
1 Teaching Literature as Reflective Practice: Context, Vocabulary, Curriculum

*I was of three minds,
Like a tree
In which there are three blackbirds*
Wallace Stevens, "Thirteen Ways
of Looking at a Blackbird"

I want to begin this chapter, and this book, with a set of five observations that collectively speak to learning, literacy, and schooling.

Observation One. At least once a year, I teach a general education literature course, the course that literally is the last course in literature most students will complete. In teaching this course—which the catalog copy tells students is “Forms of Literature,” focusing on the genres of poetry, novel, and drama—I ask students to think about the reading of literature as well as the reading of other texts. To introduce this “reading process” framework to students, I ask a fundamental kind of question: “How is reading e. e. cummings different from reading your calculus textbook?” The hope is that for the students these texts invite different reading processes; the reality is that too often they don’t. When I teach a different kind of course, one in which the reading is less like poetry and more like that of calculus—say a course in rhetorical theory—I get a similar reaction. For most students, reading is a unified construct, and I continue to have a vague sense—akin, I think, to what Freud called “dis-ease”—that the writing and reading tasks I assign *in* school aren’t the same kinds of reading and writing that students do *outside* of school. And what students *do* outside of class: it’s not making its way into my classroom either. This, I think, is a problem.

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Observation Two. I know what the numbers say about what students are doing outside of class: “The average American child,” we’re told, “spends 78 minutes a week reading, 102 minutes a week on homework and study, and 12 hours a week watching television. . . .” I also know that new forms of literacy seem to proliferate more quickly than we can track them, and that many of them invite sophisticated forms of learning. James Paul Gee (*What Video*), for instance, has documented new genres of literacy that children acquire through playing video games, and the same logic is apparently generalizable since the military is now using video games for leadership training. Oprah Book Club selections make new celebrities—and spark ersatz literary scandals, as we saw in the case of Jonathan Franzen, author of *The Corrections* (who refused the designation and then apologized). Poetry jams have morphed from urban corners to rural campuses; at both sites, they are what Deborah Brandt calls “self-sponsored literacy events.” In another case of self-sponsorship, readers note their book preferences on Amazon.com’s Listmania and then provide commentary on blogs and wikis. Functioning largely *outside* of school, these literacies seem quite successful, if measured by the social goals people meet day in and day out.

Observation Three. When I go to a movie with people I like whose educational experiences and values are similar to my own—my husband (an engineer turned Web guy) and daughter (a double major in psychology and biology) and son (a double major in engineering and math)—I find that we haven’t even seen the same movie, much less responded to it the same way.

Ideally, we want students to have the opportunity to cultivate an attitude—intellectual and social—that is at once playful and responsible. It is playful in its willingness to examine ideas, to imagine different worlds, to resist habits of thought and social conventions; it is responsible in its fundamental connections to the world.—Nancy Cantor and Steven Schomberg

Observation Four. One of the big shifts in higher education, as in K–12, is a move away from the sage-on-the-stage, teacher-centered, lecture-driven model of teaching to a learner-centered, interactive model. Another shift involves understanding school learning as a “re-mediated” learning of the kind we first associate with toddlers. This new college learning, like that of young children, is grounded in playfulness, and it includes two other attributes: responsibility and reflection.

Programmatically, this learning is designed into boundary-crossing intellectual activities such as learning communities and interdisci-

plinary seminars. We see learning defined similarly in Lee Schulman's new model for general education, which he calls a "Table of Learning" and which factors into general education attributes like reflection and engagement. What these efforts share, in addition to a capacious definition of learning, is their construction of the student as *the site for the integration of a complex learning* (Booth).

Observation Five. As Peter Elbow ("Cultures") recently noted, the teaching of literature is slowly changing, moving from a lecture-based pedagogy to one more workshop oriented, such change itself located within a larger curricular change in English studies. During the last twelve years especially, scholars have repeatedly called for a new curriculum, one sensitive to student interests, multiple expertise, and mixed media. In his afterword to the Young and Fulwiler collection *When Writing Teachers Teach Literature*, for instance, Gerald Graff suggests that "the problem [in a literature course] is to respect student experience even as we try to transform it into something different." In "Telling Our Story about Teaching Literature," Alan Purves extends Graff's point about student experience by widening the definition of literature to include various forms of presentation, including images, and creating a new purpose for such a course:

The kinds of readers and viewers we hope to create are those who will work at the text or film and take pleasure in the intellectual *play* of working with it, and then take this experience with them and play with other texts and images, getting pleasure not simply from the experience of reading and viewing but from the thinking and talking that go with school (134–35; italics mine).

Interestingly, the aesthetics of Rosenblattian reading are linked to new forms of text and to an appreciation of the role of play in infusing and informing intellectual life.

