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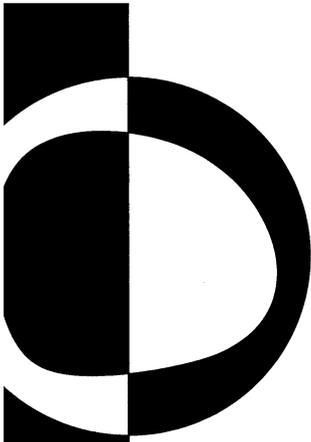
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Abstract

In the wake of research showing failures in transfer of writing skills, the question of how to help students see how their learning goes beyond individual learning experiences has become a pressing concern in composition. In addressing this concern, scholars have primarily focused on improving our classroom pedagogy so that we are teaching for transfer. However, with the finding that transfer often needs to be cued and guided in order to be successful, we need to begin focusing on writing centers as crucial spaces for the facilitation of students' understanding of the transportability of writing-related knowledge. This article presents findings from a study that examines the effects of teaching writing center tutors about transfer theory. Findings suggest that educating writing center tutors about transfer theory can positively affect their ability to facilitate the transfer of writing-related knowledge.

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In the wake of research showing failures in transfer of writing skills (Carroll, 2002; Beaufort, 2007; Wardle, 2007; among many others), the question of how to help students see beyond the present moment has become a pressing concern in composition. When attempting to answer this question, scholars have primarily focused on how to improve our classroom pedagogy so that we are teaching for transfer (Devitt, 2004; Smit, 2004; Beaufort, 2007; Wardle, 2007; Yancey, Robertson, & Taczak, 2014; etc.). However, with the finding that transfer often needs to be “cued, primed, and guided” to be successful (Perkins & Salomon, 1989, p. 19), we need to begin focusing on writing centers as key sites for the facilitation of transfer. Although some scholars have begun to look at the writing center’s role in transfer (Hagemann, 1995; Nowacek, 2013; Devet, 2015; Driscoll, 2015), more research is needed, specifically, research that investigates the ways that writing center tutors can help their students transfer their writing-related knowledge. Therefore, this article presents findings from a research study that examines the effects of educating writing center tutors in transfer theory. Through an analysis of 30 hours of recorded tutoring sessions, this research shows that after only a one-hour class on transfer theory, tutors engaged their students in transfer discussions considerably more than their peers who had not had that transfer education. Accordingly, I argue that educating tutors in transfer theory is essential to helping them more effectively encourage their students to transfer their learning, but that tutors would also benefit from learning to effectively use key concepts that help lead to the transfer of writing-related knowledge—genre, discourse community, rhetorical situation, etc.—and thus would profit from more education than can be given in one hour. In making this argument, I also argue for a more explicit focus on transfer in writing center tutoring sessions. For any given writing assignment, the student’s exclusive concern is usually the text at hand. However, most writing centers have a broader concern. The writing center’s goal is to facilitate the acquisition of knowledge and skills that go beyond the present moment, the present course, or the present writing assignment, and help students become better writers in a wider context. This goal—I argue—can be pursued through a focus on knowledge transfer.

Although knowledge transfer has become a major research area in composition studies, to date, little research discusses transfer in relation to writing centers. Although Julie Hagemann (1995) has argued “that writing centers are the ideal sites for studying how” students transfer their knowledge (p. 127) and thus has called for researchers to focus their transfer research on writing centers, this call has yet to be taken up. Several scholars have investigated how writing tutors transfer their

knowledge of tutoring practice to other situations (Van Dyke, 1997; Hughes, Gillespie, & Kail, 2010; Driscoll & Harcourt, 2012; Driscoll, 2015), but scholarship focusing on how tutors help their students transfer their knowledge is limited. Some exceptions include Randi Engle, Phi Nguyen, & Adam Mendelson's (2011) "The Influence of Framing on Transfer: Initial Evidence from a Tutoring Experiment," which investigates the ways that framing learning as expansive rather than bounded in biology tutoring sessions can contribute to the transfer of that learning; Dan Frazier's (2010) "First Steps beyond First Year: Coaching Transfer after FYC," in which he discusses how transfer can be facilitated in what he calls "third spaces"—spaces outside of classrooms, such as study groups, peer review sessions, and tutoring session; and Bonnie Devet's (2015) "The Writing Center and Transfer of Learning: A Primer for Directors," where she argues for the importance of transfer research for writing centers. In all of these studies, the scholars conclude that writing centers (and other "third spaces") are fruitful avenues for facilitating transfer, which points towards the need for more research on how writing centers can take a more active role in that facilitation.

In the rest of this article, I turn to the discussion of a research project meant to investigate the effects of teaching writing center tutors about transfer theory. Building on what Rebecca Nowacek (2013) calls "transfer talk," I discuss a one-hour class on transfer theory that I conducted for writing center tutors (along with the research/scholarship on which the class was based) and then give results from a study meant to test the effects of that education on tutors' ability to help students transfer their writing-related knowledge. In the end, I argue that adapting pedagogical approaches meant to teach for transfer in composition classes (the approach proposed in Kathleen Blake Yancey, Liane Robertson, & Kara Taczak's (2014) *Writing Across Contexts* for example) might be one possible way of educating tutors to more effectively encourage their students to transfer their writing-related knowledge.

