In my dissertation, I take up Kathy Yancey’s call (2016) to compositionists to consider reflection as rhetorical: an activity that is constantly occurring, emerging in relations to various factors, and inspiring resultant action. Yancey pushes us to investigate the rhetorical nature of reflection so that we can better understand where reflection emerges from, what reflection does and enables, and how we can make fuller use of reflection in our teaching. Educational theorists have highlighted the central role that reflective practices have played in student learning for decades—an importance made evident in the widespread integration of reflection in pedagogies across the disciplines (Bowman and Addyman, 2014; Gupta et al, 2014; Sommers et al, 2016; Turns, Cuddihy, & Guan, 2010). Within composition studies, reflection is identified as a threshold concept, instrumental in students’ development as writers because of its relationship to transfer (Taczack, 2016). Early research on the writing process showed how reflection is intimately connected with writing (Emig, 1971; Flower and Hayes 1980; Pianko, 1979; Perl, 1980), and since then, compositionists have integrated reflection in pedagogy as a means to aid assessment, first in portfolios for traditional writing assignments (Yancey, 1998) and later as a means for locating rhetorical awareness when assessing multimodal projects (Selfe, 2003; Shipka, 2009, 2011; Yancey, 2004). Reflection’s relationship to assessment has made curated, written, and retroactive reflection the primary type of reflection that has been theorized, researched, and practiced in composition (Yancey, 2016). Because “we are now riding a wave of transfer scholarship that began with first-year writing but has diversified to other areas” (Baird and Dilger, 2017, p.685), compositionists have increasingly worked to understand how students transfer knowledge across contexts. Because of reflection’s relationship to transfer and that reflection research has mostly focused on curated, retroactive texts, I argue that we need to better understand reflection-in-motion, or how reflection occurs through dynamic, interactive, and multimodal activity, so we can see how students make connections and adapt knowledge in the moment.

In order to capture rich and detailed instances of reflection-in-motion, I did daily observations of two multimodal composition classes, interviewed eight focal students and their two teachers on a biweekly basis about reflective activity within and outside the classroom, and collected various reflective artifacts. My research takes an ecological, ethnographic approach to examine how the rhetorical nature of reflection interacts with our understanding of knowledge transfer, critical thinking, and metacognition, focusing specifically on what it means to think of reflection as rhetorical and how such a rhetorical notion of reflection might affect our pedagogies by facilitating student learning and agency. By engaging in qualitative methods and analysis of interview data, multimodal discourse analysis of class observations, and genre analysis of reflective artifacts, I identified different qualities that make reflection rhetorical: reflection is rhetorical because it is ongoing, or habitual and recurring; embedded, or happening within the learning and writing process; distributed, or emerging within multiple agencies; and entangled, or intertwining with various material and emotional factors. This research gives a nuanced perspective into the ways reflection shapes the learning process and writing choices. In sum, this dissertation seeks to understand the extent to which habitual reflection helps students move knowledge across contexts.

The dissertation has five chapters, the first two of which outline the theoretical and methodological contributions. The first chapter explores how research on reflection provided groundwork about how reflection is rhetorical. John Dewey, Donald Schön, and Lev Vygotsky provide understandings of how reflection emerges from collaboration and results in action, which gave the first insight into how reflection
might be rhetorical. Because composition has been mostly concerned with reflection's relationship to assessment practices in the 1980s and 1990s (Yancey, 1998), research has most often identified how reflection is rhetorical because reflective texts for assessment purposes are often performative, a chance for students to curate a reflection they think will be valued by their instructor (Conway, 1994; Beaufort, 2016). As we broaden our understanding of reflection as rhetorical, we must understand how dynamic, multimodal, ongoing interactions like peer review, student teacher conferences, and group work are also forms of reflection, and develop methods that can follow those interactions, a task I take up in the second chapter of the dissertation where I outline my methodology, explaining how I layer ethnographic methodologies with genre analysis and multimodal discourse analysis so I can be responsive to reflection in motion. Throughout the scholarly conversation about reflection, researchers have consistently looked to written reflection and interviews with students to understand what reflection looks like, but these methodologies tend to isolate and stabilize reflection, treating it as an activity that can be faithfully recalled. (Abstract shortened by ProQuest.)