What these observations collectively suggest is that the academy is changing, as are the texts we consume and produce both inside and outside formal education and as is the role of literature in both education and culture at large. In response, as we shall see, several scholars and periodicals—including *College English*, *Teaching English in the Two-Year College*, *Pedagogy*, *ADE Bulletin*, and *Profession 2002*—have spoken to ways of changing both the teaching of literature and the education

Faculty sometimes—perhaps too often—lament debasements in students' intellectual abilities, but our graduate programs give almost no serious or sustained attention to the pedagogical face of the problem, which therefore perpetuates itself through the educational mechanism.
—Jerome McGann et al.

of the literature graduate students who will join the professoriate. In particular, as the recent MLA report “Professionalization in Perspective” suggests, many graduate students obtain employment at institutions where undergraduate education and general education are the stuff of pedagogical life. As important, as a companion piece by John Guillory underscores, no serious attention has been paid to pedagogical practices for the literature class, to the relationship between theory and practice, to the role of reflection in mediating between the two, or to a scholarship of teaching literature. The concerns of these scholars and institutions, of course, mirror the concerns of teachers already in the classroom who, faced with the need for innovative pedagogy, create new, theoretically informed practices that in turn can teach us much, as a quick example attests. In the *TETYC* article “Inviting Students to Challenge the American Literature Syllabus,” Beverly Peterson discusses the Graffian merits of explaining the logic behind the intent of a syllabus, emphasizing its constructed nature, and inviting students to challenge the literary selections. (This is a theoretically informed pedagogy that echoes the principles of constructedness central to the material of the course.) Through such a challenge, Peterson claims, students substitute a new reading for the one originally planned by the teacher. What they choose and why and what that means for the teaching of literature—that’s the scholarship of teaching.¹

In brief, that we need to change the teaching of literature is not in question. *Why* we should change, and *how*—these are.

General Education and Literature: What’s the Point?

Before we discuss what’s *needed* for students, curriculum, or both, we might back up to consider what we aim to achieve in such a course—the literature course that participates in the general education curriculum.² And here we run into the first problem: although English as a discipline agrees that a general education course is valuable and important, we aren’t entirely clear on what it is we want general education to accomplish, in part because what we want it to accomplish changes over time. Well over a hundred years ago, for instance, (before gen ed was invented, because *all* education was gen ed) the purpose of education was an exercise in delivery: we believed in the Arnoldian transmission of the best humanity has known and thought and said. Much of education today operates on that same belief, as Kathleen McCormick notes:

Believing that literary texts possess timeless truths is certainly a dominant part of most students’ literary repertoires; it is the prod-

uct of a dominant assumption of their literary educations. To assume that “great literature” is “universal” grows from a deeply ingrained ideological belief that certain cultural texts—what Matthew Arnold called “the best that has been thought and said”—contain values and experiences that are shared by most men and women in all times and places. (78)

Much like current-traditional views of writing, this view of the value of literature (and other humanities) seems to function as the default view. Directly connected to the logic of literature as the means of expressing (and sometimes problematizing) the human condition, this view of literary study is a thread that binds the changing rationales over time.

More recently, general education has been linked less to consumption of the culture and more to entering a civil and ethical discourse:

General education is, in a sense, the most amorphous part of the humanities curriculum. Its goals are perhaps less easily definable and more ambitious than the aims of a major. But the purposes that general-education courses in the humanities should serve for our students are extraordinarily important. In English courses designed for general education, students should learn to participate intelligently and ethically in the discourses of the communities to which they do and will belong as citizens. (Lloyd-Jones and Lunsford, 29)

Recent views of the role of the literature course in U.S. education sound a similar note. One seems a peculiarly American view and surprisingly utilitarian in its own way. As explained by Robert Scholes (“Transition to College Reading”), the literature course is a key to Jeffersonian democracy:

Without education, as Thomas Jefferson well understood, participatory democracy cannot function. The basis of an education for the citizens of a democracy lies in that apparently simple but actually difficult act of reading so as to grasp and evaluate the thoughts and feelings of that mysterious other person: the writer. The primary pedagogical responsibility of English teachers is to help students develop those skills. (171)

Especially in a pluralistic country, the ability to relate to the *other* is critical, and “that ability is nurtured by reading, which mediates between writer and reader” (171). More recently, scholars such as Kathleen McCormick have been interested in asking readers to engage in reading as a form of critical literacy, in which the relationship between the other and the author is examined from an ideological perspective. The outcome here involves asking students to consider how their own

situatedness contributes to the way they interpret both world and text (McCormick).

