Current Research on Writing Transfer
(When We Started)

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A Thought Experiment . . . .
Assume for a minute that you’re in an art history course. Your teacher has asked you to write an object condition report of an artifact from the Asmat people of Indonesia. These are located in the basement of a campus museum.
What do you want to know? How will you start?
• What style should you use?
• Should you be objective? Persuasive?
• How is the report structured?
• What’s it used for?
• Who are your readers? Who else might see it?
• Where should you be in the text?
• Is there documentation? Are there footnotes?
• Is there a “thesis” or main point? How do you start?
• Is this an analysis? A description of some sort? Are there recommendations?
• Can you see some examples? Where can you get help?
An Object Condition Report

- Begins with a condition check, a condition survey, a condition audit, and a technical assessment. These are related to conservation and collections care.

- May include information about legal environment

- May include handling guidelines, cataloguing or recording information, history, environmental context, previous reports, hazard notes, environmental recommendations, packing requirements, display recommendations, and risk management (among other details)
Owner: National Park Service

Park Name: Washington Support Office

Object: Frock coat

Catalog No: WASO1

Conservator: Lesley Jones

Date Examined: June 13, 2011

Supervisor/COTR: Bob Smith

Overall assessment: [X] Treatment required to exhibit/loan or stabilize condition

[ ] Suitable for exhibit/loan or stable for long-term storage

DESCRIPTION:
The object is a single-breasted Civil War frock coat of navy blue doeskin (fulled wool) with a standing collar and long cuffed sleeves. The coat has a nine-button center front closure. It is fully lined—the body and skirt with green wool and the sleeves with natural colored twill weave cotton. There is a belt tab on the proper right (PR) side at the waist and an inner breast pocket on the proper left (PL) side of the coat. The 2.4 cm (7/8 inch) diameter brass buttons depict an eagle with a shield. The eagle holds an olive branch in his PL talons and a shaft of arrows in his PR talons; he faces to the right. Two of the same buttons adorn the back vent of the skirt at the waist; each sleeve cuff contains three smaller diameter buttons—1.5 cm (1/2 inch)—with the same eagle and shield design. The buttons have a maker’s mark on the back “HORSTMANN & CO / NY & PHI.” Shoulder boards of navy blue wool with sheet brass stamped to resemble gold bullion embellish both shoulders.

Dimensions:
Length: 98.9 cm (39 inches) (measured at the center back from the top of the collar to the bottom edge)

Width: 53.4 cm (21 inches) (measured at the widest point across the shoulders)

Structure or Construction:
This coat is a well-made, hand tailored garment constructed of high quality piece goods. The doeskin is fine. This coat does not have bound buttonholes. The collar is lined in black velvet.

The back is constructed in four pieces with a center back seam and two princess seams. Each front section is a single piece with a dart extending up 14.1 cm (5-1/2 inches) from the waist seam. The sleeves are constructed of two pieces with an added cuff that measures 6.5 cm (2-1/2 inches) in width. The skirt is constructed of two main pieces with small additional pieces used to form the vent in the center back. The entire coat is lined—the
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SUBSEQUENT CARE:

DISPLAY REQUIREMENTS:
- Light levels should not exceed 30 lux (3 foot-candles) using a visitor activated lighting system.
- The coat should be inspected annually for signs of pest infestation.
- The coat should be micro vacuumed while on exhibit as required. Vacuuming frequency should be determined by inspecting the textile and noting the accumulation of dust inside the exhibit case.
- The coat should be rotated off display in 2 to 3 years and allowed to remain in storage for at least 5 years before being exhibited again.

POST EXHIBITION CARE:
The coat should remain in storage, in a dark, clean, stable environment for at least 5 years after rotation.
See NPS Museum Handbook Part I, Appendix K (Curatorial Care of Textile Objects) for preventive conservation, handling and storage procedures.

