for instance, sharing an office with some of them on campus [comp program staff], I got the sense that it wasn't valued, that the institution wasn't giving them time, resources, space to think about their teaching and make these changes or any that would come from it.

Laurence: I can hardly call myself a rhet/comp scholar, I have no idea of the discourses outside of UWM and it's hard to say what's going on at UWM because it's changing so quickly, it seems—I have this weird sense of reflection being more valued in the curriculum I came in under, and that's changed--goals and outcomes stand in for people who don't know a lot about comp., so when these change... [before] now it seemed the recursivity and the collection of documents in the assignment sequence was something you could hold in your hand and read over the course of the semester.

And if I'm right in what was changed is that there are different goals for 101 and 102 and that the goals are separate—I'm pausing here, I don't want to go back on what I said, but what I'm talking about here is “critical”—it seems that in our curriculum there was an emphasis on critical, criticality, reflective practices, instead of narrating this experience, it was positioning yourself in relation to others and not just reflecting yourself—it goes back to kind of I guess, reflecting yourself and having other objects and people to reflect with and back to yourself....

Angelo: At UWM and [a local private college] reflection is usually required but under-theorized in my view. I hear complaints from fellow instructors that it's vapid or lip-service, more at UWM, but I've been there longer too.



Artemis: Um, I think my biggest area of familiarity is the places I've taught, at [university in another state] and [grad school] and [local catholic university], and [local for-profit college]; these places where I've taught, reflective writing was not a part of the way the programs were structured and there was not a particularly strong component of it at all—[UWM] is the only place I've taught that has this focus—all those programs are focused on classical rhetoric, on argument—at [out-of-state university] it was the enthymeme—ethos, pathos, logos.

There's a definite attempt to include critical reflection in the pedagogy here that emerges as a necessity, because of the focus on student text rather than focusing on content, ethos, pathos, so on. In order to make the content explicit, the student has to make it themselves, so that reflective writing practices here attempt to do that. The reflective practices here are in flux or vaguely defined, I see someone like [a long-term lecturer] as talking about restructuring her entire course around the research inquiry analysis [the 102 course's version of a reflective essay] so that she uses it as a way to get at everything in her class, making that reflective writing do a certain kind of work, that I think it was meant to do. So I think for a lot of people the reflective writing practices get thrown in at the end—at [lecturer's, referred to above, address to the teaching staff in the composition program] she said people look at reflective writing practice as looking backward and she was trying to get people to see it as looking forward—my assignments are always asking to write about the now—whereas at the end it presumes that students are done, and this writing becomes an artifact after the fact—to me, the valuable reflective practices don't work very well as artifacts because it's something in process.

**What is your view of the purpose of education? How have you come to hold this view? What is your sense of your role in this, your, view of education?**

Laurence: I am having a super really hard time with this question right now cuz I think, the purpose of education is the solidification of a nation-state—I'm half kidding—preparing citizens, I think this is in the *Student Guide* right, which is what [we got from] Isocrates; we inherited from that, so what do I think?

Well, what I think is shaped by what I hear my students thinking about education, which is a means toward an end of getting a job—I have to be in college to get a job, so there is a commodification of the education that worries me; so I do have a concept of liberal arts education as exposing students to material that they wouldn't otherwise be exposed to [and] so I see education as being very political, but I'm very careful about the kinds of politics I value in education.

[Laurence runs through the dominant conception of liberatory education.] But I don't know it seems like the material conditions for students are changing, they're different than when I went to college, and that job never includes academics—I mean they're freshman and sophomores so... [trails off].

Trish: Wow, a big question—I have a schizophrenic view of education—first of all, ultimately my view has to flow out of my primary identity which is theological in a sense, but being in a university that is secular, in a sense, I have to have an educational identity, in a sense that allows me to function in this kind of university.

I am a Christian, born again, conservative Christian who believes that the bible contains god's truth and that's the only truth—while I believe postmodernism and such has correctly identified problems in writing and such, I believe that the truth is in scripture—I believe that there is such a thing as multiplicity of truth, so ultimately, to be honest with you, that is the only arena in which education will be fulfilling is when education recognizes that god is the source of all knowledge.

