

Building a Pedagogy of Writing Transfer through an Undergraduate Journal Publication

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Article abstract

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Building a Pedagogy of Writing Transfer through an Undergraduate Journal Publication

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Abstract

Despite effective knowledge transfer being a primary goal among post-secondary instructors, scholars, and administrators, students still have difficulty adapting their skills to novel contexts. This challenge is especially salient in writing pedagogy, where the transfer of writing-related knowledge is not guaranteed (Driscoll, 2011; Perkins & Salomon, 2012). To investigate possibilities for catalyzing writing transfer, this paper reports on a collaborative autoethnography project (Chang et al., 2013) carried out by two undergraduate students and a faculty member based at a large Ontario university. Their experiences on the editorial team of a first-year writing journal provide insight into how mentorship within journal environments can contribute to post-secondary students' literacy development, and, concurrently, help them to transfer what they know to new contexts. We consider how similar learning opportunities may contribute to undergraduate skill development outside traditional classroom contexts.

Introduction

At the post-secondary level, writing is the primary way young scholars join and participate in academic discourse communities. Learning to parse the journal article is an undergraduate rite of passage, and engaging the literature in original compositions is an essential step into scholarly conversation. In other words, writing is the means through which students build knowledge (Flower & Hayes, 1980; Estrem, 2015) and disseminate that knowledge to others in these communities (Ogilvie, 2019). In their coursework, university students build upon previous “funds of knowledge” (Ivanič, 2009) about writing to develop a skill set that, theoretically, can transfer between the many writing demands they will encounter across their academic careers. In practice, however, successful transfer is not guaranteed. Educational research highlights the persistent difficulty that students encounter in transferring course-based writing knowledge to novel tasks, audiences, and environments (Beaufort, 2007; Driscoll, 2011). Although effective knowledge transfer is a longstanding goal among professors, administrators, and scholars of writing pedagogy, it remains a challenge for students to adapt their existing skills to new contexts.

One reason for this struggle to transfer may be a lack of contexts beyond the classroom where students can practice transferring their knowledge and skills. In a post-secondary and professional landscape that increasingly prioritizes specialization with limited formal writing training (Brownell et al., 2013), students rarely have the chance to translate their work for a wider audience. Experiential learning opportunities may offer a way to bridge this gap by bringing students into contact with real-world writing contexts. In particular, immersing students in a journal publication during their undergraduate years offers an environment where students can join a community of writers and apply previously acquired writing knowledge to a project that gets disseminated widely.

With these gaps and possibilities in mind, the current project seeks out student voices to contribute to the conversation about literacy development and writing transfer in experiential contexts. This paper reports on a collaborative autoethnography (Chang et al. 2013) carried out by two undergraduate students and a faculty member. It focuses on how the students transferred writing-related knowledge gained from an undergraduate journal hosted at a large Ontario university. In particular, the paper concentrates on how the journal's mentorship structure supported knowledge transfer of writing processes to new contexts.

The Journal

The annual undergraduate journal is a showcase of the diversity and strength of student work in first-year writing classes at our university. Students from each class are invited to submit their papers for review after each semester. Papers then go through a peer review process that mirrors the protocol used in academic journals. The journal is faculty-run and offers students an opportunity to pursue their first publication in a supportive environment. To establish this environment, authors of selected papers are paired with a faculty mentor who helps them revise their paper for publication. Students are able to build upon what they learned in the first-year classroom through dialogue and feedback with a writing expert.

The journal also doubles as a learning opportunity for upper-year students who wish to learn more about the editorial process. Each year, twelve undergraduate students join the editorial team and participate in various stages of the publication process. They usually begin as reviewers and work closely with a faculty member to adjudicate submissions in a small team. When they are ready, these students assume different roles, such as mentoring authors or participating in the journal's desk review. In each of these positions, students work closely with faculty to learn their craft and take on new responsibilities within the journal structure. The current study examines the experiences of two editorial students, Kaitlyn and Paige, who both progressed through multiple roles over their undergraduate careers.

