Perceived Roadblocks to Transferring Knowledge from First-Year Composition to Writing-Intensive Major Courses: A Pilot Study

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Despite continued emphasis over the years on *processes* in our teaching of writing, it seems we continue to privilege summative manifestations of improvement. In other words, our definitions of student success often remain tied to what can be more or less immediately observed. This circumscribed vision of student success may explain, at least in part, why our interest in the nature of knowledge transfer, as well as in strategies for facilitating it, have been so limited. To be sure, knowledge transfer is a complex construct, both to study and to manage pedagogically. It involves not only what goes on in the writing course but also what goes on in target contexts, namely other academic writing situations and the workplace. As such, it implicates not only composition teachers and their students but also writing centers; writing across the curriculum and writing in the disciplines programs; university administrators across colleges, departments, and programs; and employers beyond the academy.

While certain learning objectives, such as motivation and rhetorical understanding, can be localized, any successful approach to enhancing the transfer of composition knowledge must involve changes in composition instruction, as well as a pervasive commitment to writing across the curriculum. Indeed, the manner in which institutions of higher education structure student movement from the narrow confines of the first-year composition course out into the ever-broadening contexts of further higher education and beyond will determine the amount of success students have transferring what they learn in their composition courses. Exploring the contours of that structure at one institution of higher education, Southern Illinois University Carbondale (SIUC), is the purpose of this article wherein we report a pilot study, using survey and focus group methodology, that sought to reveal factors potentially influencing the transfer of composition knowledge.

The Nature of Transfer and Its Relevance for Composition Instruction

In clarifying the nature of knowledge transfer, it can be instructive to distinguish it from learning, which has been defined simply as the durability of knowledge—that is, information stored in memory (Georghiades 124-26; Schunk 19). Transfer, on the other hand, involves the application of knowledge acquired in one situation or context to a different situation or context (Georghiades 23; Lauder et al., 480; McKeachie 707; Perkins and Salomon, "Transfer of Learning" ¶1; Schunk 20). Of course, learning is a crucial prerequisite for transfer (National Research Council 53); still, as David Perkins and Gavriel Salomon conclude, "[T]he ends of education are not achieved unless transfer occurs" (¶1).

Because transfer occurs over time and across contextual borders that make it difficult to observe within the traditional academic institutional structure, the application of knowledge from first-year composition course to non-composition course writing contexts remains largely unexplored. The overriding assumption of educators, as Perkins and Salomon note, seems to be that "transfer takes care of itself" ("Teaching for Transfer" 23). But the findings of empirical research, both within our discipline and outside of it, belie this assumption. Consider the following examples:

In 1985, Anne Herrington found that the students in her study failed to make connections between the types of writing they were doing for different courses, even though they were writing within the same discipline. In 1987, Lucille Parkinson McCarthy found that her case study subject Dave, despite similarities among writing assignments in three different courses, interpreted these tasks "as being totally different from each other" and "totally different from anything he'd done before," and thus, failed to apply strategies gained in his composition course to these writing assignments. And in 1989, Stephen Doheny-Farina had a similar experience with his case study subject Anna, who, when writing in both an academic and a non-academic context, perceived the two discourse communities as different and, thus, interpreted the writing tasks as different, when, in fact, they were very similar.

While these localized studies tend to confirm Perkins and Salomon's claims about a general failure of transfer, longitudinal studies in Composition (notably those by Marilyn Sternglass, Lee Ann Carroll, Anne Herrington and Marcia Curtis, Nancy Sommers et al., and Jenn Fishman and Andrea Lunsford) suggest that students develop cognitively and rhetorically as writers during their college years, learning methods of inquiry and the importance of translating academic jargon into their own language (skills

important to knowledge transfer), thus implying that transfer may occur more frequently than localized studies have found.[1] Closer examination of these longitudinal studies, however, points to the possibility that the development they chart over time may be a consequence of their own research methods. Each of these longitudinal studies requires its subjects to reflect on what they are doing and on their progress over time. Reflection represents an important mechanism for achieving metacognitive awareness of the potential for transferring learning across contexts. Much of the data generated for each study comes from just such reflection, a reflexivity that the students might not have developed had they not participated in these longitudinal studies. Still, we don't want to ignore other significant implications of this longitudinal research, for it does offer us an important insight for knowledge transfer and the teaching of composition: that, in fact, teaching to transfer is possible.

Although the published empirical research on knowledge transfer may be relatively sparse, a few semesters' experience as a writing program administrator inevitably brings to light the problem of transfer in the form of complaints from non-Composition faculty about students not having been taught adequately in English 101. Often, or so it seems, such complaints are not viewed as problems of transfer but, rather, as failures of these colleagues to look beyond sentence-level errors or to provide ample time and support for students to be able to demonstrate what they have learned. While, certainly, such failures could cause the ills that prompt these complaints, it might also be the case that our students simply are not transferring what they learned in their composition courses.

Crucial to the productive application of learning is "the ability to extend what has been learned in one context to new contexts" (National Research Council 51; see also Schunk 217; Lauder, Reynolds, and Angus 22), but this is not a simple process. Pedro Georghiades, for example, characterizes the transfer process as involving several cognitive operations: a recognition of overlapping similarity between the originating context and the target context; an acknowledgement of the potential of the learned knowledge to be applied to the target situation; a mental, metacognitive testing of applicability (i.e., reflection on the potential for transfer); and the actual application attempt itself (123).

A crucial distinction in understanding knowledge transfer is that between *near transfer* and *far transfer* (Perkins and Salomon, "Transfer" ¶6; Perkins and Salomon, "Teaching" 27; Adkins 4). *Near transfer* involves an overlapping of features between the originating context, where the knowledge or skill was first acquired, and the target context, where it is to be applied. An example would be the use of knowledge learned driving your

car in the context of driving a different car. These contexts are so similar that conscious consideration of differences between them probably only occurs when you find significant points of contrast.