Teaching Tutors about Transfer

Although the large influx of transfer research conducted in the past few decades shows transfer to be a complex process, scholars have shown that some pedagogical techniques help to facilitate transfer better than others. These include (but are not limited to): having a high level of initial learning; being able to see the similarities and differences between learning situations; understanding key concepts about writing—abstract principles that transcend individual writing situations; being able to use metacognitive reflection; and promoting certain dispositions towards

learning, such as active learning and motivation. Although other pedagogical conditions also affect transfer, because I only had a one-hour class with the tutors, I focused on discussions of these five techniques, discussing how the tutors might help students take steps forward in each of those areas. The class consisted of a mixture of lecture and discussion; tutors were not asked to read anything in preparation for this class. I understand that there are limitations to any educational program, and that there may have been more effective ways of educating tutors in transfer theory (some of which I will discuss in the conclusion of this article), but since I was only given one hour with the tutors, I had to maximize the time as best I could.

To begin, we discussed how having a high level of initial learning is a prerequisite to transfer. As David Perkins & Gavriel Salomon (1988) argue, often transfer does not occur because “the skill or knowledge is not well learned in the first place” (p. 23). Students cannot transfer knowledge they don’t actually possess, and writing centers are the obvious places where students can go to get extra help with knowledge they are attempting to learn. For example, students may be writing a claim-based essay for their composition course, but they are not sure what a claim is or how it should look. Tutors can help students learn more fully what they are attempting to learn in their classes. Thus, rather than just helping students with the individual paper they bring with them, tutors can help students have a higher level of initial learning of the concept of claims (and others), so those students will be more likely to take that knowledge with them into other writing situations.

Secondly, we discussed how students need to be able to see the similarities and differences between situations to transfer knowledge between those situations. If students learn something in one situation and then go into another situation that they see as similar, they will be likely to draw on that previous knowledge to help them complete the task in the new situation. Mark Andrew James (2008), however, points out that it is the individual’s perception of task similarity and difference that is crucial to knowledge transfer rather than an objective similarity. If students do not see the similarities, they will be unlikely to transfer knowledge between those tasks. For example, in Lucille McCarthy’s (1987) “A Stanger in Strange Lands: A College Student Writing Across the Curriculum,” she found that her research participant, Dave, interpreted the writing assignments in three different classes as completely different from each other and completely different from anything he had ever done before even though there were many similarities. Thus, he did not even attempt to transfer his writing skills between those situations. Tutors can help students make connections between their current

writing project and previous writing situations by asking them to think about previous writing situations that are similar. Asking students questions such as: *Have you ever written a paper like this before?* Or *What does this assignment remind you of?* Or even telling them explicitly that they should write the paper similarly to papers they wrote in other classes (composition, for example), can help students see similarities between what they are trying to do and what they have previously done. On the other hand, students also need to be able to see the differences between situations. Negative transfer occurs when students transfer knowledge inappropriately to situations where they should not have used that knowledge. For example, students often transfer the five-paragraph essay from high school into composition when instructors in the course do not want that genre. Similarly, the students in Natasha Artemeva & Janna Fox's (2010) "Awareness versus Production" produced typical school essays when the task in their engineering communication class called for a technical report. Again, writing center tutors can help students avoid negative transfer by helping them to understand the differences between writing situations that students may not see on their own.

Thirdly, we discussed how tutors can help their students to abstract concepts from a particular situation to use them in others. In Perkins & Solomon's (1988) foundational study of transfer, they identify two kinds of transfer, what they call high road and low road transfer. Low road transfer happens unconsciously and automatically between similar situations, whereas high road transfer is much more difficult because it happens between situations with significant differences, and thus must be consciously done. To effect high road transfer, students must learn to abstract knowledge from one context to consciously apply it in another (Perkins & Solomon, 1988; Kain & Wardle, 2005). Mary Jo Reiff & Anis Bawarshi (2011) support this idea when describing "border crossers" whose "breakdown and repurposing of whole genres" (e.g. abstracting of writing strategies from specific genres for use in others) "might be working to enable students to engage in highroad transfer and adapt to new contexts" (p. 329). This abstracting of knowledge from particular situations for use in others might be aided by focusing (as argued by Beaufort, 2007; Wardle, 2012; Yancey, Robertson, & Taczak, 2014; and others) on teaching broad, abstract concepts that transcend individual situations, for example, genre, discourse community, rhetorical situation, activity system, context, audience, etc. If tutors can help students understand some of these broader concepts about writing, students might be able to take that abstract knowledge with them into other writing situations.

Fourthly, we discussed the transfer research that focuses on using metacognitive reflections to help encourage knowledge transfer (Perkins & Salomon, 1992; Yancey, 1998; James, 2008; Yancey, Robertson, & Taczak, 2014; etc.). Metacognition, the idea of having an awareness and understanding of one's own learning and thought processes, is often associated with the ability to transfer knowledge successfully. Research shows that if students are able to reflect on their learning, they will be more likely to remember and draw on that learning when they get into new situations. To transfer knowledge, during the initial learning, students need to reflect on when, where, and how they will be able to use the knowledge in the future. Once they get to that future situation, they need to be able to reflect back on previous knowledge and think about how that knowledge can be used in the present situation. The problem, however, according to Perkins & Salomon (1988), is that "people tend not to monitor their own mental processes very much" (p. 31) and thus don't engage in the reflective practices that might lead them to transfer what they have learned. Tutors can help students reflect by engaging them in discussions of their mental processes. Engaging students in transfer talk causes them to reflect on and articulate their mental processes in ways that encourage them to transfer their knowledge.

