Towards a Model of Building Writing Transfer Awareness across the Curriculum

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Abstract: Writing transfer research often illuminates the writing abilities, attitudes, and assumptions college writers bring to a writing assignment, but faculty members across the disciplines may not have the tools for understanding what the students in their particular classes bring to their particular writing assignments. In this proposed model, students respond to a series of reflective prompts before, during, and after completion of a major upper-division writing assignment. Faculty members then reflect on how these responses might change the way they assign writing and teach course content. The disciplinary and course-based threshold concepts emerging from this process suggest a dynamic and situated approach that both facilitates faculty understanding of transfer and offers a method for responding to it.

One of the responsibilities I have as a faculty member at my institution is to lead a program designed to support faculty across the curriculum who are interested in improving their writing assignments and evaluation tools. Each spring, I draw on what we know to be best writing assignment practices to help them redesign those assignments and evaluation materials so they are more student-friendly and better reflect the goals of their courses and the assignment. My job is to help faculty articulate, clarify, and modify their writing expectations and evaluation materials. I provide useful models and helpful advice. While I still believe this to be a worthy task, the assumption is that these suggestions alone will help students better understand and respond to the assignments and that instructors will see better student writing because they've explained themselves more clearly.

My perspective has been that it was the assignment that needed to be fixed, not that we needed to better understand what students did or did not bring with them to new, often more demanding writing tasks. Did students have experiences writing literature reviews in the past? If so, would the expectations be different in this assignment and discipline? Did students bring enough or the right sort of background knowledge to a writing assignment that would facilitate understanding of key course and discipline goals? In these often upper-division undergraduate courses, what was needed was a strategy for making transfer visible as it was happening and for reflecting on and responding to what was learned in order to adjust/revise the assignment, sometimes as students were still working on it and while the course was in progress. Would such an interventionist and dialogic approach help faculty more clearly articulate their advanced disciplinary-based expectations and perhaps help students approach the task in ways that were more productive? If so, what would that strategy look like?

To answer that question, I considered whether my assignment suggestions were only one part of the process. What if instructors modified their assignments based not only on my suggestions, but also on reflections from those who actually completed the assignments? What would instructors learn about what students bring with them to their assignments, and how might they modify both their assignments and their teaching in response to what they learned?

Researchers have increasingly recognized the important role faculty play in "teaching for transfer." Faculty perceptions of and responses to student writing do make a difference. Nowacek may have situated students as "agents of integration" when it comes to making connections between the content of one course and another, but she also emphasizes the role of instructors who must facilitate the daily interactions with students that make this possible and "who have the institutional authority to decide which connections count" (68). These instructors, she says, must "work behind the scenes to help students see and sell connections" (81). Transfer research in writing has often called for all instructors to be responsible for rhetorical education, especially by teaching genre awareness, since this is

important preparation for students making the transition to new genre and disciplinary expectations (Goldschmidt; Moore; Wardle and Clement). These researchers recognize that instructors across the disciplines may be less interested in creating the time and space for students to negotiate these new expectations, in part because they may be more interested in covering prescribed course content or in dictating more superficial issues such as format correctness. In her endorsement of transformation as a better metaphor than transfer, Donahue notes that "it sometimes seems our colleagues in other disciplines want all knowledge about writing to become automatic, while we argue as writing faculty that it cannot be" (130). One explanation for this belief may be that not only are our colleagues not always fully aware of their own expectations of student writing, but they also may not know what students do or do not bring with them to their writing tasks.

So how do instructors across the disciplines become more aware of their own expectations and the connections students are making between past and present writing tasks? Werder argues that the more stakeholders (students, faculty, administrators, employers, etc.) hold different expectations of writing proficiency, the less they can enable it across multiple contexts. She wonders whether some of these stakeholders can articulate what these expectations are and advocates for a process of "continually asking stakeholders to talk about their expectations about writing proficiency"(70) in order to facilitate on-going dialogue that confronts the inevitable disparities. This dialogue could be situated in Beaufort's framework for talking about writing that Yancey et al. argue is the result of defining and using key terms related to writing, reflecting on writing concepts and practices, and applying what is learned to create a theory of writing (97). In other words, both instructors and students need to find a common language to talk about writing assignment expectations and reflect on the writing produced in response to these assignments. Instructors then need to reflect on the implications of this discussion/reflection in order to act on what they have learned.

Grounded in this method of introspection/reflection, what might faculty members learn by better understanding what students do or do not bring with them to the writing they assign in their courses? How might the ways students adapt or fail to adapt influence how an instructor frames and articulates a potentially more advanced set of writing expectations? And lastly, what disciplinary concepts might faculty employ to bridge the distance between their expectations and students' ability to adapt to them?