Far transfer, on the other hand, refers to the application of skills and knowledge to a context remote from the originating one. Perkins and Salomon write that if we were to apply a strategic principle of chess, such as "take control of the center," to investment practices, politics, or military science, then we would be engaged in far transfer ("Transfer" ¶6). It is important to note, however, that *far* and *near* transfer are not dualistic absolutes; rather, they exist along a continuum with transfer often involving both *near* and *far* elements.[2]

Contesting scholarship on the distinction between the concepts of near and far transfer, some have argued that all knowledge is local—thus, bringing into question the very possibility of far transfer. Drawing on the "activity theory" of Vygotsky, Leont'ev, and Luria, David Russell has argued that writing is a "tool" that mediates the "subject" (the writer or writers) and the "object(ive)" of the activity (the purpose or goal of the writing) (53). Russell argues that "writing does not exist apart from its uses, as it is a tool for accomplishing object(ive)s beyond itself" (57), and he concludes that "from the activity theory perspective . . . , there is no autonomous, generalizable skill or set of skills called 'writing' that can be learned and then applied to all genres or activities" (59). The assumptions here are that knowledge is never general and that transfer occurs only through near transfer mechanisms.

Perkins and Salomon ("Are Cognitive Skills Context-Bound") and Michael Carter, however, based on their reviews of research on transfer, have come to a different conclusion. Rather than separating skills (or tools) from content (knowledge), Perkins and Salomon view writing, along with reading and arithmetic, as "tool domains" of knowledge. They contend that "the very existence of tool domains that enhance thinking and learning in content domains, in itself, constitutes evidence for general cognitive skills of a sort" ("Cognitive" 21), skill knowledge that crosses disciplinary boundaries. In his exploration of expertise, Carter also argues for a synthesis of local *and* general knowledge. While experts tend to rely on a local, domain-specific content knowledge, expertise is not acquired overnight, and Carter advocates for Hubert and Stuart Dreyfus's five-stage process of expertise development that begins with novice applications of "context-free rules" and moves through the acquisition of more sophisticated, domain-specific competencies. Research has shown that even experts tend to employ generalized strategies when facing unfamiliar tasks to which their domain-specific knowledge is ill-suited (Perkins and Salomon, "Cognitive" 20). Per-

kins and Salomon's research, then, as well as Carter's, suggests that writing involves both near and far transfer, relying on both local and general knowledge. This is the theoretical premise on which our own study rests.

Regarding far transfer in particular, Perkins and Salomon identify two types: *forward reaching transfer*, in which one reflects on possible future contexts where learned material could be applied; and *backward reaching transfer,* in which one recovers from memory learned material in order to apply it to a current situation ("Teaching" 26). Importantly, these manifestations of far transfer (and to a lesser degree manifestations of near transfer) are affected by various cognitive and affective phenomena including, *metacognition*, defined as the "active monitoring of learning one's learning experiences" ("Teaching" 59); *motivation to learn*, which, most notably, affects time spent on task and the amount of attention devoted to the task ("Teaching" 60), as well as the ability to recognize opportunities for transfer; and finally, *representation* ("Teaching" 63), especially at the level of generalization, since for transfer to occur, knowledge must be abstract enough to allow a person to conceive of its application in a situation dissimilar from that in which the knowledge was first acquired (National Research Council 53, 62, and 63; Schunk 218-19). This requirement of generalization, in turn, makes metacognitive reflection, the ability to reflect on one's choices and decisions, especially integral to knowledge transfer.

Objectives of the Study

While near transfer is necessarily of concern to composition instructors and WPAs, it is the potential for far transfer—transfer beyond the general composition course to writing-intensive courses in students' majors—that we have sought to make more visible through our research. As members of our institution's Communication Across the Curriculum (CAC) task force[3] we have been involved in ongoing, interdisciplinary conversations about the disparity between what is purportedly occurring in our university's first-year composition sequence and our undergraduate students' seeming lack of understanding about and/or facility with composition skills and strategies that writing-intensive instructors across campus deem important. In response to these discussions, we sought to learn more about what might be confounding the far transfer of knowledge and skills introduced in our English 101 and 102 courses. Given that empirical research in this area is sparse, the objectives of our research are exploratory, intended primarily to identify and characterize variables that may influence the potential for transferring knowledge between general composition and discipline-specific writing-intensive courses. Specifically, our goals are twofold: to

offer individuals in similar institutions with similar programs some insight into how they might bolster their own CAC/WAC initiatives with an eye toward knowledge transfer and to assist in providing some starting points for researchers, like us, who are interested in systematically building upon our field's understanding of a construct that is so crucial to our students' success in the academy and beyond.

Our study unfolded in two phases, the first consisting of a survey of graduate teaching assistants (GTAs) teaching in our first-year writing sequence, and the second consisting of focus group discussions with writing-intensive instructors from our university's College of Applied Sciences and Arts (CASA). The central research question driving Phase One was this: What specific concepts, strategies, and skills are reportedly being emphasized and practiced in our many sections of English 101 and 102? The central research questions driving Phase Two of this project, then, were these: What concepts, strategies, and skills commonly addressed in English 101 and 102 (as identified in Phase One) seem to transfer to CASA's writing-intensive courses? And, if they appear *not* to be transferring, what might be potential sources of difficulty with regard to transfer?

Survey: Methodology

The answers to the question driving Phase One of this study were fundamental to its purpose since it is impossible to learn more about what may or may not be transferring from writing courses to discipline-specific writing situations without first gaining some sense of what is actually being emphasized in the composition courses. To offer a little background on our first-year composition sequence, English 101 at SIUC seeks to prepare students for writing in a variety of academic and social situations while stressing critical thinking skills. English 102 reviews many of the concepts and strategies addressed in 101 but with an increased emphasis on argumentation and research. Despite these course objectives and despite the rigorous GTA training required by the English department (an eight-day orientation seminar and a required graduate-level, theory-based course in teaching college composition), GTAs teaching 101 and 102 at the time of this study were allowed considerable freedom—within certain parameters—in designing and executing their courses. Therefore, we could not assume that the same writing skills and strategies were being stressed in the various sections of 101 and 102.[4]

To gain a sense of the skills and strategies that various sections reportedly did stress, we decided to query the instructors who were actually teaching the courses in question. Toward this end, we drafted an extensive,

multi-faceted survey and subjected it to a pilot study.[5]After revising the survey in accordance with findings of the pilot study and receiving approval of our research methodology from SIUC's Human Subjects Review Board, we invited all GTAs teaching in the first-year writing sequence (a population of sixty) to complete the survey. In the end, thirty-five GTAs responded to the call, helping us achieve a relatively high rate of participation (58 percent). Specifically, the survey instrument (Appendix A) included sections asking for the following information: demographic particulars, composing concepts and strategies that GTAs tended to emphasize in their classes and, using a Likert Scale, the level of emphasis; the informal and formal writing assignments employed; and the participants' sense of the collective strengths and weaknesses of their students (both at the beginning and at the end of the course).

