ESSENTIAL CONCEPTS IN THE SECONDARY ENGLISH CLASSROOM: A META-WRITING APPROACH USING INQUIRY AND REFLECTION

A Thesis
submitted to the Faculty of the
Graduate School of Arts and Sciences
of Georgetown University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of
Master of Arts
in English

By

Elizabeth A. Thackeray, B.A.

Washington, D.C.
August 24, 2011
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Elizabeth A. Thackeray, B.A.

Thesis Advisor: Norma Tilden, Ph.D.

ABSTRACT

My project considers how secondary Language Arts instructors can integrate inquiry and reflection into their classrooms as a way to cultivate a conceptual understanding of writing. Although writing instruction has undergone many developments over the last century, most approaches to writing focus primarily on skill development. I seek to investigate how focusing on essential concepts of writing (specifically authorship, audience, and the recursive nature of the writing process) engages students in a learning process that helps them come to a deeper understanding of writing. My project will consider what essential concepts are and why they have a place in the secondary English classroom, how inquiry and reflection are both forms of writing-to-learn, and how inquiry and reflection can work together to help students both experience the essential concepts firsthand, and then understand the concepts and their own process of learning to write.
I wish to thank my family for their continued encouragement and never-ending support throughout this process, and those friends who offered their time and advice.

I am also grateful to my thesis advisor, Professor Norma Tilden, for her environmental and constructivist approach to mentoring.
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Chapter One—Essential Concepts and the Secondary English Classroom

While secondary Language Arts teachers are increasingly identifying broad-based learning goals that link critical reading and writing, writing instruction continues to focus on skills. I will argue that educators concerned with critical pedagogy must design their curriculum to actively engage students in the learning and writing process, not only to help students gain skills needed for writing, but also to develop a conceptual understanding of writing. This project encourages teachers to use an inquiry-based approach to teaching writing paired with reflective writing. I advocate specifically for assignments that are sequenced to encourage a growing understanding of writing as inquiry and metacognition. This sequencing will help students work through essential concepts specifically authorship, audience, and the recursive writing process as a way to fortify and expand students’ understanding of writing.

The Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) publication *Toward the Thinking Curriculum: Current Cognitive Research* explains the goal of education as developing students’ thinking ability. Despite the fact that the development of student thinking has long been the goal of education, researchers acknowledge that many students never reach this capstone (3). In the ASCD publication, Lauren Resnick describes an approach to establishing a Thinking Curriculum that enables teachers to put cognitive thinking at the center of their curriculum. Resnick explains that this approach to teaching and learning asserts “that people are not recorders of information but builders of knowledge structures. To know
something is not just to have received information but also to have interpreted it and related it to other knowledge. To be skilled is not just to know how to perform some action but also to know when to perform it and to adapt the performance to varied circumstances” (4). Essentially, the instructional philosophy behind the Thinking Curriculum seeks to “stimulate and nourish students’ own mental elaborations of knowledge and help them grow in their capacity to monitor and guide their own learning and thinking” (4). As students develop their metacognitive awareness, they are more equipped to learn—and they become better learners. Resnick explains that developing metacognition in students is best achieved as teachers focus on the concepts behind skills and content (6).

In their article, “What is a Thinking Curriculum,” Todd F. Fennimore and Margaret B. Tinzmann build on the research presented in the ASCD publication emphasizing the importance of conceptual learning and how it can best be achieved in the classroom. Fennimore and Tinzmann explain that by implementing a curriculum that intrinsically links content and process, the teacher creates a holistic approach to learning that leads to greater depth in understanding (1-3). The focus on conceptual learning is key because pedagogy—particularly in teaching writing at the secondary level—focuses primarily on skill development. I argue, however, that for writing instruction to be most effective as a means of helping students learn the content and skills necessary to become good writers, instruction should have a conceptual foundation.
This conceptual foundation is based in what I will term essential concepts. I base the term “essential concept” on what educational theorists Jan Meyer and Ray Land, term “threshold concepts.” Though I define “essential concepts” similarly to Meyer and Land’s threshold concepts, I use the term essential concepts because threshold concepts are situated within the disciplines and where writing is interdisciplinary—meaning that writing crosses all disciplines as they all incorporate writing as part of their curriculum, the term “threshold concepts” does not apply. Here I define essential concept as a principle connected to the subject that requires time, experience, and higher-order thinking skills in order to understand, and once understood will provide the student with a framework to not only grasp other essential concepts, but to develop the content knowledge and skills necessary to master the concepts and skills effectively. Essential concepts are usually discussed or defined along with state and national standards. Though state and national standards focus largely on skills and content knowledge they do reference the concepts behind the skills and content. The idea of essential concepts and core standards is certainly not new to education; indeed, teachers are always striving to develop their curriculum around the concepts they (or the states) want their students to learn. In 1992, the National Council for Teachers of English (NCTE) teamed up with the International Reading Association (IRA) to develop national standards for English/Language Arts defining what “students should know and be able to do with language” (NCTE v;1). Grant P. Wiggins and Jay McTighe describe essential concepts as the driving force behind teacher planning and preparation. Advocating for a backwards-design approach to curriculum development and planning, Wiggins and
McTighe argue that teachers should think about the desired outcome they want their students to achieve—the essential concepts they want their students to understand or master—and then work backwards in planning to find ways of teaching that will help their students reach the desired outcome (17-21). In this paper, I will focus on three essential concepts in the writing classroom, fundamental principles that build upon each other to influence students’ writing ability. I have derived these three concepts from research on teaching writing, my own experiences teaching in the classroom, and also from the NCTE/IRA standards. Though the essential concepts I have designated are implied in the NCTE/IRA standards, the NCTE/IRA Standards are defined within the broad framework of rhetoric looking at what language is, why we use it, and how we use it. Though NCTE/IRA acknowledges that the standards are only a starting point within the context of the classroom, the standards focus largely on skills students should develop (9-10). The essential concepts are not explicitly defined within the NCTE/IRA standards, nor do the standards have a conceptual focus. In offering a brief explanation of each concept, I will proceed by explaining the concept both in terms of my experience in the classroom and also how it relates to the NCTE/IRA standards.

Authorship

Initially, I consider the concept of authorship. On the first day of each writing class, I begin with an activity\(^1\) in which I read statements aloud and students move to one of four corners around the room to show whether they strongly agree, somewhat

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\(^1\) I adapted this activity from Deborah Dean’s book *Strategic Writing*. Deborah Dean also used this activity in a Teaching Composition course in which I enrolled at Brigham Young University Provo in Fall 2006.
agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree with the statement I read. The statements, of course, all have to do with writing. Many statements provide mixed responses and one that is always surprising to me is the statement: “I am a writer.” I am always surprised by the very small number of students who strongly agree or even somewhat agree with this statement. Most of my students do not see themselves as writers or authors. As an essential concept, authorship involves multiple facets: the student’s ability to find his/her voice in writing, the student’s ability to take ownership over his/her writing, and the student’s ability to read texts from a writer’s perspective, recognizing the rhetorical moves authors make and why they make them. Linda Flower and John R. Hayes performed studies with students to look at how cognitive processes function in writing. In doing so, they found that good writers are more consciously aware and are in more control of their choices as writers than the poorer writers they studied (377). Good writers thought not only about their rhetorical options (such as genre, word choice, tone, and sentence fluency) in composing for a particular writing assignment, but also considered how they could best use strategies in the writing process to complete the task. Chris Anson also elaborates on the concept and importance of authorship. In his article “The Classroom and the ‘Real World’ as Contexts: Re-examining the Goals of Writing Instruction,” Anson quotes William Zinnser to illustrate how authorship enables students to become autonomous writers: “Countless Americans are paralyzed in their jobs by the inability to express themselves. This wouldn’t happen if they understood from childhood that writing is a craft that applies to every area of life. It’s not a special language that they have been sent off to
learn from the English teacher” (10). Anson adds that helping students become autonomous readers and writers is—or should be—one goal of the English/Language Arts curriculum, and that one way to help students become autonomous is to foster a sense of authorship. Ann Berthoff in her book *The Making of Meaning: Metaphors, Models, and Maxims for Writing Teachers*, similarly describes the concept of authorship and how it influences a student’s ability to write well. She states that “meanings don’t just happen: we make them; we find and form them” (69). All of these scholars illustrate the importance of gaining a conceptual understanding of authorship as a way to improve writing. When students come to understand that they are authors—meaning-makers—and that they have control over the meaning of their text, it empowers them to take more control over their writing.

In addition to the literature I have cited, two of the NCTE/IRA Standards directly address the essential concept of authorship:

**Standard 11**: Students participate as knowledgeable, reflective, creative, and critical members of a variety of literacy communities.

**Standard 12**: Students use spoken, written, and visual language to accomplish their own purposes. (NCTE 3)

These standards illustrate the importance of students participating as a member of the literacy community and using language to communicate their own purposes. These standards are fulfilled in a large part when students see themselves as authors. When students see themselves as authors, they begin to take ownership over their writing. They are not simply responding to a prompt or their teacher, but are communicating
their own ideas and joining the conversation. By acknowledging their identity as authors, they come to recognize that they have rhetorical choices in their writing. They notice how their writing changes as they alter their rhetorical choices in genre, organization, tone, word choice, and even sentence structure and punctuation. As students begin to understand the rhetorical implications of their own writing, it changes the way they view other texts and the world around them because they begin to consider the rhetorical moves of other writers and speakers, even moving across disciplines into film, art, and multi-modal compositions such as websites.

**Audience**

The next essential concept I will address is audience. The notion of audience encompasses several factors: first, a sense of audience demands recognition that writing is not egocentric—students are not writing for themselves. So many times in my classroom, students would say things such as “but it makes sense to me.” Part of understanding the concept of audience means that students recognize that they are not writing for themselves, but that their writing addresses a particular audience and should cater to the specific needs and concerns of that audience. Audience also encompasses the idea that not only does a text respond to a specific group of people, but it also exists in a discourse of other texts to which it must respond. Many times secondary students see their texts written as if in a vacuum. This is particularly problematic with the research paper where students need to reference other views and sources and put their own text in conversation with other texts. In his book *Teaching Writing as Reflective Practice*, George Hillocks describes the way a discourse of texts functions as a
collective group. He states that “At the very least our meaning making is a partnership between each individual and all who have gone before….The process of making meaning must be an effort in conjunction with other times, other people, other texts. It is never individual” (Teaching Writing 8). Recognizing the process by which individuals make meaning and gain understanding by seeing connections between information is an important aspect of the concept of audience. It is important for students to recognize that certain audiences have background knowledge, perceptions, and certain expectations that if a writer fails to address will limit understanding. Important too is the way that audience background knowledge, perception, and expectation play into the way texts interact and respond to one another as a discourse.

One of the NCTE/IRA Standards directly addresses the concept of audience. Though this standard focuses on the skill of addressing audiences that students should develop, the conceptual understanding and implications of audience are indirectly referenced within this standard:

Standard 4: Students adjust their use of spoken, written, and visual language (e.g., conventions, style, vocabulary) to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences and for different purposes. (NCTE 3)

This standard supports the idea that writing is not egocentric and that students must learn to adjust their use of language to fulfill specific purposes with specific audiences. The essential concept of audience builds upon the essential concept of authorship. Once students see themselves as authors they begin to recognize that they are able to adjust their writing to meet the needs of certain audiences. They can cater to audience in forms
of genre, content, style, word choice, and even through grammar and punctuation. Additionally, when students see themselves as authors with a degree of expertise in what they are communicating, it will help them understand how their text becomes part of a larger discourse of texts. They see themselves as joining the scholarly conversation.

**The Recursive Nature of the Writing Process**

One last essential concept I will consider is the recursive nature of the writing process. Though the process movement has been in full swing for some time now, with Donald Murray and others encouraging teachers to teach the process of writing rather than focusing solely on the product, many teachers still teach a process that does not resemble the non-linear, lived process of writing. The process approach has become formulaic in many classrooms (mine included) where one day is brainstorming day, another is drafting day, revising day, and publishing day. Though this approach strives to implement aspects of the writing process in the classroom, it fails to generate an authentic writing process—one that is recursive rather than linear. Speaking of the difficulty in teaching writing as a recursive process, Berthoff explains that “composing is not a linear process, though what it creates has linear form. That’s why it’s easy to mistake the methods appropriate to teaching the product as being equally appropriate to teaching the process (Berthoff 20). The concepts of understanding and teaching the writing process as a recursive process are difficult, primarily because the written product—the result of learning—is linear. But teaching this process recursively is also difficult because embedding such a process into the structure of a classroom can be very tricky. It is tricky work to find ways to implement recursivity for a process that is
different for each student while trying to maintain order, continuity, and progress in the classroom.

As with the other two essential concepts, the writing process is found in one NCTE/IRA Standard:

Standard 5: Students employ a wide range of strategies as they write and use different writing process elements appropriately to communicate with different audiences for a variety of purposes. (NCTE 3)

This standard emphasizes the importance of using various strategies within the writing process and altering that process to meet the demands of the writing task. In this way, the essential concept of understanding the writing process as a recursive process builds upon both the essential concepts of authorship and audience. When students see themselves as authors, they begin to understand that each author uses a unique process for writing, and that as they develop as a writer, they will develop their own processes for writing. Understanding the concept of audience is also important to understanding the recursive nature of the writing process and effectively using the process because students will come to see how they will adjust their writing process when writing in different genres for different audiences.

**Threshold Concepts and Essential Concepts**

An idea that parallels essential concepts is what recent theory in education introduces as threshold concepts. Jan Meyer and Ray Land have developed the notion of “threshold concepts,” describing these understandings as “‘gateways’ or ‘portals’ that lead to a previously inaccessible, and initially perhaps ‘troublesome’ way of thinking
about something” (Epistemological 373). Threshold concepts are transformative, irreversible, integrative, often bounded, and “potentially (and possibly inherently) troublesome” (Linkages 5-6). These concepts represent barriers that students must overcome in order to continue to advance in a field of study. Without understanding or bridging these concepts, students will only have a surface understanding of the discipline and are essentially in a “stuck place” or “liminal space” (Epistemological 377). Though threshold concepts are situated within disciplines and are not directly associated with writing, the theory of troublesome knowledge, liminal spaces, and conceptual building blocks has many interesting connections to the essential concepts of writing and can help teachers think through ways to teach writing conceptually in order to help students understand essential concepts and ultimately improve student writing.

As Meyer and Land describe threshold concepts as troublesome knowledge, they explain that there are liminal spaces that exist between the introduction of the concept and the mastery of the concept. Such spaces can lead students to become stuck because the students find themselves in an abstract place with little or no concrete knowledge (Epistemological 375). Other scholars see these liminal spaces as places of reflection and growth—places that are necessary for students to come to an understanding of the concepts with which they are grappling. The notions of troublesome knowledge and liminal spaces are particularly relevant to the essential concepts in the English classroom because of the very nature of writing and the writing process. Pat Belanoff in her article “Silence: Reflection, Literacy, Learning and Teaching,” quotes Mikhail Bakhtin to explain how writing occurs in a state of
liminality. Bakhtin states of language: “Language, for the individual consciousness, lies on the borderline between oneself and the other” (421). Belanoff herself states that we “live and write in the gaps” (421). Similar to the liminal spaces Meyer and Land describe, writing too functions within a liminal space. The liminal spaces as related to Meyer and Land’s threshold concepts are places of abstract thinking that a student must pass through in order to gain new knowledge and understanding. Writing becomes the borderland between the individual and an audience or even the individual and the self. It is the unknown space that must be deciphered in order to produce effective communication that results in understanding—or learning on the part of the individual.