Although this quick, partial account of the purposes of general education isn't intended as comprehensive, it nonetheless illustrates the shifts in education in which we participate and which we sometimes shape. As important, this brief chronology demonstrates that when it comes to general education and the literature course that is so categorized, we want it to play both intellectual and political roles in educating students.

What's the Problem?

If I ask, What's the problem?, I assume that there is in fact a problem. Readings of recent relevant publications, from MLA's *Profession* to PMLA to *ADE Bulletin* to *Pedagogy*, suggest that regardless of how we assess the situation—the number of students majoring in English, the number taking literature classes, the number of new faculty hires, the continuing crisis over the job market and the decline in tenure-line positions, the sense of ennui characterizing departments and the discipline at large—the delivered curriculum in literature is in some jeopardy.

Robert Scholes locates the difficulty in students' reading processes. Students read everything the same, he says. Thus, the

The black poet, as exemplified by Gwendolyn Brooks and later Amiri Baraka, had many voices—with no voice being identified as more or less authentic. The insistence on finding one voice, one definitive style of writing and reading one's poetry, fit all too neatly with a static notion of self and identity that was pervasive in university settings.—bell hooks

problem emerges as one of difference, or otherness—a difficulty in moving from the words of the text to some set of intentions that are different from one's own, some values or presuppositions different from one's own and possibly opposed to them. This problem, as I see it, has two closely related parts. One is a failure to focus sharply on the language of the text. The other is a failure to imagine the otherness of the text's author. ("Transition to College Reading," 166)

Much like Geoffrey Sirc, Gerald Graff sees the problem as a function of our failure to link students' "street smarts" with our intellectual concerns:

It's not a new idea, of course, that students harbor intellectual resources—"street smarts" that go untapped by formal schooling. What is not so widely noticed, however, is that these intellectual resources go unnoticed because they are tied to ostensibly

anti-intellectual interests. We tend to assume that intellectual distinction can be manifested only with bookish subject matter—that is, that it's possible to wax intellectual about Plato, Shakespeare, the French Revolution, and nuclear fission, but not about cars, clothing fashions, dating, sports, TV, or Bible Belt religion—and we thereby overlook the intellectualism latent in supposedly philistine pursuits. (“Hidden Intellectualism,” 21)

And like Scholes, Jerome McGann and his colleagues see the problem as one of reading, though they define the problem somewhat differently:

We all know how young students, in discussing a novel, want to talk about characters (as if they were “real”) and plot (as if it were a sequence of events). They usually try to “understand” characters, for example, in terms of types and in more or less generalized psychological terms. They deal with plot and events in a similarly schematic way. Events are viewed not as a structure for exposing (for example) more and more complex features of the characters, but as a sequence of connected happenings meant to interest the reader in the outcome of the fictional events (the story). In this context, we also see the students’ inclination to seek thematic and conceptual interpretations of character and event, often completely abstracting away those literal textual levels that license such thematic moves. (145)

There is, McGann et al. say, a “theatricality of fiction” that students thus completely miss.

Taken together, these scholars pinpoint two sources of the “problem.” Reading is a problem, and in excluding students’ street smarts from the classroom, so are we.

What’s the Fix?

Collectively, some of the proposed cures at least begin to paint an interesting picture of another kind of education, one much more socially constructed, more inquiry based, more informed by *reflection*.

Kathleen McCormick argues for a combined approach that brings together three schools of reading. The first approach, she says, is “a *cognitive*, information-processing model which contends that readers must actively draw on their prior knowledge to be able to process texts,” an approach dominated by a pedagogy of “direct instruction”³ (13). The second, more learner-centered approach “follows an *expressivist* model which privileges the reader and the reader’s experience in the reading process” (13). The third approach, she says, is “a *social-cultural* model; it is one that privileges the cultural context in which reading occurs” (13). Partially ethnographic, partially liberation pedagogy, the hope of

this approach is that it will carry out “the broader social implication of the earlier two positions.” Key to McCormick’s theory of reading is a dialogue among the three approaches:

These three approaches are not diametrically opposed to each other: rather, they exist in dialectical relationship. Each acknowledges the importance of the reader, the text, and the larger social context in the reading situation, but each assigns quite different significations to the terms. While my discussion throughout privileges the social-cultural model, I am not arguing for the wholesale takeover of the other models by this model, but rather for the active development of genuine dialogue among all approaches. (14)

Robert Scholes proposes an approach we might characterize as both neoclassical and electronically wired. In thinking about the role of recitation in earlier curricula, Scholes advocates a return to a McGuffian pedagogy seemingly akin to McGann et al.’s focus on the “theatricality of fiction”:

