
Rhetorical Invention, Conflict Resolution, and Critical Awareness in Composition Instruction

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The challenge to civilized people is to contextualize conflict so that its energies can be directed toward positive ends.... Rhetoric is at least a metaphor for all human relationships and therefore is a system for combining and resolving conflicting interests.

—Richard Lloyd-Jones (“Rhetoric”)

As Richard Lloyd-Jones suggests, we need to place conflicts in different contexts in order to resolve them. Only then can we understand what causes different opinions to become destructive. In “Rhetoric and Conflict Resolution,” Lloyd-Jones defines conflict as “diversity of point of view and desires” (172), emphasizing its inevitability and ubiquity in our lives. Simply put, conflict is an expressed difference in opinion or belief that cannot be accommodated within its context. People experience conflict when they are unwilling to accept others’ beliefs regarding a shared situation. Student writers experience conflict when they fail to critically analyze viewpoints that challenge their claims, and their writing offers one-sided evidence that fails to consider the complex perspectives held by varying audiences. Fortunately, however, several specific classroom practices can improve our students’ abilities to better understand conflict, enabling them to write both more analytically and thoughtfully.

In the following, I forward approaches to composition instruction that embrace conflict as a productive heuristic for rhetorical invention, a dialectic experience that improves critical thinking. In particular, I suggest viewing inquiry as a type of conflict resolution where students must negotiate with shared meaning in order to establish their own voices and places in academic conversations. This approach to conflict resolution is similar to traditional and transformative approaches of mediation where disputants develop new ways to recognize the views of others and empower themselves.

Much contemporary scholarship in rhetoric has focused on the relationship between conflict and communication. Perhaps the most significant contributions come from rhetorician and literary critic Kenneth Burke. Rooted in the desire to improve human cooperation, Burke’s scholarship on rhetoric reflects his desire to

eliminate conflict or “purify war” (*A Grammar of Motives*). Much of Burke’s writing comes from a time period following the Great Depression—in between the world wars when structural violence was ubiquitous—and reflects his interest in better understanding human differences. For Burke, language and communication are at the heart of conflict, so he interprets rhetoric as “the use of language as a symbolic means of inducing cooperation in beings that by nature respond to symbols” (*Rhetoric* 41). Through rhetorical criticism, Burke attempts to uncover the many ways that language both reflects and refracts “reality” and envisions rhetoric as an appropriate tool for improving human relations. Burke’s expansive understanding of rhetoric also helps move beyond overly simplistic understandings of rhetoric as persuasion and demonstrates the significance of cooperation in successful communication.

Burke furthers this idea through his concept of “identification,” a concept significant to composition theory. It amends the understanding of rhetoric-as-persuasion to directly involve cooperation and consubstantiality. Burke explains, “You persuade a man only insofar as you can talk his language by speech, gesture, tonality, order, image, attitude, idea, identifying your ways with his” (*Rhetoric* 55). For Burke, persuasion does not necessarily imply action; it primarily (at least in a relatively free society) involves changing someone’s attitude. While attempting to persuade others, a rhetor naturally suggests a difference of opinion exists: “identification implies division ..., matters of socialization and faction ..., [and] a wavering line between peace and conflict” (*Rhetoric* 45). Because of its understanding of union and separation, Burke’s expanded rhetoric is well suited for composition, as student writers often struggle to identify with their audiences and new discourse communities.

Furthermore, Richard McKeon’s investigations in rhetoric’s problem-solving nature also strengthen rhetoric’s connection to conflict. Motivated by developments in “new rhetorics” and working with concepts from philosophy and classical rhetoric, McKeon argues that rhetoric is a method for helping negotiate the “resolution of new problems” (127). To further connect rhetoric and conflict, McKeon applies Aristotle’s concept of *architecton*, or master craftsman, which argues that rhetoric, since it owes allegiance to no core discipline (like geometry or chemistry, for example), can be applied to other disciplines (Aristotle 28-29). Because rhetoric, according to McKeon, is both productive (involved in the process of creating arguments) and architectonic (involved in the structuring of thoughts), it is well suited to the type of problem-solving needed in conflict resolution. He explains, “Rhetoric provides the devices by which to determine the characteristics and problems of our times and to form the art by which to

guide actions for the solution of our problems and the improvement of our circumstances” (134). This organizational, or architectonic, nature enables people to apply rhetoric to any discipline and discover how knowledge is constructed and acted upon in conflict situations. For example, student writers can analyze a given situation through the rhetorical proofs of pathos, logos, and ethos in order to create more effective discourse. These terms, adopted from Aristotle’s *On Rhetoric*, provide an organizational scheme for categorizing aspects of discourse in order to better understand its functionality. Thus, as an architectonic art, rhetoric creates new ways to understand situations. Applied to conflict, rhetoric can discover new connections between diverse interpretations and help interpret competing worldviews.