So functioning here, I would say that the goal of the university is to deepen, widen, develop individual students, and there's no limit to that—I don't want to say that the goal here is to create better workers, but there's a part of that, too—I want to say that the purpose of education is to broaden perspectives, to expose students to multiple viewpoints—so I see the career-oriented and the sort of classical view of the edification of the individual have to merge somehow in the university—speaking of the secular university.

So here I see what I do here in comp. I resent the service component that others in the university have of me, but I recognize that I do some of that work.

But I know I also do critical thinking, and because I'm a committed Christian some say how can I believe in this, check your brains at the door—but no, one of the things I value about the curriculum is the critical reading skills: “Where did you see that in the text? How did you come to that interpretation of what you're seeing in the text?” So I see that my students are taking some of this to their other courses—writing for context and so on.

And I'm still forming all my thoughts on all that and sometimes it still is difficult for me to navigate my personal beliefs in an environment that is not always quite welcoming to speak frankly [...] one of the things I'd like to do someday is bring together the kind of teaching I do in the university and what I've found to be a much more fulfilling kind of education and what this has done, is push me back to scripture in that what we don't know, what we can bring what we don't know—that human knowledge is constantly subject to change, one day all that knowledge is going to pass away and that as a believer I have the confidence, assurance, and hope that I will be able to know truth and that's exciting—one day I would like the opportunity to teach the kind of work that we do but with the theological grid that helps me do everything I do.

Angelo: Trying to think of a concise way to put this—the purpose of education would be to aid some sort of democratic enlightenment project, maybe—I'll stand by it—my role is to enable students to engage in self-critique and responsible communication, I suppose. [You seem hesitant with your answer] Yeah, I always feel like I'm leaving something out.

I'm specifically interested in Gramscian interrogation of common sense as far as the particular classes I teach....

Artemis: I think that there are two distinct ways of answering these questions; I try keeping them both in mind while I'm teaching: one is to guide students to develop their ability to become critical thinkers, that's not about writing, not about English, it's about being a responsible person in the world; there's that sort of civic aspect of it, practical but important. The other aspect is making sure students are prepared for life beyond college, in their careers, and this is something that sometimes gets lost—I think we privilege some

voices in a postmodern way in our classroom and ignoring those elements is just as counterproductive; I strive not for a happy medium but to keep those two in constant tension.

## Appendix D

### On Dialogue as Educational Praxis

Freire says that dialogue is “the seal” of the transformed relations (“Education: Domestication or Liberation,” p. 21). It is also the vehicle through which the transformations take place. The best way to describe this particular form of dialogue is to say both what it is and what it is not. I will begin with the latter. It is not at all the same as a discussion, no matter how harmonious or amicable the discussion may be. Discussions require a leader or someone who is in charge of the process, and in educational contexts this is normally the teacher. In dialogue the process should be collectively led or controlled. In other words, the aim of dialogue is for the responsibilities of the leader to be shared by all members of the group, so that at all times they are mutually responsible both for their own and for everyone else’s learning. However, this does not happen automatically; it becomes a reality only as a part of the struggle for transformation. This is one of the main reasons why Freire distinguishes between teacher-learners and learner-teachers or, to use his exact and even more cumbersome terms, “educators-educatees” and “educatees-educators.” Both are required to reunite within themselves the internally related processes of teaching and learning—an internal relation forcibly ripped apart in conventional educational contexts. Nevertheless, the teacher-learner has always, at the point of initiation and any other point when necessary, the responsibility for making sure that the dialogue does not lapse into a distortion of the principles and aims the group is striving to achieve.

Discussions, although often harmonious, actually involve a sharing of monologues that often bear no relation to one another except that they address the same topic or question. Ideally, each person is supposed to be given the opportunity to state his or her ideas, answers, opinions or knowledge and questions as they pertain to the topic being discussed. When discussions are used as a teaching method, teachers try to ascertain the students’ current level of understanding or accumulated knowledge and also use this format to offer their knowledge and understanding to the students. They are responsible for the ordered and managed communication of monologues.