Reflection as Methodology

The contextual nature of transfer is evident when Wardle poses the question: If transfer is found in a combination of the individual, the task, and the setting, then how do we understand it, explain it, and teach for it ("Creative Re-Purposing")? In this study, I started with the assumption that transfer, like genre, must be studied in context and in a socially dynamic but goal-oriented way. I did not intend to explain definitively what transfer was or whether it was happening. Instead, I hoped to create a model of inquiry that engaged students in active reflection on their values, assumptions, and processes before, during, and after completing an advanced writing project. If my goal had only been to learn more about student dispositions and processes, I might have stopped there. However, I was also interested in how faculty would respond to student reflections. So I then used those reflections to engage faculty members in discussions of what they do or do not want to see students transfer from their past writing experiences. I wanted to learn more about how faculty members might adapt to what they learned about student dispositions. Rather than write a prescription for or a description of transfer to some unnamed course or writing task, I asked: What does it look like when students in a specific writing environment attempt to adapt previous writing knowledge to a new writing assignment and situation, and how can faculty use what they learn to modify their assignments or teaching strategies? In other words, how does knowledge about transfer lead to negotiation in the ways in which writing is assigned and completed? My goal is to add to the discussion of what a dynamic and contextualized faculty development model meant to teach transfer awareness might look like, using examples from classes representing a range of disciplines.

Wardle recommends surveying students in order to invite reflections on a particular writing assignment at the beginning, middle, and end of the process. This method is, as she says, not a method for studying transfer, but for studying the *role* of transfer ("Creative Re-Purposing"). Moore recommends such reflection not just in FYC, but in courses "university-wide," using "both generalizable and discipline-specific writing strategies (8). Bawarshi first argued that teaching genre awareness through reflection across the curriculum is transferable in a way that a focus on the written product is not. Clark shows how reflection can illuminate unspoken expectations and create opportunities for student "uptake," and Rounsaville describes the specific times/space this might take place as when literate learners encounter and "make sense of new learning tasks at the convergence of prior knowledge and local genred events." Reflection has become a well-respected strategy that helps facilitate what we have come to think of as transfer when students see themselves developing an awareness of what works or doesn't as they write in different rhetorical situations and genres across time.

Context of Study and Participants

I teach at a smaller co-ed four-year college in New England. Students come for a range of programs, but the college is best known for those that focus on health and athletic-related studies. I wanted to invite faculty participation in this project that represented as wide a range of disciplines as possible given these institutional limits. I also invited faculty based on my previous experience with them developing writing assignments and evaluation tools, as well as their interest in participating and whether they taught an upper-level course taken primarily by majors in their department. Class size varied from small (one class was only four students) to larger (25 students). The average class size was about 15-20. Six faculty members participated in this project (see Appendix 1 for classes/disciplines studied).{1}

Primarily juniors and seniors completed the reflections. I invited students to reflect on their writing using variations on the following:

1. to describe and frame the writing task in comparison to others they've completed
2. to describe what they thought they knew or didn't know about the topic
3. to describe what they learned when they completed the assignment
4. to describe the process they thought they'd go through in order to be successful and how that process changed as they worked on the assignment.

These invitations were based on Yancey et al.'s recommendations for teaching for transfer (138-139) as well as my initial conversations with faculty members about the course and their goals for student writing in the course (see Appendix 2 for surveys). In these conversations, faculty were able to express their goals in assigning the writing and sometimes relate those goals to particular professional, disciplinary, or course outcomes. I sometimes added questions to surveys based on those on-going conversations with faculty about the assignment. For example, in an athletic injury rehabilitation class, I asked students to reflect on the process of "doing research" for their paper, since the assignment required students to reconcile potentially different therapeutic recommendations. In a course on the U.S. Civil War, I asked students to consider whose perspective was emphasized most in the sources they encountered, since primary and secondary sources needed to be evaluated in context. In the Health Care Disparities class, I asked students how the area they might be researching related to the overall goals of the course, since conversations with the instructor revealed how important making this connection was to her. Although a core of similar questions began the process, I believed that the questions needed to be adapted to the needs and goals of any particular instructor or course if the responses would help bridge the distance between student assumptions and instructor values.

Data Collection and Analysis

The reflective writing began during the class period when faculty members first introduced the writing assignment. After the faculty member talked about the assignment, I administered the first of three reflection surveys. The first reflection typically asked students to explain the assignment in their own words, discuss a topic they were interested in writing about, imagine the sequence of steps they would need to complete the assignment, guess how it might be organized, and explain what sort of knowledge would be produced and what kind of writing they would be doing. Students were also asked where and under what circumstances they might use the knowledge or skills gained through this writing. Participation in the study was voluntary, and survey respondents were assured of individual anonymity. However, I told them I would summarize and share their responses as a class with the instructor. The study received IRB approval from my institution.

After students completed the first survey, some classes discussed their responses in small groups and shared their responses with the rest of the class given enough class time. I then collected the initial surveys and distributed a second shorter survey that invited students to reflect on the writing as they were creating a draft. These questions were also influenced by the preliminary discussions I had with faculty members. These discussions sometimes revealed particular concerns based on instructor experiences with the assignment in the past. For example, one instructor wanted students to be able to examine the methodologies used in cited studies in order to evaluate the conclusions of the researcher. After distributing the second survey, I asked students to respond to these questions as they were working on the draft and to return their responses on the day when the assignment was due. Using a grounded theory approach, I then read, transcribed, and summarized the responses to each question from the first reflections, looking for emerging themes and reoccurring responses. For each faculty member, I then shared a rationale for each question, summaries of the responses to each question, and the answers themselves. I then invited faculty members to discuss with me what was interesting, surprising, or predictable in the data.