Study Rationale

This paper emerges from the journal's first attempt to understand what editorial students learn from working with the journal. Bringing together two editorial students who had moved from being reviewers to being mentors themselves offered a unique opportunity to examine how their skills developed from one year to the next. That these students had also participated in other journals and had moved onto several different opportunities at the

university also offered a chance to reflect upon how the skills they developed in writing, literacy, and pedagogy transferred to other contexts. Their reflections, therefore, could highlight their funds of knowledge about writing from several perspectives: from what they knew before participating with the journal, what they learned with the journal, and how they applied that learning elsewhere.

Two questions guided our discussions:

1. How might mentorship in undergraduate journal environments facilitate transfer of writing-related knowledge?
2. What skills can students learn through a journal mentor, and how do those skills facilitate students' ability to transfer knowledge?

These questions zoom in on the role that mentorship may play in facilitating transfer and supporting students' other work with writing. They position us to consider how work in one writing context—an undergraduate journal—can support students as they adapt to and assume leadership roles in other writing contexts. They also allow us to consider how students develop or enhance writing skills so they can more fully contribute to their academic discourse communities.

Theoretical Frameworks of Transfer

This project is informed by the intersection of writing and social literacy theory. Work in these fields highlights how transfer is contingent upon the unique sociocultural backgrounds and lived experiences of each student (Ivanič, 2009; Qualley, 2016), suggesting that a one-size-fits-all approach may not pay dividends in pedagogy nor research (Wardle, 2017). As such, transfer discourse affirms the critical importance of "[a]dding student voices as participants, or even as co-inquirers" in studies seeking to understand the conditions, processes, and outcomes of transfer (Elon, 2015, p. 9). We drew from this highly personalized, narrative-based framework in the construction of our methodology, which views students' stories as valuable material for contextualizing and informing empirical work. Our analysis of these stories was then informed by theories of social literacy and writing study, which outline students' funds of knowledge and transfer processes, respectively.

Theory on Writing Transfer

Writing transfer theory is a popular framework to examine learners' writing development. Moore (2017) described transfer as a way of exploring a "writer's ability to repurpose or transform prior knowledge about writing for a new audience, purpose, and context" (p.2). How students do this is a "fundamental issue for learning to write in the disciplines" (Driscoll & Jin, 2018, p. 1). Examining writing transfer relies on examining students' prior knowledge and experiences (Elon, 2015; Robertson et al., 2012; Yancey et al., 2014). These experiences form a lens through which students may understand their learning and adapt it for new contexts. From a research perspective, transfer offers a useful way to examine how prior experiences and skills developed get adapted for new learning experiences.

Low-road and high-road transfer are two of the most frequent ways that writing transfer theory classifies data into larger analytical categories. These dimensions of transfer

were first elaborated upon by Perkins and Salomon (1988). Low-road transfer refers to situations where learners transfer their knowledge to similar contexts requiring similar skill sets. High road transfer requires that learners adapt their skills to unlike contexts. As Perkins and Salomon explain, students must often abstract prior knowledge and experiences for a new context that is relatively unlike the context in which the learners developed and used those skills previously. Building open-ended prompts into our methodology allowed Kaitlyn and Paige to reflect on a wide range of writing experiences, identify instances of low and high road transfer, and analyze how their learning from the journal applied to their work in other academic and professional spaces.

Theory on Social Literacy

Literacy research has a long history of discussing the socially-situated nature of literacy. The lens that social literacies provide aligns well with the notion of students transferring knowledge. Literacy scholars such as Street (1998) and Ivanič (1998) emphasized the need for scholars to pay attention to what students bring with them to the classroom. Ivanič (2009) underscored how most students “come to education with ‘funds of knowledge’ in terms of the literacy practices in their everyday lives, which might act as resources for literacy development at school or college” (p. 103). The notion that students bring funds of knowledge to the classroom that they then draw upon to transfer knowledge to their new classroom context has been taken up in discussions about literacy and writing (e.g. Street et al., 2015).