Concepts like identification and rhetoric as architectonic provide frameworks for helping writers better understand and enter new communities, contributing to an understanding of the interdependent relationship between writer and reader. This relationship has motivated scholars interested in discourse communities to examine how certain discourses facilitate inclusion and exclusion from more dominant discourse. In “Collaborative Learning and the Conversation of Mankind,” for example, Kenneth Bruffee examines how difference creates opportunities for understanding. Working with Richard Rorty’s “normal” and “abnormal” discourses, Bruffee argues that learning occurs within students’ experiences in discourse communities beyond their own, in situations where “consensus no longer exists with regard to rules, assumptions, goals, values, or mores” (648). According to Bruffee, these moments generate conflicts and lead to cognitive dissonance, the type of learning that occurs as different discourse communities interact with each other and generate new ideas and relationships.

Forwarding the conversation, John Trimbur agrees with Bruffee’s assertions of collaborative learning but points out how consensus, by its nature, ignores conflict. In “Consensus and Difference in Collaborative Learning,” Trimbur insists on viewing consensus not through terms of agreement but through conflict, which enables composition teachers to focus on diverse, often marginalized voices (608). Because consensus can potentially ignore conflicts and differences, he displaces it “to a horizon which may never be reached” (615). Instead, he offers “dissensus,” the conversation generated by the “marginalized voices, the resistance and contestation both within and outside the conversation” (608). Instructors therefore should carefully use consensus not as a classroom goal but as a springboard through which to generate a conversation where differences begin to emerge.

As a result of these examinations, concepts such as “dissensus” entered pedagogy conversations and made spaces for different types of conflict to emerge

in the classroom. Most notably, Mary Louise Pratt's "Arts of the Contact Zone" demonstrates how important conflict is to the classroom. Defined as "social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power," contact zones provide teachers themes by which to analyze conflicts within different cultures (34). Pratt lays out several pedagogical tools—storytelling, critique, and comparison, for example—that can help generate contact zones and encourage what she describes as "cultural mediation," the process of working out differences in cultures to help foster learning (40). Contact zones, therefore, attempt to create places to study cultural differences, effectively transforming the classroom into a place where conflict can safely emerge and invite engagement.

Such work is significant to understanding constructive communication. Beyond illuminating connections between rhetoric and conflict, it demonstrates how academic investigations into knowledge construction can help people improve critical awareness and create mutual understanding. Moreover, such examinations emphasize how specific strategies from rhetoric and composition actively improve critical awareness, strengthening students' abilities to join new discourse communities and participate in academic conversations.

Rhetorical invention has long been significant—albeit somewhat controversial—to composition studies. As explained by Young and Becker, "The strength and worth of rhetoric seem ... to be tied to the art of invention; rhetoric tends to become a superficial and marginal concern when it is separated from systematic methods of inquiry and problems of content" (127). Within rhetoric scholarship two general views of invention have prevailed: one view sees invention as a static process of uncovering existing information, while the other views invention as a dynamic process where rhetors create new information. In the former process, rhetors simply examine relevant bodies of knowledge—communities, logic, reason—to understand a topic better, whereas in the latter, rhetors utilize various methods of critical inquiry to generate information. Consequently, rhetorical invention can be generally defined as "the process and art of creation, discovery, or problem solving" (Young, "Invention" 349). Through its focus on rhetorical theories of knowledge construction as well as applications of heuristics and prewriting strategies, rhetorical invention offers a variety of ways to generate ideas.

A comprehensive understanding of the significance of rhetorical invention in composition can be seen in classical rhetoric. Throughout the seminal *On Rhetoric*, Aristotle emphasizes the importance of *inventio*, or rhetorical invention, by defining rhetoric as "an ability, in each [particular] case to see the available means of persuasion" (36). This definition—perhaps the most often quoted of

rhetoric—suggests the significance of “seeing,” which is sometimes translated as “discovering” (the Greek word is from *theorein*), these means through the arts of rhetorical invention. Rhetors develop persuasive arguments by discovering and inventing proofs effective to their topic and audiences. To be effective, rhetors must analyze and incorporate community beliefs, and according to Aristotle, this process usually occurs in the early stages of developing persuasive arguments.