The liminality of writing occurs in an abstract sphere where the process is both non-linear and non-standard, and is therefore catered to the individual. Though there may be certain concrete elements that are recognized as “good writing” or an “effective process,” there is not a specific formula that will help each individual to create “good writing” or experience an “effective process.” It is for this reason that writing is difficult to do and to teach.

As previously mentioned, many scholars suggest that these liminal spaces and encounters with troublesome knowledge will help students through their learning process—specifically the learning process of how to become a more effective writer. Flower and Hayes describe an approach to teaching writing that views writing as problem-solving (452). In their approach, Flower and Hayes set up a writing task in the form of a problem that the students must solve (461). They explain their approach: “Insofar as writing is a rhetorical act, not a mere artifact, writers attempt to ‘solve’ or
respond to this rhetorical problem by writing something” (Cognitive Process 369). Because the writing task is viewed as a problem, this approach creates cognitive dissonance and thrusts students into a liminal space in which they must work through the troublesome knowledge they encounter. As they do work through this troublesome knowledge, they are able to find solutions to the problem and learn from both the solutions they glean and the problem-solving process itself.

Closely associated with the idea of troublesome knowledge and liminal spaces are the different types of knowledge and the ways that different types of knowledge affect learning. The different types of knowledge will produce different types of learning and each requires different amounts of background knowledge or scaffolding as a way of preparing students to learn. In his article “The Many Faces of Constructivism,” David Perkins describes different forms of knowledge (ritual, inert, foreign, and conceptually difficult) and their place in the learning process. Perkins describes ritual knowledge as knowledge that comprises names, dates, and facts (9). Inert knowledge is described as passive knowledge. This type of knowledge is stored away, but is not regularly used (8). Foreign knowledge, Perkins describes as knowledge that conflicts with what we believe or know (9). It is knowledge that doesn’t fit into our schema, and for this reason foreign knowledge can be a form of troublesome knowledge. Lastly, conceptually difficult knowledge is also a form of troublesome knowledge. It is knowledge that is difficult to understand without proper scaffolding (10).
Similar to Perkins’ types of knowledge, George Hillocks distinguishes between similar types of knowledge in the context of writing and Language Arts: declarative knowledge and procedural knowledge. He describes declarative knowledge as knowledge dealing primarily with definitions and terms (Teaching Writing 122). This type of knowledge relates most closely to Perkins’ definition of ritual knowledge. Procedural knowledge is knowledge about how to accomplish a writing task. Hillocks describes declarative knowledge as the what and procedural knowledge as the how (Teaching Writing 123). Jeffery D. Nokes and Janice A. Dole build upon Hillocks’ types of knowledge in their article “Helping Adolescent Readers through Explicit Strategy Instruction.” In their article they describe both declarative and procedural knowledge as Hillocks does, but they also add what they term “conditional knowledge.” Conditional knowledge is the awareness of when and where a strategy might be useful (167). Applying Hillocks’ terminology to conditional knowledge, then, conditional knowledge can be understood as the when and where. The three types of knowledge build on each other, and all are necessary for learning. Declarative knowledge is the starting point by which information of terms and facts is gained. Procedural knowledge takes the terms and facts and uses them to understand a procedure or strategies to produce more knowledge or understanding. Procedural knowledge applies the declarative knowledge and puts it into action. Conditional knowledge again builds on procedural knowledge by adding the wisdom of when and where to apply the strategies and skills learned.
The importance of understanding the types of knowledge in relation to the writing classroom is two-fold. First it is important to understand that all types of knowledge have a place in the classroom. Learning can occur from each type of knowledge. But different types of learning occur depending on the type of knowledge. Second, recognizing the type of knowledge we want students to acquire or come to understand impacts the way in which teachers go about presenting that knowledge. Procedural, conditional, foreign, conceptually difficult, or troublesome types of knowledge will all require more scaffolding to help prepare students to interact with these types of knowledge so that they can fully come to understand them and make the conceptual leaps necessary to fully understand the knowledge. Similar to Meyer and Land’s threshold concepts that address troublesome knowledge, the essential concepts I am looking at here are also based in troublesome knowledge and require certain types of teaching and learning in order to help students make the conceptual leaps necessary to master the concepts. It is imperative for teachers to recognize the type of knowledge their students need to gain and the most effective pedagogical methods that will foster an approach to learning that will support students in learning the type of knowledge teachers want their students to acquire.

**Approaches to Learning**

Noel Entwistle, a prominent theorist in educational psychology, has described two approaches to learning that relate to the acquisition of the different types of knowledge. Entwistle explains that both students and teachers foster either a surface approach or deep approach to learning. Largely the approach to learning that is fostered
by the teacher and developed by the learner affects the student’s ability to master certain types of knowledge. Entwistle describes the surface approach to learning as one in which “the intention is just to cope with the task, which sees the course as unrelated bits of information which leads to much more restricted learning processes, in particular to routine memorization” (Deep Learning 3). The surface approach holds to the assumption that student’s minds are empty containers waiting to be filled, and that the teacher’s responsibility is to pour knowledge into the minds of the students. This approach is seen in the classroom when teachers or students focus on fact-finding, memorizing, mechanics (particularly in the English/Language Arts classroom), telling, teacher-led discussion, and lecturing (Styles 77). The surface approach to learning best fosters the development of ritual, inert, and declarative knowledge. It deals primarily with the what of learning, the acquisition of facts rather than the analysis or application of information. And though understanding and knowing the what is important to learning, the surface approach stops at the what and does not move beyond the facts to a more developed understanding. The surface approach, therefore, becomes problematic because it cannot help students understand or master essential concepts that are conceptually complex and involve an understanding not based on memorizing information.

The second approach Entwistle explains is what he terms a “deep” approach to learning. A deep approach to learning is much more conducive to fostering understanding of conceptually-based knowledge as well as how and when to use such knowledge. The deep approach described by Entwistle is one in which “the intention to
extract meaning produces active learning processes that involve relating ideas and looking for patterns and principles on one hand, and using evidence and examining the logic of the argument on the other. This approach also involves monitoring the development of one’s own understanding” (Deep Learning 3). It is only through fostering a deep approach to learning that teachers are able to provide the necessary scaffolding and types of learning assignments or experiences that will ultimately lead to an understanding of the procedural, conditional, and troublesome knowledge that will help students make the conceptual leaps necessary to fully understand or master essential concepts.

In describing the two approaches to learning, Entwistle explains that both students and teachers develop the different approaches to learning. Many students are simply drawn to one type of learning over another or many times a student’s self-concept or self-efficacy also affects the approach to learning he/she adapts. But Entwistle explains that just because a student’s predisposition may lean toward a surface-approach to learning, students can be conditioned to engage in deep approaches to learning as teachers engage them in assignments and experiences that foster and/or require such an approach. In their description of the different types of knowledge,

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2 It is important to note that the term scaffolding should not be confused with simplifying. Scaffolding does not simplify the material, but rather prepares the students with the necessary foundational steps to enable them to deal with the material in its complex form. In their theory of threshold concepts, Meyer and Land warn against simplification: “Efforts to make threshold concepts ‘easier’ by simplifying their initial expression and application may, in fact, set students onto a path of ‘ritualised’ knowledge that actually creates a barrier that results in some students being prevented from crossing the ‘threshold’ of a concept” (Course Design 61). Simplification will often lead to a surface approach to learning, which is not conducive to learning conceptual knowledge required to master threshold concepts. And due to the similarities between the types of knowledge necessary to understand threshold concepts and essential concepts in the writing classroom, it is important for teachers to find ways to scaffold material rather than simplify.
Hillocks and Perkins\(^3\) also provide approaches to teaching that address the different types of knowledge. These approaches foster either a surface or deep approach to learning.

**Approaches to Teaching**

In his book *Research on Written Composition*, George Hillocks describes three different approaches to teaching writing: Presentational, Natural, and Environmental. The presentational stance is described as an approach where the teacher has clear and specific objectives. It consists largely of lectures and teacher-led discussions that deal with the concepts to be learned and applied. It may include the study of models and other materials that explain and illustrate the concept. The specific assignments in this approach generally involve imitating a pattern or following rules that have been previously discussed. Finally, feedback on student writing comes primarily from the teacher (116-17). Hillocks explains that this approach to teaching carries the assumption that students can convert the rules and examples into guides for their own writing (118). This approach also implies that the teacher is the expert and authority in the classroom. It parallels the analogy that the teacher is the holder of all knowledge and therefore needs to impart that knowledge to the students—relating well to the concept of students’ minds as empty containers into which teachers will pour their knowledge.

Although this approach could lead to deep learning in some instances, it primarily fosters a surface approach to learning because students are not actively engaged in the

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\(^3\) Meyer and Land cite David Perkins’ article and herald a constructivist approach as a productive approach to helping students work through troublesome knowledge and master threshold concepts. Meyer and Land’s suggestions in course sequencing and assessment are grounded in a constructivist stance to teaching.
learning process. Rather helping the students engage in the learning process to promote self-discovery, the teacher does a lot of telling, providing specific models of product and processes that students should imitate.

Almost the polar opposite to the presentational stance, the second approach Hillocks describes is a “natural stance.” The natural stance assumes that skills of good writers are naturally part of students and it just takes time for them to blossom. In the natural stance the teacher has only generalized objectives. The students engage in a lot of free writing about whatever interests them. The students write for an audience of their peers and their peers review their writing and provide positive feedback. There are many opportunities to revise and rework their writing. The study of models is avoided and the teacher’s role is that of a facilitator (119). This approach also assumes that writing should be free without restriction. The approach aims to avoid limiting the topic, genre, and other aspects of student writing. It seeks to give students complete control over their writing. For this reason, in Hillock’s natural stance, the teacher’s role is reactive—one that responds to student writing. Instead of using direct instruction to help teach particular skills or methods of developing writing, teachers using a natural stance allow the students to write and then respond to the product the students have created. Lastly, the natural approach assumes that students will learn on their own (121). This approach is almost too hands-off. The assumption that students will learn on their own is a hefty assumption. This is not to say that Hillocks’ theory does not acknowledge that students are incapable of learning on their own, but rather that many
students do not possess the necessary background knowledge to properly scaffold their learning so that they can improve their writing on their own.

Supporting the importance of scaffolding to support student learning (and therefore in opposition to the natural stance), Nokes and Dole describe the importance of teaching strategies using direct instruction. In their article “Helping Adolescent Readers through Explicit Strategy Instruction,” Nokes and Dole explain the importance of making instruction explicit. They explain that although some students will figure out some strategies on their own, “there is an even more important reason to teach strategies to students. Many students will not figure out strategies on their own. So if someone does not teach them, they will never learn them” (163). They explain that many students benefit from explicit instruction because though students do already use many strategies in their learning, they are not metacognitively aware of the strategies they use or how they could use them. When strategy instruction becomes explicit, it enables students to see how strategies can be used and empowers students to use the strategies and apply them to new situations in the future. The type of explicit instruction described by Nokes and Dole does not align with the natural approach Hillocks describes, but it does align with his third and the final approach Hillocks describes.

The final approach Hillocks describes (and the one he favors) is termed an “environmental stance.” In an environmental stance the teacher has clear and specific objectives. In order to meet these objectives the teacher selects materials and problems to engage students with one another in specifiable processes that are important to some particular aspect of writing. These activities usually involve small-group problem-
centered discussions and are conducive to high levels of peer interaction as the students work on tasks in groups before doing them individually. The environmental approach puts the teacher and student in balance: the teacher plans and selects materials through which the students interact with each other to generate ideas and learn identifiable writing skills (122-23). This approach is almost a balance of the presentational and natural approaches. In this approach the teacher focuses on specific concepts that students should learn, but rather than feeding the knowledge to the students, the teacher engages the students in experiencing and learning the concepts for themselves. Hillocks describes the importance of experience in the learning process as one of the most essential aspects for learning—specifically for learning to write. In his book *Ways of Thinking, Ways of Teaching*, Hillocks describes two teachers who use a similar approach to teaching writing. In drawing conclusions on the effectiveness of the approach of these teachers he explains how this method of teaching writing demonstrates the importance of experience in the learning process: “students must themselves be active agents in their own learning, transforming what is to be learned through the screen of their own experience and existing understandings. They believe that to be successful, learners must construct or reconstruct, for themselves, what is to be learned” (93). The concept of experience actively engages students in the learning process and helps them become involved in their own learning. This constructivist stance to teaching helps foster a deep approach to learning as students take responsibility for their own learning, but also engage in activities that are more than
simply imitation or mimicry and instead use higher order thinking skills such as analysis, application, and synthesis.

Hillocks’ environmental stance closely parallels what educational theorists term a constructivist approach to teaching. A constructivist approach to teaching actively engages students in the learning process—again seeking to help them experience learning or construct their learning and understanding. In his article “The Many Faces of Constructivism,” David Perkins explains that “constructivism generally casts learners in an active role. Instead of just listening, reading, and working through routine exercises, they discuss, debate, hypothesize, investigate, and take viewpoints” (7). This approach—similar to Hillocks’ environmental stance—puts the student and teacher in balance where the teacher designs engaging learning activities and assignments to help the students discover and learn the material on their own. Perkins continues to explain the value of a constructivist approach as he discusses the benefits of active engagement: “Considerable research shows that active engagement in learning may lead to better retention, understanding, and active use of knowledge. A social dimension to learning—what is sometimes called collaborative or cooperative learning—often, although not always, fosters learning. Sometimes engaging students in discovery or rediscovery processes energizes them and yields deeper understanding” (8). Because a constructivist approach engages students in active learning, it is more conducive to deep learning or as Perkins states a “deeper understanding.” This type of approach is an effective student-centered approach to address essential concepts in the English classroom because it helps students to experience and engage in the necessary processes that will enable
them to interact with the essential concepts and come to a deeper understanding of
them. In the chapters that follow I will discuss how inquiry and reflection (two branches
of the Writing-to-Learn movement) are specific ways to use an environmental stance
and constructivist approach in the English classroom to address the essential concepts of
authorship, audience, and the recursive nature of the writing process.
Chapter Two—Writing-to-Learn: Inquiry

The business of knowledge communities is inquiry—coming to know.

--James Reither, “Writing and Knowing: Toward Redefining the Writing Process”

Before looking in depth at inquiry and reflection in the chapters that follow, it is important to understand the Writing-to-Learn movement and some of the history surrounding the teaching of writing as it has evolved over time. Historically, the Writing-to-Learn movement developed in tandem with the Process-Over-Product movement as it expanded to include cross-curricular writing programs. In their article “Writing as a Learning Tool: An Introduction,” Päivi Tynjälä, Lucia Mason, and Kirsti Lonka explain that “as early as in the 19th century some American universities established discipline-specific writing courses, which can be seen as predecessors of the extensive Writing-Across-the-Curriculum movement in the 1970s” (7). Though these discipline-specific courses acted as precursors to the Writing-to-Learn movement, the Writing-Across-the-Curriculum and the Product-Over-Process movements are traced to the work of James Britton. In the 1960s Britton conducted several studies looking at how writing skills were developed and the processes in which students engaged while writing. Britton’s study was unique because up until this point, studies of writing had focused mostly on the written product (and primarily focused on the rules and conventions of those products). Britton, however, sought to discover the cognitive work of composing behind the product (Durst and Newell 376-78). Britton’s study inspired
Janet Emig who then became one of the key scholars in both the Writing-to-Learn and the Process-Over-Product movements.