The socially-situated nature of literate practices—where meaning-making is textually mediated—means that transferring knowledge depends on the wider social, cultural, and pedagogical experiences learners bring to the classroom. Lea (2004) described how literacy scholars “challenge the belief that acquiring a set of skills means that they can be translated to any context” (p. 740). Instead, those who research learners’ literate practices focus on these practices in context (Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Burgess & Ivanič, 2010; Lea, 2013), and they pay particular attention to how learners’ wider social and cultural practices can facilitate how they transfer their experiences to new meaning-making practices (Barton et al., 2007; Hamilton, 2015; Pahl, 2014; Street, 2009). Developing learners who can transfer their knowledge about writing to a new context means that instructors must account for the other contexts in which they’ve worked, lived, and learned. They must also facilitate ways for learners to bridge these practices to the new contexts in which learners build knowledge. Since a writer’s identity and lived experiences are so tightly intertwined with their literate practices, our study treats Kaitlyn’s and Paige’s narratives as essential to understanding their individualized transfer processes.

Literature Review

The ability to transfer knowledge from one situation to another is a defining feature of meaningful learning. Yet research has long lamented that writing-related transfer is notoriously difficult and frequently unsuccessful, even in university-level composition classes specifically tailored to develop these skills (Beaufort, 2007; Driscoll, 2011). Recent studies have focused on pinpointing why transfer is so difficult to teach. Driscoll and Cui (2020) found that the transfer of specific skills can be invisible to students, noting how transfer was happening without students recognizing that they were transferring prior

knowledge. Transfer typically happens implicitly unless specific cues (often generated through research) identify moments of transfer. This aligns with work from Driscoll and Jin (2018), who argued that the invisible epistemologies learners held shaped their abilities to engage with their learning and how they transferred knowledge across contexts. If they could recognize skills that transferred and how they could transfer them, they were more likely to successfully adapt their skills to new contexts.

Experiential contexts are particularly relevant transfer sites because they require students to adapt their classroom skills to a professional setting (Yancey et al., 2019). In particular, journal contributors must develop a way to use their existing skills to meet the demands of a new genre, audience, and goal. This challenge can be viewed through what Perkins and Salomon (2012) described as a “detect, elect, and connect” model, which allows writers to create and leverage “mental bridges” between previous knowledge and new contexts. Writers must first “detect” similarities between prior experiences and the task at hand that would prompt transfer to take place. They must then “elect” to use this knowledge in the novel situation and “connect” the prior and new contexts to produce a transfer effect. The student’s prior experiences and available supports influence how they respond to the demands of each stage.

Successful initiation of the detect-elect-connect process depends on the writer’s willingness to expend cognitive energy engaging with the material. Affordances—which represent the *perceived* availability of resources available to assist with a task (Billet, 2013; Norman, 1990)—are therefore critical to the decision to attempt transfer. Responsive mentorship structures can serve as a significant affordance, with targeted attention and personalized feedback being specific to the small-scale learning environment. Since transferable knowledge and skills often go unrecognized by the student employing them (Driscoll & Cui, 2020), a mentor who renders the invisible visible may help students to “detect” connections to prior learning and “elect” to persevere with the transfer task.

Once a writer does detect and elect to pursue a transfer opportunity, they can proceed to the “connect” stage of the transfer model. This transition may be conscious or subconscious, creating a spectrum of possible outcomes depending on the writer’s level of metacognitive awareness (Nowacek, 2011). In superficial forms of transfer, a writer may assume similarities between knowledge and context and proceed to transfer without critical examination (Robertson et al., 2012). While the student’s funds of knowledge may assist with the completion of the task, the lack of metacognitive reflection means that very little new information will be integrated into their existing schemas (Qualley, 2016). In other words, the transfer remains isolated and invisible. If, however, the student is prompted to reflect upon the learning experience, they may “remix” their previous knowledge with information from the novel context to form a revised knowledge base and skill set (Robertson et al., 2012). Within this process, learners will sometimes encounter forms of troublesome knowledge that are incompatible with their previous experiences (Engeström, 2015). The challenge of integrating these competing perspectives forces students to reconsider how they acquire, interpret, and apply knowledge—making exposure to diverse writing environments a useful site for exploring the transformative potential of transfer processes.