Perhaps an even more important component of rhetorical invention evolving from classical rhetoric is the concept of organizational schema, or heuristics. Also detailed by Aristotle, heuristics, derived from the Greek *heurisko*, or “I find,” are lines of questioning that abet the discovery of information relevant to a given topic. In *On Rhetoric* Aristotle provides numerous aids to rhetorical invention: Aristotle’s topics, or *topoi*, are divided into “common” and “special.” Of the common topics, Aristotle suggests speakers should be aware of ways to make propositions correspond with their respective occasions of speech (deliberative, judicial, and epideictic). He argues, “it is necessary for the deliberative speaker to have propositions about the possible and the impossible and [about] whether something has happened or not and [about] whether it will or will not come to be” (51). Thus, these occasions are common to general beliefs and cover strategies such as comparison and definition. Book Two of *On Rhetoric* provides twenty-eight common topics to help rhetors explore lines of argument, ranging from opposition to comparison to probability. These generalizations were intended to help rhetors develop persuasive arguments on a variety of different subjects. Aristotle’s *topoi* thus contribute methods of seeing rhetorical invention as a dynamic process that directly links rhetoric to the discovery of knowledge, a view strengthened in contemporary investigations.

Aristotle’s examinations in *On Rhetoric* not only established the significance of rhetorical invention but also influenced contemporary scholars to expand ideas of social knowledge construction and heuristics. Neo-Aristotelian approaches have led to broader understandings of how various *topoi* can be used as generative means of invention. For example, Carolyn Miller, in her recent “The Aristotelian *Topos*: Hunting for Novelty,” forwards the notion that the *topoi* serve as places where meaning can be generated. For Miller, the topics are containers where “productive and not completely predictable or predetermined combinations of concepts may occur” (136). The topics, therefore, enable a generative act that is directly bound to community beliefs. They also stress how heuristic procedures can aid invention.

Writing specialists understand heuristics as not only a line of argument but also any device that “enables one to translate knowledge about something into knowledgeable practice” (Young and Liu xvi). Common contemporary invention exercises in composition pedagogy, for example, are brainstorming procedures

like clustering, free writing, and journalism's five w's—procedures that encourage individuals to discover new knowledge about topics. As these different varieties suggest, it is important to regard heuristics as both systematic and flexible, not merely mechanical devices that confine one's invention process (Young, "Concepts" 198). Aristotle's *inventio* and the accompanying invention exercises are significant to a contemporary understanding of composition; moreover, they create opportunities for writing instructors to encourage different points of view in writing.

In the classroom, theories of rhetorical invention help students organize situations, invent solutions, and create persuasive appeals that are based on their discoveries. They provide *topoi* for analyzing lines of arguments, heuristics for organizing situations, and enthymemes for incorporating social knowledge. Specific composition-based invention strategies like prewriting and brainstorming offer proven methods that help writers expand their abilities to critique and develop arguments. Whereas the aforementioned principles offer strategies for better understanding differences and provide specific ways of fostering constructive conversations, three different contemporary invention theories offer writers unique ways to understand and possibly resolve conflict situations: theories focusing on social interaction, collaboration, and openness. When students critically analyze writing situations using these strategies, they can increase their abilities to interact with differing viewpoints, ultimately improving the critical nature of their work.

In *Invention as a Social Act*, Karen Burke LeFevre demonstrates how a social understanding of rhetorical invention affects both social invention and conflict resolution practices. She argues that people's inventive processes are limited by what she refers to as the "Platonic view," an understanding of invention not as a process occurring between an individual and society as Aristotle asserts but as a process where an isolated thinker discovers knowledge alone. This understanding—perpetuated by romanticism, individualism, and capitalism to a certain degree—has both helped and harmed current understandings of rhetorical invention. It helps by stressing the importance of invention in generative processes, encouraging reflection, and acknowledging individual merit by encouraging writers to find resources from within. But, according to LeFevre, it harms because it considers invention as a solitary act and separates individuals from society, thus supporting an understanding of invention as a "closed, one-way system," ignoring the potential of collaboration (32). LeFevre amends these misunderstandings by developing a collaborative theory of invention.