I administered the third and final reflection on the due date for the assigned writing. I asked students to use their responses from the in-process reflection to help them respond to these questions. In the third reflection, I asked

many of the same questions from the first reflection but in slightly different forms. For example, I again asked students to summarize what they were asked to do, but this time to also reflect on why they were asked to do it. I again asked students about knowledge and writing forms but asked them to reflect on what sort of knowledge they relied on and how that affected the way they wrote the paper. I again asked them about their writing processes, but this time I asked about the extent to which they actually followed their initial plan of action and if it changed, why. Instead of asking how they would organize the draft, in this iteration I asked students which parts of the draft they struggled with the most and invited them to think about what they would do differently the next time. Finally, I asked students to frame/contextualize their topic in relation to other similar topics appropriate to the focus of the course.

I again read, transcribed and summarized the responses to each question from the third reflections based on emerging themes and reoccurring responses and again shared the summaries of the data with each faculty member. To conclude the project, I first met individually with each faculty member to reflect on the assignment and all of the reflection responses, then provided faculty members with their own reflection questions to assist them in writing about what they had learned from the entire process. I specifically asked faculty to reflect on the following: a) their assessment of the goals of the assignment, b) their assessment of student strengths, attitudes, assumptions, processes, and genre awareness, c) what, if any, actions they might take, and d) what insights they had about how students might be better prepared for this writing assignment. My role became what Werder has called a "knot-initiator" or someone who can facilitate a "gathering around emergent shared concerns" rather than work through more "static institutional structures" (77).

What follows is a summary of my observations from three of the six courses studied. I hope these serve as illustrations of this model of faculty development. The three courses discussed here illustrate not just how instructors can productively use student reflections to improve their assignments, but also how they can employ what I and others describe as threshold concepts to bridge student knowledge and disciplinary knowledge. By putting the process of inquiry in motion, by asking both students and faculty members to reflect on what they're doing and why they're doing it, the larger contexts of course goals, program expectations, and other factors that influence what is transferred and what is not become illuminated, for better or worse.

America's Civil War: The Monuments Assignment

This course ("America's Civil War" or History 388) fulfilled a majors requirement for History majors or minors. Fourteen students were enrolled. The goal of this course was to prepare majors who would go on to teach History in middle or high school to develop a more nuanced and complex understanding of the U.S Civil War. A key objective of the assignment described here was to engage students in an understanding of the phrase "resolution and consensus" in relation to specific civil war monuments visited by these students. Students examined both primary and secondary sources in order to complete this writing assignment. The instructor began by asking students to choose three civil war monuments in Boston and analyze how they reflected the beliefs of people at that time. Students also visited some of these monuments. Students were introduced to the monuments by the instructor and asked to read the first chapter of Kirk Savage's book *Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves: Race, War, and Monument in Nineteenth-Century America*. Students also read reports on the statues published in the Boston Globe at the time of their dedication. The instructor initially sought to help students develop a sense of audience for their analysis by asking them to imagine they worked for a tour guide company and had to write a brochure about the monuments on the walking tour that the company gave.

Process, Discourse Community, and Content Knowledge Awareness

As students worked on their drafts, the instructor thought about students' initial reflections and how he might intervene in order to challenge their assumptions about a range of transfer concepts, including process knowledge, discourse community knowledge, and content knowledge (Beaufort). These "teaching for transfer" principles became a part of the on-going discussions I had with the instructor and the instructor had with students as they worked on drafts and engaged with their sources. For example, even after the first reflection, but certainly by the time they completed the final reflection, it was clear some students had resorted to familiar and formulaic (it worked for me in the past!), but inadequate writing processes. For example, in the first set of reflections, several students responded to the question about their writing processes by saying they didn't feel like writing the paper would really begin until they had taken the tour of the monuments and chosen which ones they would write about. They saw the assigned reading as material that would be added to their drafts after they knew what they had to say rather than as material that would inform their thinking about the monuments. As indicated in their response to how they would organize their writing, some students quickly defaulted to a familiar five-paragraph genre, with one monument per paragraph. The instructor assumed students would read the Globe articles prior to the trip to visit the monuments, but based on early

reflection responses, many students had only skimmed over these articles, appropriating buzzwords like "patriotism" or "freedom" that would then confirm initial perceptions of what they saw during their visit. As the instructor and I discussed these reflections, he recognized that he needed to intervene in their writing processes sooner.

In his post-assignment reflection, the instructor wrote about the need to "plant seeds" of interpretation of the monuments by asking key questions about the monuments long before they went to visit them (why are these soldiers leaning forward in the Shaw monument, for example, or why are slaves on their knees). He saw the need to align class content more closely to writing assignment content throughout the semester, adding "small bits" of content to "set up" the subject matter of the writing assignment. He also recognized the importance of providing brief historical accounts of people depicted in the monuments so that students might reflect on the degree of historical accuracy in both the Globe coverage and the monuments themselves. Students could then grapple with potential dissonance between how historical figures were perceived at the time compared to how history came to judge them later. By doing so, he not only emphasized interpretation in the assignment, but encouraged students to think more like an historian, using discourse community knowledge they might transfer to other history assignments and their own teaching. This awareness resulted in a change in his approach to audience in the assignment, since he recognized that the level of sophistication he was asking of students was inappropriate for imagining themselves to be writers of a tour guide brochure.