**The Writing-to-Learn Movement**

In her article “Writing as a Mode of Learning,” Emig revolutionized the idea of writing as a method of learning. Specifically, Emig examined the parallels between effective learning and writing, including how writing is multi-representational and integrative; provides for connections; has an opportunity for self-feedback; and is an active and engaging process (128). Emig established a foundation of scholarship for others to build on and continue to develop her notions. Not far behind Emig, Ann Berthoff’s book *The Making of Meaning: Metaphors, Models, and Maxims for Writing Teachers* both supports and furthers Emig’s idea of teaching writing as a mode of learning. In her book Berthoff also argues for the importance of teaching composition as “a mode of learning, a way of thinking” and advances the notion that this approach is effective because both learning and the writing process are recursive or dialectical in nature and that out of the process students will find meaning and gain understanding (20; 25; 69).

Another important contributor to the Writing-to-Learn movement is Walter J. Ong who built on and extended the work of these scholars with his article “Writing as a Technology that Restructures Thought.” In his article, Ong argues that because writing is not a natural process it has the ability to engage the individual in ways that restructure thinking. To describe how writing restructures thought, Ong explains, “writing separates the known from the knower more definitely than the original orally grounded
manoeuvre of naming does, but it also unites the knower and the known more consciously and more articulately” (31). The very nature of writing is a liminal space. In the act of writing we start in a place unsure of where we will end up, but through writing our ideas become structured. Writing brings structure to the liminality of thought and forces ideas into organization and order. And through ordering and organizing our ideas, learning takes place.

Finally, one last important contribution is in the work of Judith Langer and Arthur Applebee’s study titled *How Writing Shapes Thinking*. Building on Ong’s theory of how writing restructures thought, Langer and Applebee extend Ong’s theory to consider how writing not only restructures thought, but alters thinking as well. Langer and Applebee found that writing is able to alter thinking in several different ways: Because writing is a permanent record of thought, it allows the writer to rethink concepts and revise their thinking on these concepts over a period of time. Because writing must explicitly convey ideas to another party, the ideas must be completely clear to the writer in order to convey them to someone else—meaning that the writer must alter his/her thoughts to meet the demands of a particular audience. Additionally, writing enables students to make connections between ideas and concepts and provides an effective means to organize those ideas. Lastly, Langer and Applebee found that writing is an active process and because it is an active process it engages students in deep learning (4-5). Their study added significant insight into the ways in which writing can be used in the different disciplines to promote learning. Throughout their various studies, Langer and Applebee discovered that although writing can be used to promote
deep learning, different types of writing produce different types of learning (135). They found that all writing is not equal and that some forms of writing tasks—those that deal mostly with recall and recording information—foster a surface approach to learning as discussed in Chapter One, while writing that engages students in analysis or evaluation produces lasting learning and fosters a deep approach (135).

**The Process-Over-Product Movement**

James Britton’s work also inspired Janet Emig to consider how experienced writers work through the process of writing. In her book *Strategic Writing: The Writing Process and Beyond in the Secondary Classroom*, Deborah Dean gives a brief history of the writing process movement in which she explains that Emig’s work as well as that of Donald Graves led to a focus on the process over the product (2). Both Emig and Graves began looking at the cognitive work of writers. To discover what cognitive work writers do as they write, Emig and Graves designed studies in which they would have writers compose orally, talking through their thought processes and actions. Following closely behind the work of Emig and Graves, Donald Murray is probably most well known for his emphasis on teaching the process over the product in the writing classroom. In his article “Teach Writing as a Process Not Product,” Murray sanctions the importance of helping students view writing as a process and not solely a product. He asserts that the writing process is a “process of discovery through language” (4). Langer and Applebee’s study also endorses the process approach to teaching writing. They explain in the introduction to their findings that, “paralleling our general concern with writing as a way of thinking, advocates of these approaches emphasized the
thinking strategies underlying the processes of composing a text” (6). Langer and Applebee identify the ways in which writing strategies can be implemented to encourage thinking throughout the various stages in the writing process, and their findings support the fact that more learning occurs when writing tasks focus on synthesis, analysis, and evaluation.

**The Benefits of Writing-to-Learn and Process-over-Product in Relation to Essential Concepts**

The Writing-to-Learn movement is rich with benefits to student learning: it helps students make connections; brings about understanding and clarity; creates a permanent representation of thought or understanding; and ultimately promotes deep learning. As Ong explains, writing can take one outside of his or her thoughts and helps the individual to view the material in new ways and also become more cognitively aware of the learning process. This awareness is akin to the deep approach to learning when paired with the types of writing Langer and Applebee found to be conducive of more than simply recall and memorization. These benefits are important because writing can be used within the classroom to help foster the types of learning that will enable students to successfully interact with essential concepts, work through them, and master them.

Because writing restructures thought, it helps students make connections in their learning. In her article “Writing to Learn,” Nancy Nelson quotes Albert D. Van Nostrand to demonstrate one of the benefits of writing-to-learn. Van Nostrand states: “Composing consists of joining bits of information into relationships, many of which
have never existed until the composer utters them. Simply by writing—that is, by composing information—you become aware of the connections you make, and you thereby know more than you knew before starting to write” (25). Nelson uses Van Nostrand’s ideas to illustrate how the Writing-to-Learn movement increased in popularity because it fosters high-order thinking and conceptual understanding to promote deep learning (26). These ideas are founded in Ong’s theory of the way that writing restructures thought. As students compose, their thoughts are restructured, allowing them to see connections between information that they would be less likely to have seen without the act of composing. Thus, this awareness and discovery enables students to gain a deeper awareness of the concepts they are learning.

In addition to helping students make connections, writing-to-learn helps students respond to the social nature of writing because it brings about understanding and clarity both to individual writers and the communities in which they write. Mari Haneda and Gordon Wells discuss the way in which writing-to-learn can help students clarify their knowledge and understanding in their article “Writing in Knowledge-Building Communities.” They explain that one reason to focus on writing is that “in order to make one’s meaning clear for others, one must first make it clear for oneself. Writing is thus potentially a powerful means of developing one’s own understanding of the topic about which one is writing (433). As students write, the process of writing brings out new ideas and clarifies others. This aspect of writing-to-learn is very beneficial to help students work through essential concepts in writing because it not only encourages students to clarify their ideas for their own understanding, but also for the understanding
of others—stressing the way in which writing is a social act. Vicki Jacobs also promotes this idea by expressing the benefit of writing to the process of learning. In her article, “Reading, Writing, and Understanding,” she asserts: “For learning, the act of writing provides a chronology of our thoughts, which we can then label objectify, modify, or build on, and it engages us in becoming invested in our ideas and learning. Writing-to-learn forms and extends thinking and thus deepens understanding….it is a meaning-making process (60). Here Jacobs extends both the ideas of Ong and Berthoff. Writing is able to restructure thought as it enables students to label and modify their ideas, and ultimately it is a meaning-making process in which writers become aware of how their writing is creating meaning. Writing thus enables learners to find meaning as they actively engage with the material and seek to communicate their understanding with others.

Jacobs extends the notion of writing-to-learn as a form of meaning-making to include the way that writing allows students to chronicle their thinking. Chronicling their thinking in writing establishes a permanent representation of their learning. Haneda and Wells also draw attention to the permanence of written representation. Because writing is a permanent representation of meaning, the generated text becomes what Haneda and Wells term an “improvable object.” The idea of a text as an “improvable object” works well to articulate the way in which writing adds to the recursive nature of the learning process and the way students will interact with essential concepts and come to master these concepts over time. The physical presence of a text enables students to review it and build upon it. The text becomes a physical
representation of students’ learning. It thereby allows them to both evaluate their learning and further their learning. This aspect of writing-to-learn is particularly relevant to the concept of reflection, which will be discussed in Chapter Three.

**Writing-to-Learn: Inquiry**

There are many approaches included in the Writing-to-Learn movement that use writing to promote learning. Inquiry is one approach that is founded in writing-to-learn. The inquiry-based approach to writing paralleled the shift to the process movement in writing instruction. In their article, “Beyond Strategies: Teacher Practice, Writing Process, and the Influence of Inquiry, Anne Whitney, et al indicate that in the shift to process, the focus of writing instruction was changed from one that emphasized style and mechanics to one that stressed invention and revision (1). The concept of invention is a guiding principle in inquiry because inquiry involves student investigation prior to writing as a way for students to begin to restructure their thoughts and to invent their own texts.

George Hillocks as well as Linda Flower and John R. Hayes were forerunners in the push toward using an inquiry-stance in the English classroom. Hillocks himself first applies the term “inquiry” to writing, and is one of the first leading scholars to use the term to describe the problem-solving approach that Flower and Hayes advocate. The term “inquiry” is more encompassing than simply a problem-solving approach in which students pose questions or respond to rhetorical problems; rather, inquiry also includes the collection of data through empirical observations, interviews, surveys, library-based research, and mining texts (*Research* 181). Inquiry-based writing implements an almost
hands-on approach that has students both find and evaluate sources, examples, and concepts. This approach allows students to find multiple meanings in their learning and experiment with different concepts and ideas. Because students engage in inquiry during the pre-writing stage of the writing process, it is an effective strategy for idea development and planning. Vicki Jacobs, in her article “Reading, Writing, Understanding,” endorses inquiry as a strategy to bring about rhetorical invention. She describes inquiry as an approach that “treats writing as a problem-solving activity in which students come to understand something that they want to say before they begin drafting” (60). In essence, inquiry serves as both a way to help students generate and develop ideas to increase rhetorical invention, which assists students in responding to the rhetorical problem their writing poses. In this way inquiry guides students to restructure thought as they go through the writing process.

In his book Research on Written Composition: New Directions for Teaching, George Hillocks found that inquiry was one approach to teaching writing that had a significant effect on improving student writing (Research 186; 231; 233). Perry Klein and Steve Graham and Dolores Perin also conducted meta-analyses of studies of writing instruction to look for common themes of methods that improve writing. In each of their meta-analyses they found that inquiry was one of the most promising teaching approaches to improve student writing (Klein 254; Graham and Perin 445; 467). As a proven research-based method, inquiry effectively engages students in the learning process and because of increased engagement, often improves student writing. It is through this type of engagement that inquiry can be an effective method for helping
students work through essential concepts. Because when students are engaged, they foster a deep approach to learning, and a deep approach helps them successfully comprehend the conceptual knowledge they encounter.

Meyer and Land also describe inquiry as an effective method for working through threshold concepts. Though they do not term their description *inquiry*, the approach they describe is one that parallels Hillocks’ concept of inquiry:

We would argue, similarly, for the notion of learning as *excursive*, as a journey or excursion which will have intended direction and outcome but will also acknowledge (and indeed desire) that there will be deviation and unexpected outcome within the excursion; there will be digression and revisiting (recursion) and possible further points of departure and revised direction. The eventual destination may be reached, or it may be revised. It may be a surprise. It will certainly be the point of embarkation for further excursion. (Implications 60)

The concept of learning as an excursive process or journey describes the way in which inquiry works. When students embark on a journey of inquiry, neither the teacher nor the students know exactly what they will discover along the way. As Meyer and Land suggest, the outcome may be unexpected and both student and teacher may be surprised at what will come from the inquiry. This type of stance is particularly effective in promoting deep learning and active engagement in the classroom because it requires students to fully experience the learning process. Students must create and construct their learning. This approach counters the expectation that teachers will pour knowledge into the minds of their students, because in an inquiry-stance, although the teacher may
predict what learning will occur, the students are the primary agents in their own learning and the teacher does not know or anticipate all of the learning that the students will experience.

Although threshold concepts are very relevant to writing across the curriculum, methodologies of writing-to-learn and inquiry become a bit trickier to implement within the English classroom because we are essentially using writing to teach writing. Whereas in other disciplinary courses such as biology or history students will use inquiry to research and conduct experiments, in an English classroom students likewise use inquiry to investigate the topics on which they will write, but also to investigate the writing itself. In their study, “A Meta-Analysis of Writing Instruction for Adolescent Students,” Steve Graham and Dolores Perin discuss the use of inquiry specifically for the writing classroom. They propose a variety of strategies that teachers can use to emphasize discovery:

Involve adolescents in writing activities designed to sharpen their skills of inquiry. Effective inquiry activities in writing are characterized by a clearly specified goal (e.g., describe the actions of people), analysis of concrete and immediate data (e.g., observe one or more peers during specific activities), use of specific strategies to conduct the analysis (e.g., retrospectively ask the person being observed the reason for their action), and application of what was learned (e.g., write a story where the insights from the inquiry are incorporated into the composition). (467)
These techniques actively engage students in a process of discovery in which they work to respond to a rhetorical problem. Though teachers begin with a specific goal in mind, there is always room for surprise as students embark on a journey of discovery. In the following two sections I will discuss how these types of activities can be implemented into the classroom and how such activities address the essential concepts of authorship, audience, and the recursive nature of the writing process.

**Inquiry in the Classroom**

Because inquiry results in a constructive process in which students become active participants in the act of discovery and then write about their findings, an inquiry-based approach naturally increases engagement and deep learning in the writing classroom. This stance involves students in the entire learning process, one in which the students not only explore and investigate, but then analyze and evaluate their findings. Inquiry is an effective method to support Hillocks’ environmental teaching stance and a constructivist approach to teaching. In their book *Understanding by Design*, Wiggins and McTighe support Hillocks’ environmental teaching stance and a constructivist approach to teaching. Similar to Hillocks, they state, “if students are to understand what is known, they need to simulate or recreate some of the inquiry by which the knowledge was created” (33). Here the emphasis on experience (as was also referenced in Chapter One) is the most important aspect of the learning process. In order for students to really learn something, they have to experience the process of learning. They have to construct or reconstruct the concepts and the process by which such concepts are understood.

Inquiry is an essential part of this process of construction and reconstruction. This type
of experienced-based learning that Hillocks, Wiggins and McTighe reference is a precursor to creating the type of learning situation in which students can effectively grapple with essential concepts. Echoing Wiggins and McTighe as well as Hillocks, Haneda and Wells explain that an inquiry paradigm is one in which

Knowledge is not something that is imparted by teachers or books. Indeed, knowledge is not a thing at all: the term is simply an abstraction that is sometimes useful for referring to the knowing that is manifested by individuals in particular situations of action and discourse. Teachers and authors of books can certainly be valuable sources of information, but what they know cannot be unilaterally transferred; each learner has to construct his or her own understanding. (438)

An Inquiry approach engages students in the learning process and allows them to experience and construct their learning as they seek and find information. And this is the goal of the teacher for her classroom. As James Reither states in his article “Writing and Knowing: Toward Redefining the Writing Process,” “the business of knowledge communities is inquiry—coming to know” (625). Coming to know through active experience produces learning. For this reason, I use the term “experience” throughout the rest of this chapter to describe the experience of learning the concepts through a constructive or reconstructive approach.

