

*THE THINGS THEY CARRIED*: CONCEPTIONS OF WRITING TRANSFER IN  
COMPOSITION STUDIES

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COMPOSITION STUDIES

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## VITA

Elizabeth Mary Hollis, daughter of Robert Austin and Barbara Jean Smith, was born on July 22, 1985 in Chicago, Illinois. She graduated with honors from Carrollton High School in Carrollton, Georgia in 2003. Graduating Cum Laude from Auburn University in the fall of 2006, she received a Bachelor of the Arts degree in English with a minor in Psychology. As a graduate student, Elizabeth focused her research and course work in Rhetoric and Composition, particularly literacy and transfer studies. She graduated again from Auburn University in August 2009 with a Master of the Arts degree in English. Elizabeth married Joseph Johnson Hollis, Jr. on July 7, 2007.

THESIS ABSTRACT

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COMPOSITION STUDIES

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This thesis will look at a body of scholarship that dominates both short and long-term case studies of writing and will attempt to understand and identify assumptions that underlie how they are enacted. Through this examination, it will be made clear how definitions coined some twenty years ago by David N. Perkins and Gavriel Salomon have been taken up and continue to influence and shape current research on writing development, specifically that of Anne Beaufort's *College Writing and Beyond* and David W. Smit's *The End of Composition Studies*. Together, such analyses of Beaufort's and Smit's work will explain why we are left with the same discouraging conclusions that transfer is difficult and not always possible. With so much predicated on transfer when analyzing the success of students in their writing and academic careers, highlighting biases and assumptions will help to move beyond those now antiquated terms to view transfer in a new light.

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## Chapter One: “Notes” from “In the Field”<sup>1</sup>

*“Now we have arrived at what I take to be the heart of the matter in learning to write. If writing is a complex number of related abilities that rely on very different kinds of knowledge, depending on the writer’s purpose and context, when writers learn any particular piece of knowledge or when they learn how to put a particular skill into practice, just what have they learned?...In psychology and learning theory, these questions are part of a process called ‘transfer.’ – David W. Smit<sup>2</sup>*

In an English classroom in 1975, a sixteen year-old student, Jeff, sits in a sixth grade classroom and is scolded for drawing during a standard pre-writing exercise and told to “get to work” (Atwell 7). While students around him are presumably on task in their writing activities, Jeff opts to draw sailboats as a means to sort through his ideas for the specified creative-writing assignment (7). Several years later, his teacher, Nancie Atwell, discovered that what she had designed for her students as “helpful structures (had) served Jeff as constraints” (8). Why did this happen? Why was Atwell so resistant to accept the different pre-writing practices in which Jeff was participating and favor the more traditional, writing and outline methods preferred in classrooms and the academy? On a simple level, Jeff’s story is one of many that take place in academic classrooms. Students transfer, or carry over, skills used outside the confines of a classroom into their academic lives in an effort to appropriate the task to their own means. However, due to the fact that Atwell was not able to observe Jeff outside of school, she could not witness

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<sup>1</sup>Title of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> stories in O’Brien’s collection.

<sup>2</sup> Taken from Chapter 6 of Smit’s 2004 *The End of Composition Studies*.



the positive outcomes of Jeff's in-class activities, however often they were deemed off-task and not useful. More complexly, Jeff's reappropriation of the mandated in-class pre-writing activities and Atwell's attempts to make Jeff conform to her expectations is one example among many of the daily instances of transfer that students routinely practice. While Jeff was transferring skills that he found useful and had honed outside of academic settings, such transfer was deemed negative and unfit for his schooling context.

Over 30 years later, in her 2004 CCCC address, Kathleen B. Yancey called for a dramatic change in the way composition is constructed, discussed and taught in order to better accommodate students like Jeff, who are transferring outside influences into their academic tasks. Yancey notes that "never before has the proliferation of writings outside the academy so counterpointed the compositions inside" (298). Along with the continued advances in technology and the ways in which such tools are being manipulated and appropriated, questions are raised that "suggest ways that literacy is created across spaces, across time" (Yancey 298). Yancey is arguing the need to look at writing more broadly so that practices like Jeff's can be valued and appreciated. With writing outside the classroom continually influencing the writing inside the classroom, transfer is central to Yancey's call and an understanding of the term becomes critical in order to move forward within composition studies.

Discussions of transfer are not new to composition studies, however, the ways in which the term is traditionally discussed have not changed with the passing of time, going against Yancey's call and ultimately limiting what can and is viewed as successful transfer. Often discussed within the confines of case studies, transfer has been a topic at the forefront of educational studies since the late 1980s. As a practice, the study of a

student's writing has long been viewed as one of the best ways to glean information about their writing processes. This study of one's writing inevitably leads to a discussion of transfer due to the cross-disciplinary approach in many case studies, a discussion which continues due to the often elusive nature of transfer. In order to better understand how transfer has been constructed within composition studies, this thesis will look at two foundational articles by David N. Perkins and Gavriel Salomon, "Teaching for Transfer" and "Transfer of Learning," and the key assumptions made about transfer within those articles. Through this examination, it will be clear how definitions coined over twenty years ago continue to shape and influence current research on writing development and freshman writing curriculum, specifically the work of Anne Beaufort and David W. Smit

As a term and practice, transfer has been defined in several different, yet altogether, similar ways. In 1992, David N. Perkins and Gavriel Salomon defined transfer as "the ability to apply knowledge, skill, and specific strategies from one domain to other novel situations" (8). Later, in 2004, David W. Smit posed that transfer involves a simple question: "in what sense can various kinds of knowledge and skill be transferred from one situation to another, or learned in one context and applied in another?" (119). Through these various definitions, the issue of transfer appears quite clear. What also appears clear, however, is how similar Smit's definition is to Perkins and Salomon's, despite the years of research and supposed advancement in the study of writing development. Ultimately, while Perkins and Salomon provide a foundation for the study of transfer, their definition is flawed due to three governing principles/assumptions: transfer should be studied only in academic settings, transfer can be taught, and the integrity of the skill before and after transfer should not be compromised. These

assumptions will be further analyzed and contextualized in Chapter two, followed by a critical look at how those assumptions present themselves in the work of Beaufort and Smit.

While this study will focus intensely on the work of Beaufort and Smit, recent articles by Gerald Nelms and Ronda Leathers Dively<sup>3</sup> as well as Diane F. Halpern's "Teaching Critical Thinking for Transfer Across Domains: Dispositions, Skills, Structure Training and Metacognitive Monitoring," continue to show the influence of Perkins and Salomon, particularly the articles examined in this thesis, as they are cited throughout Nelms and Dively's and Halpern's work. Additionally, Elizabeth Wardle's "Understanding 'Transfer' from FYC: Preliminary Results from a Longitudinal Study" provides interesting findings in relation to the work discussed within this study. Wardle followed seven former students from her Fall 2004 FYC course into their later writing within the university, focusing on four specific questions: "what do students feel they learned and did in FYC, what kinds of writing are students doing elsewhere, how do students perceive that writing and what strategies do they use to complete it, and do students perceive FYC as helping them with later writing assignments across the university" (70). Wardle's students felt that they had learned in FYC, but her findings conclude that students did not transfer those skills not because they did not learn, but because they did not "perceive a need to adopt or adapt most of the writing behaviors they used in FYC for other courses" (76). Unlike much of the literature that proliferate the field, Wardle shifts the responsibility for transfer from the teacher, who must be

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<sup>3</sup> See "Perceived Roadblocks to Transferring Knowledge from First-Year Writing-Intensive Major Courses: A Pilot Study."

provided a “recipe<sup>4</sup>” for transfer, onto the student, who must determine what skills are appropriate for them to transfer based on the situation. Wardle further emphasizes the need for “context-specific” education with the hopes that familiar situations will trigger the desired transfer of skills (82).

Furthering notions of student accountability, in “Disciplinary and Transfer: Student’s Perceptions of Learning to Write,” Linda Bergmann and Janet Zepernick observed “a tendency among students to actively reject the idea that what they learned about writing in high school or in first year composition (FYC) courses should be applied to the writing they were asked to do in courses in other disciplines” (124). Here it would seem that no matter what “recipe” scholars such as Perkins and Salomon suggest, students are still left with the responsibility to transfer useful skills and apply them in other areas. In their research, Bergmann and Zepernick observed four focus groups of 7-10 participants, ranging in area of study. Several students were later pulled from the initial groups and placed into follow-up groups for further questioning. Overall, students felt that the writing they were asked to produce in English classes was “expressive rather than academic or professional,” had a more personal feel, was a “natural act,” and most importantly, writing skills were not “portable” (129). Not viewing students in their learning environment makes it difficult to infer with certainty whether or not such assumptions were because of the teacher’s methods or the students’ own desires, but such a level of consensus among the respondents lends credibility to their assertions.