By examining how the affordance structure of undergraduate journals allows students to engage in critical and self-reflective thinking, we aim to investigate possibilities for guiding writers toward deeper levels of transfer. The present study compares the autoethnographic reflections of two undergraduate journal editors to investigate the connections between undergraduate journal editorships, mentorship communities, and writing transfer across various contexts. While we recognize that our methodology does not draw empirical conclusions about the impact of these experiences on student learning, we aim to investigate the conditions that may facilitate successful transfer and invite further conversation about integrating similar non-classroom opportunities into undergraduate education.

Methodology

Our research used collaborative autoethnography (CAE) to understand the experiences of two undergraduate journal editors. The decision to use an autoethnographic framework was based on its ability to explore the lived experiences of two individuals involved with the journal, Kaitlyn and Paige, as well as generate qualitative feedback from these recounts (Miyahara & Fukao, 2022) that could better understand how (and what) students learn from their work. As a narrative methodology, CAE does not seek empirical conclusions. Rather, it provides researchers with a systemized way to examine lessons learned through personal reflection and experience. It then allows them to find commonality in these experiences and act upon the findings. It is a piece of the puzzle that can inform more empirical work. CAE applies a broad approach that allows for researchers to compare their ethnographic recounts, or in true ethnographic language—stories—and then extract the meaning behind their sociocultural contexts (Chang et al., 2013). Researchers using CAE focus on the collaborative and reflexive nature of research, as well as the process of meaning-making (Denzin, 2003) by both a group and the individuals within that group (Miyahara & Fukao, 2022). Individual researchers will relay and analyze their own stories, and then react and analyze the stories of others (Sughrua, 2019).

Data Collection

For this CAE, we first focused on collecting reflections on the editorial students' experiences. Kaitlyn and Paige participated in four total reflections from January 1 to April 8, 2022, with each round having a different series of questions created by Chris. Chris would use the most recent reflections to develop questions for the next round of reflections. This way, each successive reflection responded to the participants' experiences and to the most prominent parts of the conversation. Each stage enabled Kaitlyn and Paige to delve deeper into their own learning experiences. Being flexible in this line of questioning allowed the team to pursue pathways that emerged from intermediate discussions “[t]hrough reflection on social practices and interpretive meanings” (Saldaña, 2013, p. 268). CAE is, at its core, a methodology that responds to emergent themes, and we were building a study framework that adhered to that nature.

Figure 1 reflects our research process. Reflection questions were formulated by Chris, and Kaitlyn and Paige elaborated on the learning that the journal provided them as undergraduate students, as well as how managing and operating journals have confounding, collaborative, and long-withstanding effects. This reflective process allowed us to “look

backward as a way to *recall* prior knowledge [...], and to look outward as a way to *relocate* knowledge in effective and meaningful ways in different contexts” (Adler-Kassner et al., 2016, p. 29). Kaitlyn and Paige wrote about their past experiences and then coded these experiences. To begin, we all coded independently using an open coding method, where we generated codes by working line-by-line through the data. We then met to discuss our codes and consolidate them into themes. From here, we analyzed the reflections again, compared them, and extracted similarities and differences. This allowed us to further narrow the codes and, when we met the next time, we determined which themes were most salient. Through this process, we ended up focusing on how mentorship facilitated transfer for Kaitlyn and Paige.