In the classroom this constructive approach can take shape in different ways. Teachers can use different assignments and sequences to establish a classroom that is founded in inquiry. Reither describes one method of incorporating inquiry in the
classroom. He describes a classroom where “students and teachers function best as co-investigators, with reading and writing being used collaboratively to conduct the inquiry” (625). In this type of environment there are endless possibilities for reading and writing activities. But as Reither explains, the most important aspect of such a classroom is that it should model “language in use” (625). In this classroom students and teacher work together to make meaning; in so doing, they experience learning. They use language in all of its facets to come to deeper understandings of information and the processes of learning. This idea connects well with Berthoff’s emphasis on making meaning through language. With this approach, students and teacher engage with language both to create meaning and construct knowledge.

Janice M. Lauer also provides an approach to using inquiry in the classroom. In her article “Writing as Inquiry: Some Questions for Teachers,” Lauer explains how inquiry can prepare students to experience learning and ultimately essential concepts. She explains: “Good inquirers deliberately explore questions, guided by heuristic procedures that help them vary their perspectives, scan their memories, and create new associations. This conscious activity prepares the inquirer for incubation, the unconscious mulling from which illumination springs” (91). As Lauer explains, inquiry acts as a stage of incubation—a preparatory ground that will eventually lead to discovery and understanding. This stage of incubation could be akin to a formation of a liminal space, the space in which students grapple with essential concepts and glean understanding from the process.
The theory—as explained above—has been effectively put into practice by many educators. In her article “Walking into the Unknown: Inquiry-Based Learning Transforms the English Classroom,” Heather Brown describes the way in which she altered her research unit to include an inquiry-based, student-centered approach. Brown altered the assignment so that students were required to produce a website that served as the product of their research. The research students conducted, however, was not only library research, but involved data collection, surveys, and interviews (44). Brown was awed by the effects of the way the inquiry-stance altered the student’s engagement in the classroom. She explained that “students who usually needed reminders to get on task no longer needed them” (46). Students were not only engaged in the work of the research, but they also reached new levels of engagement with the information: “Students began to dialogue with the text, to question the authority of the author. They realized that they, too, knew about the subject” (47). Though in the past many of Brown’s students had settled for applying a surface-approach to learning in which they would simply retell information from a library source or quickly compose for the sole benefit of the teacher, Brown’s use of inquiry changed the way the students viewed the research writing assignment. The inquiry process focused on the students’ questions and encouraged their exploration and search for answers. Ultimately, Brown found that “inquiry-based learning allows students to be active creators of knowledge; to see each other as authorities; and to validate their experiences, culture, and ultimately, themselves” (44). The students in Brown’s classroom thrived in their research assignment. They constructed their knowledge and developed themselves in the process.
The inquiry prepared the students to encounter the essential concepts, and when the students did encounter the concepts, they gained a deeper understanding of them. They came to see themselves and each other as authorities. They also found their place in the discourse as their writing situated their findings in connection to other authorities in the field. As they wrote for a specific audience that included a population larger than their teacher, they came to an understanding of how to appeal to their audience, but also validated themselves as authorities who are capable and knowledgeable in their field. Additionally, the students were more naturally prone to engage in a recursive writing process: firstly, because they cared about what they were writing, and secondly, because they were writing for an authentic audience. These two motivating factors pushed students to keep working with their research and their writing to the point that they would research, survey, interview, write, and then cycle back to more research when necessary (Brown 47-48). The inquiry-stance Brown used in her classroom motivated students to actively engage with their research, which prepared them to experience essential concepts.

**Inquiry and Essential Concepts**

As seen in Heather Brown’s classroom, using an inquiry-based approach to teaching writing helps students interact directly with writing and helps them begin to experience and understand the essential concepts of authorship, audience, and the recursive nature of the writing process. An approach based in inquiry establishes a foundation for discovery and creates an environment where students are able to construct their learning and experience the core concepts. This type of experience
fosters the deep learning in which students must engage in order to develop both their awareness and understanding of essential concepts. In the rest of this section, I will look at how inquiry can be used to help students experience, interact with, and gain a greater understanding of each of the essential concepts of authorship, audience, and the recursive nature of the writing process.

**Authorship**

In Brown’s classroom, the students engaged in both a study of their research topic and a study of the genre in which they would compose. The inquiry in which the students participated (particularly that of data collection and interviews) fostered a sense of authorship by helping them see their work as a valid contribution to the discourse. Another way to promote a sense of authorship is through using an inquiry approach that encourages students to individually discover concepts such as genre, voice, style, and others that contribute to understanding the role and resources of the writer. Brown encouraged her students to explore the characteristics of websites, and thereby empowered them to make their own rhetorical choices as they presented their research in this genre. In her article “Exploring Inquiry as a Teaching Stance in the Writing Workshop,” Katie Wood Ray also explains the value of an inquiry-based approach that focuses on the study of writing and genre:

> When I think about an inquiry stance, I always feel like this reason alone—inquiry teaches students to read and think like writers—is reason enough to teach from this stance as often as possible. Why? Because so many professional writers give the same advice when asked what a person should do to become a
writer—you have to read, they say. It is discipline-based inquiry that puts
reading at the forefront of the teaching and lets students develop a knowledge
base about good writing in the same way professional writers develop theirs.
(242-43)
Using inquiry in the classroom, teachers are able to fully engage students in a process
that professionals—masters of the discipline—use in order to improve their own
writing. In this way, teachers are able to help students bridge the essential concept of
authorship as they learn to read like writers and identify the ways in which authors
make rhetorical decisions in their own writing. Then as we pair reading-like-a-writer
with writing (using writing to learn about writing), students can practice the same
process of making rhetorical choices in their own writing helping them to more fully
understand and master authorship.

In his article “The Classroom and the ‘Real World’ as Contexts: Re-Examining
the Goals of Writing Instruction,” Chris Anson echoes Ray’s ideas on the way inquiry
enables students to read like writers. He explains that “in inquiry-based instruction,
students become ethnographers of language, gathering, analyzing, responding to,
writing about, and practicing different forms of discourse” (13). As students become
ethnographers of language they come to a much deeper understanding of the way in
which language works within a piece of writing and they can then in turn begin to apply
how language can work for them in their own writing. Anson continues to explain that
in this type of environment the students are constantly making “individual discoveries
about writing,” and as they share these discoveries with their classmates, the classroom
is transformed into a place in which the students learn from and analyze the data they each contribute (13). The result of such a classroom, as explained by Anson, is that the primary focus of the classroom is not on becoming a proficient writer, but rather on “learning how to learn about new contexts and the way discourse works within them—learning the importance of audience, purpose, conventions, discourse, and other aspects of the surrounding context” (13). Though students do become more proficient writers as they study texts, language, and the rhetorical moves writers make, even more importantly, they learn how to learn about texts and the choices that writers have available to them in creating a text. Engaging students in the study of language enables them to experience the types of thinking that professional writers do when they compose: they think about the implications of word-choice, audience, and tone. Helping students to experience this same process enables them to begin to establish themselves as authors—individuals who have the ability to make rhetorical choices in their writing.

**Audience**

The inquiry process enabled Heather Brown to help her students understand the multiple facets of audience as well. First, as students conducted their own research and data collection, they were empowered to join the conversation with the texts already situated in the discourse. The methods of inquiry enabled them to see that they had something to contribute to the discourse and they were able to situate themselves within that discourse. Additionally, Brown’s assignment fostered a sense of audience in that the students were presenting their research in the form of a webpage—making their audience more authentic. Instead of simply turning in a research paper to their teacher,
the students’ research was accessible to the world—particularly the other students in their class and the members of their community. Having an audience outside of the teacher made the writing task seem more real. The students had to know their audience and consider the questions their audience would have and the answers their audience would be seeking from their research. Brown’s classroom was able to use reading-like-a-writer to foster a sense of authorship. Additionally, Brown’s students employed this strategy to build on the concept of audience as students first considered the characteristics of effective websites, and then took their consideration a step further to think about how their website should be designed to address the questions and concerns of their audience.

Similar to Brown, Nancy Nelson explains the way that students learn to experience the concept of audience in her article “Writing to Learn.” She explains: “Through writing from, and writing in response to, [the disciplinary] texts that they read, students gain authority over them and increase their own knowledge so that they can make their own contributions. And through giving students writing tasks, instructors authorize them to make their own assertions” (35-36). Just as Brown’s students experienced the concept of audience as they used multiple forms of inquiry in their research process, they gained authority over the texts they read and were able to find their place in the discourse of research and add their contribution to that existing discourse.

Another facet of helping students experience the essential concept of audience and begin to construct their understanding of this concept is to help them to avoid
seeing writing as an egocentric activity. Through her research assignment, Brown was able to give her students the opportunity and necessity to address an audience other than themselves and her as their teacher. In their article “A Cognitive Process Theory of Writing,” Flower and Hayes also discuss ways in which teachers can help students experience the concept of audience and help them avoid egocentricity in their writing. In their article, Flower and Hayes discuss ways that teachers can help promote the creation of “reader-based prose.” Flower and Hayes acknowledge that writing lends itself to egocentricity:

> Writing is inevitably a somewhat egocentric enterprise. It is always easiest to talk to ourselves, and we naturally tend to express ideas in the same patterns in which we store them in our own mind. But if our goal is to communicate to someone else, those patterns in our own head may not be particularly clear or effective for a reader. The writer's job is to translate his/her own train of thought into a rhetorical structure. That is, s/he must translate his/her own egocentric or writer-based organization of information into a reader-based structure that meets the practical and cognitive needs of a reader. (459)

One way that Flower and Hayes suggest to help students create reader-based prose rather than writer-based prose is the use of inquiry. Specifically, Flower and Hayes suggest that teachers set up writing tasks centered around a problem that students must solve and in their writing they will argue their proposed solution to the problem (460). In this approach, students again engage in inquiry to solve a particular rhetorical problem. The problems could be research questions, argument questions, or others. But
turning the writing task into a problem and then asking students to grapple with it and find a solution to the problem can help students engage in the inquiry process and come to a greater awareness and understanding of the concept of audience.

**The Recursive Nature of the Writing Process**

As students experienced the essential concepts of authorship and audience in Heather Brown’s classroom, they also experienced the recursive nature of the writing process. Brown’s students were motivated to work through a writing process that was not linear. Rather, the students incorporated a dialectical process in which various stages of composing built on one another and recursively re-occurred throughout the course of completing the writing task. Vicki Jacobs argues that using inquiry helps students engage in a non-linear writing process because students have more motivation to write. Jacobs explains, “The inquiry process is a way to discover something worth writing about. Strategies that accomplish the purposes of composition-based inquiry engage students in developing their thinking in preparation for drafting” (61). Inquiry motivates students to become fully engaged in their writing. As students engage in inquiry, they become connected to the topic they are researching. This connection motivates them to write about their topic and to write about it well.

The engagement and motivation that come from inquiry naturally lead students to use a non-linear or non-formulaic writing process, because that process reflects the way learning occurs. Katie Wood Ray argues that an inquiry stance helps foster a non-linear writing process—one that is more true to life. She states:

> When teachers give students a simple way to write something, not only are they
not true to the product, they aren’t true to the process either. Outside of school, when faced with tasks that require composition, writers have to figure out how to write things. No one gives them a formula, and the struggle to organize and make everything work together is there anew every time. It is an essential part of the writing process. (243)

Using inquiry enables teachers to help their students experience an authentic rather than formulaic process of writing. Such an experience is important to helping students construct their understanding of the recursive nature of the writing process. As Ray explains, when teachers simplify writing tasks, they make writing products and processes formulaic. In doing so, teachers foster a surface approach because the process is not true to life. Part of the writing process is learning and finding ways to effectively organize and communicate ideas. This process changes with genre and audience, so helping students experience “the struggle” to which Ray refers, enables them to develop a non-linear writing process that is authentic and provides them with a pattern of understanding that can be applied in future writing situations.

Flower and Hayes’ work in their article “A Cognitive Process Theory of Writing” substantiates Ray’s ideas. Flower and Hayes argue for an approach to writing that engages students in inquiry as students attempt to solve a rhetorical problem. In setting up the writing process in this way and using a process in which students will use inquiry to inform and support their writing, Flower and Hayes believe that this design will cultivate an environment that will support students in using a non-linear process. In such a scenario they describe the writing process as “the writer’s tool kit.” They explain
that, “in using the tools, the writer is not constrained to use them in a fixed order or in stages. And using any tool may create the need to use another. Generating ideas may require evaluation, as may writing sentences. And evaluation may force the writer to think up new ideas” (376). Instead of seeing the process as linear—as steps that one must follow in a set order—students come to see the writing process as a strategy, and to understand that there are different strategies or tools within the different stages of the process that can help them restructure their thinking to find a solution to the rhetorical problem they are striving to solve.

Inquiry is an effective approach to help students actively engage with conceptual learning. An inquiry-stance helps students experience essential concepts, and as students experience these concepts their awareness and understanding of them increase. Inquiry alone, however, is not sufficient to promote a deep understanding or mastery of the essential concepts in the classroom. Reflection solidifies the experience that inquiry constructs, and as such, it provides the focus of the third chapter of this study.
Chapter Three—Writing to Learn: Reflection

"Literacy cannot exist without the reflection that fills silence."

--Pat Belanoff, “Silence: Reflection, Literacy, Learning and Teaching”

Reflection is another important practice within the Writing-to-Learn movement. In her article “Writing to Learn Across the Curriculum and the English Teacher,” Dana Mitchell describes and defines writing-to-learn. Though her description details only one aspect of writing-to-learn, it highlights the way reflection functions as part of writing-to-learn: “In a nutshell, writing to learn involves getting students to think about and to find the words to explain what they are learning, how they understand that learning, and what their own processes of learning involve” (93). Part of writing-to-learn encourages students to reflect on what they are learning and the way that they are learning. Reflection need not be written down, one may reflect by merely thinking, yet the act of composing one’s reflection adds to learning and is one reason writing-to-learn encourages written reflection. In her article “Silence: Reflection, Literacy, Learning, and Teaching,” Pat Belanoff describes reflection as “inner speech.” She explains that reflection reveals ideas, connections, and understandings one may not have noticed before (409). The act of writing these ideas, connections, and understandings creates a visual record and with it a sense of permanence. Supporting this idea of permanence, Päivi Tynjälä, Lucia Mason, and Kirsti Lonka describe the value of a written record of reflection in their article “Writing as a Learning Tool: An Introduction.” They assert that, “written words make it possible to reflect on the ideas which are put into words
and revise them” (11). Written reflection thus gives students the opportunity to create a record of their learning to which they may return at a future date to monitor growth and development over time.