Notes:
Fulled wool was a British specialty. After the cloth was woven, removed from the loom, and scoured to remove the oils used in the spinning process, fulling occurred to both felt the cloth and shrink it. Fulling was done in a fulling mill using wooden hammers or stocks to raise the nap. The cloth was first scoured with the slow motion of hammers, "leisurely without such violence as heats it much;" fulling was then done with "quick heavy strokes which heat the cloth and shrink the fiber" using an aenae, a flat wooden implement set with spikes. In some cases the woven cloth was burled before being fulling but after being scoured. Fuller's earth in soft water was used as a detergent in the scouring process; if Fuller's earth was not available, sig (stale urine) or swine's dung was employed instead. The scouring agent needed to be alkaline; sig provided a natural source of ammonia.

The main problem in fulling was ensuring that the textile shrank evenly. "Fine medley broadcloth made in the early eighteenth century shrank less than half its width and one-third its length." Shrinkage was proportional to the texture of the cloth and the length of the fulling process; the thinner the cloth, the less the shrinkage. Well-woven Wiltshire medleys of the eighteenth century could be finished in nine hours; the process was lengthened considerably for badly woven cloth. The degree of fulling varied by location—Gloucestershire cloth tended to be more heavily fullled.

Cloth was easily damaged during the fulling process. After emerging from the fulling mill, the cloth was hung on tenter frames to dry; the tenter frames served to stretch the wet fabric. The fulling process sometimes left the sides of the cloth longer than the middle section. Gloucestershire led in the mechanization of scouring; Wiltshire led in the mechanization of fulling. The first patent for a fulling machine was obtained in 1833; by the mid-19th century the fulling process was fully mechanized.

Consider these college assignments

- “Phase report” (engineering course)
- “Object condition report” (art history course)
- “Causal provided-data paper” (early American history course)
- “Crit” (landscape design course)
- “Country migration report” (political science course)
“Transfer”

- What knowledge, ability, and awareness are you bringing into the new (unfamiliar) context to help you succeed?

- What experiences with other genres “carry over” to this new and unfamiliar genre?

“Distance” between contexts is everything
What’s “Transfer”? 

Strategic ability to match new situations to previous experiences and generalize abstract problem-solving skills from previous experiences to apply in new situations. Involves *mindfulness* and *meta-cognition*. 
Why Transfer is Difficult in Writing

[Because writing is] a matter of learning to participate in some historically situated human activity that requires some kind(s) of writing, it cannot be learned apart from the problems, the habits, the activities—the subject matter—of some group that found the need to write in that way to solve a problem or carry on its activities.

--David Russell, “Vygotsky, Dewey, and Externalism”
Russell’s “Ball Sports” Analogy

- Many different types of ball games
- Game originators used tool (ball) for game objective
- Kind of game (activity) changes form of the ball (large, small, hard, soft, leather, rubber, round, oblong, etc.)
- Game objective determines use of ball (e.g., you could use your head in baseball, as in soccer, but it’s not effective for the objective of the game).

“Some people are very adept at some games and therefore at using some kinds of balls, while they may be completely lost using a ball in another game because they have never participated in it. . . . There is no autonomous, generalizable skill called ball-using or ball-handling that can be learned and then applied to all ball games.”

David Russell, “Activity Theory and Its Implications for Writing Instruction”
Teaching students a particular format may very well result in improved student essays and improved state exam scores. It will not, however, result in improved understanding about how writing actually works, because the second they enter a writing occasion where that particular format does not work, they will not know how to proceed. I have seen this first hand year after year in my students who score Advanced on the Massachusetts state exam (MCAS) but have no idea how to write for an audience other than the teacher and for a purpose other than a grade.

–Bill Sheehan, Barrington, RI, NCTE
Connected Community post
Expanding Conceptions of Transfer (Working Principles)

Theories of Transfer and Learning

Theories of Writing Transfer and Pedagogy

Enabling Transfer (Practices)

Recognizing Transfer (Evidence)
Expanding Conceptions of Transfer (Working Principles)

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What the Cohort Knew in Year 1
(Not much!)

“As far as I know, there are no research studies that concentrate directly on the nature of transfer in writing” (Smit, 2004, 124).

“As a field, we know little to nothing about the transfer of writing-related knowledge from FYC" (Wardle, 2009, 770).
What’s Changed
(Not much!)

“Mapping the research on writing transfer reveals both pockets of detail and gaps in disciplinary knowledge” (Moore, 2012).

