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ABSTRACT

The conceptual starting point for almost all recent gender related theory and research is to identify the characteristics of current educational practice as rooted in a type of thought that is linear, analytical, stage dependent, discursive, and "objective," and that separates thought and language--this is the mode that is typically associated with males. Critics, on the other hand, propose a type of thinking that is holistic, inductive, circular, narrative, and subjective, and that asserts that language and thought are inextricably interrelated--this is the mode that is typically associated with females. The error that is often made is treating analytic and holistic thought as dichotomies. A new model of development for composition and cognition portrays the two as interrelated processes that evolve separately. Holistic thinking provides the context for analysis. In fact, it may be the only base from which analytic thought develops and fully matures. The educational system should work toward an "integrated dialectic" mode of thinking that is dialectic in nature, integrative in design, capable of switching quickly from analytic to holistic, able to address ambiguities and uncertainties, and reflective. Such a model can be a transcendent one for human beings, allowing them to live in each reality as though it were the only one. (One diagram is included; 20 references are attached.) (SG)

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"The Dialectics of Gender: A Move Beyond Dichotomies Constraining Growth"

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My objective this morning is simple, I think! For the next twenty minutes I want to propose a new model of development for composition and cognition. To borrow from Kinneavy's universe of discourse, my aim today is exploratory, though not purely speculative. The model presented pictorially in the handout given to you is based on a decade of reading widely in classical rhetoric, the philosophy of language, cognitive psychology, composition studies, and gender studies. And it relies on an empirical base, specifically a four-year longitudinal study of high school and college writers. I still wish to call my aim exploratory, however, because, in a "Kinneavian" sense, my goal is to reshape the paradigm from which we view the development of writing, preparing in the process a new paradigm that not only accounts for much of our current research, but also argues for an advanced mode, "Integrated Dialectic," whose strength lies in its power to shape educational practice as well as students' composing processes.

The conceptual starting point for almost all recent gender-related theory and research is to identify current educational practice as being rooted in a type of thought that:

- is linear in nature,
- is deductively or analytically based,
- is stage dependent, if seen in a developmental context,
- is discursive in organizational design,
- is "objective," detached,

- separates thought and language,
- assumes separate individuals explore reciprocal connections.

This type of thought is depicted in my model by the successive parallel lines connected by arrows which simulate the step by step progression of discursive, analytic cognition (The dashed-lined versions, by the way, indicate less mature versions of thought than the solid-lined versions. More on that later).

Critics, then, with linear, analytic thought as a base, propose a second type of thinking (depicted in my model by the circular arrow) that:

- is holistic, or web-like in nature,
- is inductively or intuitively based,
- is circular if seen in a developmental context,
- is narrative, or episodic in organizational design,
- is subjective, personal, contextual,
- asserts that language and thought are inextricably interrelated,
- assumes individuals within a network of connections seek ways to separate the self without destroying the original connections.

When confronted with these two types of thought, theorists, researchers, and teachers often yield to the urge to treat them as opposites, dichotomies. To do so with analytic and holistic thought would be to destroy what I believe, based on biological, theoretical,

and empirical evidence, is the inherently integrative nature of thinking and writing. Analytic thought and holistic thought are not opposites. If they were, they would conflict by nature. Analytic thought and holistic thought are not contraries. If they were, our sense of joining them would require each to give ground, to compromise for the other.

As indicated in the handout, analytic and holistic thought are interrelated processes that do develop separately (see Modes A, B) when cognition is subjected to personal or social influences, the "neglected" type of thought lying dormant or more probably affecting the dominant type in subtle, less recognized ways. Challenging the dominance of analytic thought by attempting to dislodge it or counterweight it only plays into its hands. I propose that holistic thinking not be seen as "an equal partner," but as the type of thinking that provides the context for "analysis." In fact, it may even be the only base from which analytic thought develops and fully matures. Notice in Mode C, where both have theoretically matured, that the analytic operates within the context of the holistic.

To look at the model, then, you will notice that at no level do I assume that one type of thinking operates solely without the other. For children (top level) both modes develop roughly--until the appearance of formal operational thought in early adolescence leads to Mode A, typically associated with females, and Mode B, typically associated with males.

