

Key Terms and Concepts for Transfer



Genre – types of texts that are recognizable to readers and writers and meet the needs of the rhetorical situations in which they function (Swales, 1990); formal features of a text and the function for which texts are used (Clark & Hernandez, 2011); a way to develop students' awareness of how rhetorical conventions are meaningfully connected to social practices and how (as a result) genre knowledge can help them recognize/adapt more effectively/critically to new writing contexts; a mental schema writers invoke as they analyze new writing tasks in contexts (Reiff & Bawarshi, 2013).

Apprenticeship genre – genres structured to represent a shared way of knowing mirrored in other professional genres in a field to encourage socialization into a certain discourse community; in context, they contribute and shape the experience in the field itself; example – lab report (Carter, 2010)

Transfer of Writing Skills and Knowledge is learning or generalization (Beach 40).

Wardle (2007) offers three conceptions of transfer that focus on task, individuals, and activity. Each aspect frames transfer differently, but they are not mutually exclusive.

1. Task-centered - knowledge required to complete a task.
2. Individual – learned, intelligent behaviors and dispositions.
3. Contextual (Tuomi-Grohn & Engestrom, 2003)
 - Situated – patterns of participatory processes (affordances directly perceived by an individual) across situations.
 - Sociocultural – relations between people and activities involved in the construction of a task.
 - Activity-based – learning is understandable only if we understand the learning of the activity system.

Transfer can also be both application and misapplication, or a failure to understand what is expected within an activity system.

A taxonomy of transfer (Perkins & Salomon, 1992):

- *Near transfer* - transfer between very similar but not identical contexts.

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- *Far transfer* - transfer between contexts that, on appearance, seem remote and alien to one another. Applying learning to situations that are quite dissimilar to the original learning.
- *Low road transfer* – automatic triggering of well-practiced routines in circumstances similar to the original learning context. In writing studies, they may include grammar, mechanics, citation methods.
- *High road transfer* – involves reflective thought in abstracting from one context and seeking connections with others, but requires the effort of deliberate abstraction and connection-making and the ingenuity to make the abstractions and discover the connections; requires metacognitive awareness and mindful abstraction of key writing concepts.
- *Positive transfer* - when learning in one context enhances a related performance in another context.
- *Negative Transfer* - when learning in one context undermines a related performance in another context.
- *Forward reaching transfer* (a form of "high road" transfer) – one learns something and abstracts it in preparation for application elsewhere.
- *Backward reaching transfer* (a form of "high road" transfer) – one finds oneself in a problem situation, abstracts key characteristics from the situation, and reaches backward into one's experience for matches.

Strategies for promoting transfer (Perkins & Salomon, 1992):

- *Hugging* – encourages low-road transfer by requiring students to repeat specific practices in similar contexts
- *Bridging* – encourages high-road transfer by demanding both the decontextualization of knowledge and the deliberate abstraction of general principles and protocols

Transfer depends on

- *Metacognition*: effective learners think beyond the particular situation in which something was learned by reflecting on and directing their own thinking (National Research Council, 2001), and
- *Motivation*: both value and expectations are established for or by the learner.
 - Value – attainment vs. intrinsic vs. instrumental
- Expectations – outcomes & efficacy (Ambrose et al. 2012)

Prior Knowledge. An individual's prior knowledge can match the demands of a new task, be a bad match, or be at odds with a given situation. This knowledge can be mapped to Habits of Mind. Reiff and Bawarshi (2011) identify two common types of undergraduate students:

- *Boundary crossers* – more likely to question and re-purpose genre knowledge.
- *Boundary guards* – more likely to apply genres regardless of task.

Types of prior knowledge include

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- *Assemblage* – grafting new knowledge onto old in the form of isolated bits.
- *Remix* – integrating new knowledge into the schema of the old.
- *Critical incidents* – episode that demand rethinking of prior knowledge in light of what went wrong.

Threshold Concepts are ideas that are central to the mastery of their subject; concepts that bind a subject together, being fundamental to ways of thinking and practicing in that discipline.