I am not certain how close we can come to the McGuffey method in our classrooms, but I think that we should try to bridge the gap. I know that we can come very close to it in teaching drama, where the move to oral interpretation requires no explanation or apology—which is an argument for getting more drama into our courses. (“Transition to College Reading,” 168)

The second change involves using electronic sources and networks to engage students:

[N]ewer technologies also offer possibilities for the teaching of reading that we are only beginning to explore. There is a lot of writing on the Web that takes positions and makes arguments, well or badly. There are ongoing arguments, on all sorts of topics, that can be traced through particular threads on Web sites. Part of the problem we face in classrooms, especially in the general-education classrooms of colleges and in the English course of secondary schools, is that debates about literary interpretation simply do not engage many of our students. These same students, however, may go right from our classrooms to their terminals, where they engage in serious debate about issues that are important to them. (170)

Scholes specifically recommends using the Web for its “constantly replenished source of textual materials for study.” Much like Graff, Scholes implicitly argues for linking our intellectual concerns with those of students, who, he says, should be invited to bring back to class “sites of interest to them” for discussion and analysis. “We need, in short,” says Scholes, “to connect the development of reading and writing skills to

the real world around us and to the virtual world in which that actual world becomes available to us in the form of texts" (171).

McGann et al.'s approach is located squarely in a multilayered, reiterative practice of recitation and reflection conducted in what they call "The Learner's Classroom." The faculty member, in this pedagogy, "is urged to assume a learner's posture in relation to the students and what they need to learn." Students, "in a Wittgensteinian sense," can read, they say, and beginning with what they can do is a first step.

It is important that the students, both individually and collectively, come to see that they have these reading competencies, and also that they often don't perceive how and why they do. Coming to such realizations, students are positioned to see as well the limitations inherent in their own competencies. It is only at that point that they begin to gain access to *critical* reading skills. (147)

Just as important as the practice of critical reading is "that they [students] develop an ability to explain their judgments to others."

To carry out this pedagogy, McGann and colleagues use a reflective notebook where initial "pre-critical" moments of reading are recorded and where "a second-order process of reflection in which students could assess the relation of the two moments of reading" is also located, as is a third reflective moment. In a given unit of study, then, undergraduates

had been moved through a triple reflective process. They had, first of all, turned reflexively on [one text, in this case] *The Bride of Lammermoor*, and on their ideas about that book, in a series of integrated classes. Second, they could see (they learned by doing) that "comparison and contrast" exercises setting two or more works in dialectical relation—in this case, Scott's and West's—could be a powerful critical tool. About the ninth week of the course, reading these novels in relation to secondary critical and theoretical works became yet another stimulus to the students' thinking. (152)

The result of this approach, according to McGann et al., is that

students came to be able to see themselves as readers and to realize that the "meaning" of a novel is something they themselves construct on the basis of certain determinate ideas and materials; they understood that they can access the basis of their own judgments, though only with serious reflective thought. (156)

Gerald Graff's approach is more suggestive than particularized. Reflecting on his own experiences, Graff queries how "teachers can tease out the critical theory latent in student street smarts":

It certainly never dawned on me that I found the sports world more compelling than school because it was *more* intellectual than school, not less. Yet sports were full of challenging arguments, debates, problems for analysis, and meaningful statistical math in a way that school conspicuously was not. Furthermore, sports arguments, debates, and analyses made you part of a community, not just of your friends but of the national public culture. Whereas schoolwork seemingly isolated you, you could talk sports with people you had never met. Of course, schools can hardly be blamed for not making intellectual culture resemble the World Series or the Super Bowl, but schools might be learning things from the sports world about how to organize and represent intellectual culture, how to turn the intellectual game into arresting public spectacle. (“Hidden Intellectualism,” 28)

A new Graffian approach would be located in both spheres, that of the academy and that of the world: “It is a matter of finding points of convergence and translation, moments when student discourse can be translated into academic discourse and vice versa, producing a kind of ‘bilingualism’ on both sides of the student-teacher divide” (23).

In thinking about how to reinvigorate the study of literature, then, these scholars make four principal recommendations, *all of which underscore the importance of the role that students play in their own learning*:

1. Include the drama of literature, especially through performance and oral interpretation.
2. Connect the scholarly print tradition to resources on the Web; bring the resources of one into the outcomes of the other; connect the world and its intellectual pursuits to those of the class.
3. Read and study literature individually *and* socially.
4. To misphrase E. M. Forster, “Only reflect.”



We can change curriculum by design, of course. But as David Booth suggests, the best-laid plans cannot guarantee our success. Students must activate these plans, and within that dialogic relationship, learning occurs.