Mode B is in fact the type of thought valued in schools (secondary, college, and graduate) in society (politics, government, and business) and in standardized tests (SAT, GRE, LSAT). However it should not be replaced by Mode A, though Mode A needs to be valued and recognized. Rather, our educational systems need to work toward Mode C or the "Integrated Dialectic" which can be characterized as:

- dialectic in nature, which Jean Paul Sartre would call understanding through participation, or being part of what you are trying to understand (Solomon 32-33),
- integrative in design,
- high speed, that is, capable of switching quickly from analytic to holistic, from language-bound thought to language-free thought,
- able to deal with ambiguity and the tension or uncertainty that results,
- reflective.

Allow me to be a bit more specific about the dialectic, integrative nature of Mode C. Both of these characteristics assume that analytic and holistic thought come together in some way. If I could boil down to one lesson what I've learned from all of the gender studies which I have read in ten years, that lesson would have to be that when society and education shortchanged little girls, all of us were shortchanged as well because analytic thought loses the base from which it evolves. Jeffrey Walker in his 1990 College English article "Of Brains and Rhetoric," Aristotle in On Rhetoric, Ann Berthoff in

her view of abstraction, Carol Gilligan in her two books In a Different Voice and her newest work Making Connections, Jean Piaget in his constructivist view of development, and Nobel Prize winning physicist Steven Weinberg in his emphasis on professional judgment all stress the inferential, intuitive, bilateral, holistic nature of the mental powers, that according to Walker, "lie beneath the more consciously-directed activities of logismos or ratiocinative calculation. . ." (306). "Logismos," Walker concludes, "is not the whole of rationality" (307). Contemporary culture and education and, I may add, most graduate programs that I know, have allowed analytic, deductive thought to develop in isolation from the whole, thus limiting its full potential. When Carl Bereiter and Marlene Scardamalia note the developmental shift from planning that is concerned with the question, "What should I say next?" to a concern for "the whole, and the backward and the forward-looking analysis that are the hallmarks of [mature] compositional planning" (70), they aren't negating the concern for what comes next; rather, they are asserting that that question makes sense only when more holistic concerns are met. When Steven Weinberg says that scientists--not lab technicians--make decisions about a theory based on that theory's beauty, he isn't denying that the strict empirical method isn't useful to test portions of a theory. He means merely that that testing takes place within a larger series of judgments that are not analytically based. Aristotle doesn't deny the power of the syllogism, but he does say that its first principles derive not from logic but from inference, perception,

and intuition. Jean Piaget doesn't eliminate the need for logico-mathematical thought, but he does state that dialectical codes or interactions will always in the end replace linear orders (124), that "a formal system of abstract structures is. . .transformed into that of the construction of a never completed whole" (140). For Piaget, a human's existence is defined by the ability to construct, to interact with experience and then integrate that experience with past experiences. And finally, though most people remember Carol Gilligan's discussion of the moral decision making processes of males and females, few remember:

- that the problems she isolates are not with women but with our representations of the problem (1),
- that neither mode is a precursor to the other (33),
- that the images of the hierarchy and the web do not distort but enrich each other (62), that they are complementary (100),
- and that development should be conceived as integrative, as an embracing spiral that reaches out to assimilate and accommodate (120,122); that development is a dialectic process (156, 174).

I guess since I'm a teacher at heart as well as a parent/husband, the implications of ideas for this world are never far from my mind, nor if one is true to the theory itself, should one forget that the holistic mode is, to quote Gilligan, "embedded in the