Still, many students didn't deviate from inadequate plans of action (which included procrastination) unless the instructor actively intervened through on-going consultations. Student responses to these interventions varied among what Robertson et al. describe as "grafting" or "re-mix" or a "critical incident" based on a moment of awakening about how their initial approach might not be useful for this assignment. In order to initiate a more meaningful response to inadequate adaptation strategies, the instructor sometimes required the submission of tentative thesis statements, paragraph outlines with topic sentences, and evidence cited in each paragraph. With these interventions, some students made better connections between course content and what they saw on the monuments tour, thus making better generalizations—what Beach described as a "changing relationship between individuals and sets of social activities" (3). These "mediational transitions" between different learning environments became "consequential" to the extent that students applied what they learned from multiple learning environments to other situations. The instructor's on-going consultations with myself and students also illustrate what Martin and Schwartz have described as "dynamic transfer," the ability to relate prior knowledge (for example, an oversimplified version of "freedom") to other resources (such as the readings) to produce new understandings (as cited in Hayes et al. 184). The monuments themselves also challenged students to consider what freedom might mean depending on your social status or the historical context.

The student/instructor consultations, initiated by student reflections, also created a space for me to discuss potential sites for far transfer or generalization with the instructor. For example, while many of the monuments did generally convey the message of "freedom," successful students were able to recognize that freedom was defined in different ways by different groups and individuals and that the monuments may have conveyed other messages besides freedom, such as racial superiority. The instructor's class discussions and consultations after the paper was assigned invited some students to go beyond describing heroic figures in a stereotypical way to asking what constitutes a hero and why some historical figures were celebrated and others not. Students were challenged to think about how the monuments might be different in the South instead of the North. Students were challenged to imagine how they, as future history teachers, might use what they had learned about monuments in other contexts. How might the way they learned this influence the way they taught history and world events in the future? When might they teach students by taking a field trip, and when might they use other methods and why? The instructor also imagined adapting the assignment so that students chose and analyzed monuments in other history classes.

Working his way through this iteration of the assignment meant reading student reflections, talking about the responses with me, and reflecting on student writing processes himself. He became more aware of what students brought to the assignment as well as what he wanted from them, especially higher level critical thinking and making connections between source materials and learning experiences. He also recognized that interpretation rather than analysis best described how students might find a more critical voice in their writing. He became more assured that the order of the presentation of materials mattered so that he could "plant the seeds" of this interpretation. A key concept also emerged in his thinking—the value of teaching students "historical memory" or how certain events and individuals are remembered, which is sometimes in conflict with historian's evidentiary-based conclusions. This disciplinary threshold concept helped to initiate the sort of critical and transfer thinking that was nurtured when asking students questions across sometimes unfamiliar contexts or when looking for opportunities to link similar situations or interpretations of events. All of this required students to sometimes embrace dissonance rather than reconcile or ignore it in favor of an oversimplified thesis or conclusion. The impact of this threshold concept was so profound that the instructor renamed the course—calling it "America's Civil War in History and Memory."

The recent insights on threshold concepts in writing (Adler-Kassner and Wardle; Adler-Kassner et al., 2016) illustrate their use in facilitating better discussions about writing. Threshold concepts are "concepts critical for participation in communities of practice ... the sites where participants share common rituals, values, and stances" (Adler-Kassner et al. 18, 2016). But these "communities of practice" also exist across the disciplines and allow faculty to share common beliefs about what questions and evidence matter most. When students engage with particular disciplinary threshold concepts, their awareness may be enhanced because threshold concepts offer faculty and students an opportunity to develop disciplinary-based or even "meta-genre" awareness of knowledge forms (Carter). Adler-Kassner et al. (2012) recognized this in their discussion of writing and history threshold concepts. These "concepts across the curriculum" may "set the table" for transfer awareness for faculty as they articulate their own disciplinary knowledge and expectations in their assignments and help students better negotiate the terms of engagement with this knowledge.

By reflecting on student reflections, the instructor recognized a number of influential process knowledge concepts, such as more flexibility working through the process, more questioning of materials, and generally more interventions in the writing processes of students. He also recognized the importance of articulating discourse community knowledge, such as helping students speak as history scholars to other history scholars and applying what they learned in one context to another or making generalizations about what they learned that could be challenged at some later point in the conversation of history scholars. The cultivation of these habits became what the instructor hoped would transfer to the next upper level course these students might take with him.

Health and Health Care Disparities: A Literature Review

This course (Health and Healthcare Disparities or HSRS 410) fulfilled an upper-level requirement for health science majors as well as those interested in social justice course content and healthcare systems in general. Approximately twenty students were enrolled in the class. The goal of this class was to explore and understand disparities in access and quality of healthcare to underserved populations. Disparities included, but were not limited to, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, location, age, gender, disability status, and sexual orientation. Students consulted primarily text-based studies of healthcare disparities in particular populations in order to complete a literature review of a topic related to health care disparities. The instructor provided a list of five choices for topics, including

1. racial segregation
2. vulnerable populations, with a focus on one population/topic, such as gender studies, people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender; low-income individuals, people of various racial backgrounds, people with disabilities, or the elderly
3. the effect of language interpreters
4. provider/patient gender concordance
5. the effect of cultural competency training programs on disparities

Prior Knowledge Meets Genre Knowledge Expectations

Like the history students, most students in this class were initially confident they would succeed with the assignment based on past writing experiences, especially writing literature reviews. However, some understood "review" to mean either simple summary of their chosen articles or a writing to learn experience demonstrating knowledge learned from the articles. Some understood review as analyzing, evaluating, or critiquing the material, and others as investigating or comparing/contrasting what had been discovered. Some were confident of the particular process they would follow, while others had a sense there was a formula everyone should follow. As Robertson et al. argue, student writers may draw on knowledge and practices from the past, in this case genre and process knowledge, either attempting to use it in identical ways or reworking it to fit the new task. This "reaching back" for a familiar past academic experience was made more likely due to the unspoken audience in the assignment—the instructor—who would evaluate students primarily based on the demands of the literature review genre. Although some looked to the instructor for explicit genre instruction, they saw this less as genre knowledge and more as generic "instructions" for completing the assignment.