In “By Chance and by Design: Incidents of Learning,” Booth, a professor of philosophy at St. Olaf College in Minnesota, defines what it means to learn and explains how that learning happens. To do so, he focuses on what he calls “incidents of learning, a phrase meant to point to the way learning arises out of circumstances that are only partly under the control of the people involved.” A curriculum, he says,

can be planned in minute detail; a syllabus can be planned in minute detail; a lecture can be planned at the level of each specific word. Each of these preplanned forms expresses a coordinated, synthesized, integrated arrangement of meaning in the mind of the planner. And each of these is crucial to the activity of learning. Indeed in the best of circumstances these can be the occasion of sublime inspiration. . . . [At the same time, as we know,] none of these *guarantees* that any particular curriculum, syllabus, or lecture will be the occasion of meaning making for the particular students who swing within their orbits. (n. pag.)

This observation, if accurate, raises a question: how does what Booth calls “meaning making” happen? Booth’s reply is that for students, it “arises accidentally, depending on *what* they bring into the classroom, and on *how* the things they bring interact with whatever else is brought into the classroom by teachers and other students” (*italics mine*). In other words, all learning, depending on *teachers and other students*, is social. Just as important, learning is *situated*, depending on what students bring with them—and how they construct what they are given. As Booth argues, we can prepare for these accidents: we can

lay down conditions for them, we can encourage one another to be on the watch for them, and to respect (even treasure) them when they occur, and we can develop ways of relating to each other that increase the chances that incidents of learning will occur. (n. pag.)

But as he suggests, the very nature of the academy—through our grading criteria and our discourse practices—tends to discourage such accidents, such serendipity. Ironically, then, by excluding the students’ curricula, we can’t have coherent meaning in the classroom. Or, stated as a positive,

no matter how carefully crafted a curriculum, if coherent meanings emerge from the way elements in a curriculum are coordinated, they will emerge in *the student’s own, utterly unique experience, or not at all*. Meaning is the student’s achievement, and within limits that a community could probably come to agree on, the student’s unique way of doing it is intrinsically worth a teacher’s attention. (n. pag.)

In making his argument, Booth cites the work of various scholars, including Belenky et al.’s *Women’s Ways of Knowing* and Aristotle. He focuses specifically on Aristotle’s use of metaphor, claiming that Aristotle’s “genius” lies in “recognizing similarity in dissimilars.” It is through such recognition that coherence—and thus meaning—is made, especially between dissimilar phenomena, situated as they are in often disconnected institutional structures (such as established departments).

Here is Booth's example of such a connection: "[A] student whose literature class read Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* might find herself thinking in an unexpected way about a unit on genetic engineering in a biology class—and vice versa." His point, of course, is that while the university

makes no *promise* of coherence between literature and biology classes, students often discover meaningful connections of their own. And we—as individual faculty and institutions—can make a commitment to increase the *likelihood* that students will capitalize on such opportunities when they arise. (n. pag.)

Booth reminds us that our designs are always subject to chance, and he cautions us to build a curriculum that prepares and invites such fortuity.



Like Jerome McGann et al., David Booth sees in reflective practice a means of making education meaningful. In Booth's case, as in my own project, a portfolio—with its multiple reflective practices—locates the student's learning by providing texts that can chart development, allow analysis, and ground inquiry and projection.

The use of reflection to assist learning is, of course, not new.⁴ John Dewey wrote extensively about reflection, most explicitly in *How We*

Our premise, which we continue to test, was that it is such reflection more than anything the teacher may say that will induce students to discover the hidden intellectual in themselves.—Gerald Graff, "Hidden Intellectualism"

Think: A Restatement of the Relation of Reflective Thinking to the Educative Process, where he defines reflective thinking as "the kind of thinking that consists in turning a subject over in the mind and giving it serious and consecutive consideration" (3). Reflection, he says, is goal driven; since there "is a goal to be reached, . . . this end sets a task that controls the sequence of ideas" (6). Put definitively, reflection is the "[a]ctive, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or

supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and the further conclusions to which it tends" (9). In brief, reflection is defined as goal directed and sequential, controlled by the learner because he or she wants to learn something, to solve a real problem, to resolve an ambiguous situation, or to address a dilemma (14). It relies on a dialogue between multiple perspectives as the learner contrasts the believed and the known with presuppositions and necessary conclusions.

Reflection, Dewey also says, is habitual and learned. "While we cannot learn or be taught to think, we do have to learn *how* to think well," he says, "especially *how* to acquire the general *habit* of reflecting" (34). Since language "connects and organizes meanings as well as selects and fixes them" (245), it follows that reflection is language specific. Dewey claims that there are three uses of language, which people develop chronologically and apply: first, the attempt to influence others; second, the entering into of intimate relations; and only later, the third, the use of language "as a conscious vehicle of thought and language" (239). The task for the educator is therefore to "direct students' oral and written speech, used primarily for practical and social ends, so that gradually it shall become a conscious tool of conveying knowledge and assisting thought" (239).

