The Writing Transfer Project: A RAD Approach to Enhancing College Writers' Long-Term Learning

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Abstract
The Writing Transfer Project embarked on one large data collection project that has led to several investigations into the well-documented problem that post-secondary students have transferring knowledge from one writing context to another. Using a rhetorical genre studies approach to teaching writing, our primary study—a multi-institutional, longitudinal approach—uses statistical measures to identify factors promoting writing transfer: genre knowledge, metacognitive awareness of writing/skills, and the application of sources to new bodies of knowledge; prior knowledge plays a negative role. One significant implication of our study is that writing programs and centers that support students' writing development need to cue students' FYW knowledge as they enter subsequent university writing contexts. A close reading of the reflections and interviews of a sample of eight of the students in the main dataset led to the development of a new taxonomy of metacognition and to the initial finding that key components (e.g., evaluation and planning) and students' integration of certain components (e.g., monitoring and control) may facilitate knowledge transfer. The broader results of the Writing Transfer Project suggest that teaching students to respond to future writing contexts with flexibility and a willingness to adapt the writing knowledge they bring with them—especially including genre knowledge—is key.

Summary
Data included in the seminal study are written products, reflections, and interviews from students enrolled in five courses at four institutions with widely different student populations, course sequences, institutional missions, and locations. We argue that our MMRAD approach—that is, a mixed-methods, multi-institutional approach to replicable, aggregable, and data-supported research—is especially important for evaluating the relative effectiveness of various pedagogical approaches.

Recommendations for future studies
The complexity of the role that genre knowledge plays in students' transition from one writing environment to another demands further research, as does the interrelation and integration of the multiple components of metacognitive knowledge that we have begun to identify. In addition, the relative strengths of various pedagogical approaches—Writing about Writing, Rhetorical Genre Studies—and the different ways of implementing them need to be compared more systematically in future studies.