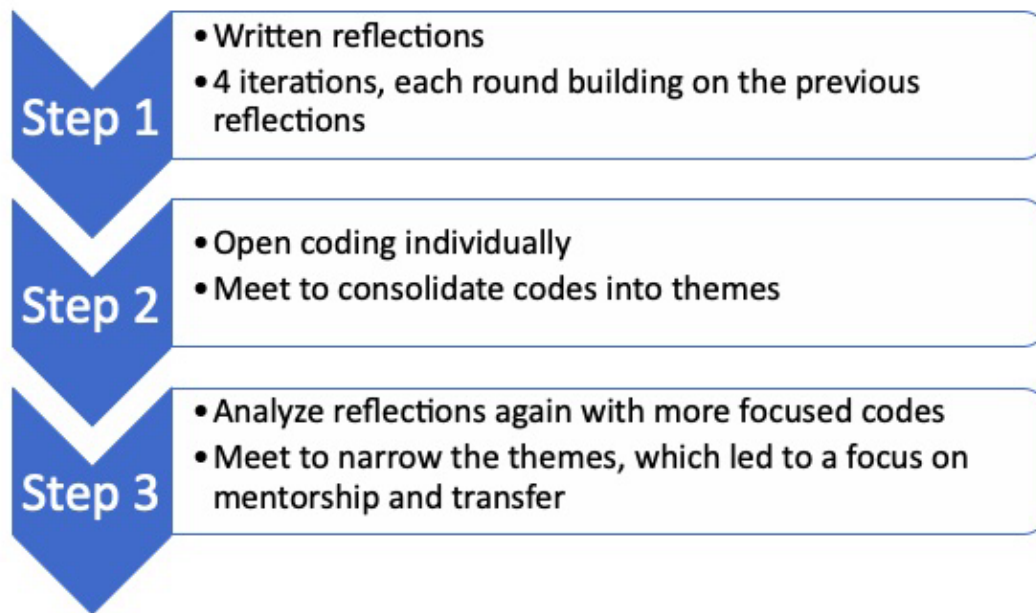


Figure 1. The Iterative Process of Writing, Coding, and Analyzing Our Reflections

Model of Transfer

A CAE approach that was tailored to our context was the appropriate methodology for our study because the journal was an opportunity for undergraduate students to work collaboratively and provide a writing experience outside of a traditional classroom environment. Essentially, we took the mentorship ethos from the journal and used it in our study: we created a collaborative environment, co-constructed knowledge between students and a faculty member, and used this knowledge to develop our skills (in this case, research skills). Garbati and Samuels (2016) explained that narrative research, like CAE, can provide a “deep understanding of complex situations as details of particular stories are considered from the perspective of a variety of interpretive lenses” (p. 335). CAE allowed us to capture stories of our experiences and better understand the complex ways that experiences writing with one journal transferred to other contexts. Garbati and Samuels also noted that, in a Canadian post-secondary education, formal writing education can often

take place inside the boundaries of writing centres and—while vastly limited—formal departments for writing in Canadian universities. CAE offered us a chance to explore our experiences developing writing skills beyond these more traditional avenues.

CAE, as Hernandez et al. (2017) explained, can be done with two or more autoethnographers who each write reflections. We used these parameters for our study and added another dimension by including the faculty member who coordinated the journal, Chris, as a mentor to support the knowledge-building process. Chris developed his own codes and added another layer to the analysis. He could guide Kaitlyn and Paige through their first CAE experience and offer a complementary perspective on data analysis, because he occupied a different position in the journal and at the university. This made knowledge-making more of a co-construction between people with varying perspectives and insights.

This approach also boosted the collaborative element and enriched our analyses by integrating an outsider's perspective that was not based on insider knowledge. This was beneficial because “logistical complexity grows as the size of the CAE team grows” (Hernandez et al., 2017, p. 252). Moving away from the “commonality” of lived experiences (Chang et al., 2013) allowed us to more effectively understand the engagement that the journal had on its two editorial students. Coding from three different perspectives provided a diversity of interpretations while still allowing the opportunity to examine how Kaitlyn and Paige developed their writing knowledge.

Results and Discussion

Our project was interested in two aspects of student learning with an undergraduate journal. The first was how mentorship from faculty editors could help students transfer writing knowledge to new writing environments. The second was the specific skills students learned from their mentor, with particular focus on how these skills helped students transfer knowledge to new contexts. In the discussion below, we will discuss what we found and their implications for transfer.