**Thinking and Metacognition**

Reflection is certainly not a new concept in education; in fact, reflective practices have played a part in education long before the Writing-to-Learn movement began. Educational theorist, John Dewey revolutionized the role of thinking and reflection in education with his book *How We Think* published in 1910. In his book, Dewey defines thinking, the different methods of thinking, and ways that educators can help students to engage in higher-order focused thinking. Dewey explains that it is important for educators to teach their students to think and engage in reflection, for it is only through reflection that understanding will be gained (33). In describing the type of thinking he endorses and believes leads to learning, Dewey says, “Active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief in the light of the grounds that support it, and the further conclusions to which it tends, constitutes reflective thought” (7). Here we see that reflection is an active and deliberate process. And through the deliberate act of practicing reflection, consciousness becomes an important component of the learning process. Furthering his definition of reflection, Dewey describes it as “turning a topic over in various aspects and in various lights so that nothing significant about it shall be overlooked” (30). This turning over process enables students to carefully think through ideas and think about their own learning and thinking—what is now commonly termed “metacognition.” Though Dewey does not explicitly use the term “metacognition,”
many educational theorists and psychologists following him build on his understanding of thinking and the role of reflective thinking in the learning process.

Developmental psychologist, John Flavell first coined the term “metacognition.”

Flavell’s definition of metacognition has two components: (1) Metacognitive Knowledge; and (2) Metacognitive Experiences (22-26). Metacognitive knowledge includes a knowledge of the self, the task, and available strategies to complete the task. Metacognitive experiences, as Flavell defines them, are “conscious experiences that are cognitive and affective” (24). In these experiences one has a need and desire to interpret and understand a particular aspect of a situation. Metacognition is essential to learning because it helps students become aware of their own learning, where they are in their understanding of what they are learning, and how they go about their process of learning.

Meyer and Land also find that metacognition plays an important role in the type of learning necessary to master threshold concepts. In their publication “Threshold Concepts and Troublesome Knowledge: Implications for Course Design and Evaluation,” joined with co-authors Glynis Cousin and Peter Davies, the authors explain the importance of including opportunities for students to engage in metacognitive experiences in the curriculum:

Metacognitive experiences serve the monitoring and control of the learning process and at the same time provide an intrinsic context within which learning processes take place. This intrinsic context is to a large extent affective and determined by self processes, individual difference factors as well as task
factors, including task difficulty, task instructions, and feedback used. The intrinsic context influences students’ strategies in problem solving, but also their emotions, causal attributions, and self-concept. In this way, metacognitive experiences affect both online task processing and future motivation towards learning. (59)

Metacognition not only encourages students to think about their learning processes, but it encourages them to continue to engage with difficult concepts and troublesome knowledge that they may not fully understand the first time. Metacognition affects a student’s self-concept and their perseverance in continuing to learn the difficult concepts with which they encounter. Because metacognition fosters conceptual learning and encourages student persistence, it is a key factor to helping students experience and understand essential concepts in the English classroom. In the following sections I further define reflection in its various forms, considering how reflection can be used in the English classroom to address the essential concepts of authorship, audience, and the recursive nature of the writing process.

**Forms of Reflection**

Reflection is an act of metacognition. In her article, “Written Reflection: Creating Better Thinkers, Better Writers,” Dawn Swartzendruber-Putnam defines reflection in terms of the English classroom. She states, “reflection is a form of metacognition—thinking about thinking. It means looking back with new eyes in order to discover—in this case, looking back on writing” (88). The idea of looking back with new eyes as a means of discovery describes reflection in a way that connects well to the
definition and etymology of the term “reflection.” In her article, “Silence: Reflection, Literacy, Learning, and Teaching,” Pat Belanoff states that the Oxford English Dictionary includes three pages on the word “reflect” (405). Belanoff uses the etymology of the word “reflection” to push her reader to see the term in a new way:

Etymologically, reflect is composed of re "back" and flect "bend" so literally to reflect is "to bend back,” certainly not just an uncomplicated rendering of a duplicate in an image, but a bending in some way of the original image. The earliest definition that moves to the abstract sense common today is from 1605: "to turn one's thoughts (back) on, to fix the mind or attention on or upon a subject, to ponder, meditate.” Fixing suggests a need for some degree of stasis, a lack of movement. Within the word reflection we thus uncover a paradoxical linking of "turning" and "fixing.” (405)

Swartzendruber-Putnam and Belanoff’s ideas of bending, turning, and seeing anew help us see reflection as an active and transformative process. The process requires active, conscious, engagement, and leads to a transformation of understanding and the self. Within this process, students come to learn more about their learning and thinking but also about themselves.

In the previous section on metacognition I referenced Flavell’s definition of metacognition and how it promotes a new understanding of the self, the task, and available strategies to complete the task. In their article “Helping Adolescent Readers through Explicit Strategy Instruction,” Jeffery D. Nokes and Janice A. Dole summarize
Flavell’s aspects of metacognition and further explain each of these transformative elements to illustrate the important role metacognition has in the English classroom:

Knowing ourselves includes knowing how we learn, knowing when we do or do not understand, and knowing our strengths and weaknesses. Knowing our task involves an awareness of the nature of the task, its difficulty, and its demands in regard to time and cognitive resources. Knowing strategies involves an awareness of cognitive activities in which we can engage to increase the likelihood of our success. (165)

Through reflection students learn how to become more consciously aware of their own capabilities, the demands of the task, and strategies and resources they can use to meet those demands. This practice establishes a pattern of thought, which leads them to develop a pattern of learning. In her book *Reflection in the Writing Classroom*, Kathleen Yancey explains that when students consistently participate in reflection, “Reflection becomes a habit of the mind, one that transforms” (12). This type of transformation enables students to engage in deeper learning. Engaging in active reflection helps students interact with all three types of knowledge defined in the first chapter. In reflection, students not only think about what they are learning (the declarative knowledge), but they think about how they are learning (the procedural knowledge), and they also think about when and where they will use the content knowledge and strategies they have learned (the conditional knowledge).

This cognitive awareness of content, process, and application shows great promise for helping students navigate the troublesome knowledge and liminal spaces of writing.
in the English classroom. The act of reflection enables students to think consciously about both content and process and in doing so focuses the students’ attention on the way they learn, enabling them to self-monitor when their process is not leading to the depth of understanding they or the teacher requires. Additionally, reflection cultivates a rhetorical approach to writing in which students are conscious of the way their writing works; the needs of their audience; and the way they can use rhetorical strategies to meet the needs of their audience. In her article “Reflection: A Critical Component of the Composing Process,” Sharon Pianko published the results of a study she conducted to compare the composing processes of traditional college writing students and remedial college writing students. She found that one of the key differences between the two groups of students was in the area of reflection. Pianko found that “The ability to reflect on what is being written seems to be the essence of the difference between able and not so able writers from their initial writing experience onward” (277). Reflective writers—writers who consistently engage in reflection throughout the writing process—are more able writers. The process of reflection enables writers to more astutely communicate their ideas by helping them think about how they can best use rhetorical strategies to achieve their purpose in writing. Pianko further explains this idea: “It is reflection which stimulates the growth of consciousness in students about the numerous mental and linguistic strategies they command and about the many lexical, syntactical, organizational choices they make—many of which occur simultaneously—during the act of composing” (277). Helping students practice and establish habits of conscious reflection enables them to become more capable writers as they become more
consciously aware of their writing process and the strategies they have to address the purpose of their writing and meet the demands of the audience to which they are writing.

Helping students to establish these beneficial habits of reflection throughout the writing process requires that teachers have a well-developed understanding of both the benefits of reflection and also the process of reflection. In her book *Reflection and the English Classroom*, Yancey discusses three types of reflection that increase student learning and transformation throughout the writing process: reflection-in-action, constructive reflection, and reflection-in-presentation. Yancey explains that these three types of reflection work together to increase cognitive awareness and ultimately result in deep learning (142-43). Here I will summarize and explain each type of reflection because in the following sections of this chapter (and in the chapter that follows) I will illustrate how each type of reflection can be integrated into the classroom to increase engagement, foster deep learning, and cultivate an understanding of essential concepts.

Reflection-in-action is a phrase Yancey borrows from George Hillocks. In his book *Teaching Writing as Reflective Practice*, Hillocks defines reflection-in-action in terms of the teacher reflecting on her practice as an educator. He explains that reflection-in-action is the “moment-to-moment observation of student responses to logistical, instructional, and social particulars of learning activities. In effect, the teacher is asking how any particular observation matches the expectation for that activity” (202). Yancey adapts Hillocks’ definition and applies it to students reflecting on their own writing and daily writing processes. She defines reflection-in-action as “the process
of reviewing and projecting and revising, which takes place within a composing event” (13). Reflection-in-action occurs within a single act of composition and involves the ongoing type of reflection Pianko observed in her study.

While reflection-in-action deals only with one act of composition, constructive reflection asks students to engage in a more comprehensive form of reflection. Yancey explains that constructive reflection is “the process of developing a cumulative, multi-selfed, multi-voiced identity, which takes place between and among composing events” (14). In constructive reflection, students have the opportunity to look back at several compositions and evaluate both the process of composing and the resulting products. Constructive reflection enables students to see patterns and come to a greater awareness of their learning and writing processes and a greater awareness of themselves as learners and writers (Yancey 62; 67).

Reflection-in-presentation is the final method of reflection Yancey describes. Reflection-in-presentation builds on constructive reflection in that it 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” (14). Unlike reflection-in-action and constructive reflection, reflection-in-presentation is public—commonly seen in portfolios. Yancey explains that, “reflection-in-presentation takes place in the reflective letter that opens the portfolio and the reflective essay that closes it” (15). Reflection-in-presentation is a cumulative form of reflection that asks students to not only reflect on their product and process, but also to reflect on the reflection-in-action pieces and constructive reflection pieces in which they engaged as they went through their process.
and eventually arrived at their product. In this way, reflection-in-presentation is multilayered and dialectical as it pushes students to reflect on their ability to learn and the culminating results of their learning.

Yancey’s types of reflection enable students to become more actively engaged in the learning process promoting a deep approach to learning. In the sections that follow, I will discuss how reflection—particularly the three types of reflection Yancey defines—can be implemented in the classroom. Drawing on examples from Yancey’s book and other scholars, I will look at how these three types of reflection can increase student engagement and learning in the English classroom.

**Reflection in the Classroom**

Reflection is of course valuable and important to incorporate in the writing classroom, but it does require certain strategies to help develop the type of reflective thought processes in our students that will result in the deep reflective thinking teachers are looking for. Pat Belanoff encourages the idea of engaging students in productive reflection. She explains that even though we may value and see the benefits of reflection, “we still need strategies to help our students develop their own habits of reflection. We cannot just decide to be reflective, and then it will happen. Nor can we just tell our students to reflect and expect them to produce reflective writing any more than we can expect them to engage in worthwhile group work just because we create smaller circles in the classroom.” (419). Belanoff’s concern is valid: simply asking our students to reflect will not produce the depth of reflection we would like them to reach. Such an approach is akin to the natural teaching stance (as noted in Chapter One) in
which teachers ask their students to write—causing writing—but not really teaching writing. Instead, we need to teach our students how to reflect.

Nokes and Dole also advocate that teachers teach their students how to improve their metacognitive abilities. They explain that, “a teacher can improve metacognitive abilities by making [students] more aware of the existence of metacognition; teaching them strategies and how to evaluate strategies; showing them how to regulate, adapt, and adjust strategies; and fostering a metacognitive environment by attributing student success to strategy use” (166). Modeling the processes of metacognition and reflection—both by thinking aloud and composing written reflection in front of students—is one effective method of helping students come to understand the level of depth of reflection we want them to achieve. In her classroom, Yancey models the process of reflecting with her students and engages them in looking at examples of reflections to help students understand the depth of thought she expects of them (78). Additionally, Yancey continuously pushes students in their reflection. When students have not reached the level of depth Yancey wants them to achieve or if she would like them to go a bit further, she will ask questions in the margins or at the end of their reflective compositions that push them to continue thinking and engaging in the process of reflection (112-24). These methods can actively engage students in the process of reflection that will help them develop a pattern of reflective thought that will enable them to cultivate a deep-approach to learning.

John Dewey believes that in order to help students engage in reflective thinking there must be five distinct steps in place: “(i) a felt difficulty; (ii) its location and
definition; (iii) suggestion of possible solution; (iv) development by reasoning of the bearings of the suggestion; (v) further observation and experiment leading to its acceptance or rejection; that is, the conclusion of belief or disbelief” (37). Belanoff echoes Dewey’s ideas particularly in regards to his notion of “felt difficulty.” She explains that “reflection often grows out of discomfort even though it may afford delight and thrive in mystery and paradox. Educational settings have to create some level of disease, some disruption of student and teacher expectations” (420). In order to help students engage in the type of thoughtful reflection necessary to learning, students will need to experience some form of disease. They need to grapple with a problem. This type of grappling connects back to Flower and Hayes and their push to help students see writing as a rhetorical problem. In setting up a writing task as a rhetorical problem, the process of solving the problem automatically engages students in the discomfort or felt difficulty needed to prompt reflection and help them learn.

Stuart Greene is one scholar who has put the theoretical foundation of reflection to work in his classroom. His classroom demonstrates ways that teachers can effectively use reflection in the classroom to push students to reach greater depth in their thinking and learning. In his article “Exploring the Relationship Between Authorship and Reading,” Greene explains one method he uses in his classes to develop the habit of reflection is “mining texts.” Mining texts is a strategy that helps students read like writers. In mining a text, students look both at what the text is saying, but also at what the text is doing—or how the writing conveys meaning through the use of rhetorical strategies. Greene helps students engage in the process of mining texts to read like
writers, but then pushes them to reflect on the rhetorical strategies the writers use and think about how they themselves could employ similar strategies in their own writing.

In his classroom, Greene has students read a model essay—the type they are going to compose. After the students read the model to understand its content, they are then asked “to consider the issue he [the author of the model text] has written about and the techniques he used to further his purpose and goals, mining the text for whatever they might use in writing their essays” (38). From his observations and interviews with students about their mining process, Greene found that his students were more conscious of their writing and more purposeful in the choices they made as writers (40). This type of reflection encouraged Greene’s students to actively engage with the writing task and pushed them to new depths as they began to apply the rhetorical work of another writer to their own writing. Such reflection, Greene found, enabled students to begin mining their own texts. Through this activity, students began to articulate the rhetorical moves they made in their writing and the purposes behind their choices as writers (40-41). Greene’s use of textual mining encouraged students to become reflective writers and enabled them to improve their writing and add depth to their learning. Textual mining is one effective method teachers can implement to increase deep learning in the classroom—learning that will lead students to understand essential concepts.

**Reflection and Essential Concepts**

As seen in Greene’s classroom, the incorporation of written reflection and metacognitive experiences into the curriculum cultivates student understanding of
essential concepts. Reflection is a critical practice to help students understand essential concepts because it not only helps them think about their learning, but it helps them see their development over time. To further understand the idea of continuous growth, Belanoff uses the analogy of crossing a river on stepping stones. She explains that, “a crosser of water on stepping stones must both move and stop” (417). This analogy applies well to the notion of essential concepts: the river becomes the liminal space and the stepping stones (the “points of stasis” as Belanoff refers to them) become points of reflection along the way which eventually lead to a deeper understanding or reaching the other bank of the river.