Unfortunately, the Platonic view of invention, according to LeFevre, ignores the dynamic social nature of language. Language use directly links individuals to

their societies so much that individuals (even in solitude) are influenced by shared language conventions. As LeFevre explains, “Language plays an active role in the generation of what we come to know and say, and in that role, it demonstrates the inextricable involvement of social elements in invention” (120). Consequently, individual interpretation is relative to specific cultures and worldviews, and invention builds upon knowledge relative to social understanding. LeFevre, therefore, redefines invention as the process of “individuals interact[ing] dialectically with socioculture in a distinctive way to generate something” (33). Because of the commonality of shared language, she argues, invention is inevitably social.

As LeFevre demonstrates, invention is never a solitary act, regardless of the physical condition of the inventor. The degrees to which social factors affect invention are mapped out by LeFevre through a continuum on social perspectives. The continuum provides four different degrees of invention, each demonstrating a different level of social involvement:

1. *Platonic view* where invention is a private, individual process.
2. *Internal dialogic view* where invention takes place during an internal dialogue modeled after Freud’s theories of the individual.
3. *Collaborative view* where invention occurs during the actions, interpretations, and responses of collaborators.
4. *Social collective view* where invention occurs only after various social collectives (institutions and cultural influences) have influenced the inventor. (49-50)

It is important to note that these categories do not confine processes of invention; one instance could easily include elements of all four categories. But they do demonstrate the varying ways invention can be influenced by factors beyond the isolated individual, helping student writers become capable of seeing how their ideas are socially influenced.

When placed in relation to other views, the Platonic view limits the discovery of knowledge to an isolated process. It ignores the significant reality that ideas are “generally initiated by an inventor (or rhetor) and brought to completion by an audience” (38). More importantly, the Platonic view ignores the collaborative nature of invention. Collaboration is not just limited to direct communication; it also occurs indirectly in a process of invention wherein ideas are constantly being modified and reaffirmed to conform to the beliefs of peers and communities. LeFevre calls the generative advantage “resonance,” a term she borrows from Harold Laswell’s “The Social Setting of Creativity.” As LeFevre explains, “Resonance comes about when an individual act—a ‘vibration’—is intensified and prolonged by sympathetic vibrations. It may occur when someone acts as a facilitator to assist or extend what is regarded as primarily another’s invention, or when people

are mutual collaborators at work on a task” (65). For example, students could be discussing a situation involving unequal treatment of a peer and, in the process of judging the treatment, echo ideas from the founding fathers that “all men are created equal.” Resonance, therefore, works both directly and indirectly as individuals collaborate, constantly influencing our ideas and methodologies.

Understanding invention as a social process, which is important for understanding conflict in composition, helps individuals recognize how different ideas or beliefs resonate with varying outlooks and also encourages individuals to work together to understand their differences. LeFevre realizes this importance and demonstrates how an understanding of open, social invention can help resolve conflict by referencing the Camp David Peace Accord negotiations between Egyptian president Anwar Sadat and Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin. During this negotiation, a team of American mediators worked with the disputing parties and focused on drafting a mutual agreement that summarized their conflict over the Sinai Peninsula. As the mediators went back and forth between parties, the text became a collaborative document with multiple authors:

After each meeting, the negotiating text was revised in light of the criticism received. After twenty-three revisions, the American team formulated an actual proposal, phrased so that it could be answered by a yes or no: they proposed a demilitarized Sinai that would return to Egypt’s rule, thus achieving security for Israel and sovereignty for Egypt. Begin and Sadat each agreed to accept this proposed text if the other would. (43)

By describing an international peace negotiation of epic proportions, LeFevre expands the scope of rhetorical invention. She provides a tangible situation where an understanding of invention that acknowledges the social nature of invention helps people work with their differences possibly to create a resolution. In addition, she demonstrates the importance of invention beyond the composition classroom and academics. In the preceding conflict scenario, rhetorical invention provided negotiators new opportunities to work together and create resolutions whereas a static, asocial understanding of invention could limit possibilities for resolution. As LeFevre’s example illustrates, closed conceptions of invention could have grave consequences—preventing peace, for example.

Within the classroom, instructors can foster the social nature of invention by asking students to perform a preliminary investigation of their research topic. By uncovering the existing academic discussion and documenting it in a literature review or annotated bibliography, students can begin to join the conversation and become familiar with the resonating ideas and vibrations. On a broader scale, instructors can design courses that seek to identify these different viewpoints

regarding a variety of texts. As Pratt demonstrates through the course titled “Cultures, Ideas, and Values” described in “Arts of the Contact Zone,” students can be asked to examine texts and locate their own personal understandings in relation to conflicting social and cultural viewpoints.