“While transfer is clearly at the heart of educational or training concerns, we don’t yet know that much about how it works” (Donahue, forthcoming).
Helpful Concepts from Cognitive Research on Transfer

Near transfer:

- Contexts are closely related

Far transfer:

- Contexts are distant from each other

Low-road (reflexive) transfer:

- Use of automatized skills (gear-shifting)

High-road (mindful) transfer:

- Effortful abstraction and search for connections between contexts
Hugging:
Making new learning situation more like old

Bridging:
Helping learners to apply what is learned in one context to another, less familiar context

“Bo Peep” Theory:
Teach, and learners will effortless transfer on their own

“Lost sheep” theory:
Teach narrow, context-specific skills (naïve transfer)
“Good shepherd” theory:
Structure teaching so students practice both reflexive and mindful transfer

“Situated learning”:
Learning is situated in social practice and context-dependent

“Entrenchment”:
Certain learned patterns and habits are inappropriately applied to new situations without reflection
General Cognitive Research (Donahue)

Transfer of knowledge is helped when:

--The two tasks are similar (Bransford), similarities between the situations are made explicit, and affordances for transfer are present in the next situation (Tuomi-Gron & Engestrom);
--Initial learning is not rushed (Bransford);
--Learners can explicitly abstract principles from a situation (Gick & Holyoak);
--Material is taught through analogy or contrast (Bransford);
--Learners engage in self-reflection and mindfulness (Belmont et al; Bransford; Langer; Bereiter)
General Cognitive Research (Donahue)

Transfer of knowledge is helped when:

--The learning of new material is scaffolded (Dias et al.);
--Teachers provide work that is appropriately challenging to students’ current ability levels (Alsup and Bernard-Donals; Jaxon);
--Learners are in a context “that encourages collaboration, discussion, and some form of ‘risk taking’” (Guile & Young).
Limited Writing Research (Rogers)

12 key longitudinal studies show that:

--Students’ pre-existing conceptions of writing from other contexts can prevent transfer

--Students who transfer writing ability successfully begin “seeing texts as accomplishing social actions” and develop a “complex of activities” rather than a set of generalizable skills

--Students whose teachers help them deconstruct the genres of their field transfer writing knowledge/ability more effectively

--The kinds of scaffolding required to support transfer differs from student to student

Entire issue online at:

http://compositionforum.com/issue/26/
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Enabling Transfer (Practices)

Recognizing Transfer (Evidence)
Working Principles

Writing transfer . . .

- Requires meta-awareness
- Requires situational awareness
- Is shaped by writer’s identity and history
- Is not linear
- Involves knowledge, skills, and dispositions
- Must be supported by institutional practices
Expanding Conceptions of Transfer (Working Principles)

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Enabling Transfer (Practices)

Recognizing Transfer (Evidence)
Instructional Theory 1: Teach to Own Context

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Isolationism: ignore other/future contexts</th>
<th>Teach what matters to you most, in the best way you can</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assume the integrity of your own curriculum</td>
<td>Let other/future contexts “teach” the writer by immersion</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Instructional Theory 2: Teach to Other Contexts

- Intentionally teach to an upcoming context
- Focus on the most common upcoming genres
- Develop genre-specific schemas for success
- Assume others may not support writing in those contexts
Instructional Theory 3: Teach Mindfulness

- Intentionally teach meta-strategies
- Focus on how to analyze contexts for writing
- Study various genres to internalize
- Assume others may not support writing in those contexts
Meta-Knowledge

Common Language
- "claim"
- "support"
- "revision vs. editing"

Rhetorical Concepts
- "audience"
- "persona/ethos"
- "rhetorical purpose"

Common Processes
- revision
- drafting
- invention

"Reading" Contexts
- genres
- conventions
- purposes
- readers’ expectations

Coping Strategies and "Disposition"
- inquisitiveness
- procrastination
- anxiety
- persistence
Expanding Conceptions of Transfer (Working Principles)

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Enabling Transfer (Practices)

Recognizing Transfer (Evidence)
Recognizing Transfer

- Genre awareness
- Audience awareness
- Reflection and meta-awareness
- Performance assessments
- Knowledge and skills
- Dispositions
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Faculty, pedagogy</th>
<th>Program, institution</th>
<th>Domain, workplace, discipline, community</th>
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</thead>
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Four Views