Both students and instructor worked earnestly to articulate and meet these genre expectations. These students understood more clearly than the history students that content knowledge would come from sources they were asked to review, but some chose to approach the sources by first reworking forms of prior knowledge. They chose topics they had some kind of personal experience with because they saw the literature review as a place where they could further understand problems they were already aware of and create better policies and programs to address those problems. If a student had experience working with a veteran with PTSD or had family members with limited English proficiency, they could take what they already knew and "test" that knowledge against what researchers said in order to extend their pre-existing knowledge, challenge it, or possibly rework it.

However, this inclination to value prior knowledge was somewhat challenged by implicit genre and process assignment expectations, which emphasized explaining what the research in the articles said first. Students dutifully described their writing processes as finding articles first, then creating outlines, analyzing methods, or evaluating results. The instructor reinforced this approach by emphasizing what to do when discussing each article, such as describing how the research was conducted (methodology), describing the results, noting similarities and differences among and between studies, and describing the limitations of studies. Although helping students understand and evaluate academic research was a major goal of the assignment, students' "prior and concurrent knowledge" (Robertson et al.) was perhaps not "tapped into" as much in order to adapt previous knowledge to new knowledge. Evidence-based organizational patterns emphasized summarizing the results of research-based studies so that students would come to value the ways of knowing of those in a particular discourse community. Working from the known to the unknown was not emphasized as much in the assignment (although it was valued in the course), so some students may have been less likely to make connections or experience needed dissonance between what they already knew and what they were learning by doing the literature review. While the historian's discourse community values became a part of the writing process, health practitioner practices may have been supplanted in this iteration of the assignment by emphasizing prescriptive and static academic genre expectations instead of recognizing the potential for dynamic transfer associated with "coordination of prior knowledge and the target context" (Hayes et al.).

In spite of this, making connections was important to the instructor. She wanted students to see their research area as related to the content and goals of the course. For example, she wanted students to not only evaluate the factors that lead to disparities in access to maternal health, but also make the leap to asking questions about how public health programs in general contribute to or limit disparities in maternal health. She wanted students to see many factors contributing to a range of health disparities, even as they were perhaps focusing in their literature review on factors affecting only one disparity. She wanted students to contextualize the studies they were reading, not simply summarize or describe them. In this way, the instructor may have been articulating her goals for far transfer by sketching a map of potential student engagement with many aspects of course content.

Like the history instructor, this instructor also recognized the value of talking with students as they worked on their drafts. The most successful students submitted rough drafts and generally asked questions about purpose and organization. As Brent might say, their learning was transformed as they worked through the expectations of genre and audience in consultation with the instructor. I discussed these expectations with the instructor as she responded to early drafts and to the student reflection summaries I provided to her. In one of our discussions, she expressed frustration that students were not able to "pull out" trends that contributed to particular disparities. When I asked her what an example of a trend might be, she named "protective factors" or particular characteristics that might shield an at-risk patient from a health problem. For example, health risks can go down for members of the African-American population that reach a certain age. "Protective factors" then became a possible threshold concept enabling easier access to the literature review content. In this way, she realized she might create an "angle" in the assignment by asking students to evaluate a particular trend that contributes to or limits a particular health care disparity. Rather than leaving this to be discovered by students focusing on individual research results, the instructor hoped to use this and similar concepts in the future when discussing possible areas of research, thus guiding her students to potentially more inter-connected studies and a literature review with a clearer purpose and better insights.

Athletic Injury Rehabilitation and Therapeutic Modalities: A Case Study Rehabilitation Plan Critique

This course (Therapeutic Interventions 1 or ATRN 307) was part of a series of required courses for Athletic Training majors preparing for careers as Athletic Trainers. Approximately 25 students were enrolled in the course. Students came to the course with a background in diagnosing injuries and an interest in becoming athletic trainers. However, for many this was their first introduction to rehabilitation. Much of their work prior to this course focused on the physiology and dynamics of athletic injuries. The goal of this course was to help students begin to think like a practitioner, using research applications to help them evaluate effective modalities for treatment. In this assignment, students were asked to evaluate a real life rehabilitation program executed on a real life patient. In order to do this, they were asked to make suggestions, critiques, or endorsements of the intervention based on evidence from the actual rehab plan, from a class handout and power point presentation, and from five professional peer reviewed journals. Students were asked to follow a six-step process:

1. identify the injury and patient,
2. identify four key terms that could be used to research the injury/topic,
3. provide an introduction that stated the purpose for evaluating the rehab design,
4. provide demographic data about the patient and injury,

5. provide a section evaluating the goals of the plan, it's physiological effects, the use of modalities to treat the injury, whether the goals of the patient were addressed, and an evaluation of the plan overall using outside sources, and
6. provide a references page.