Survey: Findings and Discussion

A tabulation of the number of Likert-Scale points for each concept or strategy on the list of possible issues (a total of fifty-seven labels) broached in 101 and 102 resulted in a substantial grouping of items that were, reportedly, at the time this research was conducted, commonly and regularly addressed in these courses. At least two-thirds of our subject pool noted that they "frequently" interacted with their students regarding the following items constituting the survey list: (1) process writing; (2) written peer response; (3) formulation of main ideas; (4) audience analysis; (5) development of ideas; (6) analysis of assigned texts or issues; (7) structure of argument; (8) supporting claims; (9) organization; (10) incorporating sources; and (11) internal citations.[6]

In contrast to the level of agreement on the concepts, strategies and skills that were "frequently" addressed in 101 and 102, the results for concepts, strategies and skills that were "rarely" or "never"[7]addressed revealed few points of commonality across sections. Indeed, the only "rarely"/"never" items that achieved at least two-thirds response rate (the rate of agreement for the "frequently" responses) were (1) titles, (2) text imitation, and (3) spelling. At the 50 percent response rate for "rarely"/"never" items, the list expands to include (4) group conferencing; (5) evaluation of model student essays; (6) literary interpretation; (7) formal heuristics; (8) document design; (9) data-based searches; (10) text annotation; (11) sentence types; and (12) vocabulary.[8]

In addition to inquiring about the strategies and skills that our GTAs reportedly emphasized in 101 and 102, we also sought in our survey to determine the types of formal and informal writing assignments that

received the most attention. The survey instrument included a list of thirty possible assignments (see Appendix A) that might have appeared on a syllabus for our 101 or 102 courses. GTAs were instructed to check any and all assignments that they included on their syllabus for the most recent section of 101 or 102 that they were assigned to teach. Ninety percent of the GTAs responding reported that they included the following assignments, listed here in descending order of "hits": rough drafts, analytical essays, persuasive essays, response journals, research papers. Beyond these five, the level of agreement among syllabi regarding assignment types dropped considerably. The next highest grouping of responses rested between 50 and 70 percent, listed here in descending order of "hits": informative essays, invention journals, personal experience essays, research proposals, annotated bibliographies, process journals.

We conclude from these survey data that, at the time of this study, most of our 101 and 102 students were being exposed to a process paradigm including the drafting and revising of their papers. Many engaged in journal writing and conducted secondary research. Persuasive and analytical writings were the predominant genres assigned, although most sections of 101 began with personal experience or informative writing assignments. Despite this overall agreement among GTAs, quite a bit of diversity existed across sections of 101 and 102. Such diversity, no doubt, was a result of a writing program philosophy that advocated a good amount of GTA autonomy. In the context of such a program, students were likely to encounter disparate experiences across the many sections of these courses, and, therefore, writing-intensive instructors in other departments could not rest assured that students entering their courses had engaged in similar composing scenarios or had achieved competency with regard to a *standardized* base of composing knowledge.

At the conclusion, then, of Phase One of this project, we possessed a sizeable list of concepts, strategies, skills, and genres that our survey suggested were being emphasized in English 101 and 102. The survey also provided us with a list of infrequently addressed concepts, strategies, skills, and genres. In Phase Two, we sought to get a sense of whether or not professors teaching discipline-specific writing-intensive courses witnessed indications that the concepts, strategies, skills, and genres emphasized in 101 and 102 were being employed by their students. We also wanted to hear their insights into what might be encouraging or discouraging the transfer of composition knowledge from the 101/102 sequence to their writing-intensive courses. To gather this data, we chose to employ focus group methodology, because, with its interplay among participants, this methodology

has been recognized to elicit richer, deeper feedback than might be gleaned through individual interviews or surveys (MacNealy 177).

Focus Group: Methodology

In recruiting focus group participants for Phase Two of this study, we gravitated toward professors in the College of Applied Sciences and Arts because, at the time, it had the most highly developed CAC initiatives on campus, led by an associate dean actively committed to the ideals of SIUC's CAC program. This associate dean provided us with a list of ten instructors of writing-intensive courses in his college, whom we invited via email to participate in our focus group.[9] We were able to recruit five instructors, including three women and two men, representing the Dental Hygiene, Physician's Assistant, X-Ray Technology, Aviation Technology, and Computer Management programs.

In accordance with our participants' preference, we scheduled the focus group discussion for a two-hour period in the late afternoon on a Tuesday during finals week of fall semester, 2004. The discussion was held in a conference room in the university's student center with movable tables and chairs, allowing for easy rearrangement that was conducive to small group exchange. The focus group discussion, which was both video and audio recorded, began with introductions of all participants.[10] During this introductory exchange, we informed the CASA professors of our respective roles (Dively as primary moderator; Nelms as recorder, equipment manager, and secondary moderator), we reassured our subjects of their strict anonymity, and we explained that we wanted the exchange of information to flow naturally as their observations and recollections moved them, with our primary purpose being to keep the discussion generally on track.

The formal conversation, then, began with Professor Dively presenting the focus group with a list of questions prepared specifically for the discussion (see Appendix B). Several of these questions directly referenced the data collected during Phase One of our study. As we anticipated, the conversation quickly assumed a direction of its own, with a spirited give-and-take among participants, all of whom were highly engaged with the topic. Although our questions were not addressed in the order we had planned, we urged members of the focus group to clarify and elaborate on their insights, and we left the discussion with diverse, plentiful, and illuminating data. Finally, in keeping with our exploratory approach, we analyzed these data not with a particular coding scheme in mind but with an ear toward emergent themes that might further our understanding of the challenges

students, teachers, and administrators face with regard to the transfer of composition knowledge.