Another theorist credited with defining reflection is Lev Vygotsky. Like Dewey, he sees the exchange characteristic of interplay and dialogue as the foundation of reflection. According to Vygotsky, "Reflective consciousness comes to the child through the portals of scientific concepts" (*Thought and Language*, 171)—in other words, through the formal concepts typically learned from adults and/or in school, which are juxtaposed with "spontaneous" concepts, those unmediated by external language or systematic representation. To illustrate, Vygotsky uses the task of tying a knot:

The activity of consciousness can take different directions; it may illuminate only a few aspects of a thought or an act. I have just tied a knot—I have done so consciously, yet I cannot explain how I did it, because my awareness was centered on the knot rather than on my own motions, the *how* of my action. When the latter becomes the object of my awareness, I shall have become fully conscious. We use *consciousness* to denote awareness of the activity of the mind—the consciousness of being conscious. (170)

Reflection, however, requires both kinds of thinking, the scientific and the spontaneous, the strength of scientific concepts deriving from their "conscious and deliberate character," the spontaneous from "the situational, empirical, and practical" (*Thought and Languages*, 194). Speaking generally, Vygotsky says,

the two processes . . . are related and constantly influence each other. They are part of a single process: the development of concept formation, which is affected by varying external and internal conditions but is essentially a unitary process, not a conflict of antagonistic, mutually exclusive forms of thinking." (157)

We see these processes in dialogue especially at certain times of development, he explains, such as when children are between the ages of seven and twelve. Then

the child's thought bumps into the wall of its own inadequacy, and the resultant bruises—as was widely observed by J. J. Rousseau—become its best teachers. Such collisions are a powerful stimulus, evoking awareness, which in its turn, magically reveals to a child a chamber of conscious and voluntary concepts. (165)

Learning thus requires scientific concepts, spontaneous concepts, and interplay *between them*. As in the case of tying a knot, we use this dialogue to focus on the end—the knot—as well as on the processes enabling us to achieve the end.

For Vygotsky, as for Dewey, language is critical for reflection: “The relation of thought to word is not a thing but a process, a continual movement back and forth from thought to word and from word to thought.” This interplay, then, is both foundational, in terms of our being human, and continuous. It begins at the moment of birth, as the child engages with—interplays with—the others of his or her environment, and according to Vygotsky, it is through this communal play and interaction that the child develops individuality:

Piaget and others have shown that reasoning occurs in a children's group as an argument intended to prove one's own point of view before it occurs as an internal activity whose distinctive feature is that the child begins to perceive and check the basis of his thoughts. Such observations prompted Piaget to conclude that communication produces the need for checking and confirming thoughts, a process that is characteristic of adult thought. In the same way that internal speech and reflective thought arise from the interactions between the child and persons in her environment, these interactions provide the source of development of a child's voluntary behavior. (*Mind in Society*, 89–90)

In other words, we learn to understand ourselves through explaining ourselves to others. To do this, we rely on a reflection that involves a *checking* against, a *confirming*, and a *balancing* of self with others (12–13).

More recently, philosopher Donald Schön (“Causality”) has offered another, related theoretical perspective from which to view both teaching and learning, the perspective that frames much of my work in this project. Known principally for his definition of the reflective practitioner, Schön argues that it is by reflecting on our own work—by knowing it, by reviewing it, by discerning patterns in it, by projecting appropriately from those patterns, and by using such projections to hypothesize a new way of thinking about a situation—that we theorize our own practices and that we

come to know and understand our work and perhaps thus to improve it. In other words, reflection is *rhetorical*.

In explaining the connection of reflection to epistemology, Schön (“Causality”) begins by distinguishing between two kinds of knowing: that of the technical realm and that of the nontechnical. The world of technical rationality, Schön says, allows for a knowing by way of causal inference that is controlled: the lab experiment, for instance, that confirms the presence of an antibody in the blood. This world is neat, clean, controlled, and therefore managed quite neatly.