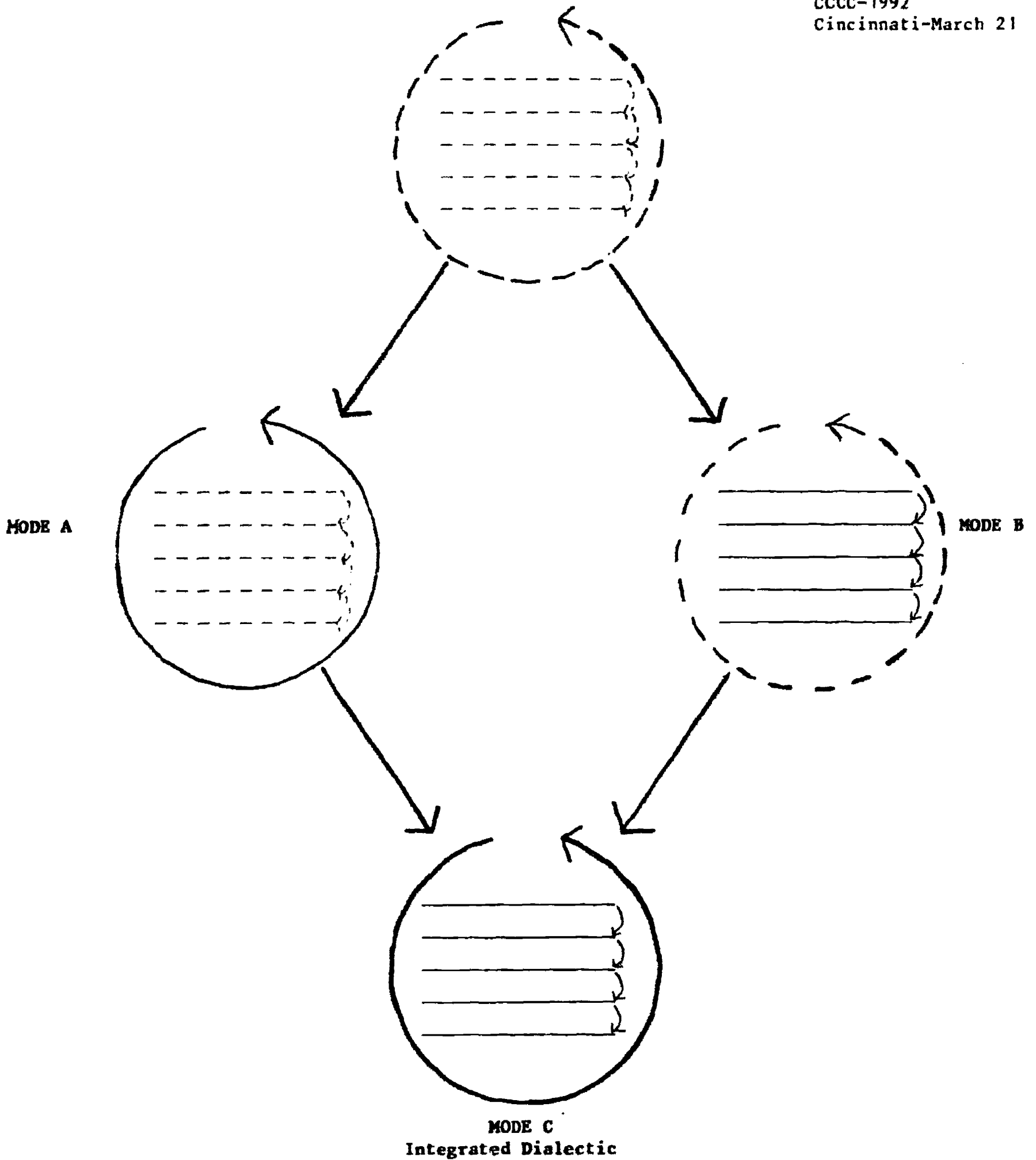
conditions of life" (147-148). Nor can I forget that the humanities were birthed in what Jim Kinneavy has called a "rhetorical manger," that "context" is the psychological, epistemological, educational principal that keeps the holistic never far from my analytic mind nor ever far from what goes on in my discussions, in university meetings, or as I settle the problems of a large 230 section/semester freshman writing program.

I could discuss all day the implications I feel my theory has for research--my own and others, for education, and for our democracy. Let me end, however, with the words of Rhoda Unger who wrote in her article "Sex, Gender, and Epistemology" that ~~we~~--those of us engaged in studies of gender and cognition (to which I would add composition), "we need a different transcendent model for human beings. Perhaps the kind of person who functions best in a socially constructed world is one who can live in each reality as though it were the only one, but who knows that it is possible to stand outside them all." I offer my model of cognition/composition as a model that would allow and lead to doing just that. Thank you very much.

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**The Dialectics of Gender:  
A Move Beyond Dichotomies Constraining Growth**

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