Lastly, we discussed the effect of certain dispositions towards learning. Recently Elizabeth Wardle (2012) has focused on students' dispositions as a critical facet for successful transfer. She suggests two dispositions that may hinder or facilitate transfer, what she calls "answer-getting" and "problem-exploring." These dispositions correlate with Reiff & Bawarshi's (2011) discussion of "boundary crossers" and "boundary guarders." Reiff & Bawarshi's (2011) boundary guarders are similar to Wardle's (2012) answer-getters (as well as Yancey, Robertson, & Taczak's (2014) students who use "assemblage" to respond to new knowledge) in that they use previous knowledge wholesale without understanding that they may need to repurpose or manipulate that knowledge for new situations. The students who use five-paragraph essays for all of their college papers fall into this category. Likewise, Reiff & Bawarshi's (2011) boundary crossers are similar to Wardle's (2012) problem-explorers in that they use previous knowledge from multiple different experiences and seek to repurpose that knowledge with an understanding that there may be multiple different ways to accomplish complex writing problems. The question, though, is how tutors can help students take on these transfer-likely dispositions. As Reiff & Bawarshi (2011) explain, without prompting, students will often fall into old habits and rely on old genres that may be ineffective for the writing problems they are attempting to solve. Similarly, Salomon &

Tamar Globerson (1987) suggest that students often need help developing an attentive, non-automatic, and active attitude towards learning. If tutors guide their students towards making their writing decisions conscious, rather than automatic/subconscious, helping them to connect their current writing projects to various past learning experiences, and helping them understand that no formula exists when it comes to writing, those students will be much more likely to consciously think about their previous or future writing and so transfer their knowledge more often. Even then, though, whether or not they take on these dispositions is up to the students themselves. In addition, these changes are likely to be slowly and incrementally implemented and so would be difficult to see.

Throughout this discussion of pedagogical techniques that help to facilitate transfer, the tutors were given time to ask questions and discuss how they might implement these techniques into their tutoring sessions. They were then asked to use that knowledge in their tutoring sessions, and to record those sessions so that we could compare their tutoring to the tutoring of the three participants who did not attend the transfer session.

Research Method

This study was conducted at a private, Midwest, religious-affiliated, liberal arts university with an enrollment of 3,100 undergraduate and 3,600 total students. The writing center's mission is "to help writers at all levels of proficiency, from all academic disciplines develop effective writing skills" (Cedarville.edu/Offices/WritingCenter), and tutoring takes place in 30-minute one-with-one peer consultations. Although the tutors do focus on the project at hand, "the long-term goal for every session is to help each tutee become a better writer overall." The center's main objectives are to focus on global concerns before sentence-level concerns, discover each student writer's strengths and weaknesses, help students understand their assignments, increase students' confidence in their writing, and encourage students to develop the initiative to pursue further discussions about writing. The writing center employs 20 undergraduate tutors from a variety of majors, and averages 1,500 tutoring sessions per semester. The majority of these sessions (approximately 49%) are with freshmen students from either First-Year Composition or Basic English. All tutors are required to take a two-credit tutor preparation course in the spring before they begin their first year as tutors. This course uses Ben Rafoth's (2005) *A Tutors Guide: Helping Writers One on One* and Paula Gillespie & Neal Lerner's (2008) *The Longman Guide*

to *Peer Tutoring* as the textbooks and spends the majority of class time discussing practical aspects of tutoring and assessing writing.

Beginning with the hypothesis that writing center tutors would benefit from learning about transfer theory, I designed a research project that attempted to answer the following research question: What are the effects of teaching writing center tutors about transfer theory? More specifically, I wanted to know whether learning about transfer theory would make tutors more effective in helping students consider how they might transfer their writing-related knowledge, and what transfer-teaching techniques the tutors would most effectively employ. The research was IRB approved and all participants (tutors and students) gave informed consent. The researcher was not the writing center director and had no previous relationship with any of the research participants; therefore, there was no conflict of interest. All participants were aware that they could leave the research at any time.

To answer the above research questions, I conducted the one-hour educational session on transfer theory described above for three writing center tutors who volunteered to participate. These three participants included: a female, senior Technical and Professional Communications major in her second year of tutoring; a female, junior Applied Communications major also in her second year tutoring; and a male, senior English Major in his third year as a tutor. After participating in the class on transfer, I asked them to record their tutoring sessions for the next three months. I also had three additional tutors who did not attend the transfer session record their tutoring sessions as well. These three tutors (who acted as the control group) included: a female, senior Adolescent and Young Adult Language Arts major in her second year tutoring; a male, senior Technical and Professional Communications major also in his second year tutoring; and a female, sophomore Technical and Professional Communications major in her first year as a tutor. The recorded tutoring sessions were transcribed by a contracted, objective third party. The participants were all de-identified in the transcripts, although the researcher had the master list of names.