Viewed as a social process, rhetorical invention can encourage people to (re)consider their own processes of working with conflict. A social view of invention helps people understand that solving problems requires patience and participation. Such an understanding of rhetorical invention asks writers to seek resonance for their ideas and, most importantly, encourages individuals to work together by reminding them of the social nature of effective communication.

Approaches to invention derived from Carl Rogers’ research in psychotherapy are especially applicable to composition. Regarded as perhaps the most influential psychologist in American history, Rogers dedicated much of his work to developing a nondirective approach to psychology commonly known as “client” or “person-centered” (Kirschenbaum xi). Rogers believed an ideal environment, usually created through therapy, could help individuals better understand their differing beliefs. He explains, “the individual has within himself or herself vast resources for self-understanding, for altering his or her self-concept, attitudes, and self-directed behavior—and ... these resources can be tapped if only a definable climate of facilitative psychological attitudes can be provided” (“A Client-centered” 135). He dedicated much of his work to creating this environment in order to facilitate effective communication.

As a psychologist, Rogers discovered that communication between therapist and client was often impeded by powerful emotions and premature judgments, actions that can easily lead to conflict. He therefore focuses on establishing “mutual communication” in order to improve opportunities for collaboration:

Mutual communication tends to be pointed toward solving a problem rather than toward attacking a person or group. It leads to a situation in which I see how the problem appears to you, as well as to me, and you see how it appears to me, as well as to you. (*On Becoming* 336)

In order to foster mutual communication, Rogers developed a process that encourages the back-and-forth, dialectic method emphasized by Plato and Aristotle. Especially effective when strong values and beliefs block communication or a sense of “threat” exists from opposing values and beliefs, this method attempts to decrease conflict and increase communication by creating a more dynamic understanding of invention. It assumes that invention must remain open prior to and during the dialectic processes of communication. Originally used between therapist and patient, Rogers’ method encourages individuals to first recognize

the viewpoints of others prior to making a claim. It forwards a collaborative understanding of invention that has applications far beyond psychology.

In “Communication: Its Blocking and Its Facilitation,” Rogers hypothesizes that communication sometimes is ineffective because limited invention strategies lead to isolation. For Rogers, contentious situations prevent people from reaching resolution by prematurely blinding them to opportunities. He argues, “The major barrier to mutual interpersonal communication is our very natural tendency to judge, to evaluate, to approve or disapprove, the statement of the other person” (285). Any system that limits how an individual creates solutions and prohibits acceptance of others’ ideas, therefore, obstructs the natural dialectic process; it does not allow people to speak and be heard. Rogers explains that in order for “real communication” to occur, one must be open to the other’s views; the “evaluative tendency is avoided, when we listen with understanding” (“Communication” 285). For Rogers, successful communication depends upon the ability of both parties to willingly listen to competing views. This more active role of listener creates a more collaborative environment. Collaboration and invention, therefore, are at the heart of the Rogerian method, an approach to communication that applies to conflict situations beyond therapy.

In rhetoric and composition, Rogers’ ideas were welcomed with great enthusiasm. As rhetoric scholar Jim Corder observes, Rogers’ ideas contributed to “changing our way of thinking about argument” in contemporary theory and have been seminal to contemporary understandings of rhetorical invention (“Argument” 20). Scholars, especially “new rhetoricians” interested in expanding rhetoric’s scope beyond categories of persuasive speech, aligned the new communicative strategy as parallel to the cooperative understanding of rhetoric. They understood it as a method that can help individuals expand their knowledge. Scholar Nathaniel Teich explains this reception: “Rogers invited us to improve the quality of our communication by applying his principles in our personal, professional, and broader social and political interactions” (1). As a result, composition teachers applied Rogers’ adaptable method to various classroom strategies.

Perhaps the most significant of these composition strategies is Richard Young, Alton Becker, and Kenneth Pike’s application, which was concerned with how Rogers’ ideas could help students establish “alternative ways of knowing” (Brent 456). In *Rhetoric: Discovery and Change*, they consider “Rogerian argument” as an effective way of “discovering information, forming concepts, seeing relationships, and analyzing and solving problems prior to the act of communicating” (xii). They suggest it as a possible means of softening the barriers that often distort people’s invention schema: “The Rogerian Strategy seeks to reduce the reader’s

sense of threat so that he will be able to consider alternatives that may contribute to the creation of a more accurate image of the world and the elimination of conflict between writer and reader” (275). They do not limit their view of conflict to that between writer and reader, however; they focus much of their energy on developing a way for writers to expand their worldviews.