In dialogue, the members of the group share their thinking about the theme or issue that they are investigating or, alternatively, some “knowledge object” that has been selected in order to help the group members think critically about the theme or issue they are investigating. The “knowledge object” might come from a source external to the group, or it might be the result of a sub-group project or simply the knowledge that an individual is sharing with the group. However, this input is only the beginning of the learning, as is any “knowledge object” or “object focus” (these are interchangeable terms) that the group might consider. The dialogical exchange that takes place between at least two and usually many more members of the group is about investigating or exploring this knowledge—not simply a one-way, monological offering of someone’s knowledge to the group, as would be the case in discussion. In other words, it is not a matter of each person or several people simply stating what they think, but it involves taking the thinking of group members and also the thinking that is expressed in the “knowledge object,” as an object of collective focus, or reflection and concern and exploring why each person thinks as he or she does and where this thinking has come

from (e.g., the historical and cultural context) and analyzing whether it can enable the group to understand the world more critically. As a consequence, thinking or knowledge is offered to the group so that it can be considered and critically scrutinized or problematized by the other members of the group. It is examined in terms of whether it deepens everyone's understanding of what they are seeking to know—that is, some aspect related to the development of their critical understanding of reality. Knowledge, therefore, is offered for consideration so that the person who offers it can reconsider it with the help of others. To reiterate: already existing knowledge is always the beginning of the process of knowing—the development of deeper and more critical knowledge and sometimes even the creation of new knowledge. At times the original understanding may also be the end point of the process, but only after it has been subjected to the processes of problematization and co-investigation.

In this dialogical form of communication, the objective is to *use* the knowledge or thinking of each member of the group, together with the knowledge of people who are external to the group—that is, those who can offer expertise of a theoretical or practical nature—in order to investigate critically the theme or issue that is the real focus of the group's attention. [...] [B]ecause it has been acted upon and explicitly related to each person's previous understandings as well as the theme being considered, it tends to be acquired at a deeper level and is thus more readily accessible for future use.

This form of dialogue is not the type of dialogue used in political negotiations. Therefore, it is not about reaching some form of highly compromised and often reluctant consensus. When decisions have to be made concerning, for example, the direction the group should take next, then dialogue is used to enable the group to reach a consensus that everyone is committed to and thus supports in all its dimensions. This often takes time, but it is time well spent because the process of reaching consensus is itself highly educational.

Dialogue, as I am describing it, is not easy to achieve. It is a process that must be struggled for on each occasion the group meets because the transformed relations that the group is trying to achieve will exist only in the learning group. Until society itself is transformed, dialogic communication and learning will remain counterhegemonic. [...] As a consequence, the transformed relations of dialogue—the relations integral to this approach to critical education—must be recreated each time the group meets, and this involves the commitment and effort of each member of the group. In light of these difficulties, it is important to follow each learning dialogue with an evaluation dialogue or a period of reflection during which the “knowledge object” or “object focus” is the struggle to learn dialogically—that is, through the dialogue that has just taken place. Of course, this, too, is time consuming, but equally a valuable experience. [...]

Dialogue, therefore, is a process of “knowing” and “being” differently. As a form of critical/revolutionary praxis, it is meant to offer a “glimpse” of some important aspects of revolutionary social transformation—an “abbreviated experience” of self and social transformation, the dialectic of self and social transformation within the specific context of the social relations of education.

by Paula Allman

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August 2013 — Present

Writing 110: Writing Studio I

Writing 111: Writing Studio II

**University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee**, Department of English

August 2004—December 2010 (Graduate employee) ; August 2014—December 2014 (Lecturer)

English 090: Basic Writing

English 095: Fundamentals of Composition

English 105: Editing College Writing (Pilot course)