The presence of Perkins and Salomon in such recent articles makes an analysis of their influence in larger studies and texts all the more useful. Accordingly, this study

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<sup>4</sup> Found in Perkins and Salomon’s “Teaching for Transfer,” and discussed more extensively in Chapter Two.

seeks to illuminate the presence of Perkins and Salomon in two present analyses of writing development and freshman writing curriculum: Anne Beaufort's *College Writing and Beyond: A New Framework for University Writing Instruction* and David W. Smit's *The End of Composition Studies*. Beaufort's 2007 study follows a student, Tim, throughout his First Year Composition (FYC) course, as well as his history, engineering, and post-College writing. Spanning six years, Beaufort was able to compile a plethora of data from interviews, writing samples, instructor comments and sources used. Beaufort herself notes that while her study is "not generalizable, (it) offers the potential for refining a conceptual framework for writing expertise that could be tested in other settings" (26). Despite such intensive work, this thesis will reveal the limitations still present in Beaufort's conclusions, aside from those traditionally given to longitudinal case studies.

Conversely, Smit's 2004 contribution to the field seeks to redefine composition studies and restructure graduate and undergraduate composition curriculum. Throughout his book, Smit firmly situates himself among those who feel that a strictly composition-themed course should be abolished within the freshmen core curriculum and favors a broader approach, referred to as Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC). Smit devotes a chapter to each of the shortcomings, or "conceptual limits" he sees within composition, including the process of learning to write, writing process models, an inability to see writing as a social practice, the cognitive aspect of writing, and the focus of this study, transfer. While Smit offers what he feels are solutions to such problems and hints that the field may need to be dissolved altogether, within his proposal lurks the influence of Perkins and Salomon, ultimately limiting his proposed changes. Together, such analyses

of Beaufort's and Smit's work will attempt to explain why, despite the large degree of progress seen in the field of composition and writing studies in particular, we are left with the same discouraging conclusions that transfer is difficult and not always possible. With so much predicated on transfer when analyzing the success of students in their writing and academic careers, highlighting biases and assumptions will help to move beyond those now antiquated terms to view transfer in a new light.

This argument will be further foregrounded in Chapter Two, where I will utilize the work of Perkins and Salomon to ground transfer and locate it within the narrow criteria under which they operate. These definitions will be drawn specifically from their articles "Teaching for Transfer" and "Transfer of Learning," published in 1988 and 1992 respectively. Ultimately, Chapter Two will outline the key assumptions seen in their work and how they not only limit the way transfer has been discussed within academic settings, but also how such notions have been retained within academia. With Perkins and Salomon's assumptions in mind, Chapter Three and Four will examine how such criteria are present and operate in the work of Beaufort and Smit. Through close readings of their texts, key sections will be discussed; particularly those that best showcase the influence of Perkins and Salomon and inevitably limit their own conclusions and analyses. Such a practical illumination of the biases that are still present will allow for Chapter Five's conclusions and implications for future research, as well as possible new applications within the classroom. Specifically utilizing the work of Margaret A. Syverson, who favors an ecological approach to composition that takes into account the myriad of factors that influence writing both within and outside academic settings, among others, will bring into sharp focus the necessity for a new term from which to discuss transfer.

This discussion on new ways with which to reference transfer will more correctly acknowledge that transfer is influenced and seen differently depending upon the individual, occurs in countless settings, especially those that are outside the classroom and is ultimately not as elusive and fraught with difficulty as previously implicated.

Chapter Two: “The Ghost Soldiers”<sup>5</sup> a Look at the Work of David N. Perkins and  
Gavriel Salomon

This chapter will take a detailed and close look at two seminal texts in the study of transfer: Perkins and Salomon’s “Teaching for Transfer” and “Transfer of Learning.” While Perkins and Salomon have published extensively on the subject of transfer, including “Transfer and Teaching Thinking,” “Are Cognitive Skills Context Bound,” “Transfer of Cognitive Skills from Programming: When and How,” and “Rocky Roads to Transfer: Rethinking Mechanisms of a Neglected Phenomenon,” “Teaching for Transfer” and “Transfer of Learning” will be examined here due to their foundational nature and the way in which they illuminate Perkins and Salomon’s three governing assumptions: transfer must be taught; transfer only occurs within academic settings, further creating a distinction between life in and outside of school; and that in order for the transfer to be considered successful, the integrity of the skill must not be compromised. While these assumptions arguably inform and build off one another, in order to discuss these assumptions fully, this chapter will look at each separately, analyzing key passages in the text in which these governing principles are most apparent.

**Assumption One: Transfer must be taught**

Those seeking evidence of assumption one need go no further than the title and sub-heading of Perkins and Salomon’s “Teaching for Transfer.” Under the title, in large bold-face, they state that “students often fail to apply knowledge and skills learned in one context to other situations. With well-designed instruction, we can increase the likelihood

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<sup>5</sup> Title of the 20<sup>th</sup> story in O’Brien’s collection.



that they will” (22). From the start, Perkins and Salomon have established that this article will be focused on ways in which to teach transfer, a task they deem to be the central focus of what any education system hopes to achieve (22). When establishing the need for transfer to be taught, Perkins and Salomon note that “transfer does not take care of itself, and conventional schooling pays little heed to the problems. With proper attention, we can do much more to teach for transfer than we are now doing” (22). Of course, given that “Teaching for Transfer” was published in 1988, a current study of America’s educational system would be necessary in order to determine if more is being done to achieve the hoped-for transfer discussed by Perkins and Salomon. However, Chapters three and four will attempt to do just that by analyzing works by Anne Beaufort and David Smit.

When addressing the issue of why transfer is “worrisome,” Perkins and Salomon explain:

the implicit assumption in educational practice has been that transfer takes care of itself. To be lighthearted about a heavy problem, one might call this the “Bo Peep” theory of transfer. Let them alone and they’ll come home, wagging their tails behind them. If students acquire information about the Revolutionary War and the Westward emigration, if they learn some problem solving skills in math and some critical thinking skills in social studies, all this will more or less automatically spill over to the many other contexts...where it might apply, we hope. Unfortunately, considerable research and everyday experience testify that the Bo Peep theory is inordinately optimistic. (23)

When discussing instances where transfer may occur, Perkins and Salomon imply, via statements like “with well designed instruction, we can increase the likelihood that they will,” that said skills must be taught, or learned, in order for one to achieve the transfer desired (22). Teaching with the goal of transfer in mind does not seem like an altogether bad thing, yet when working under the assumption that transfer can only occur when it is taught, instances of transfer can be ignored that were not what the instructor, or researcher had in mind.

A key assertion behind Perkins and Salomon’s insistence that transfer must be taught is that without proper instruction, students will not “transfer the knowledge to problem-solving contexts where they have to think about new situations” (23). Not only does this severely limit the capabilities seen on the part of the student to recognize similar situations, but it further enforces an error model of education where instructors are constantly filling in the deficit of knowledge perceived in their students, as opposed to working with the skills brought in to the classroom and aiding students in using the tools for themselves. While maintaining that transfer should be taught in order to achieve the best results, Perkins and Salomon address this key issue by directly questioning, “Can we teach transfer?” (28). They maintain that while the most “artful instructional design will not provoke transfer if the knowledge and skills in question are fundamentally local in character,” they offer the terms “bridging” and “hugging” as a solution to such a problem. Since they contend that students cannot be expected to make connections that they have not been taught to make, hugging, or “teaching so as to better meet the resemblance conditions for low road transfer” and bridging, “teaching so as to better the conditions for high road transfer” are ways in which teachers can mediate the transfer process,

increasing, in Perkins and Salomon's opinion, the likelihood that it will occur.

Throughout these statements, Perkins and Salomon make it clear that the teacher must be inextricably involved in the transfer process, given the teacher-student relationship of academic settings. This further foregrounds the fact that transfer must be taught and ultimately, given that this "teaching for transfer" method is the only one discussed, it can be assumed that Perkins and Salomon place more value on instances of transfer that occur in academic settings over those that do not.