Mentorship and Transfer

Mentorship Structure

We begin our discussion by highlighting what the mentorship structure looked like from the editorial students' points of view. This perspective offers important insights into the way journal mentors can cue transfer just from the approach they take with students.

Opportunities for concentrated mentorship offered students in-depth insight into journal-related processes. It also allowed them to participate in shaping the journal and putting their skills to work. Kaitlyn noted that she was surprised “by how closely I was able to work with the faculty leads, and how willing they were to help us develop and express our review decisions. In addition to building a quality journal, I felt like they were genuinely interested in our professional growth.” Paige, similarly, recognized that the journal was “simultaneously supporting the co-curricular achievements of me and my peers.” An individualized mentorship opportunity with the journal allowed editorial students to apply and refine their skill sets while participating fully in the journal's activities. These students were positioned as contributors who were refining their craft, and

the focus was allocated towards what competencies they could develop to strengthen their writing-related knowledge and communication skills.

This ethos is best encapsulated by the initial interactions students had with their mentors. Kaitlyn explained that, in the first review session, “my faculty mentor made sure we all knew that our input was important, valuable, and meant to be shared. Hearing this explicit affirmation was impactful for me, because I had never worked closely with a professor before, and I was unsure how much my voice mattered in comparison [to theirs].” From the start, mentors ensured that students had a positive space to contribute and encouraged their contribution. In doing so, students could see that their current skills were sufficient for, valued by, and adaptable to the journal.

From a transfer perspective, the approach to mentorship and the way it valued student contributions established an environment in which transfer was possible. Driscoll (2011) noted the difficulty students have transferring skills to new contexts. Transfer is neither easy nor automatic. Yancey et al. (2019) described the importance of cueing transfer, which means making transfer an explicit goal of the project, as well as creating and identifying ways for students to transfer their writing-related knowledge. The environment that mentors established was the first step to cueing transfer. That students could see the value of what they brought to the project—what Ivanič (2009) would call funds of knowledge—offered space for them to take what they knew, adapt it for the project, and make connections between prior experiences and the journal.

This idea is also consistent with Norman’s (1990) conceptualization of affordances. Students could perceive that they had resources available to support their learning, and that they could take an active role in contributing to the project. From there, they could participate as co-contributors and build on their previous writing knowledge. By validating students’ previous writing knowledge—gained through coursework, experiences writing for student publications, and extra-curricular activities—mentors opened space for them to bring prior experiences to this new context.

Co-Constructing Frameworks

Mentorship helped students develop structured ways to encounter new challenges and overcome them. A primary example was the evaluation framework, which students developed in collaboration with their faculty mentor. Kaitlyn described how she “learned how to create a criteria-based assessment strategy and work with a team to make informed decisions about writing pieces. I really admired how the faculty leads helped the team to negotiate and make compromises within this framework, which in turn guided us in making constructive editing suggestions.” The mentor played a key role in helping students adapt to the new context, recognize what skills they had could fit the adjudication, and learn how to bring together various perspectives so that the evaluation could combine the strengths of each member.

Developing the evaluation framework allowed mentors to encourage high-road transfer from students. This process reflected Perkins and Salomon’s (2012) notion of detecting, electing, and connecting knowledge to build mental bridges between contexts. The faculty mentor facilitated a process wherein students deliberately detected previous writing knowledge that could apply to the situation, elected what types of knowledge that fit best to the journal context, and then made connections to the new context. In the process,

students activated their strategies for high-road transfer where they bridged differing contexts to form criteria that could help them connect differing and—often—unrelated writing contexts to the journal.

Learning to Evaluate Writing—Three Core Skill sets

This framework-oriented approach also highlights specific skills editorial students developed with the help of their journal mentor. Three skill sets were developed through this relationship:

1. The ability to develop an evaluation criteria;
2. The capacity to read critically;
3. An aptitude for providing insightful comments on revisions.