Meyer and Land endorse the benefits of reflection when they describe how learning—specifically in relation to threshold concepts—occurs: “Learners tend to discover that what is not clear initially often becomes clear over time” (Implications 59). Using Belanoff’s analogy, then once we have reached the other side of the riverbank, our understanding is clear, and we realize that it was by pausing on the stones, looking backward, and then looking forward to continue the journey, that our understanding increased and became clearer over time. When reflection is built into the curriculum and students are afforded time to think about their learning and write about their learning, they are able to begin to make sense of concepts that were initially difficult for them to understand. Adding to this idea of coming to an understanding, Meyer and Land explain that engaging students in metalearning makes students more aware of the threshold concepts with which they are grappling, but also makes students more aware of their own understanding of these concepts (Dynamics 16). This form of
awareness empowers students with more control over their learning and enables them to supplement their learning in areas that are difficult. But ultimately, this form of metalearning supports a deep approach to learning because it helps students become aware of their learning process, the material they are learning, and their own understanding of the material. It helps them recognize when they don’t quite understand something and enables them to find ways to approach learning in a manner that will lead to understanding. In the rest of this section, I will look at how reflection can be used to help students understand the essential concepts of authorship, audience, and the recursive nature of the writing process.

Authorship

In Greene’s classroom, he used reflection to help foster a sense of authorship. Greene’s students engaged in the process of “mining texts.” They carefully examined genres, reflected on the rhetorical moves the author made, and considered how they could use similar rhetorical strategies to fulfill their own purposes as writers. In addition to these benefits, the mining process helps foster a sense of authorship because it allows students to see that writers have choices in using language, and when students are asked to apply the choices another writer has made to their own writing it helps them begin to see their own authority in their writing. In her article “Intertextuality, Genre, and Beginning Writers: Mining Your Own Texts,” Marie C. Paretti describes the way in which mining texts enables students to begin to recognize themselves as authors. Paretti contends that when students mine their texts they “can begin to understand their own language choices and ideas and at the same time recognize their own authoritative voice
in a conversation in the same way they recognize the voices of published writers” (132). By helping students to critically consider the way other authors use language and then asking them to reflect on their own use of language, reflection helps students come to an understanding of authorship. Reflection enables students to see with new eyes and shift their perspective to one where they begin to recognize that just as published authors make choices in language, they too make choices in language and can do so very purposefully to achieve a specific goal.

Another way to cultivate a reflective practice in the classroom and help students develop a sense of authorship is to have students mine their own texts. When students reflect on the texts they create and are asked to explain the rhetorical choices they made as writers and to consider if their choices are working to achieve their goals as writers, it places students in a place of authority over their texts. But a sense of authorship does not develop after one instance of reflection; rather, it is developed over a period of reflections. Yancey explains that when students engage in a series of reflections about their own writing, they generate a written record to which they can return to see patterns and come to understand their writing and themselves as writers. Yancey states that “in such describing [referencing process descriptions], students come to develop an authority, an expertise, about their own writing, about how it works when it works, as well as about how it doesn’t” (28-29). Students begin to see how their choices in writing work or don’t work, and in critically evaluating their choices, students gain authority and control of their writing enabling them to become better, more cognitively aware writers. In cultivating an awareness of their writing, Yancey explains that “the
successive gathering and application of reflective transfer contributes to more than an enhanced ability to address an issue or solve a problem. Over time, it contributes to an identity, the identity of a writer” (51). Eventually, students see how they approach writing tasks and learn to recognize the strategies they use while writing. Engaging students in reflection over time helps them cultivate cognitive awareness and control over their writing. Reflection develops and reinforces the students’ conditional knowledge of the concept of authorship.

**Audience**

Mining texts is also beneficial in helping students come to a deeper understanding of the essential concept of audience. As Greene helped his students develop the mining strategy, his students also began to consider the way in which writers address audience in their texts. Though she does not use Greene’s terminology, Belanoff explains how the process of mining texts can help students understand audience. She explains that, “metacognitive activity and awareness are characteristic of skilled writers, that skilled writers and readers are aware of the need to build into texts signals for a reader, signals that help the reader understand what the text is asking of him or her. Formal texts encode these reflective periods in non-obvious ways” (413). Through reflection, students develop the awareness of audience that Belanoff explains is characteristic of skilled writers.

Greene found that as his students mined texts and developed an increased awareness of the way authors include context clues in their writing, his students began to develop a more attuned awareness to how authors address specific audiences, but also
how texts function in an ongoing conversation with other texts. Greene notes: “Each piece of writing that a student reads or writes is a contribution to an ongoing written conversation. To reconstruct the context of a text requires an understanding of how an author frames a response appropriate to a given situation and an author’s own purpose” (44). Greene found that students developed their awareness of the concept of audience as they mined texts and applied the rhetorical strategies other writers used to their own writing. This mining enabled students to develop what Greene terms a “meta-awareness about writing.” Through their awareness of writing, Greene noticed that students made thoughtful choices about the content of their writing. Depending on their goals, they would choose specific content to include or not include based on the audience to whom they were writing. Greene illustrates that this meta-awareness demonstrates a “sense of control on the part of the writer who knew both what he or she wanted to say and why certain details and ideas may or may not have been appropriate” (41).

Flower and Hayes’ problem-solving approach to teaching writing can also help students develop a sense of audience and increase their meta-awareness of their own writing. In their approach, Flower and Hayes suggest that students mine their own texts and ask questions of their own text as they consider their goals for their writing and the desired affect they hope to have on their reader. Questions such as “What, exactly, are you trying to achieve in this paper or this paragraph, and what effect do you intend to have on your reader?...What do you want the reader to know at the end of your paper? What is the central information you want him/her to remember?” (458-59). Flower and Hayes construe that when students are able to answer these questions, they can center
their writing around their answers to the questions and more effectively communicate their ideas.

By helping students develop a meta-awareness of their writing—both as they mine texts and as they mine and reflect on their own texts—they gain a deeper understanding of the concept of audience and are then able to make thoughtful choices about both the content of their writing and the form of their writing so that they can meet the needs of a particular audience and also situate their text in conversation with others.

**The Recursive Nature of the Writing Process**

Finally, as students came to understand the essential concepts of authorship and audience in Greene’s classroom, they also came to a greater understanding of the recursive nature of the writing process. When students mine texts, they develop a toolbox of rhetorical strategies they can use in their own writing. Through mining they also develop the understanding of “the circumstances under which one might use these strategies to best effect” (Greene 44). In gaining such an understanding it leads students to think about their process of writing and how and when they should employ different strategies within their process of writing. Another way to help students develop an understanding of the recursive nature of the writing process is to have them reflect on their own process of writing. Yancey found that as her students completed process description reflections in her courses, they became more aware of their own approach to writing: “in writing them [the process description reflections], students frequently remember ways in which they generated material that they’d been unaware of.
Consequently, in the process of recording the process, students learn: about the myriad of methods they use to recall, remember, and re-create. And they have a record to which they can return” (28). Reflecting on their process of writing, students come to see their unique process in ways they hadn’t seen before. They learn about their methods and are able to think about the effectiveness of their process and how they can improve it. Through reflection, students come to see the non-linearity of their own writing process and/or ways to make their process less linear as a way to improve their writing.

Reflection enables students to come to a deeper understanding of essential concepts because it helps them begin to evaluate their understanding of the concepts and in this evaluation, students develop a deeper understanding of the concepts and themselves. Swartzendruber-Putnam describes the result of reflection as “an increased awareness for students; not only of what they learn, but how they learn it and what they can do with that knowledge” (93). When paired with inquiry, this increased awareness creates an engaging, student-centered approach to teaching that enables students to gain firsthand experience with the concepts, and then as they reflect upon that experience, they gain understanding of the essential concepts in the English classroom.

Swartzendruber-Putnam corroborates this idea when she states that, “reflection is only one piece of the puzzle. Alone, it doesn’t look like much. But add authentic writing experiences—having students write for real audiences, giving students choice in topic and/or genre, allowing students to choose the writing they take to final draft—and the picture of able writers actively involved in their own learning begins to take shape” (89). The pairing of reflection with inquiry creates a dual force that enables students to
engage with essential concepts and then reflect on them to gain a deeper understanding, thus fostering their learning and mastery of these concepts. The next and final chapter will look at how the pairing of inquiry and reflection cultivates an environment in which students interact with essential concepts and reflect on them to deepen their understanding of these concepts.
Chapter Four—Bringing it Together: Sequencing Inquiry and Reflection

When inquiry is paired with reflection it establishes a student-centered approach to teaching writing that fully engages students with essential concepts and the learning process at large. Where inquiry helps students experience the essential concept, interact with it, and use it, reflection helps students to apply the concept and deeply understand it. Reflection adds the conditional knowledge—the knowledge of how and when a strategy is useful—to the procedural knowledge and declarative knowledge gained through the process of inquiry. This benefits students in several ways: First, this method increases student engagement. Students are actively engaged in the learning process because they research both methods of writing and topics for their writing. Students research writing itself, the way writing works, and what authors do in their writing. Students also research topics on which to write and become part of the discourse community in a particular area. Finally, students research themselves. They research their own writing and learning processes and evaluate their writing products. Then, after students have researched and discovered, they reflect on these aspects of the course. Through this reflection students solidify and deepen their learning and understanding, making this pairing of inquiry and reflection an effective approach to help students come to understand difficult concepts.

In the writing classroom combining inquiry and reflection leads to a meta-writing approach in which students both investigate writing and write about writing in the reflection process. In this process students reflect on both the writing of others and
their own writing. They use inquiry to investigate both the topics on which they will write and the writing of others. This investigation both informs and directs their writing. Researching their topic expands and adds depth to their ideas. Investigating writing itself helps students learn strategies to present their ideas and tailor their presentation to particular audiences. As inquiry is paired with reflection, it enables students to engage with the writing process—one that is recursive—to develop themselves as writers who are capable of responding to various audiences. Engaging students in meta-writing teaches them the process of learning to write. As Luanne Kowalke asserts in her article “Student Self-Assessment: Thinking About Thinking”: “To make sure that children become intelligent, insightful, educated human beings, we educators must help them become conscious of their own learning and thought process. Instead of teaching students what to think, we need to teach them how to think, and how to think for themselves” (233-34). A meta-writing approach teaches students how to write and how to learn how to write on their own.

In this chapter, I consider how inquiry and reflection can be paired together in a practical method in order to support students in both experiencing and understanding essential concepts in the English classroom. Here, I have created a unit plan to address the essential concepts of authorship, audience, and the recursive nature of the writing process. First, I will define the goals of the unit. Then I will describe the sequence of the unit (Appendix A) and how each component provides scaffolding for the components that follow. Next, I will describe the major assignments/assessments for the unit (Appendices B-E) and provide a rationale for how each will help address the essential
concepts. Lastly, I will suggest a few ways the unit could be adapted or extended in different teaching situations.

From Theory to Practice

I have titled this unit The Non-Typical Writing Unit. In this unit students engage in common forms of writing, but do so in non-typical ways. Instead of using a print learning journal, students compose in a blog format. Instead of completing the typical research paper, students conduct extensive research and then present their research in a non-typical way—through multiple genres. The unit I have designed would work well for the secondary level, and could be adapted to any grade within the secondary level, but could also be adapted to meet the needs of higher education courses as well. The unit involves students investigating writing and genre and then using their investigation to compose in multiple genres, reflecting on their processes and products throughout. The unit has several major assignments: a learning journal; an assignment in which students investigate an unfamiliar genre in depth; a research paper; and a final reflective writing assignment. Though these assignments are typical assignments used in many English classrooms, students will compose many of them in non-typical formats.

Unit Goals/Objectives

1. After implementing the reading-like-a-writer strategy and reflecting on the use of this strategy, students will have a greater sense of authorship and recognize their ability to make decisions about the rhetorical effects of their writing.
2. Through investigation and analysis, students will be able to identify determining characteristics of genres and how genres differ from one another in ideas, form, organization, tone, audience, and context.

3. Students will be able to identify and utilize strategies for inquiry, pre-writing, drafting, and revision—and reflect on how effective these strategies were and how they could be used in future assignments.

4. Students will be able to implement the writing process to effectively research and convey meaningful information using research-based writing in multiple genres to address the needs of different audiences.

5. Students will be able to produce thoughtful reflection that analyzes both their process and product and evaluate their strengths and weaknesses and how they can continue to improve.

**Unit Sequence (Appendix A, pages 89-90 below)**

I will begin by introducing the unit, the objectives, and the essential concepts. Though students may not fully grasp the concepts of authorship, audience, and the recursive nature of the writing process, explicitly discussing these concepts will help prompt them to both engage with the concepts and become more cognitively aware of them so they can reflect on how they are mastering the notions of these concepts. The sequence is designed so that each component builds upon the others. I introduce the Read-Write-Blog assignment first in order to help students begin to develop their ability in reading like a writer—an essential skill that will help them with all of the assignments that follow. Having students complete the reading-like-a-writer blog
postings at the beginning helps them focus on the details of another author’s text and helps them examine the rhetorical moves an author makes to create meaning in a text. The reading-like-a-writer blog postings are designed and sequenced at the beginning to help students become familiar with the concept of authorship in both investigating the small things authors do to create meaning and then reflecting on how they can incorporate similar strategies in their own writing—indirectly instilling students with a sense of their own authority over their texts and helping them to come to see themselves as authors.

Next the students will complete the Unfamiliar Genre Project. This project again builds on the students’ ability to read like a writer, but expands their text mining to include an investigation of the context of the text, which helps introduce the students to the concept of audience. This project builds on the concept of authorship and continues to foster the students’ sense of authorship by engaging students in a thorough investigation of a genre that empowers the students to gain expertise in a genre that was previously intimidating to them. Having the students reflect on the components and context of the genre and then compose in the genre as part of the assignment fortifies a sense of authorship, which then helps them develop their concept of audience. As students experience the ontological shift necessary to see themselves as creators of discourse, this shift can then be expanded to include an increased awareness of how the discourse they create fits into the larger context of discourse and how certain audiences will respond to their text. Students not only gain some expertise of their genre through
their investigation of it, but demonstrate their control of the genre by authoring their own text.

Building on the students’ ability to investigate genres, students then begin investigating the genres in which they will compose for the multigenre research portfolio. Though this investigation is less extensive than the unfamiliar genre project, it is hoped that through the thorough investigation in the unfamiliar genre project and the reading-like-a-writer blog posts, students develop patterns of thought that will facilitate a deep investigation of genre, though on a smaller scale. The multigenre research portfolio encourages students to experience all three essential concepts. The portfolio strengthens a sense of authorship and audience as students both investigate a topic and become an expert in their area of research and also investigate genres, gain expertise over them, and then compose in them. The multi-layered investigation helps students join the conversation of the discourse community of their research topic, helping them to gain a greater understanding of audience. Composing in multiple genres also helps foster a deeper understanding of audience as students learn how to present their research in different forms to reach different audiences. Finally, the portfolio is designed to promote a recursive writing process rather than one that is formulaic. Although the writing process must confine to a linear school schedule where teachers set aside specific days for inquiry, planning, drafting, and peer review, the project does promote recursivity as students must conduct additional research as they prepare to write in each genre when they consider the additional information they will need to write successfully in a genre. Also, by providing students multiple days to write and multiple methods to
revise, this process will encourage students to develop a more astute recursive writing process of their own.