Perkins and Salomon maintain that education can achieve "abundant transfer if it is designed to do so," (8) mirroring their previous attempts at providing a "recipe" for transfer. This recipe, utilizing the previously discussed tools of bridging and hugging, provides some of the strongest evidence for Perkins and Salomon's insistence that transfer can be taught. They claim that "taken together, the notions of bridging and hugging write a relatively simple recipe for transfer: First, imagine the transfer you want. Next, shape instruction to hug closer to the transfer desired. Also, shape instruction to bridge to the transfer desired" (24). Under this "recipe," it would appear that transfer is in fact easy to accomplish, if you are teaching and looking for it in the right places. Indeed, Perkins and Salomon insist that "such teamwork between bridging and hugging practically guarantees making the most of whatever potential transfer a subject matter affords" (30). However, if transfer were indeed as simple as providing a recipe for teachers to use in their classrooms, dismal claims about transfer, such as those made by Smit that transfer is "largely unpredictable," would not be as prevalent in the literature available (119).

**Assumption Two: Transfer occurring in academic settings is privileged over other instances**

As previously mentioned above, each of Perkins and Salomon's assumptions build off one another. Operating under the belief that transfer must be taught, it stands to reason that such teaching practices occur in an academic setting. By providing a "recipe" for transfer, Perkins and Salmon privilege the transfer occurring within the walls of the classroom, specifically since the classroom is the only realm in which they discuss the occurrence of transfer. Furthermore, the importance of transfer in education is highlighted as Perkins and Salomon note that "any survey of what education hopes to achieve discloses that transfer is integral to our expectations and aspirations for education...the transfer of basic skills is a routine target of schooling" (22). While one may question just what "basic skills" Perkins and Salomon are referring, the importance of transfer within education and the need to increase its likelihood is established.

Continuing through their articles, Perkins and Salomon routinely refer to instances of transfer that occur within academic settings, neglecting the tacit transfer done each day by students outside the four walls of the classroom. While continuing to discuss the role of transfer within education, Perkins and Salomon propose that "European and American history should help students think about current political events," which would illuminate past events by connecting them to the present (23). Furthering this notion of expanding knowledge beyond its site of acquisition, in "Transfer of Learning," Perkins and Salomon maintain that "transfer is a key concept in education and learning theory because most formal education aspires to transfer. Usually the context of learning...differs markedly from the ultimate contexts of application" (3).

Despite the acknowledgement that learning within a classroom does not effectively approximate later application of the skill, Perkins and Salomon do not make the necessary move to study transfer that occurs outside the classroom in order to better mimic its behavior. With this in mind, the attention paid to transfer occurring in academic settings severely limits Perkins and Salomon in their discussion of transfer, providing them, and later researchers, with a small window with which to view a large, frequently occurring phenomenon.

Contrasting with the large library of information done on literacy studies by the likes of Street, Brice-Heath and Scribner and Cole, Perkins and Salomon propose that “the difficulty with testing this hypothesis is that people usually learn to write in schools, at the same time they learn numerous other skills that could affect their cognitive abilities” (24). Troubling with this statement is the fact that while much teaching of those skills does occur in formal, academic schooling situations, there are many instances in which that does not occur. Implying that such tasks are only learned in school while emphasizing their claim that transfer must be taught, Perkins and Salomon again perpetuate both the error model of education as well as the power structure at play within academic settings.

**Assumption Three: The integrity of the skill should not be compromised**

Implicit in Perkins and Salomon’s assumption that the integrity of the skill being transferred should not be altered is the notion that transfer is mere transmission of skills or knowledge across a theoretical plane. This view of learning leaves no room for reappropriation or repurposing of the skill on the part of the student, disallowing the opportunity for one to interpret the information in question and use how they personally

see fit. Behind this assumption is Perkins and Salomon's perspective on knowledge, noting that "the most discouraging explanation is that knowledge and skill may be too 'local' to allow for many of the expectations and aspirations that educators have held" (25). While continuing with their rather negative outlook on the possibility for transfer, Perkins and Salomon identify the nature of learning, or what they deem the nature of learning, as the very reason why transfer does not occur. While there is a need to understand the contextual nature of knowledge acquisition, assuming that situations need be identical in order for one to transfer skill into different situations further limits how students are conceptualized in the classroom.

Evidence of this third assumption is clear from Perkins and Salomon's definitions of transfer, in which they argue that transfer involves "the ability to apply knowledge, skills, and specific strategies from one domain to other, novel situations" (8). Building off this definition and allowing it to inform the majority of their discussion on transfer, Perkins and Salomon contend that effective transfer is measured through a "metric of closeness" between the site of acquisition and desired location of transfer, again implying that transfer simply crosses a metaphorical plane, traveling from point "A" to "B" (3-4). Just as Perkins and Salomon inform the work done by Beaufort, Smit and others, in "Transfer of Learning" it is made clear that they are informed by the earlier work of E.L. Thorndike<sup>6</sup>. Especially in regard to their third assumption, the influence of Thorndike is clear as they present his conclusions that transfer depends on "identical elements in two performances" (4). Furthering the discussion beyond Thorndike, Perkins and Salomon enter into a discussion on "expertise," which further foregrounds the importance of local

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<sup>6</sup> In the 1920's, Thorndike conducted experiments to determine whether a basic knowledge of Latin would help in other academic studies. He later concluded that Latin did not predict later success.

knowledge and the context in which knowledge is acquired. With such an importance placed on location and approximation to the original site of knowledge acquisition, it is interesting that Perkins and Salomon omit such information from their “recipe” for transfer. However, this is notably absent from their analysis, making successful transfer based on their recommendations all the more troublesome.

As previously noted each of Perkins and Salomon’s assumptions build off and inform one another. If transfer must be taught, then it will occur in academic settings where traditional methods of teaching are encouraged. In order for transfer to be taught, the skills must be used in the same way by each student, prohibiting the ability for students to change and restructure the skill to best fit their own learning and problem solving situation. As these assumptions have been illuminated in “Teaching for Transfer” and “Transfer of Learning,” an analysis of Beaufort’s text will be offered in the following chapter that highlights the presence of those assumptions at work in her theoretical lens and later data analysis and conclusions.

Chapter Three: “Field Trip<sup>7</sup>”- An Examination of Anne Beaufort’s *College Writing and Beyond*

While written with the goal of further understanding the way writing instruction from a first year composition course transfers across disciplines, Beaufort’s text also seeks to offer a new conceptualization of the way writing should be taught within the collegiate setting. By following Tim, an undergraduate, through his two freshman writing courses and later in his history and engineering classes, Beaufort attempts to show how those skills honed in his original writing classes did not transfer into other writing tasks and when they did transfer, the result was negative, as opposed to positive. Seeking to illuminate the assumptions discussed in Perkins and Salomon’s “Teaching for Transfer” and “Transfer of Learning,” this chapter will work through Beaufort’s text and through analysis of key passages, will show the presence of Perkins and Salomon’s influence, particularly the way their key assumptions color Beaufort’s findings and data analyses.

What makes Beaufort’s text so fruitful in terms of analysis and uncovering the influence of Perkins and Salomon is the vast amount of times she directly acknowledges the pair. In her acknowledgements, Beaufort credits them among those “in related fields whose work has particularly helped frame this study” (1). Additionally, she encourages her readers to read all the articles she has cited by Perkins and Salomon “for a deeper understanding of the research on transfer of learning” (177). Beaufort directly cites from both articles discussed within this study, as well as Salomon and Tamar Globerson’s article, “Skill May Not Be Enough: The Role of Mindfulness in Learning and Transfer.”

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<sup>7</sup> The 19<sup>th</sup> story in O’Brien’s compilation.



Such inclusions and direct calls to her readers make it evident that Beaufort has relied upon Perkins and Salomon to provide much of the basis of her understanding of transfer, and such influence is seen throughout her book.

Along with the fact that Beaufort directly deals with Perkins and Salomon's texts, her study is rooted in issues of transfer. Through analysis of Tim and his struggles with writing outside his FYC courses, Beaufort notes that the "transition from history to engineering discourse community norms was not smooth. It required not only learning new genres and new subject matter, but also encountering a host of new rhetorical situations, new ways of thinking, and new roles as a writer. The problems Tim encountered set the transfer of learning issue in bold relief" (8). Through this statement, Beaufort further establishes transfer, and the very Perkins and Salomon term "transfer of learning," as a crucial issue and point of contention in her study. In order to propose a more effective curriculum that would allow students to write effectively regardless of the discipline in which they are situated, transfer becomes a central part of the instruction Beaufort proposes as the ability to apply what one has learned in FYC in other classes is the end goal of the course, as opposed to completion of required papers.