In the field of composition, Young, Becker, and Pike’s introduction of Rogerian argument was immediately identified as a significant way to help students recognize others. Numerous scholars embraced what was commonly referred to as “Rogerian rhetoric,” a potentially effective tool for composition instruction. Some applied it to problem-solving (Teich), some to developing the individual writer’s self (Halasek), and others to providing opportunities for writers to “embrace change” (Baumlin and Baumlin 139). Moreover, it was also applied as a direct link to an improved concept of invention in composition. In “Rogerian Principles and the Invention Process,” Rebecca Stephens explains how the Rogerian method can directly benefit rhetorical invention: it “provides a workable combination of flexibility and structure not possible in the later stages of arrangement. A concrete, specifically worded heuristic employed at an early stage of the writing process can serve as a powerful persuasive tool for student writers in investigating their topics” (162). Such a heuristic provides detailed questions students can answer to find out more about their topics. Stephens offers several “non-confrontational” questions that students can address during brainstorming processes of their work:

- What is the nature of the issue, in general terms?
- Whose lives are affected by the issue?
- What beliefs and values motivate each of the interested groups?
- What other things influence their beliefs? For example, are there economic, social, political, legal, or religious reasons which contribute to their perspectives?
- Name and describe the reason for these influences?
- What kind of publicity do the various perspectives receive?
- Are the media biased or unbiased in presenting these views? (163)

As these basic questions reveal, the Rogerian method can expand students’ discovery processes, enabling them to become more aware of how different topics and objects interact within different situations and different responses. Rogers’ approach, therefore, enables students to become more aware of how issues relate to their specific lives by providing concrete analytical strategies. Such increased awareness leads to improved communication as people learn to recognize others’ viewpoints, a first step toward mutual communication.

As contributions to improving methods of conflict resolution, Rogers’ method and its applications are simply practical ways to increase collaboration. Perhaps

the most significant—and simplest—lesson to be learned is the basic cooperative premise behind Rogers’ work: it seeks to improve collaborative understandings in contentious situations. The Rogerian method provides a “well-articulated combination of dialogic principles combined with a practical set of techniques for implementing them” (Brent 462). Students who use the Rogerian method learn how to handle conflicts and listen to others by developing practical inquiry skills. Through asking questions such as those offered by Stephens above, students can develop a means of better understanding how their viewpoints are collaboratively constructed. Beyond asking such questions, students can research opposing viewpoints and interpretations and develop strategies for addressing them. By understanding such refutation as “Rogerian” exercises that seek mutual communication, students can develop skills for joining the types of academic conversations that we seek to foster in our classrooms.

After experiencing such development, teachers can truly appreciate the different applications of Rogers’ ideas, what Teich describes as theories of “Rogerian collaborative rhetoric,” simply because they help people work together, see ideas differently, and negotiate through different meanings (3). As Rogerian scholar Doug Brent reminds us, “If we want citizens who can listen with understanding and consciously work to relax the barriers that a sense of threat erects between people, we could do worse than to expose them to a rhetoric informed by Rogerian principles” (465). Rogers’ ideas and their applications offer a well-organized method of asking students to acknowledge others’ viewpoints prior to stating claims, a method of helping individuals expand their invention strategies to include others.

A third theory of rhetorical invention stems from Jim Corder’s research in rhetoric and composition. Blending academic and personal writing styles, Corder sought to articulate a contemporary rhetoric that could accommodate complex issues within a diverse society. He examined various interpretations of rhetoric and was especially interested in invention and authorial voice. Of his many accomplishments, he challenged misconceptions leading to tensions between academic and authorial voice, a conflict he traced to classical understandings in invention and *ethos*. Corder’s scholarship blends styles to develop an impressive corpus, a body that extends the reach of rhetoric and composition to conflict and dispute resolution.

Beginning with his early works, Corder emphasizes the significance of invention. This emphasis can best be seen in *Uses of Rhetoric*, a text that attempts to directly apply specific principles of rhetoric to contemporary society. He explains that “The arts of invention are occasions for exploration, plunging into experience, testing all possibilities” (111). The “arts of invention” allow people to improve

methods of communication by providing ways to discover information not only about topics but also about themselves. People, therefore, learn to examine their own strategies of inquiry in order to become more involved in their learning processes. Such involvement is important for Corder, as many of his works argue for the development of personal voice in writing.