Lastly, students complete a Reflection-in-Presentation assignment to help them solidify their learning experience. Throughout the unit students have completed short reflection-in-action assignments that ask them to reflect on strategies, processes, and products. These short reflection posts that students complete, prepare students for the longer reflection-in-presentation assignment that acts as a culminating assessment of their learning. Having students engage in the shorter reflection assignments develops their metacognitive ability and prepares them for the culminating reflection-in-presentation assignment in which they reflect on their multigenre portfolio product and the process of creating it, but also on their overall learning and growth over the course of the unit. This reflection is designed to help students deepen their metacognitive awareness of their own learning—specifically in relation to the essential concepts. In the next section, I will explain in each assignment in more detail and how it uses inquiry and reflection to help students experience and understand essential concepts.

Assessments/Assignments

Read-Write-Blog (Appendix B, page 91 below)

This assignment will act as learning journal, but will be completed electronically in the format of a blog. The blog format has a dual purpose: (1) to act as a visual and chronicled record for students to look back on and evaluate their growth over the course of the year; and (2) to facilitate an ongoing dialogue both between students and their peers, as well as between students and their teacher as they reflect on the writing of
others and their own writing. The blog posts will take different formats throughout the course of the project and will support students in mining texts, investigating genres, and reflecting on their processes and products.

There are three types of blog entries students will complete:

1. Read-Like-A-Writer (RLAW): In this type of post students will investigate a text and practice the strategy of reading like a writer in which they will examine the features of the text and the writing.

2. Genre Investigation (GI): Similar to RLAW, and actually using the RLAW reading strategy, in this type of post students will investigate genres. But instead of only focusing on one aspect of the writing, students will focus on the genre as a whole and look at multiple aspects of the writing.

3. Reflection-in-Action (RIA): In this type of post, students will reflect on their writing process in composing different assignments (what went well and what didn’t). Students will also complete reflection posts on the products they create (again thinking about what they were trying to accomplish in their writing; what worked and what didn’t; and why or why not).

The Read-Write-Blog assignment is designed to engage students in an investigation and dialogue about writing—their own writing, the writing of their classmates, and the writing of published authors. In the RLAW posts students will investigate small aspects of writing that make for good writing. As they read, they will pay attention to things that stand out to them and use the distinction as a springboard to think about the passage in terms of a writer.
The RLAW posts engage students in mining texts a process that has been discussed previously in Chapter Three. The mining process helps students develop a sense of authorship as they discover how other authors create meaning in their writing. Stuart Greene explains how the practice of mining texts uses both inquiry and reflection to help students develop a sense of authorship: “If we want to help students understand the decisions and processes that a sense of authorship requires, then we need to build upon and go further than traditional approaches. We can teach students to mine texts, helping them to engage in critical conscious reflection as they read in their own role as writers” (35-36). When students practice reading like writers, they engage in both inquiry and reflection. They investigate texts to discover how the meaning in the text is created and the effects the text produces. Then taking their investigation a step further, they reflect on the choices the author made and think about how they could use similar techniques in their own writing to accomplish their own purposes.

The GI posts are similar to the Unfamiliar Genre Project and have similar goals, but on a smaller scale. In the genre study posts, students will use the skills they developed in completing the Unfamiliar Genre Project to investigate a genre and look for the different aspects of writing that come out in a particular genre: what writers need to know to compose in a certain genre in terms of ideas, organization, audience, voice, and word choice. This assignment seeks to create what Janice Lauer terms “cognitive dissonance.” It sets up the study of a genre as a problem that students must investigate and solve (90). Similar to Flower and Hayes’ problem-solving approach to writing, the cognitive dissonance created in setting-up a writing task as a problem that students must
solve promotes students engagement in the learning process because learning becomes an act of discovery and resolution. The GI posts also reinforce the reading-like-a-writer strategy as students read like writers to examine genres and discover both the mandatory and flexible features of a genre as well as particular rhetorical strategies an author uses to write successfully in a genre.

Lastly, the RIA posts provide an opportunity for students to reflect on the strategies they use during the course and their overall learning. The RIA posts act as precursor assignments in preparation for the Reflection-in-Presentation assignment that will accompany their Multigenre Research Portfolio. These posts are designed to help students practice reflection and develop their metacognitive awareness to self-monitor their learning process and become more aware of their own writing process and the way in which they approach writing tasks. Kathleen Yancey observes that reflection-in-action prompts students to take ownership over their writing—thus fostering a sense of authorship—because students think about their writing goals and how well they are accomplishing them through the process they are employing (29-31).

The blogging assignment shares many of the benefits of a learning journal. Andrea McCrindle and Carol Christensen discuss the results of their study using learning journals in their article “The Impact of Learning Journals on Metacognitive and Cognitive Processes and Learning Performance.” Though their study examines a secondary biology classroom (which uses different teaching methods to teach very different content matter), they found that the use of learning journals in which students reflected on their learning significantly increased the students’ metacognitive abilities.
McCrindle and Christensen had two groups of students in their study: one that used learning journals and one that did not. They found that the group that regularly used learning journals were better able to articulate their learning process and showed more cognitive awareness of their learning than the group that did not use learning journals (178). Though biology and English could not be more different in terms of content, learning journals can be useful in the English classroom when used as a tool for reflection. In the English classroom students can use learning journals to record their observations about writing, reflect on their observations and examinations of others’ writing, and reflect on their own learning process as they write. As students reflect on their process of writing, learning to write, and even the characteristics of writing, they gain a greater conceptual understanding of writing and increase their metacognitive control over the rhetorical strategies they apply in their writing. McCrindle and Christensen found that the students who used the learning journals “were encouraged to reflect on the conceptual nature of the material they were learning in relation to the processes that they were using to acquire knowledge covered by the course. Thus, the journals could be expected to impact directly on student’s metacognition, particularly their awareness of their own learning processes” (180). Because learning journals help prompt students to think both about the concepts they are learning and the learning process itself, they become an effective method to help students think through essential concepts in the classroom.

Learning journals can help students think through essential concepts because they can be specifically designed to promote deep learning and metacognition. The
questions to which students respond can prompt them to think deeply about the conceptual knowledge of the course as well as their process in learning. In doing so, learning journals help students develop metacognitive control as students learn to recognize their learning process and the strategies they use to facilitate that process. I have used the blog format to engage students in both individual and collective metacognition. The blog format increases collaboration and strives to help students learn from both their individual learning and process, but also the learning and process of other students. The blog format seeks to establish a dialogue between the students to push them in their reflection and learning and help them consider new ideas and alternative methods of going about the learning process. In her article “Intertextuality, Genre, and Beginning Writers: Mining Your Own Texts,” Marie C. Paretti discusses how she incorporates learning journals in her classroom to help promote student collaboration and collective learning. In Paretti’s classroom she uses an assignment in which “the whole class keeps a single journal in which students not only write out their own reflections on the texts at hand but also respond to one another’s comments. Such a journal opens up new lines of inquiry, draws reticent students into class discussions, and encourages frequent syntheses and re-evaluations” (120-121). The blog format makes this type of discussion more readily accessible for students. It helps them see their own learning in relation to other students and extends the possibilities of learning as students try different methods and approaches based on the experiences of their classmates. This type of dialogue is the same type of dialogue Kathleen Yancey seeks to establish with her students when she responds to their texts, except the blog format not only allows the
instructor to create a dialogue with her students, but it also supports a dialogue between the students themselves thus increasing both inquiry, reflection, and learning.

Unfamiliar Genre Project (Appendix C, page 92 below)

This assignment is designed to establish a foundation for both the Read-Write-Blog genre investigation posts and the multigenre research portfolio. In this assignment students investigate a genre they find difficult or challenging or with which they are not familiar. These could range from sonnets to lab reports to cover letters. Students collect examples of the genre, examine them, and annotate the examples according to ideas, organization, form, context, etc. They then record their findings and analysis and then compose in the genre themselves.

The unfamiliar genre project is designed to help students come to understand the essential concepts of authorship and audience. Students engage in inquiry to investigate how writers have written in a particular genre. Students not only examine the genre itself, but they also examine the context of the genre and consider the audiences for which the genre is written. In investigating both the mandatory features and flexible features of the genre as well as the context and audiences of the genre, students begin to have an experiential form of understanding the two concepts of authorship and audience. Then the reflection component of the assignment helps to fortify student’s understanding of the essential concepts by helping them think about the way different authors use the confines of the genre to respond to specific audiences. Students then apply this information as they consider how they could use similar strategies in their
own writing. And finally, as they do employ some of the strategies when they try their hand at writing in the genre, they further distinguish themselves as authors and now have a more expertise-like knowledge of the genre they have studied. Through their investigation and reflection students understand the context of the genre and are prepared to add their own writing to the discourse.

In their article “Research Writing: The Unfamiliar-Genre Research Project,” Sarah Andrew-Vaughan and Cathy Fleischer designed the Unfamiliar Genre Project and published their method and some broad findings. In their experience implementing the project in the classroom they found that their students developed their metacognitive abilities and also gained confidence in their capabilities as writers (42). Deborah Dean (from whom I adapted the assignment sheet for my unfamiliar genre project) has also used Andrew-Vaughan and Fleischer’s ideas in her classroom and seen similar benefits. Dean explains these benefits in her book What Works in Writing Instruction where she explains that one of the most important aspects of the unfamiliar genre project is the focus on process. Dean explains that “the project gives students experience with one genre; but the process prepares them for writing all through their lives” (149). Dean then continues by encouraging teachers to help students reflect on the inquiry process. She states: “Have students consider how this process (exploring an unfamiliar genre) could become part of their overall writing process, a pattern they could use throughout their writing lives” (149). The process of exploration and reflection in which students engage in completing the unfamiliar genre project is—as Dean states—a very beneficial one. This process empowers students with a strategy that will help them become
capable writers as they will possess the skill set necessary to learn and then write in any genre they may encounter. So while the process of this assignment prepares students to complete the research and writing in the multigenre research paper, it also helps them develop their writing process by giving them a strategy that they will be able to use regularly for the rest of their writing lives.

**Multigenre Research Paper (Appendix D, pages 93-94 below)**

This assignment is an adaptation from the typical research paper that requires students to research a topic extensively and then present their research across multiple genres. Multigenre writing originated with Tom Romano, who designed the assignment to help students present research-based writing in a way that is more directly associated with how research is presented outside of traditional school settings (1-4). The multigenre research portfolio pushes students to engage in inquiry on multiple levels. Students must research their topic of interest, and then they must also research and investigate the different genres in which they will report their research. This type of inquiry fully engages students in the learning process. It promotes authorship as they become experts in their topic of study and as they gain mastery over the genres in which they are writing and discovering the best ways they can use different rhetorical strategies to communicate the information they have learned in the most effective way.

The research and the writing across multiple genres also help students work through the concept of audience as they have to both look at how their research fits in the conversation of ongoing research, but also how they can present their research in
different formats to meet the needs of specific audiences. As students seek to establish their place in the discourse community, they use specific genres to meet the needs of certain audiences and certain communities. Composing in multiple genres enables students to have many opportunities to experience the concept of audience first-hand. Additionally, as part of the multigenre research portfolio, students are required to submit a short rationale card for each genre. In the rationale card the students explain their reasoning for presenting their information in the particular genre, the intended audience for the genre, and how they have addressed the needs of this audience. Incorporating this aspect of reflection into the multigenre portfolio fortifies students’ understanding of audience and reinforces their authority as authors of their own texts who make deliberate choices in their writing.

Finally, the multigenre research portfolio helps students engage in and experience a recursive writing process, beginning with inquiry to discover, and returning to inquiry, brainstorming, and planning at multiple points of their writing as they consider what additional information they will need in order to write in a particular genre. The very nature of the assignment virtually forces students to engage in a recursive process and helps them experience a writing process that is not formulaic.

Composing across multiple genres pushes students to expand their thinking about a topic. Paretti explains how composing in multiple genres helps foster deeper levels of learning because it requires higher level thinking skills: “Different genres may in fact provide students with a way to move, at least in a limited way, outside a subject by providing multiple epistemological lenses. As a result, students may emerge with a
fuller, more nuanced understanding than if they had written only in one genre, particularly if their texts do in fact inform one another and evidence [a] kind of dialogic interaction” (122). Paretti explains that as students write in multiple genres, they more fully develop an understanding of their topic because they are required to view the topic from different perspectives. I believe that in addition to more fully understanding their topics, students also come to a deeper understanding of their writing process and the concepts that influence that process—particularly authorship and audience. As students take their writing through a recursive process when they brainstorm, research, plan, research again, write, revise, and eventually publish, they come to develop their own unique processes and develop strategies and patterns that will help them in future writing situations. Additionally, as students reflect throughout the process of writing each assignment and receive feedback from their peers and instructor, they will continue to develop their understanding of their learning process and their writing process as well.

Reflection-in-Presentation (Appendix E, page 95 below)

The Reflection-in-Presentation assignment provides students with an opportunity to explain their learning to both the teacher and their audience. It is designed to prompt reflection on product, process, and overall learning. It gives the students the opportunity to assess their work and their learning and to guide others in reading and responding to their work. As students engage in this type of reflection, they must mine their own texts searching for evidence to support the way they discuss their
learning and justify their self-assessment. This type of reflection first requires inquiry as students mine their own texts and then consider both the ways in which their products are successful and the ways in which they are not successful. Such reflection supports the development of authorship as students again recognize that they are in control of their writing and make purposeful rhetorical choices as a way of creating a particular effect in their writing. Kathleen Yancey explains that reflection-in-presentation focuses on shaping the self (70). As students examine their writing and their previous reflections on their writing (their RIAs), they begin to see their development as writers. Then when they prepare their reflection and thinking for others, Yancey claims that their “thinking becomes rhetorical” (72). This type of thinking and reflection again pushes students to take their learning further because they must abandon their egocentric view of their own learning and make their personal learning public for an audience. They must explain their learning so an audience can understand their process of growth. The students’ reflection is both individual and social as students first think for themselves, but then must push themselves to explain their thinking to others.

The reflection-in-presentation assignment is both a way for students to finalize their learning and solidify the concepts they have learned, and a way for teachers to assess student learning. It provides students with an opportunity to think concretely about the essential concepts they have experienced and think about how these concepts influence their learning process. The formality of the reflection-in-presentation assignment also provides a concrete document for teachers to assess the student’s understanding of the essential concepts, which are oftentimes difficult to assess directly.
When Yancey implemented reflection-in-presentation assignments in her courses, she found that as her students told an audience what they had learned, they themselves discovered what they had learned (89-94). In this way reflection-in-presentation solidifies learning because it asks students to think cumulatively about their work, process, and understanding. So though students learn throughout the process, the culminating reflection asks them to analyze their learning and in doing so, it reiterates and reinforces the concepts students have learned—giving them a deeper understanding of their learning and the process by which they learn.