Beaufort foregrounds the notion that transfer must be taught, stating that "Freshman writing, if taught with an eye toward transfer of learning and with an explicit acknowledgement of the context of freshman writing itself as a social practice, can set students on a course of life-long learning so that they know how to learn to become better writers in a variety of social contexts" (7). From this statement, one can see Beaufort not only explicitly utilizing the title of one of Perkins and Salomon's pieces, but emphasizing the importance of teaching for transfer in terms of a successful composition curriculum.

Much like Perkins and Salomon, who insist that transfer be taught and follow with a “recipe” with which to teach transfer, Beaufort’s text offers suggestions on how to change the freshman writing curriculum in order to better teach for transfer.

Furthering the notion that transfer be taught, Beaufort notes the lack of teaching for transfer as one of the key problems facing FYC. She contends that a major issue with “writing instruction in disciplinary settings is the issue of teaching students to learn how to learn the conventions of writing in new situations they will encounter” (15). She continues, noting that “if the writing instruction is context-specific and students are not given the kinds of intellectual tools and frameworks for being able to become astute at learning to be flexible writers, they will not be able to adapt to a variety of writing situations” (15). This statement is strikingly similar to Perkins and Salomon’s claim that without well-designed instruction specifically aimed at teaching for transfer, transfer will not occur. Attempting to hone in on what knowledge students need for successful writing in later classes, Beaufort again places emphasis on teaching for transfer when she proposes that to “articulate these knowledge domains and apply them to shaping curriculum, we can then contextualize writing instruction more fully and have a basis for teaching for transfer, i.e. equipping students with a mental schema for learning writing skills in new genres, in new discourse communities they will encounter throughout life” (17). Beaufort identifies the five knowledge domains as writing process knowledge, subject matter knowledge, rhetorical knowledge, and genre knowledge. These spheres are located in the larger knowledge of the discourse community and given that there are numerous discourse communities, these spheres of knowledge would be different for each. With this model of teaching for transfer, Beaufort comes upon different struggles in

application than those seen with Perkins and Salomon, specifically the impossibility of conveying to students the knowledge domains associated with every discourse community. Even predicting the discourse communities a student may come upon later in life would be a difficult task given the myriad of students in each classroom and their various backgrounds and career goals. Teaching for transfer is by no means a lost cause, but it remains clear that proposing one way in which to insure its success is ideal at best.

When discussing the problems Tim encountered in his transition from the composition to history classroom, Beaufort further emphasizes the need to teach for transfer, noting that “the difference between the two contexts for writing raises the question of transfer of learning and what role a required, entry-level course can play in preparing a student for the rest of his/her college education” (68). Such questions bring up concerns that are far too vast and infinite within the confines of this study, such as what should be the goal of FYC? What are composition instructors supposed to teach their students? Are they to prepare them for every instance of writing they may encounter across their life span? The fact remains that writing varies depending on the situation one finds themselves and making students aware of that fact appears to be a positive step.

Teaching for transfer dominates the later portions of Beaufort’s text, particularly her suggestions for future writing instruction. Beaufort reiterates this importance, stating that “writers will not automatically bridge or bring forward, appropriate writing strategies and knowledge to new writing situations unless they have an understanding of both the need to do so and a method for doing so” (177). Here, Beaufort echoes Perkins and Salomon’s claims that students will not transfer knowledge if not given the opportunities to do so and the instruction that facilitates such transfer, and further foregrounds the

importance of teaching for transfer. These assumptions, however, continue to be problematic in their insistence that students will not tacitly transfer knowledge. Again, these emphasize a deficit model of education, a problem that reaches beyond the scope of issues of transfer. In the same section, Beaufort calls for writing instructors to “teach the practice of mindfulness, or meta-cognition, to facilitate positive transfer of learning... What is important for transfer is constantly connecting new and already-acquired knowledge” (182). Connecting new and old information is not only important in transfer, but knowledge retention as well, an act that students must participate in daily. By conflating such ideas with teaching for transfer, Beaufort again situates the instructor in the middle of the student’s learning process, further limiting what they are able to achieve on their own.

Perhaps one of the strongest indicators of the presence of Perkins and Salomon’s assumptions, particularly the assumption that transfer occurring in academic settings is privileged over others, occurs in the structure of Beaufort’s study and the means through which she collected data. Over the course of six years, Beaufort conducted interviews with Tim and his FYC instructor, obtained writing samples and compared source materials from his history and FYC papers to the “finished<sup>8</sup>” product. Additionally, when available, Beaufort consulted “experts” to look at the papers Tim produced in his history and engineering courses as well as evaluator comments and classroom observation (27). While this provides a plethora of data from which Beaufort was able to draw her conclusions, one can see that each form of data collection is rooted in the formal, academic settings favored by Perkins and Salomon and many others. Beaufort states in

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<sup>8</sup> Some scholars, Donald Murray in particular, would argue that writing is never finished, but rather turned in for a grade due to the time constraints placed on student’s writing within academic settings.

her introduction that “assessing change or development in writing is also compounded by the fact that written products do not tell the whole story of what has transpired for the writer” (24). However, by only collecting and analyzing the written products produced by Tim, Beaufort herself is given only one side of the story, limiting the instances of transfer she is ultimately able to see. As Beaufort credits Perkins and Salomon extensively throughout her text, their assumptions are at play very early on in Beaufort’s study, restricting what she is able to see even before conclusions are made and data is collected. While it cannot be said with absolute certainty, it would appear that Perkins and Salomon form the theoretical lens through which she examines her subjects, ultimately creating the skewed and constraining conclusions she later draws.

Explaining her methodology, Beaufort comments that “seeing the subject ‘in action’- either by field observation or by interviews with others in the field of action- allows that critical element of triangulation: taking what the subject says and comparing it with others’ views and with the subject’s work” (215). For Beaufort, and Perkins and Salomon, observing writing and its potential for transfer “in action” occurs within academic settings, as these are the only realms of action that either observes. While the sole attention paid to academic setting is troubling with Perkins and Salomon as well as Beaufort, in her case it becomes almost antithetical to the very ideas she proposes, especially given her repeated insistence on including the social, or life outside the classroom, into the teaching of writing. As noted above, Beaufort is aware that looking at the finished written product does not tell the “whole story of what transpired has for the writer” (24). However, by only viewing writing occurring within academic settings, Beaufort continues to miss the “whole story.” Furthermore, Beaufort encourages other

researchers and members of the academy to use a “holistic” approach when conducting research, again, an advisement that is not enacted in her own work, even as she continues to note the need to “take into account all of the knowledge components embedded within literate acts, no matter what level or social context of writing development is being examined” (25). In this instance, Perkins and Salomon provide a theoretical framework that structures Beaufort’s methodology, but also severely limits the conclusions she is able to draw by supplying her with a narrow avenue from which to collect information.

A key example of what Beaufort misses by viewing Tim solely in the context of his academic pursuits occurs when examining Tim’s writing. During his freshman writing courses, Tim frequently chose writing topics and formulated arguments that were informed by his personal religious convictions. Encouraged to find topics that students felt passionate about, Tim often veered away from the environmental issues discussed in class and for one assignment chose to discuss the ethical implications of genetic engineering, grounding his research in an article from *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith*. Not directed in class to move towards such topics, it would appear that Tim’s interests and skills outside the classroom leaked into his academic sphere and determined his topic. Rewarded for this action, Tim was routinely praised by his instructor for “writing beautifully,” and so he continued pulling from those influences and writing on the basis of his own interests (34). Not pursuing this avenue of influence and continuing to look only at Tim’s academic career stands as another example of Perkins and Salomon’s influence skewing Beaufort’s results and limiting what she is able to see.

Just as the insistence that transfer be taught reinforces a deficit model of education, viewing students in strictly academic settings and neglecting their lives outside the classroom perpetuates a trend to view students and subjects as an “other,” separate from their instructor or the person performing the study. Beaufort’s tendency to view Tim as only the subject of her study causes her to miss one of the largest influences on Tim’s writing process and progress as a writer. Just as Perkins and Salomon promote the view that transfer only occurs within academic settings Beaufort only looks at Tim within academic settings, creating an unfinished and partial view of Tim as a person. Instead, he is student, subject, and object of study.