Unfortunately, according to Corder, the art of “thinking, searching, choosing, [and] exploiting available knowledge” (49) has been all but forgotten in most writing texts and contemporary theories. Rhetoricians from Aristotle to Whately to Corbett have promoted a sequential understanding of invention that relies upon the traditional order of the rhetorical canon—*invention, arrangement, style, memory, and delivery*—an order that confines invention to the beginning stages of a sequence. Such assumptions of “*sequentiality*” limit rhetoric’s ability to improve communication (49-50). As Corder explains, the original assumption that invention precedes other modes of rhetoric—such as arrangement, for example—has infiltrated modern theories of invention. People often do not seek to invent beyond the initial stages of their thought processes; as a result, according to Corder, they limit invention to the tasks at hand and do not seek to discover what is beyond the obvious, missing opportunities for developing critical awareness. For Corder, a society that is blind to the potential of continuous rhetorical invention—one that does not systematically discover and create new understandings—suffers from “*incompleteness*.” An increased understanding of rhetoric, however, helps resolve the negative disposition to invention.

Corder’s *Uses of Rhetoric* then seeks to expand traditional understandings of invention in order to create a new attitude that will facilitate more successful communication. Thus, for Corder, the unending pursuit of knowledge and (re)application of rhetorical principles gains precedence over all other modes of discourse, even to the extreme that “any discourse not directed at a recovery (for example, ideology-bound discourse) is imprisoned” (66). This metaphor of spatial confinement parallels his need for open invention significant throughout his later works. By referring to “*recovery*,” “*discovery*,” and “*possibilities*,” Corder sets the stage for the significant concept of openness and the generative nature of discovery. Such terms do more than just reemphasize the importance of invention: they argue for an on-going and recursive invention process that requires people constantly to revisit invention strategies as they reflect on the progress of their work. For Corder, this personal process calls for increased participation in conflict.

Corder’s emphasis on invention as integral to rhetoric and communication begun in *Uses* remains throughout his work. “*What I Learned at School*” and “*From Rhetoric to Grace*” provide the vehicle for Corder to continue his expansion of rhetoric(s). In these two works, he continues developing the relationship between personal voice and invention. However, for the sake of composition theory, they are especially important

because they develop his theory of “generative ethos.” Perhaps Corder’s “most important” contribution to rhetoric, generative ethos creates a theory of individual credibility that asks people to enter into the unknown with a willingness to learn (Baumlin 29). Thus, what begins in *Uses* as a desire to expand processes of discovery and invention confronts conflict and contending narratives, making the quest for open invention much more imperative—especially when situations become threatening.

For Corder, *ethos* is highly central to improving problematic communication. However, classical and contemporary understandings of one static concept of ethos limit our abilities both to develop our identities and to cooperate. This misunderstanding can especially challenge contentious situations where disputants reach an impasse. In such situations, Corder suggests, our narratives and personal histories inhibit us from listening to others. He therefore undertakes an examination of *ethos*—similar to the examination of invention in *Uses*—that begins in classical rhetoric and waxes toward a new understanding.

In “Varieties of Ethical Argument, With Some Account of the Significance of *Ethos* in the Teaching of Composition,” Corder abandons the “unnecessarily monistic” category of *ethos* (Corder, “Hunting” 300). He, instead, proposes a classification schema that lays out a pentadic expansion of *ethos*. By explaining five separate categories of *ethos*, Corder hopes to aid us both in understanding *ethos* better and possibly to “help us to understand ourselves better” (4). Of the five categories—*dramatic*, *gratifying*, *functional*, *efficient*, and *generative*—the latter is the most significant to this conversation. Generative ethos, according to Corder, enables the openness necessary for improving conflict situations.

According to Corder, this fifth form of *ethos* is needed “both to hear in others and make ourselves” (14). It initiates dynamic listening and invention while eschewing closure. Generative ethos is “always in the process of making itself and of liberating hearers to make themselves. In this form of *ethos*, there is always more coming. It is never wholly fenced into the past. It is a speaking out from history into history” (14). Generative ethos enables the emergence of personal characteristics that allow rhetors to overcome closed inventive processes and reach openness: “Good discourse is always moving toward completeness. What complicates and intensifies the process is that discourse is a closure, a stoppage, hence itself an incompleteness” (20). Utilizing this type of openness in discourse overcomes the barriers that could have prevented rhetors from understanding each other, by creating ways for communicants to accommodate each other.