The second world is the world in which we *live*—and it is certainly the world of the classroom—the world where causal inference is a judgment call, no matter how well informed. Such knowledge relies on the expertise of its participants who, through reflection-in-action—a rethinking “lead[ing] to on-the-spot experiment and further thinking that affects what we do” (Schön, “Causality” 29)—become skillful improvisers. Given that students work in this second world—the world of teaching and learning—they must find effective ways to ground and to exercise both inquiry and judgment. Equally important, Schön says, it is only through reflection that they—and we—are better able to accommodate ourselves to the next iteration of a similar instance:

In normal social science, the choice of questions, the selection of variables, and the design of experiments are all designed to produce externally valid causal generalizations of the covering law type. In contrast, causal inquiry in organizations typically centers on a particular situation in a single organization, and when it is successful, it yields not covering laws but prototypical models of causal pattern that may guide inquiry in other organizational situations—prototypes that depend, for their validity, on modification and testing “in the next situation.” “Reflective transfer” seems to me a good label for this kind of generalization.” (97)

Key to Schön’s perspective, then, are two kinds of reflection. Reflection-in-action is the process of thinking about the nature of a practice while that practice is ongoing. Reflective transfer is the process of thinking that allows us to generalize from specifics, to develop schemata and other models that move us from one specific instance to another, and to create a prototype that lends itself to transfer (50–51). In other words, through reflective transfer we create the specific practice from which we may derive principles toward *prototypical models*. Not least, the ability to *see oneself so generalize* contributes to identity formation.

Through reflection and awareness, a reader is developed.



What follows in subsequent chapters is one attempt to think about what it might mean as a curricular matter to make the student the site for learning literature in a general education literature class. I focus on the gen ed class as a prototype, although it can take several forms. The effort, generally, is to help students:

1. Read
2. Read critically and appreciatively
3. Read reflectively
4. Connect these readings to the world and back
5. Understand the differences between kinds of readings and texts
6. Make associations and create habits of mind that will influence their practices and judgments as they go forward

Much of our thinking about literature has focused elsewhere, perhaps rightly so, on the college student planning to teach middle or secondary school, for example, and on the English major. But as we see

The work of general education is critical inquiry and critical exchange. The fundamental commitment underlying this work is the giving of reasons. When high school teachers ask me, as they often do, what they should teach their students, this is what I answer. Don't teach them writing. Don't teach them reading. Teach them the habit of giving reasons for what they think, and explain how reading and writing can help them do this.—James Slevin

in the proposals of McCormick and Scholes and Graff and McGann et al., we are still in search of what we want the general education literature class to do.⁵ Equally important, as I think about such a course and as I construct this curriculum, I also want to think about how reflection needs to be woven into the curriculum.

I'll begin by thinking about the curriculum that students bring in the door with them: *the lived curriculum*. As Anne Gere has shown, students learn well in sites other than schools.⁶ And even when they are school learners, no student walks in the door as a

blank slate. Each one brings with him or her a set of prior courses and experiences and connections that contextualize the delivered curriculum. How, we might ask, can we tap that lived curriculum when students enter the course, invite it into the course not only as a way to engage students but also as intellectual activity in its own right, and, not least, as a means of linking to the delivered curriculum? Just as important, if we want students to carry the course forward in a living way, we might think about making that future connection part of the curriculum.

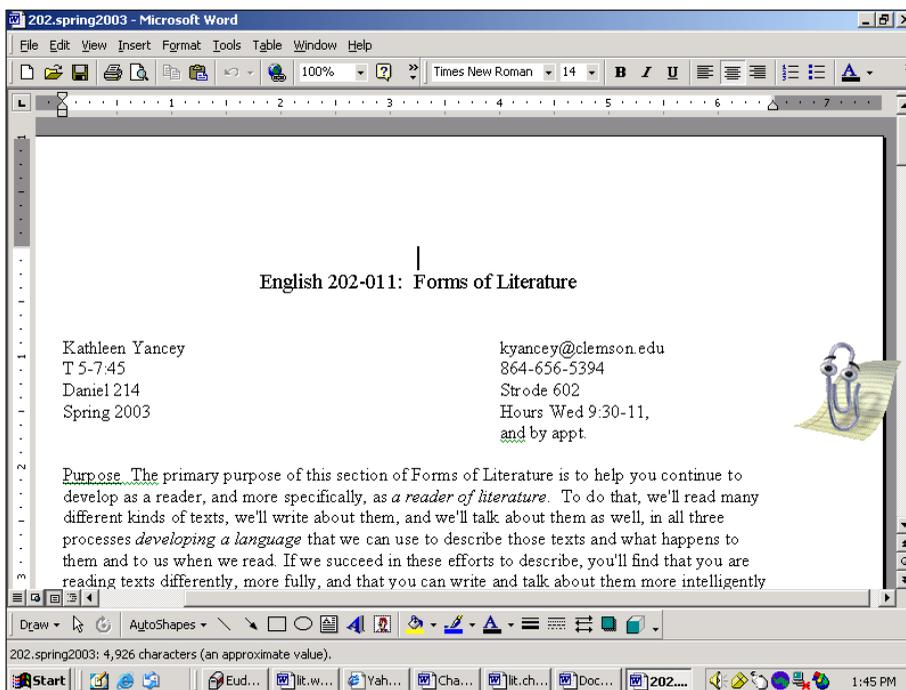


Figure 1.1

A second curriculum, the one we are most familiar with, is the *delivered curriculum*, the one we design. We see it in syllabi, where course goals are articulated (see Figure 1.1). We see it in assignments, where students deal with the specifics of the curriculum. We see it in readings, where students enter a specific discourse and specific ways of thinking. We see it in the vocabulary of the course. Given that the students in a general education literature course are not novices in the discipline, but rather potential members of a reading public, we see it in our desire that students continue to engage with the processes and materials of the course once it has concluded.