In total, I received 60 recorded tutoring sessions, which was approximately 30 hours of recorded sessions. To account for the differing number of tutoring sessions recorded between the two groups of tutors, the findings discussed here are based on all twenty-two sessions received from those in the transfer class, and twenty-two randomly-selected sessions out of the thirty-eight received from those who were not (N=44). Although such a large data sample required a larger time commitment, it also provided a wider range of more generalizable data than a smaller set would have been able to give. The data were analyzed quantitative-

ly based on Rebecca Nowacek's (2013) discussion of "transfer talk." Therefore, I was looking specifically for moments when tutors engaged students in talking about their previous knowledge or in talking about how their current learning connected to future tasks. Because quantitative research has its limitations, I also analyzed the data qualitatively to show moments of transfer talk as well as some missed opportunities for transfer talk that may have helped students make more connections between previous knowledge and their current writing projects. The major goal of the data analysis was to compare the tutoring sessions of those who had been in the class on transfer and those who had not, and specifically look for "transfer talk": moments where students either 1. talk about their previous learning and so are encouraged to draw on that learning in the present situation, thus seeing how previous learning transcends those previous situations; or 2. talk about how what they are learning may affect future learning situations and so are encouraged to think about how their current learning goes beyond the current situation.

Instances of transfer talk were divided between explicit transfer talk, when tutors were consciously asking students to engage in transfer talk, and implicit transfer talk, when tutors engaged students in transfer talk without specifically meaning to. The reason for the explicit/implicit frame was simply that I wanted to distinguish between times that tutors seemed to be purposely engaging their students in transfer talk and times when they may have triggered their students to think about previous or future learning without explicitly meaning to. Explicit instances of transfer talk were when tutors explicitly asked students to reflect on their previous or future writing experience and relate it to their current writing situation. For example, "Tell me what you have been taught about X" followed by discussions of how the student was taught to do X and how that may help them in their current writing situation. Implicit instances of transfer talk were those where the tutor would mention things that students would have previously learned about, but did not necessarily ask the student to talk explicitly about that previous learning, for example, when genre names or writing concepts were mentioned, but students were not asked to explicitly talk about their previous learning about those genres or writing concepts.

After dividing between explicit and implicit instances of transfer talk, the moments of transfer talk were then coded according to entirely data-driven categories, meaning that I created the codes based on what I found during analysis rather than going into the analysis with codes already in mind. When an instance of transfer talk occurred in the data, I would decide on one word or a short phrase that would describe what

it was, exactly, that they were talking about in the moment of transfer talk. I originally had over 30 codes that I was then able to group into wider categories to make the data easier to work with. For example, “thesis,” “organization,” and “evidence” all became part of “writing concepts.” The open coding was used in order to remain as unbiased as possible and to see only what was there. Table 1 gives definitions and examples of the larger categories used.

Table 1: Examples of Transfer Talk

| |
|---|
| <p>Genre <u>Definition:</u> Whenever a genre name was mentioned. <u>Explicit:</u> “Have you ever written a literary analysis before?” followed by a discussion of what the student was taught about the genre conventions of literary analysis. <u>Implicit:</u> “So, this is the argument essay from Dr. [X’s] class?” without further discussion of the genre of argument essays.</p> |
| <p>Mechanics <u>Definition:</u> Items of grammar, punctuation, spelling, etc. <u>Explicit:</u> “Tell me what you have been taught about verbs,” followed by a discussion of the student’s knowledge of verb use. <u>Implicit:</u> “I see some subject/verb disagreement here,” with no explicit discussion of what students know about subject/verb agreement.</p> |
| <p>Disciplinary Knowledge <u>Definition:</u> When the disciplinarity of writing was discussed or when disciplinary knowledge was discussed in relation to writing. <u>Explicit:</u> “Tell me what you know about writing for Psychology,” followed by a discussion of the disciplinary writing conventions of Psychology. <u>Implicit:</u> “Well, it’s Psychology, so you’ll have to use APA,” without any explicit discussion of writing for Psychology or the use of APA.</p> |
| <p>Writing Concepts <u>Definition:</u> Any time writing concepts such as thesis statements, or organization, or evidence, etc. were mentioned. <u>Explicit:</u> “Tell me what you know about writing a thesis statement,” followed by discussions of what the student had previously learned about writing thesis statements. <u>Implicit:</u> “What kind of evidence are you using?” without any discussion of what the student had been taught about evidence use.</p> |

Points Towards Future Writing

Definition: Any time the current writing assignment was discussed in relation to possible future writing situations.

Explicit: “Tell me how you might be able to use this same strategy for your next paper,” followed by a discussion of how the current writing project might positively affect future writing projects.

Implicit: “Well, they will want it that way in Lit Analysis as well,” without explicitly talking about how the writing strategies would need to be employed in the Lit Analysis class.

Previous Writing Experiences

Definition: Whenever past writing situations were mentioned, more generally.

Explicit: “Tell me how you were taught to write papers in high school,” followed by explicit discussions of what the student had been taught in high school about academic writing (in general).

Implicit: “This would probably be similar to how you wrote papers in composition,” but without explicit discussion of how the student might be able to use what she learned in composition.

Process

Definition: When the process of creating a paper was mentioned (i.e., invention, drafting, revising, etc.).

Explicit: “What strategies have you used in the past to help you come up with paper topics?” followed by a discussion of what the students had been taught about brainstorming.