English 101: Introduction to College Writing

English 102: College Research and Writing

English 150: Multicultural America

English 201: Strategies for Academic Writing

English 240: Rhetoric, Writing and Culture

English 268: Introduction to Cultural Studies

English 298: Undergraduate Service Learning

**Carroll University**, Adjunct Faculty, Department of English and Writing

August 2011—May 2013

English 140: Introductory Language Skills for Liberal Arts

English 170: Writing Seminar

**Minneapolis Community and Technical College**, Adjunct Faculty, Academy of Liberal Arts and

Transfer, January 2003—July 2004

English 0900: Fundamentals of Written English

English 1110: College English I

English 1111: College English II

**Brown College**, Communications Instructor

June 2002—October 2002

General Education 100

**Saint Cloud State University**, Composition Instructor

August 2000—May 2002

English 191: Introduction to Rhetorical and Analytical Writing

English 191: Online / MOO

## PROFESSIONAL WRITING

### Writing, Editing and Photography

**OnMilwaukee.com, LLC:** Contributing writer and photographer.

**Froedtert Today:** Contributing writer.

**Legal Action of Wisconsin:** Contributing writer

## GRANTS, AWARDS, AND FELLOWSHIPS

**Cultures and Communities Grant**, \$1,200, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2007.

**Chancellor's Research Fellowship**, \$2,100, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2006.

**Graduate School Travel Award**, \$400, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2005.

**Composition Program Travel Award**, \$450, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2005.

**Teaching Circles Development Grant**, \$500, MN Colleges and Universities System, 2003.

## INVITED LECTURES

“English 105 for Elective Credit.” **Academic Advisors Workshop and Orientation**. University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, April 2007.

“English 105: Relationship to English 101” and “Maintaining/furthering ‘critical’: Working with the Course Goals as Criteria and Concept.” **English 105 Curriculum Orientation**, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. August 2006.

“Portfolio Review,” **First-Year Composition Instructor Orientation**, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. August 2006.

## CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

“Radical Love: Toward the Transformation of Everyday Composition Teaching and Learning.” **Conference on College Composition and Communication**, Indianapolis, March 2014.

“Graduate Students and Academic Freedom.” **Modern Language Association Annual Convention**. Seattle, January 2012. (Accepted.)

“Dialogue and the Enactment of Social Justice Classroom Models.” **SUNY Council on Writing 2010 Conference**. Plattsburgh, NY, March 2010.

“Freirean Dialogue and Teacher Education: Toward the Transformation of Everyday Teaching and Learning.” **Conference on College Composition and Communication**, Louisville, March 2010.

“Reading and Writing Social Change: Multi-level Methods for Teaching Critical Connections,” with Angela Aranda and Katherine Malcolm. **Wisconsin Council of Teachers of English Annual Conference**, Milwaukee, October 2009.

“Critically Reflexive Writing Program Administration: Reworking Professionalism for Collective Action.” **Council of Writing Program Administrators Conference**, Minneapolis, July 2009.

“Radical Reflection: The Practices of Four Composition Teachers.” **Conference on College Composition and Communication**, San Francisco, March 2009.

“Critical Effects: ‘New Media’ and the Other Work of Composition.” **Thomas R. Watson Conference**, Louisville, October 2008.

“Whose Vision? Conceptualizing University Hierarchies as Labor Relationships,” with Carrie Wadman. **Rethinking the University Conference**, Minneapolis, April 2008.

“Writing Possible Futures: Basic Writing and Social Being.” **Conference on College Composition and Communication**, New Orleans, April 2008.

**PRESENTATIONS, cont.**

“‘Feminist Only by Implication’: Gorgias’s *Technê* of Generative Reproduction and a Feminist Relativization of *Logos* through *Nomos*.” **Feminism(s) and Rhetoric(s) Conference**, Houghton, Michigan, October 2005.

“A Curriculum Awaiting Diversity: Multimodal Learners in a Two-Year College.” **Conference on College Composition and Communication**, San Francisco, March 2005.

**WORKSHOPS**

Labor Organizing in Hard Times, Workshop Organizer and Discussion leader. **Conference on College Composition and Communication**, Atlanta, April 2011.

“Conceptualizing ‘WEF’: Worker Education Forums (WEF) and the UW-M Newspaper for Worker Democracy.” **Reworking the University Conference**, Minneapolis, April 2009.