Background. Threshold concepts (TCs) emerged from a 2003 national research project in the UK, which was examining the possible characteristics of effective teaching and learning environments. While pursuing research in the field of economics, Eric Meyer and Ray Land discovered that certain concepts were considered to be central to mastery of the subject, all of which had certain common features (Cousin, 2010). Since then, many disciplines outside of economics have embraced the idea of TCs, viewing them as valuable tools for student understanding of a subject and in the process of curriculum development.

Features of a Threshold Concept. A TC framework promotes a “re-view” of the forms of dialogue about a topic that may not otherwise take place. It may also be a catalyst, drawing together a variety of fields into one productive, educative framework.

- *Transformative*. TCs have been described as “akin to a portal, opening up a new and previously inaccessible way of thinking about something . . . it represents a transformed way of understanding, or interpreting, or viewing . . . without which the learner cannot progress” (Meyer & Land, 2003). These concepts represent a significant shift in the perception of a subject because the learner begins to think less like a student and more as a professional in the disciplines in which they are studying, which involved both ontological and conceptual shifts on the part of the learner.
- *Irreversible*. Once a TC has been mastered, it is very difficult for them to be unlearned. Once a learner has seen a new perspective, it may be difficult for them to understand their previous interpretation of it. As Vince Lombardi once said, “Practice does not make perfect, but it does make permanent.
- *Integrative*. Once learned, these concepts expose previously hidden interrelatedness of aspects of the subject that previously did not appear to be related, allowing the learner to obtain a more global and richer perspective of knowledge in this discipline.
- *Potentially represents a boundary*. Many TCs are bounded in that they probably delineate a particular conceptual space, serving a specific and limited purpose. Most have a point where a learner moves into territory seemingly outside of their discipline, which in turn helps to identify new disciplinary territories for both the teacher and learner. These boundaries are represented by such features as the jargon associated with different disciplines, terms with new meanings for the learner which may clash with previous definitions.
- *Discursive*. Crossing such thresholds is accompanied by incorporation of an extended and enhanced use of language, a representation of their new way of thinking. Such a shift in language use may include acquisition and meaningful use of professional vocabulary in various contexts.
- *Potentially troublesome*. Mastery of TCs often involves attaining knowledge that is troublesome, counter-intuitive, alien, conceptually difficult or seemingly incoherent. Such

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conflict may be characterized by an inaccessible “underlying game”, a super-complexity, which is result of the learner resisting the need to change their way of understanding a something (Perkins, 2006).

- *Reconstitutive*. Overcoming such thresholds may also entail an ontological and epistemic shift in learner subjectivity, the result of one letting go of a previous, conceptual schema. This change may take place over time, rather than quickly, and be recognized by others before the learner is aware of it.
- *Liminality*. Understanding a TC is like a journey of questioning - and even self-doubt - during which students typically go back and forth between using their old lens, what seems to them "common sense", and their new lens of the threshold concept, until the new concept is comfortable and familiar enough to rely on. This difficult space has been described as a suspended state of partial understanding, which may result in approximation of rules and mimicry (Land, Meyer, & Baillie, 2010). One way to get through this state of discomfort is by finding comfort in it.

Progression through a Threshold: While the following progression offers a relational view, it should not be viewed as an overly rigid sequential manner. The mastery of a TC involves various degrees of excursions and oscillation between various states rather than crossing from “easy” to “difficult” in a linear fashion.

- *Pre-liminal state*. The pre-liminal state is when the learner encounters some kind of troublesome, unfamiliar knowledge. This knowledge instigates motivation for further inquiry into the subject.
- *Liminality*. This is an unstable space in which the learner may go back and forth between old and emerging understanding of new knowledge, but once a learner enters this liminal space, she is engaged with the mastery unlike a learner who remains in the pre-liminal state, whose understanding is vague at best. This state may involve integration or discarding of the new knowledge. And an ontological and epistemic shift takes place in order for the learner to reconstitute their frame of knowledge.
- *Post-liminal state*. This state is one of transformation which is irreversible, crosses conceptual boundaries, and alters the learners discourse. Once in this state, the threshold has been crossed and the concept has been mastered.

Zone of proximal development

- Liminal states
- Scaffolding

Habits of Mind

- Boundary crossers
- Boundary guarders
 - Strict
 - Loose