Implicit: “You might want to do an outline to help you organize more effectively,” without any discussion of what an outline is or whether the student had ever been taught to use outlines.

Other

Definition: Transfer talk that didn’t seem to fit within any defined category. For example, analogies where tutors would compare the writing to other non-writing situations students may be familiar with, or discussions of vocabulary words, or other literacy issues like close reading, etc.

Explicit: “And what does that mean: ‘intertextuality?’” followed by a discussion of what the students had been taught about using intertextuality in her paper.

Implicit: “You’ll really have to read critically,” without further discussion of what critical reading is, etc.

Data/Results

Table 2 shows the categories and amounts of each type of transfer talk for all the tutors. The table is divided between those who had been in the class on transfer and those who had not, and between implicit and explicit transfer talk. The total numbers tell us some important things about how the class on transfer affected the tutors. We can see that the tutors who had learned about transfer engaged their students in transfer talk considerably more times than those who had not had the class (136 to 77). Although the instances of implicit transfer talk are almost equal between the two groups (65 and 61), instances of explicit transfer talk were considerably higher with those who had been in the class (75 to 12), meaning that those who had the class were asking their students to engage in transfer talk consciously. More important are the kinds of transfer talk they were engaging their students in, and the ways they were attempting to help their students transfer their knowledge.

Table 2: Moments of Transfer Talk in Peer Tutoring Sessions

| Types of Transfer Talk | No Transfer Teaching Explicit | No Transfer Teaching Implicit | Transfer Teaching Explicit | Transfer Teaching Implicit |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| Genre | 3 | 9 | 16 | 16 |
| Grammar | 2 | 4 | 1 | 3 |
| Disciplinary Knowledge | 1 | 2 | 3 | 8 |
| Writing Concepts | 3 | 46 | 9 | 23 |
| Points Towards Future Experiences | 1 | 1 | 8 | 1 |
| Previous Writing Experiences | 1 | 0 | 14 | 5 |
| Process | 0 | 1 | 12 | 2 |
| Other | 1 | 3 | 10 | 1 |
| | | | | |
| Total | 12 | 65 | 75 | 61 |
| Overall Totals | 77 | | 136 | |

As can be seen on the table, writing concepts such as thesis statements, introductions/conclusions, transitions, evidence, etc. were often invoked implicitly but not explicitly explained or discussed with the students. Tutors used writing terminology, assuming that students knew those terms and understood them in the same way as the tutor. For example, one tutor used “thesis” multiple times throughout her tutoring sessions and never asked the students to define the term or talk about what they knew about writing a thesis. On the other hand, other tutors asked students questions such as, “How would you describe a thesis statement?” and after discussing that for a few minutes they would then move on to talking about the specific thesis the student might want to make in her paper. However, in both groups, the tutors relied heavily on implicit use of writing concepts rather than explicitly asking students to reflect on their knowledge of those concepts. Tutors not in the transfer class mentioned writing concepts 49 times, but only 3 times did they explicitly ask students to talk about their knowledge, while the tutors who had the class mentioned writing concepts 31 times and explicitly engaged in transfer talk about those 8 times.

When it came to helping students see the similarities and differences between writing situations (in categories such as genre, previous writing experiences, and disciplinary knowledge), instances of transfer talk were, again, higher with those who had been in the class. However, although genre was mentioned explicitly in this data 16 times versus only 3 for those not in the transfer class, other key concepts that may have increased students’ ability to see the similarities and differences in situations and thus increase the likelihood of transfer (discourse community, context, audience, etc.) were not mentioned at all by either group, and even when genre was discussed it was not discussed in a really accurate, complex way that saw it as anything more than simply the formal features of a text type. I will return to this below.

When it comes to metacognition and dispositions (the last two topics discussed in our session on transfer), both are effected by explicit reflections on learning. Although these are difficult terms to define, and even more difficult to code for, in explicitly engaging students in transfer talk, tutors ask students to use metacognition, to reflect on their previous and future writing experiences and to think through their own cognitive processes. Therefore, any instance of explicit transfer talk would be an instance of metacognition that would make transfer more likely. Dispositions toward learning are even harder to code for, and although this data can’t actually show a change in student disposition, if students come to see how their learning goes beyond the particular situation, they might be more likely to draw on that knowledge in fu-

ture situations, and thus move more towards problem solving/boundary crossing dispositions that in return will cause them to continue to think about their writing in more complex ways. This, then becomes a process where a change in disposition may cause a change in learning habit and vice versa. As difficult as it is to define what we mean by metacognition and dispositions, though, it is equally or even more difficult to see moments of transfer talk as actually contributing to a change in student disposition; that is a question left for future research.

Lastly, if we want students to see how their learning transcends their current writing situations, we need to help them make connections between what they are learning and future writing situations in which they might use that learning. As the table shows, those who had not had the transfer class only explicitly prompted students to think about future writing situations one time, whereas those who had the teaching explicitly asked their students to connect what they were learning to future writing situations eight times. For example, one tutor asked, “What do you see yourself doing with writing in the future?” and then talked with the student about how her current writing might affect her future writing as an engineering major. Another tutor asked her student, “How do you see this memoir, writing this paper, kind of carry over into other papers you may write?” In this case, the tutor explicitly asks the student to think about how her learning goes beyond the particular assignment and connects to future writing situations. Although those taught about transfer did engage their students in these kinds of discussions more than those not in the transfer class, they still only did it eight times, which suggests some missed opportunities.