The third curriculum is the *experienced curriculum*. I observed earlier that my family and I go to the same film but see different movies; we both share that experience and don't. Likewise, students come to the same course, but that course differs somewhat from one person to the next (Yancey, "Teacher Portfolios"). Inviting that experienced curriculum into the course, making it visible and thus accessible and indeed legitimate, is yet another task we might assign ourselves.

The next three chapters—"The Lived Curriculum," "The Delivered Curriculum," and "The Experienced Curriculum: Closing the

But reading is interactive: all readers concretize the meanings of the texts within the frameworks provided by their own repertoires. They bring their own associations to help make meanings from texts, and their readings may therefore often be quite different from the writer's or the original audience's. Readers will understand and interpret texts differently not just because of their psychological profiles or personality types, however, as reader-response critics would have it, but rather for culturally specific reasons—because they bring different gender-specific, race-specific, generation-specific or culture-specific questions to their reading.—Kathleen McCormick

Circle”—speak to these curricula, showing the logic of each, illustrating the logic through assignments and student responses, and exploring in the process how reflective practice is a necessary corollary of literature practice. In Chapter 5, we review a culminating activity, the literature portfolio, by exploring two genres of such portfolios, the print and the digital, showing how to move from one to the next, and arguing that the virtues of one are quite different from

the virtues of the other. Not least, in Chapter 6 we conclude by thinking about how all this fits together and what it means for a new literature practice, and by considering the kind of questions prompted by this approach as well as some future explorations worth considering.



The postsecondary institution of learning is organized into boxes—departments and programs and centers and colleges. If there is to be integration, the student will be its locus. If we understand where that site of integration is—within multiple curricula—and if we provide space for all three such curricula as well as dialogue between them, we may find that our students learn more as well as other than we anticipate.

Notes

1. It's also fair to note that students exercise choice as a substitute only when they “win” a challenge.

2. General education is hardly a unified construct, as we know. Portland State University, for example, bundles it all into a set of vertical, team-taught interdisciplinary seminars, and to good effect; many places use cafeteria models, in which students often choose from a buffet of courses, sometimes on the basis of time the course is taught (rather than as a construction of an intellec-

tual or academic plan for development); other schools are moving to a more outcomes-based model.

3. As Anne Gere and her colleagues show, the cognitive model doesn't have to presume direct instruction: see Ellis, Gere, and Lamberton.

4. The following discussion is adapted from *Reflection in the Writing Classroom* by Kathleen Blake Yancey. Reprinted by permission of Utah State University Press.

5. Ironically, we have of course thought about the general education literature class as part of the *writing* curriculum, as the work of Young and Fulwiler, for instance, attests. But most of us haven't thought very hard or well about what such a course ought to do outside of that context.

6. The term *lived curriculum* is in some ways similar to Gere's use of *extracurriculum*. As she notes,

Arthur Applebee also uses the term "extracurricular," but for him it describes one of three traditions—the ethical, the classical, and the extracurriculum—from which English studies emerged. Applebee defines the extracurriculum as the nonacademic tradition that contributed to the development of English studies. Like Rudolph, he employs their term extracurriculum to describe eighteenth and nineteenth century college literary clubs and recounts how these groups discussed vernacular literature not judged worthy of academic study. As Applebee explains, college literary clubs also sponsored libraries, speakers, and magazines, providing a context where students could "polish their skills in English composition" (12). Applebee's extracurriculum does not include fraternities or athletic groups, but it confirms Rudolph's point that the extracurriculum lent undergraduates power in American colleges because the curriculum was adapted to their interests. Gerald Graff emulates Applebee's description of extracurricular literary clubs, noting their contribution to the development of English studies. (79)

Gere also notes this usage of *extracurriculum* to describe "a white male enterprise" (79) that "positions the extracurriculum as a way-station on the route toward a fully professionalized academic department, thereby implying that the extracurriculum withered" once its work was done. My use of the term *lived curriculum* thus borrows some of the same experience in that it acknowledges the curriculum occurring outside of institutional educational sites. At the same time, it includes all learning prior to the site in question.