Findings and Discussion: Analysis of Focus Group Data

Theme One: Lack of Transfer and the Compartmentalization of Knowledge

Tapes of the focus group discussion revealed that all participants were genuinely concerned about knowledge transfer. They repeatedly noted the perceived inability of their students to make even the most superficial connections between what they were learning in one course and what they had learned in another. As one professor put it: "They want to compartmentalize everything." Students' seeming inability to make inferences or apply knowledge across different educational contexts was a tremendous source of frustration for our focus group subjects and helped explain many of the weaknesses in students' writing witnessed by non-composition instructors.

Unfortunately, we don't have time to ponder here the question of how we might condition students to view all of their learning experiences as connected. But we suspect that answers to that question could reduce the instances of students approaching us to ask, "Is this what you wanted for this paper?"—an inquiry that suggests that they view all school-sponsored writing experiences as utterly discrete. We suspect that if students are encouraged to search for connections among these experiences, they would be more apt to stop fixating on the differences. Such a disposition could not help but facilitate knowledge transfer. Obviously, teachers will have to model such a disposition, if not explicitly address it, in their own classrooms.

Of additional concern, according to our focus group members, instructors of non-writing-intensive courses in CASA may have been inadvertently undermining transfer by implying a separation of content and writing instruction by not assigning writing in their own courses. Surely, this attitude encourages the compartmentalization of courses focused on content domains and courses focused on tool domains, and it also supports CASA students' reported nonchalance regarding their writing and the widespread belief that writing will be of little value to them as they advance into their technical fields beyond the academy.

Theme Two: Points of Transfer from English 101 and 102

The focus group participants were quite solid in their agreement regarding which composing concepts, skills, and strategies most commonly addressed by our GTAs in 101 and 102 did seem to be transferring. Those capabilities

included an understanding of the relationship between thesis and support; a facility for analyzing various texts; and a familiarity with principles governing source citation. The focus group members also agreed that several items on that list did not regularly manifest themselves in their students' writing. In short, they suggested that a disconnect between what is taught in 101 and 102 and the writing submitted for their courses did exist.

As noted earlier, some would argue that this disconnect is, to some degree, unavoidable, that each writing situation by its very nature has its own objectives in line with different disciplinary values and educational purposes. Nonetheless, research on transfer tells us that knowledge transfer can be one of our course objectives and that transfer can be facilitated by searching out points of overlap or similarity between writing in the composition course and writing in non-composition courses (Foerstsch). Moreover, if Perkins and Salomon and Michael Carter are correct that "tool domains" consist of general knowledge—that is, knowledge that crosses "content domain" boundaries—as well as local knowledge, then we should be able to identify general concepts, skills, and strategies, if not genres, that can be employed in writing situations beyond that of the composition course. In fact, Carter, following the work of Hubert and Stuart Dreyfus in *Mind Over Machine*, suggests that expertise in writing within a discipline takes place over time and that the use of "global" or "general" strategies, quoting psychologist John Anderson (206), can "enable the initial performance and impose a goal structure on the performance so that the knowledge compilation process can operate successfully" (qtd. in Carter 273).

Theme Three: Lack of Time for Addressing Writing in "Content Area" Courses

Even if general composition courses and discipline-specific writing-intensive courses could chart larger patches of philosophical and practical common ground, the opportunity to concentrate on writing instruction in content-oriented major courses—such as those taught by our focus group participants—would remain severely limited. At least, this is the way the five CASA professors involved in our study viewed the situation. Indeed, time and again during our two-hour exchange, they lamented the fact that, because they feel so much pressure to cover what their students will need to know for board exams and other measures of their technical knowledge, they could not find adequate space in their curricula, or time during individual class periods, for direct instruction focused on writing or even for integration of exercises that highlight composing practices that they know are vital to their students' success.

Interestingly, the three practices touted by the focus group participants as vital to successful composing processes—invention, peer-response, and metacognition—are all rooted in reflection, which, as noted earlier, represents a crucial mechanism of knowledge transfer. Kathleen Blake Yancey defines reflection as "the dialectical process by which we develop and achieve, first, specific goals for learning; second, strategies for reaching those goals; and third, means of determining whether or not we have met those goals or other goals" (6). In short, reflection heightens our awareness of our goals and accomplishments so that we may evaluate our progress and assess our products.

Reflection has been implicated in rhetorical invention, in particular, for over two millennia. While scholars of rhetoric have debated whether consciously applied invention heuristics, such as the Aristotelian *topoi*, should be taught to writers (Young), few modern scholars of rhetoric question the important role of conscious reflection in developing content for discourse, even if that reflection is more "organic" than "rule-governed." As Janice Lauer notes, invention is a conscious process of "examining alternatives" (6-7). Peer responding, too, in its reliance on reflection, requires the peer responder to cast backward to recall what she's learned about effective writing from various sources and in a diversity of contexts. The writer, then, must reflect on the responder's commentary in order to assess its relevance. Finally, reflection, of course, is implicated in any manifestation of metacognition—that is, active reviewing of one's own progress in accomplishing a task in order to determine strategies, resources, and processes needed (Schunk 192; National Research Council 58-59). Linda Flower has shown that writers must be able to consciously verbalize their own thinking processes, mental strategies, blocks, and leaps that combine in virtually every problem-solving task (27-28; 53; 121; 184-88; 223-62). Such conscious verbalization is, by definition, a form of reflective practice.

Ironically, even though each member of our focus group recognized the importance of reflective activities involved in invention, peer response and metacognition, and even though some went so far as to encourage the practice of prewriting exercises and peer response outside of class, not one of these professors claimed to have found a way to orchestrate these or other reflective practices within their scheduled class meetings. Most importantly for considerations of knowledge transfer, metacognition reportedly was neither addressed nor encouraged, despite these professors' avid appreciation for the notion. This finding that the need for vital reflective activities may continue to be overridden in the face of the perceived need for content coverage in writing-intensive courses suggests that CAC initiatives—from both directions—may not have been as successful as they might have been

in clarifying the notion that content coverage and writing instruction need not necessarily compete with each other for time but, rather, can be mutually supportive.

Theme 4: Students' Lack of Motivation

Members of our focus group also unanimously agreed that their students appear to lack motivation when it comes to writing. They attributed this situation, at least in part, to the fact that writing is not, as noted above, integrated throughout CASA curricula. It is possible, they explained, for students to go for several semesters after completing 101 and 102 without any significant writing being assigned. In such a system, the always challenging and sometimes painful process of writing will become increasingly alien and intimidating.