The following two data excerpts (both from tutors who had been in the class on transfer) show moments of transfer talk, but also show moments of missed opportunity to more effectively help students make connections between learning situations. In the first data excerpt, the tutor initially asks the student to talk about her previous experiences writing in the genre and then also asks her to think about how that writing is similar to or different from the writing she does in her major courses. However, the tutor then immediately turns back to the text in front of them, missing the opportunity to really make the connection between those previous writing experiences and the current project.

Tutor: How many, not really research papers but how many, cuz this is a more argumentative paper. How many argument papers or, like, persuasive essays. How many of those have you written before?

Student: I wrote several in high school. We went through each

type of paper and did our process of writing, two or three on each so like informative and then persuasive and, there was another type.... So I've done a little bit, not a ton. Cuz I didn't take Composition here I took it at high school and then transferred it in. Which, in my high school, it was a college class. So that was really my only exposure so far.

Tutor: Okay, and do you do a lot of writing in your social work class or kind of reasoning I guess?

Student: Yeah, kind of, I mean I'm not into like the higher level classes yet, but we do kind of have to be able to provide support like why, where are you coming from, in like this decision you're making, or this support you're giving or ...

Tutor: Right, okay. Well definitely something that I noticed is that umm, you do seem to have a handle on what each viewpoint kind of nuances a bit.

In the second excerpt, the tutor asks the student whether she has a thesis in her paper. After the student says that the professor told them they didn't need a thesis, the tutor misses an opportunity to help the student gain a more complex understanding of how to make her paper's purpose clear, and to understand the genre-specific nature of writing conventions.

Student: Dr. [X] said we don't need a thesis in this paper.

Tutor: Oh really?

Student: Because she said it's like open form.

Tutor: Okay

Student: Because like it's yeah. So she's like being more free you don't need a thesis.

Tutor: Okay. Okay. I mean obviously you want to follow what your professor wanted you to do, so. That's good to know. In that case never mind.

Student: But I can try to add one if it makes it better.

Tutor: Well no because I think that, based on what you said your professor was expecting, I see where she's going with it now.

Student: Okay.

Tutor: Because if I can definitely see now how you kind of start at one point and then at the very end that's when the reader kind of gets the main idea out there about what your paper's about and what your story is which is really cool.

Student: Okay

Tutor: So. I think you're good there.

These excerpts will be discussed further below.

Discussion

The results of this research point towards three major conclusions: 1. Learning about transfer theory does cause tutors to explicitly engage their students in transfer talk more often; 2. A one hour class is not enough to really teach tutors how to effectively use transfer talk to encourage the transfer or learning; 3. Along with more education on transfer specifically, tutors would benefit from having a stronger understanding of key concepts that help lead to transfer (genre, discourse community, rhetorical situation, etc.) and so would profit from preparation focused on genre theory as well as transfer theory.

The first finding, that learning about transfer theory helps students to explicitly engage their students in transfer talk, is clearly shown through the numbers presented above. The tutors who had been in the class on transfer explicitly engaged their students in transfer talk considerably more times than those who had not (75–12). However, the missed opportunities to engage them more effectively and more often in transfer discussions lead to the second two findings stated above.

Finding two suggests that tutors need more than a one-hour class on transfer to be able to really be effective in helping their students transfer their knowledge. For example, the type of transfer talk that all of the tutors engaged their students in the most was writing concepts. However, writing concepts were overwhelmingly invoked implicitly without explicit discussion, which I think is problematic. For example, one tutor told her student, “I don’t see a clear thesis, so you’ll also want to work on that,” but never talked with the student about whether she understood what a thesis was or what it should look like, etc. If we are attempting to help students move forward in their initial learning of writing concepts, tutors cannot just use writing terminology and assume their students know what they mean, especially when the vast majority of students who come to the writing center are first year students who are either in FYC or in basic writing courses (as least at the university where this research was conducted). Tutors need to ensure that they and the students are on the same page, understanding those terms in similar ways. This conversation would only take a few minutes in each tutoring session. If the tutor in the above example asked a student to tell her what she knew about thesis statements, and the student could not explain it or had a different definition than the tutor, it would be a perfect opportunity to discuss that concept and help the student understand it in more detail. If the student had a firm grasp of the concept, they

could then move on to working on drafting a good thesis or making the thesis clearer, etc. They do not have to spend large amounts of time talking about things the students already know. However, assuming the student knows something they don't can cause the student to be even more confused than they already were. If tutors had more time to work with the concept of transfer and the ways that transfer can be facilitated effectively, they may have been more explicit in their discussions of writing concepts than they were.