A strength of this assignment was its situated context. Students were asked to construct what Brent called a "good sense of rhetorical knowledge" that positioned them to "adapt well to new rhetorical environments" (588), in this case developing therapeutic plans for injured athletes in their future professional lives. This assignment also afforded what Beach would call an opportunity for "mediational" transfer, since it was practice for a more professional activity done later.

In the first survey, students expressed a high level of confidence in their writing ability and in the process they would go through in order to complete the paper. They believed the goal was to critique an existing plan. Like some of the students from the health disparities class, most of these students had interests in particular topics (injuries) based on their experiences and prior knowledge, and some had experience identifying and working with patients on particular injuries. The most successful students were also confident about the process they would work through to complete the assignment. Most writing processes could be summarized as "find patient/injury, analyze evaluation/treatment program, answer the questions." But most were also less able to explain how they would "determine the best treatment for their injury" or what the process would be for figuring out how they would do that. "Doing research" was an assumed part of the structure and organization of the writing but was not as explicit in the assignment as other directives. For example, in the fifth step, the instructor asked students whether the clinician's goals were realistic, whether the rehab program addressed those goals, and on what basis the treatment program was effective. But many students were reluctant to critique another clinician's work and felt uncomfortable recommending a treatment plan for a patient they did not know personally.

In order to evaluate whether the goals of the program were realistic, students needed to consult sources that supported their conclusions in one way or another. The handout and PowerPoint presentation provided by the instructor helped many students to do this in a general way. But since discussion of how to use outside sources in the assignment was less explicit, students were disinclined to see "doing research" as part of the assignment until they were well into the writing of it and needed to understand the rehabilitation of a particular injury in more detail. At that point, some had misjudged how much time the writing assignment would require, and many noted that doing the outside research was the hardest part of writing the paper.

For the instructor, the research component of the assignment was meant to empower students to better evaluate other's treatment plans. Based on responses from previous classes, the instructor was eager for students to "take more risks" in these evaluations rather than be "humble" about their own authority. He wanted them to learn how to challenge each other and another clinician's recommendations. By doing so, students would begin to see the "gray" areas in program design rather than see the evaluation as black or white, good or bad. As professionals, these future athletic trainers needed to see evaluation as an on-going conversation about assessment and intervention. The instructor understood this puts students in an uncomfortable position when they are not yet confident of their knowledge, but Brent might argue that by working through this sort of practice evaluation, they are acquiring the rhetorical knowledge that will make them more confident once they start making real life evaluations. Baird and Dilger might add that the quality of the instructor intervention in helping students make the transition from practice to real can influence how well students adapt to real life writing.

Before students had completed the writing reflections, the instructor's desire for students to take more risks in their assessments was not related directly to the way they completed the assignment. After discussing student reflections, he decided to intervene in some students' writing processes by inviting them to evaluate the rehab plans before they committed to completing all sections of the paper. He recognized that this would enhance student self-confidence and motivate students to take more evaluative risks. Also, based on discussions of student reflection content, he committed to changes in the assignment that included completing the assignment in steps and re-considering the critique portion. He imagined the first step as data gathering, especially from referral forms obtained and referred to in the assignment. From the data in these forms, students would then identify specific patient injuries, functional limitations, and goals for rehabilitation. He saw this as a better first step that would lead to better identification of key terms for literature searches. The instructor saw two barriers to students creating strong critiques—the first a lack of experience with rehabilitation and the second a lack of interaction with the patient being treated. In response, he also decided to require students to spend an hour in the rehabilitation clinic with the chosen patient prior to critiquing the original treatment plan.

Finally, like the other faculty members in this study, an important threshold concept emerged—the notion of "critique." Although seemingly synonymous with evaluation, in this context and for this instructor it meant a series of steps intended to go beyond diagnosis to laying the groundwork for rehabilitation decisions. Students needed to not only

evaluate the response to an injury, but also explain how the injury became the basis for specific rehabilitation goals for a particular patient. The instructor's recommendation for students to spend time with the patient became a possible bridge from the known (the injury) to the unknown (a potentially better treatment plan). In this case, a transitional learning experience invoking a re-working or re-purposing of prior knowledge in order to reapply that knowledge for a unique rhetorical purpose became an important insight for the instructor.

Discussion

For the purposes of teaching for transfer, reflection was most powerfully situated in faculty conversations using transfer concepts such as process knowledge, disciplinary knowledge, prior knowledge, and genre and rhetorical knowledge. For example, student responses helped instructors better understand the limitations of some student writing processes and make adjustments in their approach to assigning writing. The history instructor recognized the need for students to begin researching and writing about historical monuments before students visited them. The health disparities instructor recognized the need to help students build course content and prior knowledge into their literature reviews and make better connections between and among disparities as part of their writing process. The athletic training instructor frontloaded data collection and exposure to a patient into the process to prepare for further research.