Evidence of Perkins and Salomon’s third assumption is clear in the discourse model of knowledge that Beaufort proposes as a framework from which to teach for transfer. She suggests that

What is most important for those teachers, administrators, and researchers reading this is

not how far this one writer progressed toward any form of writing expertise, but rather, the mental note we should make: look at the whole picture- the five knowledge domains in writing expertise - not one part or two when trying to help writers or to assess them. Each aspect of the knowledge involved in the writing expertise is important, each affects the other areas in which the writer is seeking mastery. (148-8)

Implicit in the discourse model is the idea that one can teach to each discourse available. It would appear that an instructor need merely tell a student the norms of each discourse and later, when a student finds themselves within that sphere, recalling that information

will insure their success. However, akin to Perkins and Salomon's "recipe," mastery of a discourse and an understanding of its norms and expectations involves more than carefully designed instruction.

Reflecting further Perkins and Salomon's third assumption that transfer is merely a transmission across a theoretical knowledge plane, Beaufort discusses several instances of "negative" transfer on Tim's part when moving from his FYC to history courses. In an interview with Beaufort, Tim explained that "the biggest thing I guess from her that I learned, which I still hold onto, is that audience is everything. That was her biggest and first point I think, for the whole year. Audience is everything and style is fun" (36). That said, Tim theoretically transferred the importance of audience that he learned from FYC and tried to implement those considerations into his history papers. However, Tim was rebuffed by his instructor and GTA and forced to produce writing that he felt was "writing for the sake of writing" (54). Upon first glance it would appear that Tim transferred the knowledge, like he was supposed to, and while it may have been an instance where he needed to re-evaluate who he was writing to and in what situation he was writing, the transfer none the less occurred. However, due to the fact that Tim was instructed to write in a different manner, Beaufort concluded that the transfer did not occur and if it did, it was negative, meaning that it impeded Tim's success, rather than aiding his development as a writer. When discussing and evaluating Tim's writing in his later courses, it would appear that Tim transferred everything he learned and simply had to adjust to each new discourse community and their established rules and conventions. That said, in addressing her conclusions from Tim's writing experiences, Beaufort questions "what was gained from freshman writing that could serve Tim as he



encountered writing situations requiring different sorts of knowledge and skill? The question remains elusive and troubling” (105). While the adjustment to writing in other discourses may not have been as smooth as Beaufort apparently wanted to see, one cannot deny that Tim did indeed transfer what he learned in FYC and simply had to adjust, on his own terms and within his own timetable, producing the individual differences that Perkins and Salomon, as well as Beaufort seem to shy away from.

While Perkins and Salomon should be given their due credit for providing a language and avenue with which to discuss one of the very bases of education, without moving beyond their limiting framework, all those who attempt to redefine the structure of writing instruction and look at the way skills are transferred will continue to see the same antiquated results. For Beaufort, framing her research around Perkins and Salomon’s assumptions caused her to miss actual, positive instances of transfer on Tim’s part, such as his interest in writing on religious topics. Additionally, she concluded that successful transfer of writing skills did not occur due to the struggles Tim encountered when initially writing in his History and Engineering courses. These conclusions become troubling when one is using findings to re-structure FYC programs, a task additionally taken up by David W. Smit and his chapter on transfer, a discussion of which will continue in the following chapter.

Chapter Four: “On the Rainy River<sup>9</sup>” – Perkins and Salomon’s Influence on David W.

Smit’s *The End of Composition Studies*

As previously noted, Smit’s text sets out to provide a new framework for freshman composition, one that operates under a “writing across the curriculum” model as opposed to general writing instruction. Modeling analysis after that seen in Chapter Three’s look at Beaufort’s work, this chapter seeks to uncover the influence of Perkins and Salomon’s governing assumptions in chapter six of Smit’s *End of Composition Studies*, appropriately titled “Transfer.” Due to the fact that the text analyzed here is a chapter as opposed to a book, the amount of information available for analysis is not as abundant, but given that Smit devotes an entire chapter to transfer and saves such an analysis as the last in his list of the major problems he sees with current writing instruction, such an analysis is fruitful.

As with Beaufort’s text, Smit directly cites Perkins and Salomon, providing solid evidence that he is indeed familiar with their work and has used it to inform his discussion on transfer. Appearing suitably in his chapter on transfer and more specifically within his concluding remarks, Smit echoes the importance Perkins and Salomon’s place on the contextual nature of knowledge and refers his readers to several articles written by the duo when discussing the differences between novice and expert writers and the inherent differences in their writing processes, notably one not discussed within this study: “Are Cognitive Skills Context Bound?” (134). Smit uses Perkins and Salomon to

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<sup>9</sup> The 4<sup>th</sup> short story in O’Brien’s collection and chosen for this chapter due to the distinctly negative and dreary tone regarding FYC taken up by Smit throughout his book.

not only provide a foundation for transfer, but to enforce his main point that teaching a general knowledge of writing skills is not enough for students in FYC courses. Directly quoting the pair, Smit notes that “there are general cognitive skills, but they always function in contextual ways” (134). Given the contextual nature of knowledge and its ability to function differently in different settings, Smit feels that transfer, if desired, must be central to any curriculum and instructional plan, grounding his proposal in Perkins and Salmon’s first assumption that transfer must be taught.

Smit opens his chapter, stating:

Overwhelmingly, the evidence suggests that learners do not necessarily transfer the kinds of knowledge and skills they have learned previously to new tasks. If such transfer occurs at all, it is largely unpredictable and depends on the learners’ background and experience, factors over which teachers have little control...The only way teachers can help students with the process of transfer is to help them see the similarities between what they have learned before and what they need to do in new contexts. (119)

Due to the elusive nature of transfer, Smit insists that teaching for transfer is central to its success. Its “unpredictable” nature leaves it up to the teacher to facilitate, removing agency from the student and positioning power within the institution. Such a view once again ignores the fact that students participate in activities of transfer on a routine basis and foregrounds/privileges transfer that occurs in academic settings as more important and of value. However, within his insistence that transfer be taught, Smit highlights some of the very problems in attempting to teach for transfer, notably the differences in each student’s “background and experience” (119). Again, teaching with transfer in mind is

not a bad thing, but assuming that specialized instruction is the only route to transfer is misleading and offers an oversimplified solution to a complex problem.

Operating under the same deficit model of education as Perkins and Salomon and further reflecting their first assumption, Smit notes that we cannot “assume” that students will know how to write in different contexts if they are not shown how (121). Again, Smit concludes that students must be taught how to use skills in different contexts or such behaviors will not take place. Conversely, we cannot assume that they do not know how. Perhaps, if given the opportunity, students could be capable of accomplishing such tasks, as seen in Jody Shipka’s “A Multimodal Task-Based Framework for Composing<sup>10</sup>.” If allowed to decide for themselves which skills are important to transfer into other areas of study, whether they are aware of such transferred knowledge or not, students could potentially produce just the work that scholars and others in the academy have been desiring. Furthermore, teaching for transfer in a specified manner assumes that there is a right and wrong way to not only teach for transfer, but to conduct that transfer, a byproduct of Perkins and Salomon’s first assumption that leads to their notion that transfer is transmission.

Smit further mirrors Perkins and Salomon’s first assumption when he states: writing teachers get what they teach for, instruction in particular kinds of knowledge and skill and not broad-based writing ability. If we want to promote the transfer of certain kinds of writing abilities from one class to another or one context to another, then we are going to have to find the means to institutionalize the similarities between the way writing is done in a variety of contexts. (120)

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<sup>10</sup> Shipka argues that “students have a much richer imagination for what might be accomplished...than our journals *have yet to even begun to imagine*, let alone to address” (282). She proposes that we imagine all the communicative practices available to the student and allow for experimentation and implementation.

While attempts to “institutionalize” writing instruction would possibly help insure greater accountability and consistency in writing programs, such moves would mark further strides against reappropriation by the student in terms of learning, furthering the notion that transfer is transmission. Smit’s sentiment that “writing teachers get that they teach for,” not only encourages the direct teaching of transfer skills, but also echoes Perkins and Salomon’s assumption that transfer involves the movement of a skill across a theoretical knowledge plane. More realistically, it appears that while teachers may often “get what they teach for,” there are often surprises on the part of students, both positive and negative. This fact seems to stem from the individual nature of learning and not from a failure on the part of the teacher to teach for transfer, as Perkins and Salomon and others would have readers believe.