In addition, if we are attempting to help students use previously-learned knowledge more often, then they need to be helped to see the connections between previous writing experiences and what they are currently attempting to do. Although tutors who had been in the transfer class attempted to engage their students in explicit transfer talk about their previous writing experiences, the missed opportunities point towards the need for further teaching, and practice in helping students make connections to their previous experiences. Although the categories of genre and previous writing experiences were explicitly discussed more than many others, many times those were not discussed in detail and connections between those experiences were not made. For example, in the first excerpt above, the tutor is trying to explicitly engage the student in transfer talk about her previous experiences writing in the genre, as well as making connections to the writing she does in her social work classes. However, as my writing center colleague likes to say, she didn't "close the loop." In other words, she failed to finish making the connection. After the student discussed her previous experience with persuasive essays, the tutor could have then pushed the student further by asking her how that previous experience could help her in her current writing project. For example, how were the papers she wrote in high school similar to what she was writing now? What did she learn through those experiences that she could use in the current paper? In making the connection between her social work classes, she could have asked the student how her experience with logic and evidence in those classes affected the way she might use logic and evidence in the paper she was currently writing. In other words, the tutor needed to take the conversation one step further to help the student make connections between previous experiences and the current paper she was writing. Although this may be a common problem with tutors, and not just with tutoring for transfer, tutors may be aided in "closing the loop" through more extensive practice with this during tutor preparation courses.

When it comes to abstract concepts, such as genre and discourse community, as well as other writing concepts that encourage transfer, the tutors again missed some opportunities to help their students move

forward in their knowledge. This leads to the third finding about tutors needing an understanding of genre theory. Tutors never mentioned discourse community, rhetorical situation, or other such abstract concepts. Genres were mentioned, but the discussions were typically limited to simple discussions of the genre's formal features, and there were many missed opportunities to engage students in more complex discussions of the genre-specific nature of writing conventions, etc. For example, when one student called the paper a literary analysis, the tutor asked "What does that mean?"—which could have prompted a discussion of the genre conventions or the discipline-specific nature of literary analysis papers. However, the student answered by explaining the topic of her paper. The tutor never followed up by going back to discussing the genre. Similarly, the tutor in the second excerpt above may not have the complex understanding of genre needed to help her student understand the genre-specific nature of certain writing conventions. In this example, the tutor does not want to contradict the professor. However, the problem the tutor was trying to point out to the student was that she was unclear about the paper's main purpose. So, although the professor may have told the class they didn't need to have an explicitly-stated thesis in their papers, they still needed to have a purpose that was clear to their readers. The tutor in this situation missed an opportunity to help the student move forward in her knowledge of purpose and the different ways to make the paper's purpose clear to readers. Because an explicitly-stated thesis is a genre-specific writing convention, not all writing projects have them. However, all writing serves a purpose, and if that purpose is not clear to the reader, then the writing will not succeed. Therefore, although thesis statements are genre-specific, the idea that writing needs to have a clear purpose is a concept that transcends any one particular genre. This exchange was an opportunity for the tutor to give her student knowledge that would go beyond the individual situation by giving her knowledge of genre, the genre-specific nature of writing conventions, etc. However, the tutor missed this opportunity and instead focused on the project at hand, which in the end may not have even improved this particular paper if the student did not revise it to make the purpose clearer. It's very likely that the tutor in this excerpt does not have the kinds of complex genre knowledge needed to be able to explain this to her student, which could be improved with more specific tutor preparation. In addition, although tutors did talk with their students about the genres they were writing in, they never asked students about how the concept of genre might be useful to them in their future writing, which again points towards some missed opportunities to help students see genre as an abstract concept

that transcends individual writing situations. These kinds of examples, I believe, are likely due to the tutors themselves not having a complex understanding of those concepts.

Proposals for Tutor Education and Future Research

As Perkins & Salomon (1988) explain, low road transfer happens automatically and unconsciously between situations that differ very little. Implicit transfer talk where tutors just mention writing concepts or genre names can cause students to engage in low road transfer of knowledge about that concept or genre, which may have negative effects if the student's knowledge of that concept or genre is incomplete. On the other hand, if we want students to transfer knowledge appropriately and to engage in high road transfer, they need to consciously think about how their learning goes beyond individual situations, and therefore can be positively affected by intentional reflection on their previous knowledge through explicit transfer talk. The findings of this research demonstrate that the tutors who had been taught about transfer theory explicitly engaged their students in transfer talk considerably more than those who had not had that teaching. Although Devet (2015) argues that writing "centers already teach for transfer every day" (p. 120), I believe that a more explicit focus on transfer throughout the tutor preparation course would help them to even more successfully engage their students in the kinds of reflective practices that can lead them to transfer their knowledge more often and more effectively. After all, the tutors would need a high level of initial learning about transfer theory to be able to transfer that knowledge into their tutoring sessions as well, and it's unlikely that one session could give them that high level of learning. Thus tutors should be given multiple opportunities to practice engaging students in transfer talk that helps students not just talk about previous experiences, but make connections between those previous experiences and what they are currently attempting to do. Students should also be encouraged to make connections between what they are learning and future writing experiences, thus helping them see how their current learning transcends the current situation.