Prior knowledge was valued by the health disparities instructor but upstaged by a writing assignment heavy with the genre expectations of an academic literature review. Prior knowledge was built into the curriculum of future athletic trainers but shortchanged by the athletic injury instructor who assumed interaction with the patient was not necessary to a critique of an existing rehabilitation program. Genre and rhetorical knowledge adjustments were made most obviously by the history instructor, who dispensed early on with the tour guide brochure when he understood its limitations, even though he had chosen that genre for its seemingly context specific purpose. And genre awareness was also a by-product for the athletic training instructor, who recognized that some students might not be able to critique a genre they were not yet skilled at producing themselves.

Disciplinary knowledge was valued in these classes as instructors worked to model and teach discourse community norms and practices. The degree to which students engaged with the research they encountered and thought about the topic in ways similar to a professional in that field of study was a disciplinary knowledge marker for all the instructors who participated in the study, but especially the history instructor and the health disparities instructor. For these instructors, disciplinary threshold concepts such as "historical memory" and "protective factors" emerged as potential "uptake" moments that could orient students to knowledge and ways of thinking in a discipline.

In this project, students revealed what they brought to writing assignments for better or worse, a form of knowledge that helps explain where they have been in their thinking and writing and where they may yet need to go. Nowacek notes that when instructors don't know about what students are transferring, it can make teaching for transfer more difficult. Without this knowledge, any faculty changes in the way they assign writing or help students meet new writing expectations are based on guesses about what a particular group of students may or may not do when they engage with a writing assignment. But even when faculty know what students bring to their writing assignments, they also need the opportunity to reflect on and interpret the meaning of student responses before they make decisions about how or when to intervene. They need to read student reflections, talk about the responses with someone who can offer insights about student writing, and reflect on students' processes for completing the paper. In their study of student dispositions as they transition from academic to internship writing, Baird and Dilger ask what would have happened if the transitions their subjects were going through "had been explicitly addressed by their instructors, perhaps preemptively?" They suggest, "instructors need to be mindful of relationships between classroom practices and transfer with support from stakeholders such as writing program administrators" (708). Most faculty will need someone who can individually help them make sense of this sort of data in a supportive way. Variations in the way this might be done depend on the needs and resources of individual institutions. For example, support and understanding might also be initiated through faculty group discussions facilitated by a WPA discussion leader. Individual faculty members could collect data from their students and share the results with other faculty members in a way that might lead to cross-disciplinary awareness of differing expectations and different disciplinary threshold concepts, as well as illuminate particular course values and objectives.

Transfer as adaptation of existing "abilities and understandings" (Adler-Kassner and Wardle) to meet new expectations can be a part of any students' new learning experiences. Being explicit about expectations, exploring the value of key terms (including disciplinary threshold concepts), and building on existing student frameworks of knowledge remain as important in upper-level coursework as in FYC. What has been missing is a strategy that writing instructors at all levels can use in order to learn more about their particular students and their particular course goals and content. Perkins and Salomon have argued that in order for transfer to occur, students must detect

a possible relationship between their past knowledge and present task, elect to pursue it, and work out a fruitful connection. The model described here can show instructors across the disciplines how to assist students as they determine whether past knowledge is appropriate, and if so, how and in what ways they might use it. The model is in this way potentially disruptive of both student and instructor processes. Any disruption must be negotiated so that students and instructors arrive at mutually satisfactory outcomes.

In this model of faculty development, student reflections enabled faculty to learn from and adapt to student strengths and needs. Instructors adjusted the way they assigned and taught writing in ways that made sense to them based on what they learned from this process. Faculty members may sometimes feel that students are unprepared for their classes, but they may also lack an awareness of the attitudes, assumptions, and habits students bring with them to those classes. The first step is for faculty to be aware of how students attempt to adapt to our expectations. We then need to assist faculty members as they reflect on that awareness in order to take actions that lead to meaningful student transitions.

Appendices

Appendix 1

Course, Department, and Assignment Names

America's Civil War	Social Science Department	The Monuments Assignment
Health and Health Care Disparities	Rehabilitation and Disabilities Department	A Literature Review
Therapeutic Interventions 1	Exercise Science and Sports Studies Department	A Case Study Rehabilitation Plan Critique
Forensic Psychology	Psychology Department	A Literature Review
Seminar in Art History	Visual and Performing Arts Department	A Research Proposal
Seminar in Issues in Sports and Recreation	Sport Management Department	A Poster Presentation

Appendix 2

Health and Healthcare Disparities: A Literature Review

Pre-write Reflection Questions

Summarize in your own words what the assignment asks you to do and what the purpose of the assignment is. Identify areas that need clarification. Explain how this writing is similar or different to other forms of writing you've done in the past.

1. What topic interests you and why? What do you think you'll learn by researching this topic? What do you already know? How is this topic important when discussing health care disparities?
2. What kind of knowledge would you call this? What kind of writing will you need to do to order to demonstrate your knowledge?
3. What is the sequence of steps or plan of action you'll need to take in order to complete this assignment? Will this sequence be similar to or different than the way you've completed other assignments?
4. How might this writing be organized and why?

5. Where and under what circumstances might you use this knowledge?

While Drafting Reflection Questions

1. Choose a study you're read and explain what you can think of that's NOT discussed that should be.
2. Name one thing (value, data gathering strategy, concern, focus of attention) that keeps coming up in several studies you've read and explain how you think that's important.
3. Whose perspective matters most in the studies you've read? The patients? The health professionals? The health system? The families of the patient? Outsiders?