Despite moving away from Perkins and Salomon at times throughout his chapter, Smit reflects their assumptions, particularly that transfer be taught, when he states: “the only principle we have is that transfer can be taught if the similarities of the knowledge and skill needed in different contexts are pointed out” (132). While such ideas would be helpful in a classroom setting, this statement further foregrounds the influence of Perkins and Salomon by insisting that transfer be taught, that skills should not be changed, as well as continuing to discount the ability of the student to comprehend subject matter and make connections on their own. This vein of reasoning is continued in Smit’s closing remarks as he makes it clear that “we must find ways to help novices see the similarities between what they already know and what they might apply from that previously learned knowledge to other writing tasks” (134). The “we” in Smit’s statement is clearly teachers

and instructors, furthering the insistence on teaching for transfer despite the many different learning styles and educational backgrounds seen in any given classroom.

Concluding his chapter with suggestions for new ways of teaching, Smit proposes to his readers that

the most effective pedagogical methods for teaching writing may be those that immerse novices in particular social contexts, giving them the opportunity to use writing to accomplish very specific tasks in those contexts, and promote a sense of how what they are doing has been shaped by what they have learned before and how it might be used in different contexts in the future. (134)

No where in this chapter or in the entire book for that matter does Smit discuss the influence of activities outside of school or reference any studies that do so. Rather, importance is given to the academy and remains there throughout his argument, creating a reconceptualization of writing instruction that does little to enhance what knowledge students can be expected to leave a writing program with. Smit further argues that “if we want to help students to transfer what they have learned, we must teach them how to do so. That is, we must find ways to help novices see the similarities between what they already know and what they might apply from that previously learned knowledge to other writing tasks” (134). This again places responsibility for transfer on the teacher, adding weight to the argument that transfer be taught, as well as foregrounding Perkins and Salomon’s assumption that transfer only occurs in academic settings.

As seen in the above discussion, it is difficult to separate the instances of Perkins and Salomon’s assumptions occurring in isolation from one another given the fact that they build so intrinsically off each other. Building upon the assumption that transfer must

be taught, Smit foregrounds Perkins and Salmon's second assumption that transfer only occurs in academic settings, when he continues to cite case studies that focus solely on academic writing. Most often cited is the work of Lucille McCarthy and Barbara Walvoord, whose case study deals directly with issues of writing transfer<sup>11</sup>. While they note that some students were able to transfer skills successfully, they "cite example after example of students who have difficulty with such transfer. They cite example after example of students who try to apply knowledge and experience that is inappropriate or in ways that are not helpful" (129). The fact that transfer does not always occur is an issue that cannot be ignored. However, the attention paid to areas where transfer is not successful is given an inordinate amount of interest. Furthering the insistence that transfer only occurs on academic settings, Smit voices the opinion that "unless we actually hear them use the word to mean many different things...we cannot assume that writers know" how to use words in the many different settings in which they encounter from day to day. Again, the "we" that Smit is invoking is the collective of writing teachers, who must witness their students using the skills they have imparted correctly in order to ascertain that the appropriate transfer has occurred. Seeing transfer in academic settings is important, but by only looking at academic settings, scholars and instructors alike are setting themselves up to miss the many and varied instances of transfer that exist beyond school walls.

While rather more implicit than the direct statements made by Smit that echo Perkins and Salomon's assumptions, the terminology Smit employs also draws attention to the assumption that transfer should be viewed in solely academic settings. Utilizing the

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<sup>11</sup> Walvoord and McCarthy's study, *Thinking and Writing in College: A Naturalistic Study of Students in Four Disciplines*, examined students in business, history, psychology and biology classes.

same terms seen in “Teaching for Transfer” and “Transfer of Learning,” Smit further exhibits the novice/expert paradigm, directly citing Perkins and Salomon in his discussion. He places emphasis on the “appropriate knowledge and skills” that are desired in transfer, a decision that is again placed in the hands of not the student, but those that control the knowledge: “experts” within the specified discipline (130). Much like Beaufort, Smit is attempting to restructure and re-imagine the teaching of composition. Unlike Beaufort, Smit does recognize the problems inherent in attempting to see transfer in all its incarnations. He argues that “writers may very well possess a kind of knowledge we might call ‘general,’ a kind of knowledge about many different things independent of particular contexts: knowledge of syntax, for example, or a general ability to adapt generic knowledge to particular situations” (133). Within this idea, however, lurk the ideologies within his word choice of “general” and “generic,” placed up against more valued “specialized” and “specific” knowledge. Like Beaufort, however, is the conflation of the social with different discourses and academic practices, further foregrounding Perkins and Salomon’s qualification that transfer must only be dealt with within academic settings.

Smit makes an important move towards seeing beyond Perkins and Salomon’s assumption that transfer only occurs in academic settings by including the work of Deborah Brandt, specifically her “Sponsors of Literacy.” Smit uses the example of “Carol,” a woman “who reports that she transferred the knowledge of a particular kind of specific detail, the conversational anecdote, from one context to another without any formal instruction at all” (131). Cases such as “Carol’s” stand in direct opposition to the assumptions made by Perkins and Salomon. Transfer does occur in realms other than the



academic, but due to the priority placed on the academy and the actions occurring within its walls, it remains the arena where the majority of study takes place. Additionally, observing a student or any subject of research within a classroom setting does provide a certain amount of control that venturing out beyond school would not provide.

Evidence of Perkins and Salomon's third assumption that successful transfer involves transmission across a theoretical plane is quite abundant in Smit's chapter. In attempts to define transfer, Smit calls upon the analogy of learning to throw/catch a ball. He concludes his analogy, stating that "in each case, the ability to use a ball is a particular skill to be used in a particular manner in a particular context, and we would expect the skill of being able to use a ball in a certain way to be transferred only to other similar uses" (121). Smit harkens back to this analogy several times during his chapter and it stands to function as a framing narrative of sorts, not only allowing Smit to articulate how he sees transfer functioning, but also continually lending credence to Perkins and Salomon's assumption that transfer involves movement, similar to the throwing of a ball, of a skill from one context to another. Central to this assumption and the ways in which it colors Smit's discussion is the context in which one originally learns a skill and the future contexts one hopes to apply that knowledge. Smit further addresses this issue when he states that "learning to write is a matter of learning how to use similar tools, such as language, discourse conventions, composing strategies, and problem-solving techniques in radically different contexts" (121). He correctly acknowledges that the setting in which one applies the transferred skill will change, but he does not address the possible need for the skill to adapt in order to better fit the situation, reflecting Perkins and Salomon's third assumption.

Similar to the presence of the assumption that transfer only occurs in academic settings, evidence of Perkins and Salomon's third assumption is seen most often through the language employed by Smit as well as the case studies he continues to cite. Repeated usage of the words "similar tools," "general" and "generalize" all place importance on the context of the skill being transferred, both when it is initially learned and later applied. However, to suggest that transfer can only occur in these more obvious areas is to further diminish the ability of the student to make broad connections and serves to again place responsibility on the teacher to facilitate transfer. Citing Barbara Rogoff several times throughout his discussion, Smit relies on her usage of his favored terminology in order to add support to his claims, citing her sentiment that "cognitive skills seem to fluctuate as a function of the situation, which suggests that skills are limited in their generality" (120). As previously seen, to uphold and propagate such a dismal view of transfer serves to limit the arenas in which one is able to see its existence, a fact that is clearly seen when Smit notes that "it is difficult to say just what kind of evidence would demonstrate sufficiently whether a person is capable of transferring certain kinds of knowledge and ability from one situation to another" (133). Seen throughout Beaufort's text as well, by only looking for and expecting to see transfer in a number of set and prescribed circumstances, one is ultimately severely limited in what they are able to see and later discuss. While each of Perkins and Salomon's assumptions hinder the appearance of transfer within case studies, the final assumption that transfer is mere transmission appears to be the most destructive and confining in terms of what those in the field of composition are able to witness and obstructs much of what Smit is attempting to propose regarding the future of writing instruction.