Although one session on transfer is better than nothing, in the future, I hope to focus on transfer throughout our tutor preparation course, so tutors can help their students transfer their writing-related knowledge more often. Specifically, I would want to base my tutor preparation course on the principles of teaching for transfer advocated by composition scholars studying transfer, by adapting a pedagogical approach such as Douglas Downs & Elizabeth Wardle's (2007) *Writing*

about Writing, Amy Devitt's (2004) *Genre Awareness*, or Yancey, Robertson, & Taczak's (2014) *Teaching for Transfer*. For example, in Yancey, Robertson, & Taczak's (2014) recent study of transfer, they describe their approach to teaching for transfer in their first-year composition courses. The course they describe has three main goals: 1. teaching students key concepts about writing—abstract concepts that transcend individual writing situations—such as genre, context, audience, discourse community, etc.; 2. teaching students to use reflective practices that engage them in metacognition at all stages of the writing process; and 3. helping students to come to a more accurate and complex theory of what writing is and how writing works both within and outside the university. I would argue for adapting this approach not only for tutoring sessions, but also for tutor preparation classes. In order to help students transfer their writing-related knowledge, the tutors themselves need to know how to accurately use these key concepts, understand the value of reflection, and have an accurate and complex theory of what writing is and how writing works. As discussed by Dana Driscoll (2015) in her “Building Connections and Transferring Knowledge: The Benefits of a Peer Tutoring Course Beyond the Writing Center,” a transfer-focused tutor preparation course can be beneficial to the tutors themselves as well, by encouraging them to transfer the knowledge gained in the course beyond just the writing center. In her study, “A transfer-focused pedagogy” was effective in helping the tutors with “building connections to multiple contexts, encouraging transfer-focused thinking during the course, and encouraging students to be prepared for future learning” (p. 163). Thus the transfer-focused tutor preparation I propose can have benefits beyond just helping students who come to the writing center, but can benefit the tutors themselves beyond the writing center as well.

In order to encourage a high level of learning of key concepts that encourage transfer and help tutors construct a more accurate and complex theory of writing, in the tutor preparation course, I would have students read texts about these concepts written by composition scholars. For example, I would have students read some (if not all) of the following texts: Lucille McCarthy's (1987) “A Stranger in Strange Lands,” Amy Devitt's (2004) “A Proposal for Teaching Genre Awareness and Antecedent Genres” (from her book *Writing Genres*), John Swales' (1990) “The Concept of Discourse Communities” (from *Genre Analysis*), Anne Johns' (1997) “Discourse Communities and Communities of Practice: Membership, Conflict, and Diversity” (from *Text, Role, and Context*), Wardle's (2012) “Creative Repurposing for Expansive Learning,” Donna Kain & Elizabeth Wardle's (2014) “Activity Theory:

An Introduction for the Writing Classroom,” Dan Fraiser’s (2010) “First Steps After First Year,” and one chapter from Yancey, Robertson, & Taczak’s (2014) *Writing Across Contexts*. Our discussions of these texts would focus on giving students a high level of knowledge of genre, discourse community, transfer, activity system, context, the social nature of writing, writing across the curriculum, rhetorical situation, and teaching for transfer, all of which would also give them a more accurate and complex understanding of how writing works, which in turn will help them more effectively and accurately encourage their students to transfer their writing-related knowledge. In addition, tutors would be given multiple opportunities to practice using explicit transfer talk through mock tutoring sessions. They would also be given opportunities to observe experienced tutors who are effectively engaging in transfer talk with their students, which would demonstrate to the new tutors the multiple ways they can use transfer talk to improve their students’ approach to writing.

In summary, as argued by Devet (2015), “Transfer studies and writing centers are made for each other” (p. 138). Because a focus on transfer can help students become better writers in a wider context, we should encourage writing center tutors to engage their students in explicit transfer talk. However, because transfer, as well as concepts such as genre and discourse community, are complex concepts that are often difficult for students to comprehend, if we want tutors to use those concepts in their tutoring sessions, we must teach them to do so. Although this research points towards the benefits of teaching tutors about transfer theory, more research is needed to investigate the effects of this transfer talk on students’ dispositions toward learning, and the extent to which explicit reflection helps them transfer their knowledge more effectively. Whether students actually were able to use previous knowledge more effectively is a question that is beyond the scope of this article and thus a question for future research. In particular, follow up research might take one of the following directions:

- Follow some of the students whose tutors had been taught about transfer theory and who had engaged in transfer talk with those tutors to see the effects of that transfer talk on the student’s ability to transfer their writing-related knowledge.
- Repeat the study with tutors who already have a higher level of learning of the writing concepts discussed here. For example, the goal of my first-year composition course is to explicitly teach students about these very concepts: genre, discourse community, activity system, contexts, transfer, audience, the social nature or writing, etc. It is a combination *Writing about*

Writing/Genre Awareness course. This is not the case in any other composition course at my university. Several students who took my composition course are now writing center tutors. I am interested to know if these students, who should have a higher level of understanding of these terms, are more effective in using those concepts to help their students talk about writing in more complex ways.

- Implement the suggestions for tutor preparation that are presented here and then repeat the study with the tutors who had that preparation, comparing the results either to the results presented here or to new recordings from those who had been through previous iterations of the tutor preparation course.

There are multiple other directions that future research could take, but the above are studies that would begin to answer lingering questions that could not be answered with the current research.

Because we hope writing-related knowledge will transfer beyond our own classrooms, the facilitation of transfer needs to happen beyond our classrooms as well. Teaching for transfer can only do so much; students often need more help to understand how their learning transcends individual situations. The writing center is a powerful place for the facilitation of the transfer of writing-related knowledge. By teaching our tutors about both transfer theory and genre theory, we can make a huge impact on students' ability to transfer their knowledge appropriately, which will greatly influence the ways they value both their writing knowledge and their time spent in the writing center itself.

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