Our focus group also observed that their students tend to prefer the "hands on" work associated with their respective fields. Aviation technology students would rather be tuning an airplane engine, aspiring dental hygienists sliding floss around inside a patient's mouth, and computer management students configuring and entering programs. Though we have no data to confirm such a conclusion, we find it sensible to think that these students might be tactile or schematic learners, less attuned to writing. Of course, to our way of thinking, this possibility only increases the need for more writing instruction and teaching for transfer of composition knowledge.

In addition, our focus group members reported yet another motivational obstacle for CASA students: a mistaken belief that they do not need to develop higher order writing competencies, such as producing well-organized texts, because most of what they will be doing is recording fragmentary information on charts. Research in workplace communication, of course, has shown that full-text production is not as unusual in the workplace as these students seem to believe (National Commission on Writing 3). Such competencies, too, might well be transferable to other situations demanding higher order organizational ability.

Finally, our focus group members noted the pervading sense of entitlement that many of their students display, the idea that because they (or their parents) are paying for their education, they should be able to dictate what it consists of, as well as the manner in which they receive it.

Whatever the premise on which the lack of motivation rests, this absence is problematic for knowledge transfer**,** because of the key role that motivation plays in the process of learning. If we are not motivated to learn, we won't learn, and thus, as Georghiades makes clear, we will have nothing to transfer (123).

Theme 5: Disparity in Composition Vocabulary

Even if all of the aforementioned "themes" were effectively addressed, the transfer of composition knowledge would still be constrained by significant vocabulary differences between general composition courses and discipline-specific courses. While it comes as no surprise that different disciplines employ different terminology when referencing similar types of writing assignments, composing strategies, and writing skills, it is interesting to note where the specific points of disparity arise within the context of our study.

Of greatest concern, perhaps, is the confusion regarding aims for writing which compositionists label as "persuasion." When we asked members of our focus group about the level of emphasis they placed on persuasive writing, all were noticeably hesitant in replying, until one CASA professor asked what we English professors meant by that term. Our discussion revealed that they did indeed assign persuasive writing; they just didn't conceive or label it as such. More specifically, what we referred to as "persuading," they referred to as "justifying an opinion" or "explaining your reasoning," for example.

This use of different terminology, no doubt, must contribute to the failure of knowledge transfer from composition courses. It can cause students to overlook cues that might signal the potential application of concepts, strategies, and skills learned in first-year composition. If the CASA professors do not connect "persuasion" with "justifying an opinion"—or if composition instructors don't make a point of learning what terms their colleagues in that college use when referring to the concept in question and, then, introduce those terms as well—then how can we expect students to make the connection?

Another point of confusion relevant to this theme that was made evident during our focus group discussion involved the term "research." As it has typically been employed in 101 and 102, "research" refers to general library skills and the act of effectively integrating external source material into one's text. However, our focus group participants reported that CASA professors tend to reserve the term for work that adheres to the scientific method.

Finally, relevant to the terminology theme, it became clear during our focus group discussion that CASA professors are not as particular as composition instructors about distinguishing among "types" of composing tasks, preferring instead to assign all exercises—regardless of topic, aim, level of formality, etc.—to the categories of "written assignments," "weekly writings" or "papers."

Implications and Recommendations

Clearly, increased communication between those involved in designing and delivering general composition courses and those involved in designing and delivering writing-intensive courses could help dismantle roadblocks to the transfer of composition knowledge. Such interdisciplinary exchanges need to concentrate on sharing understandings about writing concepts, strategies, skills, and genres as well as course objectives and student attitudes toward writing, all with the intention of creating a general continuity of understanding in composition instruction, both within the first-year sequence and across the disciplines.

Although such conversations typically do not occur naturally, connections can be achieved through CAC initiatives, such as faculty and GTA workshops, campus forums, newsletters, consultations, etc. Obviously, then, CAC and WID directors/coordinators and task force or committee members need to know the scholarship on knowledge transfer and have transfer as a major objective of their programs. The following activities would make a good start toward enhancing programmatic coordination: (1) training in rhetoric and writing processes for administrators and writing-intensive instructors; (2) training in knowledge transfer and the benefits of reflective practices for all faculty members; and (3) a renewed emphasis within the CAC community on addressing the issue of workload and time. (Our focus group members revealed that they did not believe CAC claims that incorporating more writing in their teaching would not, by necessity, add to their workload or infringe on the traditional content of their courses.)

Composition program administrators also need to learn more about and create curricula that teach to the application of composition knowledge beyond the context of the composition course. Such training would entail (1) developing more discipline- and/or workplace-specific assignments for first-year composition in order to lessen the distance between FYC and future writing contexts, rendering learning experiences more like possible future applications; (2) developing ways of motivating students to write generally but also to see applications of these processes beyond the composition course; and (3) including more metacognitive reflection on writing processes, on rhetoric, and on applications of writing strategies. Thus, composition course curricula also need reexamination and revision with an eye toward finding ways of enhancing transfer.

Beyond these larger administrative initiatives, individual instructors also can help facilitate the transfer of composition knowledge. Composition instructors can learn the language that their non-composition colleagues use when talking about writing with students and vice versa. Individual

instructors also can reevaluate their own course goals, course content, and pedagogies, and make transfer an explicit course objective. Most importantly, individual instructors can learn specific strategies for teaching to transfer.

Key to this endeavor are the concepts of "hugging" and "bridging" (Perkins and Salomon, "Transfer" 32-33; Perkins and Salomon, "Teaching" 28-29). "Hugging" is the label given to teaching for low-road or near transfer (that is, the transfer of knowledge between very similar contexts), while "bridging" is the label for teaching for high-road or far transfer (that is, the application of skills and knowledge to a context remote from the originating one).