Specific skills students developed with their mentor was a central component to our second research question. We decided to focus on skills because this was something that both editorial students noted was a motivation for joining the journal in the first place. Kaitlyn described how “the chance to work under faculty leads was different from my work with [another student journal on campus]. Having an academic and professional mentor to guide me in the development of my reading and editing skills was an important draw to this project.” Paige echoed this point, noting that she “gained firsthand knowledge in the processes required to encourage submission, provide constructive editing and feedback, and the path required to polish and publish academic work.” The framework, and its influence on the review, was a primary vehicle for them to develop and apply these skills with the journal.

Involving editorial students as co-constructors of the evaluation framework became a way for mentors to encourage transfer throughout the editorial review. By participating in the framework’s creation, students developed specific skills in assessing writing criteria. They did so by connecting what they knew before and comparing it to what others saw.

Applying the Skills and Transferring Knowledge

This knowledge was essential when the reviewing occurred and when the reviewers provided editorial comments. Kaitlyn recalled feeling “scattered” in her first round of reviews with the journal, discovering that her instincts about writing were not sufficient to make informed review decisions. However, through the use of a structured adjudication format, she learned to integrate criteria, evidence, and revision suggestions in a way that “helped [her] to make more objective evaluations based on the content of the piece itself.” Similarly, Paige explained that she learned to assess less on “what makes a piece a great piece and more about what makes it a piece that fits the scope of the specific journal.” A lot of this involved taking a step back and “reject[ing] the first idea that comes to mind” about an individual paper in order to seek out the most insightful submissions. The structure allowed both students to consider what they learned from their mentor and what they discussed with their mentorship team when they developed the framework. It offered a living document for them to calibrate their evaluations and integrate feedback from others.

Though the influence of the mentor is less direct when students apply these skills, it still has considerable influence on whether transfer occurs in the first place. Moore (2017) noted that transfer-oriented curricula must “focus on the study and practice of rhetorically based concepts (e.g., genre, purpose, and audience) that prepare students to analyze

expectations for writing and learning within specific contexts” (p. 7). The work that students did with their faculty mentors accomplished this goal. Having a mentor to help refine how students implemented reading and editorial skills helped students both develop and adapt their skill sets for specific tasks, such as doing peer review and providing author feedback. This made the act of transfer and adapting to context practical, overt, and specific such that students could expand their writing skill sets while working with the journal.

Transfer via the Low Road and High Road

The skills students developed with the journal also transferred to other contexts. In some cases, the skills applied to other journals on campus. In other situations, they moved well beyond journal contexts. The following part of the discussion highlights a couple of these moments.

Low-Road Transfer

The transformative effect of the students’ learning emerged in their subsequent leadership of other undergraduate journals. As a creative writing journal’s Editor-in-Chief, Kaitlyn adapted our journal’s method “to set up a list of criteria, including adherence to theme, balanced exposition and imagery, strong narrative voice, and a ‘so what’ takeaway. This framework guided us toward evaluating concrete details instead of discussing vague feelings.” Even though the creative publication dealt with different genres, subjects, and styles than our journal, the experience of developing a framework to facilitate reviews and ensure critical reading transferred to the new journal. In her second year, Paige established a journal for undergraduate science research on campus. To accomplish this, she also adapted many of the policies and approaches she experienced in our journal, especially the way that we approach reviewing papers and ensuring that reviewers share a common lens.

The evidence of low-road transfer (between similar journal contexts) underscores the lasting influence of faculty mentors on the students. Because of the knowledge the editorial students gained from their faculty mentors, they were well-positioned to transfer their knowledge and adapt their skills for new publications. What is more, they moved from mentee to mentors as they became leaders in their own publication ventures. For Kaitlyn and Paige, transfer facilitated the type of community-oriented “knowledge building” that characterizes effective 21st century pedagogy (Scardamalia & Bereiter, 2006).