Throughout his chapter, Smit is attempting to identify a general set of writing skills that can effectively be transferred from one context to another, such as summary/evaluation, thesis statements, and supporting evidence (132). However, by supporting Perkins and Salomon's notion that transfer is transmission, Smit is unable to locate the general skills he desires that will be useful in all writing situations, causing him to conclude that "the degree to which any kind of knowledge or any given skill in writing is generalizable- that is, transferable from one context to another- will always be problematic" (133). Transfer will continue to appear "problematic" when one is trying to view the same skill moved from a FYC classroom to a History, and looking for the skill to appear the same in each situation. A push to look at transfer as something other than movement between two situations is necessary in order to move beyond Perkins and Salomon's assumptions.

To be sure, Smit includes some insightful and progressive suggestions for the construction of writing programs in *The End of Composition Studies*. Despite making acknowledgements that reach beyond the scope of Perkins and Salomon's influence, without moving beyond those boundaries, there is little room left for a change of curriculum. Discussed more adequately in the next and final chapter, in order to see transfer in its many incarnations and move beyond a view that places sole responsibility on the instructor to facilitate transfer, assumes transfer only occurs in academic settings and is an act of transmission, one must move toward a way of looking at students that encompasses the whole individual, with everything they carry.

## Chapter Five: “The Things They Carried”- Moving Toward a New Conceptual Framework for Writing Transfer

Now we have arrived at what *I* take to be the heart of the matter: what does this all mean and how does it impact composition studies and how we view transfer? Now that it has become clear that Perkins and Salomon continue to color the ways in which transfer is conceptualized and discussed, how do we, as a field, move beyond such influences and begin to see the student as a whole individual so that transfer can be seen more frequently? This chapter will reference the changing way in which literacy has been discussed within composition as a model for the potential progression of transfer. Additionally, an overview of the way transfer can be discussed in the future will be presented based on the way it is referenced and conceptualized primarily in the work of Margaret A. Syverson, in addition to Paul Prior, Charles Bazerman, Jody Shipka, and Ann Dyson. Within these texts, the practice of transfer is discussed with new terminology which helps move away from Perkins and Salomon’s limiting view in order to see the broad existence of transfer across many spectrums.

Often mentioned alongside discussions of transfer, the understanding and acceptance of multiple literacies and literate practices is a critical step towards gaining a new understanding of transfer, one that has been studied by the likes of Sylvia Scribner and Michael Cole, Brian Street, and Shirley Brice-Heath. While appearing to discuss only the topic of literacy, in “Unpacking Literacy,” Scribner and Cole question the value of formal schooling and identify the fact that the social aspects that influence schooling

need to be taken into account when studying the literate practices of individuals. Through their critique of the monolithic notion of literacy, they shed light on the multiplicity of values that characterize writing. Within their ethnographic study of the African Vai culture, they note that simply because writing instruction often takes place in school, that is not the only place it occurs (Scribner and Cole). Transfer is implicated here by Scribner and Cole's acknowledgement that a skill taught by a teacher may not be used by students as initially intended, often involving a reappropriation by the student in order to best use the skill according to their various education needs and skill set. Since writing is a cognitive process that continues to build over time and space, knowledge acquisitions will of course take place outside of school and can have just as much, if not more influence on a person and their intellectual and literate development.

Viewing literacy as a social practice is further discussed in Shirley Brice Heath's "Protean<sup>12</sup> Shapes in Literacy Events: Ever Shifting Oral and Literate Traditions." Here, Heath recognizes the gate-keeping power at play in the value placed on academic literacy. After studying the town of Trakton and identifying their various literate practices, Heath discusses how oral and written communication inform each other despite the fact that written communication, especially that composed in academic discourse, is valued far more often than its counterpart. While viewing literacy as a social skill, the need to recognize the skills brought into each literacy event<sup>13</sup> by each individual is paramount (Heath). When viewing this issue along side those of transfer, it becomes paramount to further understand and identify the skills brought into the classroom and

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<sup>12</sup> Heath utilizes the two-face nature of the Proteus to suggest the two-faced nature of literacy, involving oral and written communications.

<sup>13</sup> A literacy event is viewed as any occasion in which a piece of writing is integral to the nature of participants' interactions and their interpretive processes.

those that influence students during their writing processes in order to view the way in which skills are transformed by each individual. Such a process allows different literacies to be privileged, but also instances of transfer to be recognized even when the integrity of the skill is changed or manipulated by students.

Furthering the discussion of the power inherent to literacy definitions and the problems implicit when viewing one “big” literacy, Brian Street, in his article, “The New Literacy Studies,” offers a new approach that attempts to level the playing field by welcoming all literacy practices into the equation. Again placing importance on the social, Street argues that we must take such influences into account when viewing literacy events and attempting to understand their complexities. Recognizing the fact that everything is dictated by ideology, Street comments that we must uncover what those ideologies are in order to move to new conceptions of literacy and how its practices are enacted. These ideological powers tie literacy to culture and determine its power structures. Street is a proponent of ethnographic studies, praising their ability to study culture along with the subject of the study, which inevitably offers a much richer and diverse picture. Rather than attempting to study literacy itself, social practices should be the focus which will result in an understanding of what literacy practices are valued (Street). In terms of transfer, the context in which the skill is first acquired must likewise be acknowledged, along with a history of the individual and how their history determines their own appropriation and use of specific cultural tools. Accordingly, ethnographic studies have gained in popularity, one of which, Beaufort’s, has been a central focus of this study.

The task of directly relating such practices to transfer is accomplished in Larry Mikulecky, Peggy Albers, and Michele Peers' article, "Literacy Transfer: A Review of the Literature." Like knowledge acquisition, they note that literacy is "situational," or based on the context from which it is gained. While they conclude that literacy transfer can best be achieved through several different teaching styles, including modeling, practice and feedback, cooperative/social group studies, and cognitive apprenticeship, much of the responsibility is left to the teacher to facilitate the transfer, while it is ultimately up to the student to take that initiative. Along with previously noted assumptions made by Perkins and Salomon, Mikulecky, et al. do not acknowledge differences in levels of interest with regards to learning, acquisition of new skills, or interest in various subject matters, all of which can color the level of transfer success.

When looking at the trajectory of change that literacy has undergone, it appears not only possible, but likely that the same can happen to transfer. While the term "literacy" has not changed itself, new terms have been added to offer further definitions, such as "literacy event" and "literacy practice." Within the work of Syverson, Prior, Dyson, Shipka and Bazerman, the term "transfer" may be explicitly discussed, but as a practice it is referenced under new terminology that better suits the activities to which the authors are referring. Just as literacy needed to be further defined in order to move beyond definitions that refer only to the skills of reading and writing, transfer needs to be re-defined so that connotations of physically moving something from one context to another can be moved to the background while the more important implications of transfer, such as its ability to help students better connect with and understand their studies is foregrounded.

Tackling several of the problems inherent in Perkins and Salomon's work as well as Beaufort's study and Smit's analysis of FYC, Syverson proposes a way of looking at student's writing that encompasses the wide variety of influences that affect their academic and non-academic lives. In *The Wealth of Reality: An Ecology of Composition*, Syverson deals with transfer not by applying a new term to the idea, but by discussing the trajectory of writing across space and time, detailing all of the ways in which a piece of writing is influenced by those that come into the writer's life. Explaining the process from which the title of her book was created, Syverson details her "awakening" moment in the preface. She describes a moment in which she realized the "wide range of cognitive activities that seemed to involve no verbal language at all. (She) had the eerie sensation of someone who had been peering through a microscope for a very long time and then suddenly steps back and notices the vastness of the world" (xiv). Similar in scope and sensation is the realization that perhaps the reason that transfer has long been considered so elusive and unpredictable is not based on the nature of transfer itself, but the way in which it has been conceptualized and to a larger extent, the ways in which researchers have gone about uncovering its occurrence. Taking a cue from Syverson and continuing to view transfer without the Perkins and Salomon microscope and instead taking a more ecological approach that focuses on the "wealth of reality" surrounding issues of transfer, suddenly, transfer is everywhere as opposed to nowhere.

Syverson characterizes the "wealth of reality" as richly complex, interdependent and emergent; we are embedded in and co-evolving with our environments, which include other people as well as social and physical structures and processes. Although composed of many individuals acting



independently, the dynamics of processes occurring in these ecosocial environments is irreducible to discrete individuals. (xv)

Furthering the possibility for application within the confines of this study, Svyerson explains that “we cannot hope to understand these situations by studying individuals in isolation; we need an ecological approach that considers the dynamics of systems of people situated in and codetermining particular social and material environments” (xv). When viewed in this way, it seems impossible to consider studying the writing process or instances of transfer in an individual without taking into account their own “wealth of reality.”