Perhaps the most effective "hugging" instruction, according to Perkins and Salomon, "directly engage[s] learners in approximations to the performances desired" ("Transfer" ¶32). Hugging instruction helps prepare students to accomplish tasks within the context in which the learning is taking place. "Bridging" instruction, which aims more broadly to prepare students to apply their learning across contextual borders, is more complicated, involving both *forward reaching transfer*, where students generalize from their learning in preparation for future applications of that learning, and *backward reaching transfer*, where students reach back into their past experiences to find matches with their present situation and task ("Teaching" 26). Kathleen Blake Yancey's reflective exercises, *reviewing* ("a casting backward to see where we have been") and *projecting* ("a looking forward to goals we might attain"), clearly echo forward reaching and backward reaching transfer respectively (6).

In addition to increasing reflective practices, individual instructors might also employ these active learning strategies: (1) contextualizing assignments so that they exemplify possible future writing tasks; (2) using role-playing as a way of signaling future applications of composition knowledge; (3) demonstrating how tasks might be accomplished; and (4) having students actively engage in practicing those tasks. [11]

To be sure, the importance of identifying *contextual cues* or signals alerting students to possible applications of what they are learning cannot be overemphasized. For example, instructors could ask students to identify target audiences for their texts and to compare and contrast those audiences with past audiences whom they have addressed in their writing and with possible future audiences to whom they might write. Students might also be asked to research the different writing genres used in a particular field of interest and, then, to identify those which involve persuasion and what strategies learned in the composition course might be applied in those writing situations.

As promising as all this sounds, it is important to reiterate how relatively little we know about the transfer of composition knowledge and, thus, how much research is still needed. Particularly with regard to our study, we are eager to learn if the perceived roadblocks to transfer identified by CASA faculty are the same roadblocks perceived by faculty in other colleges at SIUC. Additionally, we are eager to learn if the *students* enrolled at our university feel that composition knowledge is adequately transferring and, moreover, if they can offer insights as to why it seems to be or not to be transferring. The following are just some of the other research questions raised in the context of this exploratory study that we feel deserve the attention of our profession:

1. Exactly which of the many concepts, skills, strategies, and genres that we teach seem to transfer and which do not? Are certain contexts more favorable than others for the transfer of certain aspects of composition?

2. What specific roles do motivation and reflection play in the transfer of composition knowledge?

3. What role can writing across the curriculum and writing in the disciplines play in knowledge transfer?

4. How should our understanding of knowledge transfer affect writing program structure and administration?

These questions chart broad ground for our continued inquiry into a fundamental learning objective for educators in general and composition teachers in particular. Given the obvious centrality of written communication to the pursuit of competency and/or success in most any field of study or career, thinking about and teaching toward transfer in composition courses is absolutely incumbent upon those who design and execute writing and writing-intensive curricula. While it seems clear that this sense of responsibility is a driving force behind the WAC movement, faculty and administrators are still laboring to determine how their programs might effectively live up to this responsibility. In light of this observation, it seems that research into how better to facilitate the transfer of composition knowledge needs to be made a priority of our discipline.

Notes

[1] Sternglass' study began in 1989 and followed 53 students, most of them African-American and Latino, for six and a half years. Her findings are based on analyses of interviews, written papers, classroom observations, and copies of

all attempts of her subjects to pass two required writing tests. Carroll followed 20 middle-to-upper class students over four years, relying primarily on students' digital portfolios, which included representative examples of their writings. Herrington and Curtis conducted longitudinal case studies of four students. They do not describe their students as representative, but they do express some conclusions that suggest a generalizing from these students' experiences. Harvard's Expository Writing Program's longitudinal study (Sommers et al.) and the Stanford Study of Writing (Fishman, Lunsford, et al.) are recent studies, whose data analysis is still ongoing. Our conclusions regarding these two studies, then, must be considered tentative. Nevertheless, their methodologies and the findings that have been released so far suggest similar limitations to those of the earlier longitudinal studies with regard to tracking knowledge transfer. See also The Stanford Study of Writing, "Preliminary Findings"; Harvard Expository Writing Program, "Longitudinal Study Highlights Importance of Writing (Fall 1999)"; and Harris, "What Do College Students Think about Writing?" There are other longitudinal studies of knowledge transfer, although most focus on elementary or high school students (e.g., Loban; Britton, et al.; Freedman and Pringle; and Wilkinson, et al.). Hays did an early longitudinal study of just college students in 1983 that is not considered here. Also not included is a study of college students by Wolcott begun in 1989. Wolcott herself acknowledges the limitations of her use of one fifty-minute, timed essay to determine level of development.

[2] In her dissertation, Julie Lynn Dyke adopts a different taxonomy of transfer: R. M. Gagne's distinction between *lateral* and *vertical* transfer, as described by Nathaniel Teich. Lateral transfer involves the application of knowledge "in a new situation of the same level of complexity as that of the original," while vertical transfer involves the activation of ability "at the next higher level" (Dyke 26). Both dichotomies provide productive ways of thinking about knowledge. We found, however, the near and far distinction more suggestive of a transfer continuum, and thus, it allowed us to conceptualize the gray areas between the two extreme manifestations of transfer.

[3] Dr. Nelms, as Interim Director of SIUC's Communication Across the Curriculum Program, chaired this committee from January 2001 to July 2004, when the CAC program was discontinued.

[4] Since the time this research was completed, the writing program has moved to the use of a common syllabus for English 101, which ensures greater continuity across sections.

[5] In an attempt to make the list of concepts and strategies as comprehensive as possible, Professor Dively enlisted the help of five experienced GTAs enrolled in her composition research methods course (Lucia Amorelli, Chris Drew, Valerie Dunn, Betsy Herman, and Caroline Liao, who would later be exempt from participating in the study). While involved in a unit on survey construction, these students were asked to begin independently generating lists of concepts and strategies that they typically addressed in their own first-year writing courses or

that they knew their peers typically addressed. Upon completing their individual lists, class members combined them for an even broader list and then workshopeed the list, adding items they might have missed and omitting items that might be construed as redundant. At the end of this process, these students had generated a list of fifty-seven items to be included on the Likert-Scale portion of the survey. These students also participated in generating the list of possible formal and informal writing assignments in Part 4 of the survey. In addition to acknowledging the significant contributions of the students who helped develop the survey instrument, we would like to thank those graduate assistants who helped administer the survey (Lucia Amorelli, Casey Deaton, Chris Drew, Valerie Dunn, Evon Hawkins, Betsy Herman, Jen Mueller, Ryan Thornsberry, and Abby Waldron) as well as those who helped tabulate the results (Casey Deaton, Jen Mueller, Jan Presley, and Ryan Thornsberry).