**Adaptations/Extensions**

Other adaptations could be made with this unit as well. The unit could be paired with a novel or a thematic literature unit of some sort that could guide students’ research topics. Additionally the multigenre research portfolio could be adapted to meet the needs of certain genres that need to be taught within the state core or desires of the teacher. The multigenre research portfolio could also be shortened to reduce the number of required genres. Finally, I have based my unit on a technologically rich classroom environment with the incorporation of blogs and webpages. I do recognize, however, that many schools are not equipped with technology and may not be able to accommodate such extensive technology use within a single unit. These assignments could also be adapted to a print medium as well. Though I see the blog losing some of its ease in collaboration, it would be possible for students to write in research journals and share them with their peers.
A Final Reflection

A meta-writing approach to teaching writing—one pairing inquiry and reflection—does not automatically guarantee that students will become better writers. Learning, like writing, is a process and takes time to develop and perfect. What such an approach does afford is the opportunity for students to be actively engaged in the learning process. Students will experience the essential concepts in the classroom, and then as they reflect on their experience, they will gain a deeper understanding of the concepts, their learning, and themselves. Then as teachers consistently engage students in inquiry-driven learning and guided reflection, students will develop the metacognitive capability to become better writers, and ultimately better learners. In essence teachers are not teaching students what to learn, but how to learn—a skill that will be much more far-reaching than the classroom.
Appendix A: Unit Sequence

Day 1
Introduce the unit as the non-typical writing unit
Discuss objectives/unit goals and essential concepts
Introduce Reading-Like-a-Writer (RLAW)
Model and Practice
Introduce Read-Write-Blog assignment
Create blogs

Day 2
Discuss the concept of genre
Genre as a strategy for writing
How genre uses the RLAW strategy
Introduce Unfamiliar Genre Project (UGP)
Brainstorm genres
Begin drafting proposal

Day 3
Investigate genre: start finding examples
Model annotating and note-taking
Work on UGP
{RLAW blog post due & comment}

Day 4
Discuss analysis and reflection
Look at blog posts & comments in connection to analysis and reflection and discuss how it can be applied to the UGP
Work on UGP

Day 5
UGP Presentations
{Reflection-in-Action (RIA) blog post due & comment: genre investigation}

Day 6
UGP Presentations
{RLAW blog post due & comment}

Day 7
Research topic brainstorming
Research questions
Initial inquiry into several topics

Day 8
Narrowing research topic/question
Research practices: evaluating sources, research reading
{RLAW post due & comment}

Day 9
Library day
Research reading
{RIA blog post due & comment: research reading}

Day 10
Library day
Research Reading

Day 11
Library day
Research reading
Summarize and synthesize research findings
{RIA blog post due & comment: What have I learned about my topic so far?}

Day 12
Finish written summary of research findings
Additional questions to investigate further
Introduce Multigenre Research Portfolio (MGRP) assignment

Day 13
Mini investigation of webpages
Begin planning out genres and webpage
Particularly plan for the audience
{RLAW blog post due & comment}

Day 14
Investigate how-to articles
Plan how-to article: What other information do you need to find out about your topic to write a how-to article?
Supplemental research
{Genre investigation (GI) blog post & comment: how-to article}
**Day 15**
Draft how-to article
Investigate newspaper articles
Plan newspaper article: What other information do you need to find out to write a newspaper article?
Supplemental research
Begin drafting
{GI blog post & comment: newspaper article}

**Day 16**
Peer Review how-to articles
Work day: newspaper articles, my choice genres
{RIA blog post due & comment: peer review process}

**Day 17**
Investigate compare-contrast essays
Plan compare-contrast essay: What additional information do I need to write a compare-contrast essay?
Supplemental research
Begin drafting compare-contrast essay
{GI blog post due & comment: compare-contrast essay}

**Day 18**
Peer Review newspaper articles
Word day: compare-contrast, my choice genres

**Day 19**
Investigate webpages
Plan webpage: What additional information do I still need?
Supplemental research
Webpage tutorial
{GI blog post & comment: webpage}

**Day 20**
Self-review compare-contrast essay
Work day: webpage, final drafts, my-choice genres
{RIA blog post due & comment: self-review process}

**Day 21**
Work day: webpage, final drafts, my-choice genres

**Day 22**
Peer review webpages and my choice genres
Investigate PowerPoint presentations or Prezis
{GI blog post due & comment: PowerPoint presentations or Prezis}

**Day 23**
Plan presentation: What additional information do I still need?
Supplemental research
Draft presentation
Work day: webpage, my choice genres

**Day 24**
Self-review presentation
Post presentation to webpage
{RIA blog post due & comment: evaluate your project so far}

**Day 25**
Introduce Reflection-in-Presentation (RIP) assignment
Discuss questions to address in RIP
Brainstorm and plan RIP
Work day

**Day 26**
Work day: finish up

**Day 27**
Student presentations

**Day 28**
Student presentations

**Day 29**
Student presentations

**Day 30**
Student presentations
Appendix B: Read-Write-Blog

Instead of keeping a typical reading log or writer’s notebook, we are going to combine the two in the form of a blog. The blog format has a dual purpose: (1) To act as a visual and chronicled record for you to look back on and evaluate your growth over the course of the year; and (2) To facilitate an ongoing dialogue between you, me, and your classmates as we investigate and reflect on the writing of others and our own writing.

Before we get into the specifics of what you will be writing on your blog, I want to put those of you who don’t know very much about blogging at ease. Don’t worry. We will go through the process of posting, tagging, and commenting. We’ll even go through a few of the style features of blogging as well, and before you know it, you’ll be blogging experts who know more than I do!

Okay, now onto the actual assignment. Over the course of the term, you will be required to post 15 blog entries. Additionally, you will be required to read your classmate’s entries and comment on many of them (at least 15 comments over the course of the term—one per each blogging assignment).

There are three types of blog entries you will complete:

1. Read-Like-A-Writer (RLAW): In this type of post you will investigate a text and practice the strategy reading like a writer in which you will examine the features of the text and the writing. Please be sure to tag these posts RLAW.

2. Genre Investigation: Similar to RLAW, and actually using the RLAW reading strategy, you will investigate genres (categories of writing, for example, essays, cover letters, etc). But instead of only focusing on one aspect of the writing, you will focus on the genre as a whole and look at multiple aspects of the writing. Please be sure to tag these posts GI.

3. Reflection-in-Action: In the reflection posts, you will reflect on your writing process in composing different assignments (what went well and what didn’t). You will also complete reflection posts on the products you create (again thinking about what you were trying to accomplish in your writing and what worked and what didn’t). Please be sure to tag these posts RIA.

We will look at examples of each of these types of posts, so you get a better understanding of what this type of writing looks like and what will be expected in each of your posting.

Lastly, you will need to read through your classmate’s posts and comment on at least one person’s post each time we complete a posting assignment. That means you will have 15 comments over the course of the term.

We will also look at examples of effective comments, so you will understand what is expected in the comments you make in order to create a dialogue within our class.

**Additionally, we will be posting much of our writing on the blog as well and the blog will serve as a place to share our writing so others can respond to our writing and provide critical feedback before publishing our writing. Posting our writing on the blog will NOT count toward the 15 posts or comments, but will be a separate assignment.
Appendix C: Unfamiliar Genre Project

As readers and writers, we consistently encounter multiple genres. Naturally, we tend to like some genres over others—whether it is because of familiarity and exposure or for other reasons. For this project, you will explore a genre that you find daunting or challenging: one that you avoid, one that you don’t know well (or at all), or one that intimidates you.

This project will involve several different aspects:
1. Genre Proposal: decide on an unfamiliar genre. Write a proposal for the genre you have selected to investigate explaining why you’ve chosen it. This proposal will serve as a draft for the introduction to your project.
2. Collect Examples: Collect examples of the genre. Try to find a variety, but also choose the best samples you can find. When you have 5-10 (the more you have, the better you can complete the rest of the assignment; five is the minimum number accepted—and that’s only if your genre is hard to find—most of you should have at least 6-7). As you collected genres, be sure to record your sources and photocopy the text you will use.
3. Annotate Examples: Annotate the genre examples you find. On the photocopies of the examples you find, annotate the genre. Your annotations should be thorough and show consideration of format, language, tone, organization, and anything else that is pertinent to the genre. Consider the following questions as you annotate: What ideas are addressed by this genre? What ideas are ignored? What actions does the genre help make possible? What actions does it make difficult? Is there an intended audience in this genre? Does the audience vary? How so? Also consider what variety is allowed. What aspects seem to be more rigid? What values, beliefs, and assumptions are revealed through the genre’s patterns?
4. Context Analysis: After annotating the examples and completing an initial analysis, conduct a context analysis. Consider the situations and communities that use your selected genre. What characteristics of those situations and users are reflected in the genre? How do users expect the genre to function for them? How does the genre position its users—privilege some and diminish others? What roles do the genre’s users perform? How does the genre (both its regularities and variables) seem to grow out of context?
5. Genre Product: Now try your hand at writing in your selected genre. Although your attempt may be written outside of the normal context for the genre, the product you create should still look and read like the genre examples you’ve investigated—and should also show consideration of the contextual analysis as well as the annotated samples.
6. Reflection: Finally, reflect on your process and what you learned from it: How hard was it to write in the genre? What contributes to difficulty or ease? How does this formalized process differ from what you would do (have done) with unfamiliar genres in the past? Is this more or less effective? Why?

Your Final Project should include the following items in the following order:
1. Introduction: Your choice of unfamiliar genre and reasons for it.
2. Annotated examples: Thorough and complete.
4. Genre: Reflective of findings and samples.
5. Reflection: Insightful as opposed to simply observant; thoughtful, making connections to other uses.

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4 This assignment is adapted from an assignment Deborah Dean issued her English 423 course at Brigham Young University Fall Semester 2006.
Appendix D: Multigenre Research Portfolio

We have begun selecting and researching topics in which we are interested. And we have begun to organize some of that research. Although you may need to do some additional research throughout the writing process, you are now ready to learn how you will present your research. You may have thought this was going to be a “typical” research paper. Well, it isn’t! You will present your research in multiple genres for multiple audiences. This will give you the opportunity to expand your knowledge of genre and audience, and will also give you the opportunity to use your creativity and unique talents to present your research.

GENRES:

- Your Multigenre Portfolio will consist of ten (10) genres.
- If you choose you may create up to two (2) additional genres for extra credit. You must create the extra credit genres yourself!!
- The Ten Genres:
  - Five (5) are Required: a How-To article; a Newspaper article; a Compare-Contrast essay; and a cumulative Webpage that brings some cohesiveness to your other genres and publishes your genres in one place; and a PowerPoint presentation (or Prezi) in which you will present your information and product to the class. (Don’t worry! We will spend significant time in class investigating these genres!)
  - The other five (5) genres are Your Choice!
    - Of the five genres that are Your Choice two (2) must be written.
    - The other three (3) may be artwork, music, dance, videos, etc.
    - One (1) of the Your Choice genres may be created by someone other than yourself (i.e. you could find a photo taken by someone else, a song performed and written by someone else, etc.).
  - For each genre you will need to complete a short Rationale Card that explains why you chose this particular genre to present your specific information and the specific audience you have in mind with this genre. So you will have ten (10) total.

PROCESS:
As with most assignments, process points will be a significant part of your final grade.

You will receive Points for the following Processes:

- Planning your paper and each genre
- Drafting each genre
- Revising each genre: some will be revised through Peer Review and others will be revised through Self Review
- Publishing each genre in final form

ASSESSMENT:

- Process: First you will receive completion points for both the planning and drafting portions of your genres. To earn these points you must turn in your planning sheet and draft on time! These points may not be made up after the fact. I will also give you feedback on your initial drafts to help guide you in the process.
- Revising: With some genres you will be required to revise another classmate’s draft. And you will need to have another classmate revise your draft—it must go both ways. If you are
not in class on the day we complete peer review, it becomes your responsibility to find another classmate to make up the points.

- **Publishing**: You will receive an evaluation of your work and writing when you publish your final product. This grade will be based on both completion (having all of the genres and rational cards) and the individual rubrics for each genre.

- **Presentation**: Lastly, you will formally present your research to the class and will be assessed both on the way you adapt your information to the audience of our class and the presentation skills we have practiced so far.

**EXPECTATIONS:**

I want your research portfolio to be interesting, vivid, specific, insightful, diverse with many genres, intelligent, bold, experimental (I want to see your imagination and intellect turned loose), and comprehensible. When I am finished reading, I want to really know more about your topic through your perceptions. I am asking you to do a lot. But, I know you can do it if you're willing to risk and work (writing always involves both). Finally, I want to help you as you develop your ideas into exceptional writing.

**DUE DATES:**

- How-To Article (Draft IN CLASS) Due: ________________
- Newspaper Article (Draft IN CLASS) Due: ________________
- Compare-Contrast Essay (Draft IN CLASS) Due: ________________
- Webpage (Draft IN CLASS) Due: ________________
- PowerPoint Presentation (Draft IN CLASS) Due: ________________
- Final Published Multigenre Portfolio with all parts Due: ________________
- Presentation Due: ________________

**EXAMPLES OF GENRES (for the “your choice” genres):**

1. Poems: found poems, biopoems, poems for 2 voices, narrative poems, etc.
2. Short Stories
3. Journal/Diary Entries (real & imaginary)
4. Adventure
5. Quotes
6. Dialogues and Conversation
7. Children’s Books
8. Telegrams
9. Songs and Ballads
10. Documentaries
11. Interviews
12. Collages
13. Historical Stories
14. Resumes
15. Facts
16. Radio Scripts
17. Photos and Captions
18. Plays
19. Letters (personal, persuasive, observations, informational, etc.)
20. Comic Books
21. Art work (painting, drawing, sculpture)
22. Screen Plays
23. Dances (recorded)
24. Brochures
25. Emails
26. Blogs
27. MySpace/Facebook pages
28. Prezis
29. Podcasts
30. Songs (written and recorded)
Appendix E: Reflection-in-Presentation

As part of your Multigenre Research Portfolio, you will complete a letter of introduction. In this letter of introduction you will reflect on both your product and the process of completing your portfolio.

Your letter of introduction should create a context for your portfolio and prepare your reader to read and interact with the portfolio you have created. The context should guide your reader as to how to best interact with your webpage portfolio (what should be looked into first, etc.).

Your letter should also describe and assess the processes you used in creating your texts. In this portion of your letter you should describe the evolution of your product and how one draft evolved to another to reach the final form you are presenting.

Additionally, your letter should explain your goals for the portfolio and how they were accomplished with specific references to the texts included in your portfolio.

Lastly, I would like you to reflect on the essential concepts we have discussed throughout the unit: authorship, audience, and the recursive nature of the writing process. Consider how your experience with these concepts has shaped your learning throughout the completion of your portfolio.

The following questions may help you in writing your letter of introduction:

- What brought about this portfolio?
- Why were you interested in this topic? What inspired you to investigate this topic in this way?
- What should the reader know before going into your portfolio? What will prepare him/her to engage with your portfolio?
- Is there a certain order the reader should use as he/she interacts with your webpage? How did you design and organize your webpage to help facilitate this order?
- What were your goals for your portfolio? How well did you accomplish them? What worked well? Of what are you still unsure?
- What was the process of creating your portfolio? How did it transform over time into the product it now is?
- Who is the primary audience for your webpage? What do you predict are this audience’s needs? How did you strive to address their needs?
- What have you learned about authorship, audience, and the recursive nature of the writing process?
- As you have gained more experience with these essential concepts, how has your thinking changed?
- How do these essential concepts influence you as a writer and your writing?
- What can you do to continue to develop your understanding of these essential concepts?
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