High-Road Transfer

In addition to the near transfer that occurred between journals, a much more far-reaching form of transfer was suggested by Kaitlyn’s and Paige’s development in other professional writing settings. As a research assistant in a developmental psychology lab, Kaitlyn reflected that “[w]orking on [our journal] helped me to develop confidence working on a university-level team project I am no longer afraid to ask questions, make suggestions, or express my thoughts, which helps me actively contribute to projects alongside faculty and students alike.” This observation indicates that the mentorship affordances provided by our journal were not isolated to the journal setting, but extended to the development of the student’s skills. This sense of self-efficacy allowed Kaitlyn to employ the skills she learned and refined with her mentor for a range of purposes and audiences—including research proposals, academic posters, and lab newsletters.

Mentorship can be a vehicle to facilitate high-road transfer by fostering student involvement in academic processes. Paige noted how her critical reading skills and ability to evaluate writing affected work later in her undergraduate career, when she became an epidemiology research assistant. She explained how “[t]he experience of reading peer academic papers allows me to learn from them, to become a better writer myself, understand the perspectives of those and adapt my way of thinking to incorporate ideas that I had not thought of before.” Contrary to the direct teacher-to-student relationship that structures regular classrooms, our journal brought faculty and students together to share ideas and co-create knowledge. This site of interaction allowed for the constant remixing of writing strategies—helping Paige to develop the necessary skills to contribute to a collaborative research team.

Kaitlyn’s and Paige’s narratives highlight how faculty mentorship served as a lasting affordance, even in transfer between unlike contexts (journals and research labs). As their writing skills developed, so too did their identities as scholars and knowledge producers. This positive self-perception is an often overlooked yet important prerequisite for transfer (Billet, 2013). The practice of reading, writing, and discussing in an authentic scholarly community armed Kaitlyn and Paige with the confidence to apply their literate knowledge to new contexts.

Conclusion

Our journal’s emphasis on mentorship and the co-creation of knowledge facilitated a host of transfer moments for editorial students. Kaitlyn and Paige noted that their work with faculty mentors contributed to three transferable skill sets: developing evaluative criteria, reading submissions critically, and formulating specific and constructive revision suggestions. These experiences became part of their funds of knowledge, which they later transferred to writing-related tasks across a spectrum of like and unlike contexts. Our results support the importance of not only increasing the knowledge and resources to which students have access (Ivanič, 2009; Norman, 1990), but also making those affordances explicit (Driscoll & Cui, 2020; Yancey et al., 2019).

The project also underscored the value of undergraduate journals in helping students to develop writing skills in an authentic context. While writing instruction usually takes place within formal academic spaces (Garbati & Samuels, 2016), the classroom environment does not represent the full range of contexts in which people write and learn. Given the experiential nature of the journal initiative, our research responded to the need to integrate student voices into conversations about transfer (Wardle, 2017). We used a CAE to contemplate Kaitlyn’s and Paige’s individualized journal experiences in connection with other writing practices and domains. Such a self-reflective methodology allowed us to simultaneously examine and contribute to a knowledge-building community (Scardamalia & Bereiter, 2006) within the wider university.

This work points to the potential for further inquiry into cueing transfer for writing development. While Kaitlyn and Paige experienced transformative transfer as a result of their editorial experiences, the outcome of a transfer opportunity is highly dependent on the social, cultural, and personal positionalities of each learner (Street, 2009; Burgess & Ivanič, 2010). Additional autoethnographic work would be an asset in understanding the complexities of experiential writing transfer, as would empirical studies that are sensitive

to such sociocultural factors. It would also be useful to understand how other journal structures or experiential environments may facilitate transfer.

Overall, this collaborative autoethnography suggests that experiential writing opportunities, such as undergraduate journals, provide opportunities for transfer in ways that traditional classroom instruction may not. Through training and mentorship opportunities, students were able to take their funds of knowledge about writing, apply them within a supportive environment, and then extend what they learned to new initiatives beyond the journal. The growth that Kaitlyn and Paige experienced while working as editorial students offers a glimpse into how the right curricular and mentorship structures can simultaneously facilitate transfer and empower students to participate in the discourse communities to which they belong. Our hope is that these results can open new conversations around the value of experiential learning opportunities for knowledge transfer and writing development in post-secondary education.

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