[6] Given discussions of these concepts, skills and strategies in their orientation seminars and in English 502, we believe that the majority of our GTAs would define them similarly.

[7] We chose to combine the "rarely" and "never" categories when reporting the results because, separately, they failed to provide a substantial level of agreement on any of the survey items. Together, however, they achieved percentages of agreement approaching those achieved for the "frequently" category. Moreover, the "rarely" and "never" categories together established the contrast we were anticipating to the "frequently" category, thus clarifying the issues and skills that are prioritized and those that are not prioritized. (After all, there is undoubtedly little difference regarding the instructional impact of an issue or skill that is "rarely" addressed and one that is "never" addressed.) Because the agreement for the "frequently" category was impressive in and of itself, we chose not to combine it with the "occasionally" category, which, in retrospect, seems a rather benign designation and one that is rather difficult to ascribe any weight relative to the other designations.

[8] Non-study-related discussions with GTAs, particularly in English 502 and other courses, revealed to us possible reasons why other concepts and strategies were not as frequently employed by our GTAs. Some GTAs took for granted that their students were already proficient with regard to certain skills (producing titles, spelling, conducting data-base searches). Some believed that the concepts were so elementary that to address them would be insulting to students. Some concepts, skills, and strategies were sidestepped because program objectives discouraged them; undoubtedly, this was the case with regard to literary interpretation. And despite our attempts to troubleshoot the survey instrument, some GTAs indicated a lack of familiarity with a few of the constructs we included on the questionnaire.

[9] Some of the individuals contacted were already familiar with the study because they had attended a presentation that we prepared at the request of the associate dean in which we reviewed some of the more recently developed CAC

resources and shared the findings of Phase One of our study. At the end of this presentation, attendees were encouraged to think about participating in Phase Two of the study once we were prepared to execute it.

[10] Because we wanted to have a record of participants' facial expressions and body language, we were determined to videotape the session, despite the admitted discomfort that this can cause some individuals. Our subjects, however, did not reveal any resistance to appearing on camera. The audiotape was employed primarily as a backup in case the video recorder stopped working or the tape became damaged.

[11] All of these items reflect a more "active learning" approach to composition instruction. Clearly influenced by John Dewey and Jean Piaget, active learning can be defined as any pedagogy that seeks to involve students in their own learning, typically through activities beyond simply listening—that is, through writing, problem solving, engaged discussion, group work, role playing, simulations, case studies, and any learning motivated by activity. Bonwell and Eison argue that "to be actively involved, students must engage in such higher-order thinking tasks as analysis, synthesis, and evaluation" (¶2), and, thus, most active learning pedagogies have reflective components. Problem-based learning involves the use of real-world or real-world-like problems to engage student learning. Project-based learning focuses on learning within the context of accomplishing a task or project. And service learning involves engaging students in meaningful community service. Clearly, all of these active learning teaching methods will overlap in actual practice.

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APPENDIX A

Pedagogical Survey: English 101 and 102

Part 1: General Information
Please respond to the following queries by circling the accurate responses.
1) Gender?   **Male   Female**
2) Program concentration? **Composition/Rhetoric Literature Creative Writing Other**
3) Number of semesters teaching composition at SIUC? **1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 8+**
4) Composition courses you have taught at SIUC? **100 101 102 120 290 291**
5) Regarding Eng. 101 and 102, the course you have taught most recently? **101 102**
6) Your willingness to participate in a follow-up interview? **Yes No**
    [If answer to 6 is "yes," please offer your name: _____]

Part 2: Concepts and Activities
Below is a list of concepts and activities that teachers *might* employ in English 101 and
102. As you respond to the survey items, please have in mind the course (**either 101 or
102**) that you taught most recently. Regarding that course, indicate the frequency with
which you discussed with students and/or required them to practice each listed concept or
activity. (**Discuss** = formally talking about the concept or activity with students; **practice**
= having them complete exercises relevant to the concept/activity.) Record frequency for
discussing and/or practicing each item by marking the box in the column directly below
the most accurate frequency label (see first line of the list on each page). If you did not
discuss or practice the concept or activity in the focal course, simply mark the box in the
"never" column.

		frequently	occasionally	rarely	never
1. process writing	discuss:	—	—	—	—
	practice:	—	—	—	—
2. drafting workshops	discuss:	—	—	—	—
	practice:	—	—	—	—
3. teacher conferences	discuss:	—	—	—	—
	practice:	—	—	—	—
4. group conferences	discuss:	—	—	—	—
	practice:	—	—	—	—
5. peer response–written	discuss:	—	—	—	—
	practice:	—	—	—	—
6. peer response–oral	discuss:	—	—	—	—
	practice:	—	—	—	—
7. evaluating model student essays	discuss:	—	—	—	—
	practice:	—	—	—	—
8. evaluating published essays	discuss:	—	—	—	—
	practice:	—	—	—	—
9. interpreting Literature	discuss:	—	—	—	—
	practice:	—	—	—	—
10. interpreting assignments	discuss:	—	—	—	—
	practice:	—	—	—	—
11. freewriting/looping	discuss:	—	—	—	—
	practice:	—	—	—	—
12. brainstorming/clustering	discuss:	—	—	—	—
	practice:	—	—	—	—
13. formal heuristics	discuss:	—	—	—	—
	practice:	—	—	—	—