Viewing individuals in isolation coincides with the “writer-writes-alone” or lonely writer in the garret model of creation (Brodkey 59). While Beaufort does not situate Tim within a garret, she characterizes him in such a way that illuminates only the academic portions of his life, forgoing those events and interactions that exist outside the four walls of the classroom, or workspace. Such locations are institutionalized and create a friendly environment from which to conduct research, but as seen within this and other studies, create an incomplete and abstract view of the individual. While Beaufort’s research schemata is not as dangerous as say Sondra Perl’s in which she attempts to understand writing by placing her subjects in a soundproof lab<sup>14</sup>, it none the less colors the conclusions she is attempting to draw, especially when she is ultimately desiring to change the way composition is currently taught. Likewise, although Smit is not conducting field research, he is drawing from conclusions on the way individuals learn that again do not take into account the wealth of influences that determine an individual’s skill set.

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<sup>14</sup> See “The Composing Process of Unskilled College Writers.”

What needs to take place are studies that paint a colorful picture of the individual, not one in grayscale or black and white. Implementing her theoretical framework, Syverson traces the influences on Charles Reznikoff's poem "Early History of a Writer," taken from his collection, *Family Chronicles*. Through detailed study and excavation of forgotten materials, Syverson is able to show connections between family conversations, journal entries written in Yiddish by Reznikoff's parents, and shared sentiments among those of immigrant descent in the creation of Reznikoff's final product. Viewed in a different way, one can see the various ways transfer occurred between Reznikoff's social realm and that of his professional, writing career. Viewing such instances from a Perkins and Salomon perspective, one can see the existence of "backward reaching, high road transfer" (26). Whether or not Reznikoff was aware of such practices cannot be determined, yet the influence remains and can visually be seen and accounted for. Had one only studied "Early History of a Writer," such information would not have been available and the conclusion may have been drawn that Reznikoff was operating under a "Shakespeare" metaphor where "literary genius" supplies the impetus for one's creation (Perkins and Salomon 22). However, by accounting for Reznikoff's "wealth of reality" and viewing the complex ecological system under which the poem was created, one can witness the complex margins of his poem and perhaps come to a better understanding of the its meaning and the writer's life.

In a study that may more directly relate to practices seen in composition studies, Syverson turns to her own classroom and examines students in a collaborative writing assignment. Moving from the four walls of the classroom, she audiotapes their writing process as they compose together in their dorm room and her office. While her

audiotapes miss the body language and other non-verbal communication that would have taken place between the three, one is able to see how they move from casual conversation back to the assignment, discuss their personal lives, and ultimately how their shared experience of living in a loud dorm building determined the topic of their writing. Again, had Syverson or anyone reading their paper only looked at the final product or even conversations that had taken place in Syverson's office, these facts would have been unaccounted for. While this instance may have been one where the transfer inhibited success of the assignment,<sup>15</sup> it is not a situation where the students simply did not understand the assignment; they were just too inundated in their chosen topic to move beyond it. Following this analysis, Syverson notes that "sometimes it seems as if teaching is a continuing process of finding out too late exactly how you have failed your students" (121). Likewise, it is often only too late when one realizes the limitations their theoretical framework has imposed along with the knowledge from which they draw upon.

What appears necessary from the work of Syverson is the creation of new terms from which to discuss transfer, which would allow for more instances in which to see its existence. As noted in the beginning of this chapter, such terms are found among various other prominent scholars in composition studies. Within Paul Prior's *Writing/Disciplinarity: A Sociohistoric Account of Literate Activity in the Academy* and specifically his chapter entitled "laminations," Prior refers to Goffman's "laminations of activity" and the ways in which "flexible transformations of footing and framing are typical of everyday communication" (146). Referred to in such a way, transfer because

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<sup>15</sup> Students were to propose a solution to a problem that had broad social implications. Syverson, as well as the student's classmates, felt that the solution to a noisy dorm was too easily found and did not affect enough people to be effective in terms of meeting the assignment.

the norm, as opposed to the exception and occurs everywhere- not just within the classroom. Additionally, using the term “lamination” allows Prior, via Goffman, to place importance on the layering of skills and experiences whereas “transfer” simply implies a moving from point A to point B. Likewise, Charles Bazerman prefers the term “intertextuality” in his chapter, “Intertextuality: How texts rely on other texts,” in his collaboration with Paul Prior: *What Writing Does and How it Does It: An Introduction to Analyzing Texts and Textual Practices* (83). The term “intertextuality” allows Bazerman to discuss the interplay that is continually occurring between texts. As Bazerman notes, “almost every word or phrase we use has been heard or seen before. Our originality and craft as writers come from how we put those words together in new ways to fit our specific situation, needs, and purposes, but we always need to rely on the common stock of language we share with others” (83). To re-phrase, the originality of the text or writer is in the way the individual chooses to transfer what they have seen or heard in different contexts and apply them for their own uses. Unlike “transfer,” “intertextuality” assumes an ongoing relationship that is not one-sided: each is changed, challenging Perkins and Salomon’s notion that skills are static when transferred and remain fixed in time and place.

Cited within this study, Jody Shipka refers to transfer within the confines of her more industrial term, “repurposing” (301). When discussing the ways in which she organizes her composition courses, she encourages her students to incorporate the vast array of tools they have at their disposal in order to best complete the given assignment and later analyze their rhetorical choices. Again assuming change as the norm, rather than the exception, “repurposing” allows room for the student to change the skill in order to

met their own needs and places these actions as the preferred outcome as opposed to Perkins and Salomon's negative instances of transfer. Shipka and Prior, along with Kevin Roozen and Julie Hengst refer to transfer activities as instances of "semiotic remediation practices" in their article "'I'll be the sun': From Reported Speech to Semiotic Remediation Practices" (733). This term attends to the "diverse ways that humans' and nonhumans' semiotic performances (historical and imagined) are re-represented and reused across modes, media, and chains of activity" (733). Again, while implying the necessity of change within the term's definition, Prior, Hengst, Roozen and Shipka allow for transfer to be seen in various settings, not just academic, and in various incarnations.

This new terminology that foregrounds change and offers broader instances of transfer continues in the work of Anne Dyson and her article "Staying Inside the Curricular Lines: Practice Constraints and Possibilities in Childhood Writing." Dyson utilizes the term "reappropriation," which highlights the fact that students will take skills and change them in ways they best see fit. Throughout her article, one is able to see what happens when children are not afforded the ability to individualize and reappropriate the skills presented within the classroom, ultimately stifling them and restricting the applicability and understanding of the knowledge presented.

The diversity of terms present bolsters the need for new ways to view transfer that are not limited to and defined by the now dated work of Perkins and Salomon. However, with whatever term used now or created in the future, certain affordances and constraints are present. The creation of a term that correctly encapsulates all that goes into the act of transfer is probably not possible and it should be noted that such an implication or call is not the purpose of this study. Rather, it should be understood that no term will provide a

“one size fits all” solution to the problem. Language is inherently limiting when attempting to refer to and define such complex situations and as such, it would appear that writings on transfer simply need to take into account the affordances and constrictions offered by a chosen term or theoretical lens. Much debt must be paid to Perkins and Salomon for their contribution to the field, specifically the language given with which to discuss transfer. Within their work still remain helpful teaching methods and important insights. Transfer within the classroom and across modes and disciplines is difficult, when viewed in precisely the same way they describe. However, taking the foundational knowledge provided by Perkins and Salomon and acknowledging its hindrances, allows one to see transfer in new and exciting arenas, opening up the possibilities for freshman writing and writing across the curriculum. As with the creation of a term with which to refer to transfer practices, a “recipe” like that provided by Perkins and Salomon that would guarantee that students leave the classroom with the skills needed to succeed in every future writing task is a lofty goal at best and unrealistic at worst. More practical, would be an approach to transfer that assumes that transfer does take place everywhere and that each student *will* transfer skills they learn in the classroom to other areas of their academic and non-academic careers, such transfer just may be for them to dictate and ultimately out of the hand of the instructor. An acknowledgement of this reality rightfully places agency and responsibility for education back on the student.

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