Troubling Boundaries: Social Action and Composition, Workshop Organizer and Co-chair; “Worker Education Forums,” Session Co-leader, with Lee Abbott, **Conference on College Composition and Communication**, San Francisco, March 2009.

“Reflective Writing Conventions and Practices,” Session Leader, **First-Year Composition Instructor Orientation**, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. August 2007.

“Reflective Writing in First-year Courses” and “Portfolio Review,” **First-Year Composition Instructor Orientation**, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. August 2007.

“Course Goals/ Students’ Goals,” **First-Year Composition Instructor Orientation**, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. August 2005.

“Designing Critical Approaches to Student Goals,” **Composition Forum**. Department of English, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. April 2005.

“Multimodality and ‘Basic Writing’” **Teaching Circles: Differently and Under-prepared Students**, Minneapolis Community and Technical College, Spring 2003.

**PROFESSIONAL SERVICE**

**Organizing Committee**, Fourth Annual Educators’ Network for Social Justice Anti-racist/Anti-bias Teaching Conference, Indian Community School, Franklin, WI. April 2011.

**Conference Program Chair**, Third Annual Educators’ Network for Social Justice Antiracist/Anti-bias Teaching Conference. Franklin, WI. March 2010. Keynote presenter: Sonia Nieto.

**Organizing Committee**, Wisconsin Council of Teachers of English Conference English...for a Change. Milwaukee, October 2009.

**Organizing Committee**, Second Annual Educators’ Network for Social Justice Anti-racist/Anti-bias Teaching Conference, Indian Community School, Franklin, WI. March 2009.

**Co-president**, American Federation of Teachers Local 2169, Milwaukee Graduate Employees Association, May 2007 – May 2009.

**Copy editor**, Rethinking Schools. 2008 – 2010.

**Project Assistant**, Pilot of composition textbook Writing Conventions for Min-Zhan Lu and Bruce Horner, 2005.

**DEPARTMENT AND UNIVERSITY SERVICE**

**University Partner**, Institute for Service Learning, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2007–2010.

**Virginia Burke Writing Contest**, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. Essay Judge, 2005.

**Graduate Steering Committee**, Department of English, St. Cloud State University, August 2001 – May 2002.



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**DEPARTMENT AND UNIVERSITY SERVICE, cont.**

**English Graduate Teaching Assistant Association**, St. Cloud State University, Treasurer. August 2000— June 2002.

**General Education and Composition Committee**, Department of Academic Affairs, St. Cloud State University, January—May 2002.

**WRITING PROGRAM ADMINISTRATION**

**Coordinator for Mentoring and Professional Development**, Composition Program, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, May 2006 – June 2008.

**Composition Advisory Committee**, Department of English, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, August 2006 – June 2008.

**English 201 Course Development Committee**, Department of English, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, April 2007 – May 2009.

**English 095 Curriculum Development Committee**, Composition Program, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, May 2006 – August 2007.

**COMMUNITY SERVICE**

School Governance Council Member, **La Escuela Fratney**, Milwaukee Public Schools, June 2011 – June 2013.

Panelist, Milwaukee Area **Public Allies Presentations of Learning**, 2010-2011 Graduating Class, UW-M School of Continuing Education, June 2011.

Panelist, Milwaukee Area **Public Allies Presentations of Learning**, 2009-2010 Graduating Class, Cardinal Stritch University, June 2010.

Co-organizer, **Coalition to Stop the Mayoral Takeover of Milwaukee Public Schools**, 2009.

Panelist, Milwaukee Area **Public Allies Presentations of Learning**, 2008-2009 Graduating Class, Cardinal Stritch University, June 2009.

Co-organizer, **Worker Education Forums**, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Instituted 2008.

Mentor, Talahi Elementary, Saint Cloud, Minnesota, **Reading Mentor Program**, 2001 – 2002.

**PROFESSIONAL and COMMUNITY MEMBERSHIPS**

Conference on College Composition and Communication

Educators' Network for Social Justice

Milwaukee Artist Resource Network

Modern Language Association

National Council of Teachers of English

Walker's Point Center for the Arts

Wisconsin Council of Teachers of English