14. collaborative invention	discuss:	—	—	—	—
	practice:	—	—	—	—
15. narrowing topics	discuss:	—	—	—	—
	practice:	—	—	—	—
16. formulating main ideas	discuss:	—	—	—	—
	practice:	—	—	—	—
17. analyzing audience	discuss:	—	—	—	—
	practice:	—	—	—	—
18. achieving ethos	discuss:	—	—	—	—
	practice:	—	—	—	—
19. achieving pathos	discuss:	—	—	—	—
	practice:	—	—	—	—
20. achieving logos	discuss:	—	—	—	—
	practice:	—	—	—	—
21. developing ideas	discuss:	—	—	—	—
	practice:	—	—	—	—
22. paraphrasing	discuss:	—	—	—	—
	practice:	—	—	—	—
23. summarizing	discuss:	—	—	—	—
	practice:	—	—	—	—
24. synthesizing	discuss:	—	—	—	—
	practice:	—	—	—	—
25. analyzing	discuss:	—	—	—	—
	practice:	—	—	—	—
26. comparing/contrasting	discuss:	—	—	—	—
	practice:	—	—	—	—
27. defining concepts/term	discuss:	—	—	—	—
	practice:	—	—	—	—
28. structuring arguments	discuss:	—	—	—	—
	practice:	—	—	—	—
29. supporting claims	discuss:	—	—	—	—
	practice:	—	—	—	—
30. paragraphing	discuss:	—	—	—	—
	practice:	—	—	—	—
31. introductions	discuss:	—	—	—	—
	practice:	—	—	—	—
32. conclusions	discuss:	—	—	—	—
	practice:	—	—	—	—
33. document design	discuss:	—	—	—	—
	practice:	—	—	—	—
34. organization	discuss:	—	—	—	—
	practice:	—	—	—	—
35. transitions	discuss:	—	—	—	—
	practice:	—	—	—	—
36. titles	discuss:	—	—	—	—
	practice:	—	—	—	—
37. library skills	discuss:	—	—	—	—
	practice:	—	—	—	—
38. data-base searches	discuss:	—	—	—	—
	practice:	—	—	—	—
39. critical reading strategies	discuss:	—	—	—	—
	practice:	—	—	—	—
40. evaluating library sources	discuss:	—	—	—	—
	practice:	—	—	—	—
41. evaluating on-line sources	discuss:	—	—	—	—
	practice:	—	—	—	—

42. annotating texts	discuss:	—	—	—	—
	practice:	—	—	—	—
43. incorporating sources	discuss:	—	—	—	—
	practice:	—	—	—	—
44. avoiding plagiarism	discuss:	—	—	—	—
	practice:	—	—	—	—
45. internal citations	discuss:	—	—	—	—
	practice:	—	—	—	—
46. works-cited pages	discuss:	—	—	—	—
	practice:	—	—	—	—
47. sentence types	discuss:	—	—	—	—
	practice:	—	—	—	—
48. sentence variety	discuss:	—	—	—	—
	practice:	—	—	—	—
49. sentence combining	discuss:	—	—	—	—
	practice:	—	—	—	—
50. text imitation	discuss:	—	—	—	—
	practice:	—	—	—	—
51. increasing vocabulary	discuss:	—	—	—	—
	practice:	—	—	—	—
52. spelling	discuss:	—	—	—	—
	practice:	—	—	—	—
53. using grammar handbooks	discuss:	—	—	—	—
	practice:	—	—	—	—
54. editing skills	discuss:	—	—	—	—
	practice:	—	—	—	—
55. global revision skills	discuss:	—	—	—	—
	practice:	—	—	—	—
56. grammar rules:	discuss:	—	—	—	—
	practice:	—	—	—	—

* Which grammar rules do you tend to focus on? (please list):

57. punctuation rules	discuss:	—	—	—	—
	practice:	—	—	—	—

*Which punctuation rules do you tend to focus on? (please list):

58. Are there other concepts/activities addressed in your focal course (101 or 102) that do not appear on the survey list? Please list them and indicate the extent to which you practice and discuss each item:

Part 3: Reflections on Student Preparation:

1. In what respects do your writing students seem to be best prepared when entering your courses?
2. In what respects do your writing students seem to be least prepared when entering your courses?
3. In what respects do your writing students seem to be best prepared when leaving your courses?
4. In what respects do your writing students seem to be least prepared when leaving your courses?

Part 4: Major Assignments

Below is a list of writing assignments (not exhaustive or necessarily expected) that teachers might include on an English 101 or 102 syllabus. Please check the box preceding any of the assignments required of your students in the 101 or 102 course upon which you have been reflecting. If certain assignments you have in mind combine two or more of the categories listed, check all that apply.

— annotated bibliographies	— persuasive essays	—research proposals
— invention or idea journals	— comparison/contrast essays	— research papers
— response journals	— analytical essays (not on Literature)	— cover letters
— process journals	— literary analyses	— resumes
— rough drafts	— metacognitive essays	— business memos
— reports/summaries	— dialogs	— pamphlets
— five paragraph themes	— book reviews	— brochures
— informative essays	— film reviews	— website critiques
— definition essays	— newspaper/magazine articles	— short fiction
— personal experience essays	— letters to editor/opinion papers	— poetry

Are there other major assignments included in your focal course (101 or 102) that do not appear on the survey list? Please list them.

<div align="center">

Appendix B

Focus Group Discussion Questions:

</div>

[Note: Questions will be drawn from the following list, with the order subject to the natural flow of the conversation and the number addressed depending on the two-hour time limit established prior to the discussion.]

1. What are the most important concepts and skills relevant to composing that your students will need for success in your courses and in their chosen careers?

2. What are the concepts and skills relevant to composing with which students typically enter your courses?

3. What are the concepts and skills relevant to composing that students typically lack upon entering your courses?

    * Researcher will stimulate further discussion by providing participants a list of concepts and skills most frequently cited in survey responses by graduate teaching assistants in English as being emphasized in English 101 and 102.

4. How, specifically, do these strengths and weaknesses (cited in response to questions two and three) reveal themselves in your students' writing and/or their conversations about writing?

5. Do your students offer any particular explanations for these strengths and weaknesses?

6. What do you believe are the reasons behind the particular successes they enjoy and the weaknesses with which they struggle?

7. What composing concepts and skills do you highlight in your writing intensive courses?

* Researcher will prompt if need be with strategies relevant to the following aspects of composing: process, invention, purpose, ethos, audience, organization, research, library skills, document design, collaboration, source evaluation, docu- mentation of sources, grammar/spelling/mechanics.

8. What instructional strategies do you employ for doing so?

9. What types of writing assignments do you typically assign?

   * Researcher will prompt further discussion by providing a list of types of assignments most frequently cited in survey responses by graduate teaching assistants in English as being introduced in English 101 and 102.

10. What can/should be the responsibility of the freshman writing sequence in preparing students to write?

11. What can/should be the responsibility of discipline-specific writing intensive courses in preparing students to write?