Post-Write Reflection Questions

1. Now that you have completed the assignment, summarize in your own words what you were asked to do and why you were asked to do it.
2. How was this assignment different than others you have completed? What did you have to do that was more challenging or just different in some way?
3. What knowledge or concepts did you rely on in order to complete the essay How did that affect the way you wrote about your topic?
4. To what extent did you follow your original plan of action for completing the essay? If your plan changed, how did it change and why?
5. What parts of the writing did you struggle with the most and why? What would you do differently next time?
6. You focused on one topic in this essay, but what other topics might be directly related to your topic in some way, either as a contributing cause/effect, a separate but related problem, or a bigger or smaller problem yours is in some way related to?

Athletic Injury Rehabilitation and Therapeutic Modalities: Case Study Rehabilitation Plan Analysis

Pre-write Reflection Questions

1. Summarize in your own words what the assignment asks you to do and what the purpose of the assignment is. Identify areas that need clarification. Explain how this writing is similar or different to other forms of writing you've done in the past.
2. What type of injury interests you and why? What do you think you'll learn by studying a case study related to this injury? What do you already know? How is this injury/methods of treatment important when discussing this injury in general?
3. What kind of knowledge would you call this? What kind of writing will you need to do to order to demonstrate your knowledge?
4. What is the sequence of steps or plan of action you'll need to take in order to complete this assignment? Will this sequence be similar to or different than the way you've completed other assignments?
5. How might this writing be organized and why?
6. Where and under what circumstances might you use this knowledge?

While Drafting Questions

1. As you consult the "Essential Considerations in Designing a Rehabilitation Program for the Injured Athlete" handout and the "Approach to Patient Evaluation and Rehab Program Development" Powerpoint, explain what you can think of that's NOT discussed that should be.
2. Name one thing that keeps coming up or is emphasized in the treatment plan and explain how you think that's important, overemphasized, or inadequate.
3. Whose perspective matters most in the treatment plan you've read? The athlete/patient? The clinician? The Rehabilitation Program?

Post-Write Reflection Questions

1. Now that you have completed the assignment, summarize in your own words what you were asked to do and why you were asked to do it.

2. How was this assignment different than others you have completed? What did you have to do that was more challenging or just different in some way?
3. What knowledge or concepts did you rely on in order to complete the essay How did that affect the way you wrote about your topic?
4. To what extent did you follow your original plan of action for completing the essay? If your plan changed, how did it change and why?
5. What parts of the writing did you struggle with the most and why? What would you do differently next time?
6. You focused on one injury in this plan analysis, but what other injuries or activities might be directly related to your topic in some way, either as a contributing cause/effect, a separate but related problem, or a bigger or smaller problem yours is in some way related to? What does that suggest you will be thinking about in the future?

America's Civil War: The Monuments Assignment

Pre-write Reflection Questions

1. Please summarize in your own words what the assignment asks you to do and what the purpose of the assignment is. Identify any areas that need clarification.
2. How is this writing assignment similar to or different from other writing you've been assigned in the past, especially in your major?
3. In order to complete this particular assignment, what specific writing skills do you think you'll need? How confident are you about having these skills?
4. What kind of writing would you call this? Where have you done this kind of writing before, either in school or out?
5. How do you think you'll organize your writing in this assignment?
6. Is there course content from other courses you have taken that will help you complete this assignment? If so, explain what that content is.
7. What is the sequence of steps or plan of action you'll need to take to complete this assignment? How is this sequence similar to or different from the way you've completed other written assignments?
8. What do you think you'll learn about the civil war and its aftermath by doing this writing assignment? Will this be useful in another class or after you graduate? If so, in what way?

While Drafting Questions

1. Choose a source you're read and explain what you can think of that's NOT discussed that should be.
2. Name one concept or value (citizenship, data gathering strategies, client concern, focus of attention) that keeps coming up in several sources you've read and explain how you think that's important.
3. Whose perspective matters most in the sources you've read? The monument makers? The Boston Globe writers? The citizens of Boston? Why?

Post-Write Survey Questions

1. Now that you have completed the assignment, and in your own words, what were you asked to do and why were you asked to do it?
2. How was this assignment different than others you have completed for other classes? What was it NOT like? Did this make a difference in now you wrote it? If so, how?
3. What new writing skills, if any, did you develop by completing this assignment? Are these skills you might use in the future? If so, how?
4. Where have you done this kind of writing, either in school or out, before? What would you call it?
5. How did you organize your writing? Did you organize it differently than you thought you would? If so, why?
6. Did you rely on previously learned knowledge or concepts (like reconciliation and consensus) in order to complete this assignment? If so, describe how that affected the way you wrote the essay.
7. To what extent did you follow your plan of action for completing this assignment? If your plan of action changed, how did it change? What would you do differently next time?
8. How can you imagine using what you've learned about the US Civil War in the future?
9. What parts of the writing did you struggle with the most? For example, process, note-taking, pre-writing, drafting, finding a focus, revising, researching ? Why?

10. What, if anything, did you learn by doing this writing that you might apply to some other situation or task? What might that situation or task be?

Notes

1. Thank you to all six of the faculty participants for their patience, their time in and out of the classroom, and their commitment to student writing. Thank you also to all the students for sharing their thoughts about their writing and the assignment as they were completing it. ([Return to text.](#))

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