Similar to Rogers’ “real communication,” Corder’s “good discourse” is communication that avoids closure. Generative ethos aims to compensate for the unavoidable closure that accompanies traditional communication. It creates

a commodious environment that breaks down borders and treats communication as an invitation, an important concept for understanding generative ethos. Corder clarifies, “communication seen as invitation brings a hearer (guest) into a world that he or she can live in, that has living space and time” (20). Thus, as it is articulated in “Varieties,” generative ethos promotes several principles:

- moving toward completeness and beyond closure,
- extending the space and time of discourse,
- inviting others into one’s world. (20)

Simply put, generative ethos forwards a spatial metaphor that can help improve communication. It creates a borderless space where individuals can coexist and participate in each other’s worlds.

Corder’s development of generative ethos in “Argument as Emergence” details a concrete understanding of personal character that directly improves conflict resolution. Rooted in the collaborative nature of invention, it begins by reiterating how closure obstructs perception. Though somewhat inevitable because of the discriminating nature of language, this obstruction limits our abilities to see beyond our individual narratives. Corder explains how this closure occurs: “Sometimes we judge dogmatically, even ignorantly, holding only to standards that we have already accepted or established. We see only what our eyes will let us see at the given moment” (16). Occurring either deliberately or subconsciously, closure confines us to unaccommodating spaces. To avoid this, invention must be an ever-changing and growing concept. Invention should be always open, “always occur[ring]” (17). Again, this (re)generative notion of rhetorical invention is significant. Because conflict often confines people to a limited space, speakers and listeners must attempt to expand the space by searching for a more accommodating place outside of the discourse. They need to re-conceptualize the spaces they create for their narratives.

In the classroom, students can experiment with the generative nature of *ethos* through the types of knowledge claims we ask them to construct. By arguing for a new interpretation to a given text or countering an existing interpretation, students create new spaces for discourse and invite new participants to join their conversations. In addition, by creating varied stages of work-shopping exercises and drafting processes, instructors can structure assignments as opportunities for continual invention. Simply structuring work-shopping as a “content” and not “editing” exercise or naming a submitted essay as a “draft” can remind students of the popular Leonardo da Vinci saying: “art is never finished, only abandoned.”

In “Rhetoric and Conflict Resolution,” Richard Lloyd-Jones illustrates how contemporary society overemphasizes the role of stipulation: one chooses

to represent an aspect of reality convenient for meeting some present need. “Stipulation” implies an “act of will in observing the world that does not presume or even desire access to absolute truth” (171). Basically, to stipulate is to specify, to narrow an idea down to a clause or provision. Whereas stipulation helps people accomplish simple tasks and remain focused, it ignores the broader issues behind people’s actions. This is one reason Lloyd-Jones believes conflict regularly occurs and escalates: stipulation makes every situation case-specific and disassociates it with larger issues, separating ideas from their contexts. If individuals become more critically aware of these contexts, perhaps they can become more aware of how their ideas intersect with others’ equally relevant ideas.

When put in the context of composition, theories of rhetorical invention improve the way people solve problems by expanding their awareness of the generative potential of conflict. In the composition classroom, these same theories can help students understand the inherent social nature of their writing. Expanding rhetorical invention to include social, collaborative, and generative approaches offers students new ways of looking at their ideas and the topics of their writing. It changes what we expect from our students: when we expect their research to better acknowledge others and other cultures, we deepen their critical awareness of not only their work but also their role as writers.

Teaching the social nature of invention, for example, encourages writers to research different viewpoints and consider how these views contribute to communal knowledge. As seen in the Sinai Peninsula Peace Accords negotiation, people can work together to create options for reaching agreement. Emphasizing the collaborative nature of invention, as expressed through varied applications of Carl Rogers’ work, demonstrates how student writers can work directly with others in order to create new knowledge. Ultimately, it can help students become more capable of overcoming the predispositions that can block mutual communication. Finally, explaining the generative potential of invention enables more active opportunities for problem-solving: as writers enter topics with awareness of self and other, their writing experiences become opportunities for empowerment and recognition.

These different viewpoints demonstrate how rhetorical invention connects conflict and composition. More importantly, they provide practical methods for analyzing and discovering new ways to solve problems and interact socially, skills that are relevant to both the composition classroom and life outside of it. In both places, students must realize the importance of expanding their capacities to interpret and negotiate through contentious situations. Be it through a lack of identification, over-emphasis on consensus, or failure to attempt “cultural mediation,” people often lack the skills to engage productively with conflict. They default to closed, defensive, opinionated stances that drastically limit their

potential to effect change. One way to redress this trained incapacity, rhetorical invention creates a heightened critical awareness that draws on the diverse opinions and interpretations that often contribute to conflict ... and its resolution.

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