

Writing across College: Key Terms and Multiple Contexts as Factors Promoting Students' Transfer of Writing Knowledge and Practice

KATHLEEN BLAKE YANCEY, MATTHEW DAVIS, LIANE ROBERTSON, KARA TACZAK, AND ERIN WORKMAN

During the last fifteen years, researchers have studied how students transfer writing knowledge and practice into multiple contexts, including into many kinds of classes, among them in general education courses, in writing-intensive courses, and in writing-in-the-discipline courses. While some of these findings have been, as Joanna Wolfe, Barrie Olson, and Laura Wilder put it in 2014, “dismal” (42), other findings point toward consistent practices that can foster what we, here, define as a *writing-transfer-mindset*. For example, transfer researchers have documented multiple cases of students successfully repurposing, or transferring, writing knowledge and practice for use in many writing contexts, including within or between assignments in a writing course (e.g., VanKooten; DePalma) and between first-year composition (FYC) and disciplinary contexts (e.g., Yancey, Robertson, and Taczak). This latter study, which we build on for the research we report here, relies on a curricular design explicitly intended to promote writing transfer—the Teaching for Transfer (TFT) curriculum. As we explain more fully below, the TFT curriculum includes three integrated curricular components: a set of key rhetorical terms; a systematic reflective framework; and a culminating assignment, the Theory of Writing (ToW) assignment. Initially developed for use in a FYC course (Yancey, Robertson, and Taczak 2014), the TFT curriculum has since been adapted for use in upper-level writing courses and internships, and has been studied, in three iterations, at a range of eight institutions with diverse student demographics. Our aim in these expansions has been two-fold: (1) to understand the ways in which students transfer writing knowledge and practice from the TFT curriculum into other writing contexts, both in-and-out of school, and (2) to explore the efficacy of the TFT curriculum with a wider set of students, college courses, and institutions.

Across the three iterations of this research project and at all eight institutions, students consistently report and demonstrate—in surveys, interviews, and written documents--that TFT-based conceptual writing knowledge is key to their understanding about how, as they write across campus, writing works best in each individual

context. This conceptual knowledge about writing, which goes beyond process-based writing or the practice of writing, is especially relevant to our understanding of how students fare in WAC contexts because of its potential to help students develop and employ a conceptual framework of writing knowledge and practice for approaching writing in diverse situations. In this article, then, we report on one dimension of this research, focusing in particular on a TFT-informed professional writing (PW) course and a TFT-informed writing-intensive internship; for both of these, we specifically address the role of TFT terms and multiple contexts as keys to fostering what we call a *writing-transfer-mindset*.

We begin by briefly outlining the signature features of the TFT curriculum and some of what we have learned in the three iterations of the study; we then introduce selected student writers, chosen as representative both of upper-level and internship TFT curricular adaptations and of our study's findings. These three students, including two from PW courses and one completing an internship, who successfully transferred their writing knowledge and practice into different writing contexts shared three characteristics facilitating this transfer: (1) a conceptual vocabulary, based in the TFT curriculum, for articulating writing knowledge; (2) an ability to draw on that knowledge to frame new writing tasks in multiple contexts; and (3) access to writing contexts. As important, they shared a fourth characteristic that seems an outcome of a writing-transfer-mindset: a sense of agency, indicated in part by their ownership of writing vocabulary and experiences, and in part by their developing understanding of writing as always and at once specific *and* contextual. Not least, we close with three recommendations helpful for fostering a writing transfer mindset.

The TFT Curriculum

The TFT curriculum, although adapted to each institutional type, includes three integral curricular components constituting an ensemble: (1) a shared set of writing concepts or key terms; (2) students' engagement in systematic reflection and the development of a reflective framework for thinking about writing concepts and practices; and (3) students' development of a theory of writing through completing a reiterative assignment, the ToW, in which students articulate their writing knowledge and practice based on learning about writing (e.g., through the key terms) and on analyses of the rhetorical choices made in responding to writing situations. Key terms provide a conceptual foundation for writing knowledge developed in the course, guiding the assigned readings, class activities, and major assignments, and serving as a focal point for students' reflective work throughout the course. Eight key terms that students need to think and write with are introduced, modeled, and reiterated within and across multiple assignments: rhetorical situation, purpose, context, audience, genre, reflection, knowledge, and discourse community. (Other key terms are added to these

eight as appropriate for adaptations to upper division courses, such as the addition of “context of use” for a technical writing course.)

Reflection, one of the key words for the TFT course, is woven throughout the term at different deliberate points. As defined in a TFT course, reflection is a central and reiterative practice as well as a theoretical approach enabling students to develop the conceptual framework for transfer to occur (Yancey et al. 2014.; Taczak and Robertson, 2016). Reflection is deliberately designed into the course in three ways: students learn about reflective theory, complete a variety of writing-to-learn and formal reflective assignments, and engage in reflective activities. The culminating formal reflective assignment, the reflection-in-presentation (Yancey 1998) style “Theory of Writing” assignment, specifically asks students to identify the key terms they believe are most important to their writing processes—both their self-selected and TFT terms—and to theorize writing as articulated with their key terms in the context of their writing practices and the rhetorical choices they made while composing throughout the term. The students’ ToW provides them with space to think about their relationship with writing—their writing processes, their understanding of the key terms they enact in their own writing, and their ability to create a knowledge-base of writing and its practices that can be repurposed for use in other contexts. The latter is of particular significance to WAC; in the ToW students reflect on the rhetorical decisions they have already made, and are planning to consider, in different writing contexts, across disciplines and elsewhere. Critical to this process, and to students’ developing a writing-transfer-mindset, is students’ understanding that writing transfer is possible, and appropriate transfer desirable.

Research Design and Methods

The research reported in *Writing Across Contexts*, which focused on students as they moved from three FYC classes into various WAC courses, provides a foundation for the current study. *Writing Across Contexts* began by comparing three versions of FYC in terms of their efficacy in supporting students’ transfer during two semesters, the first when students completed an FYC course and the second when they engaged in several WAC courses. The study found that in the first two FYC courses—one an Expressivist course and the second focused on media and cultural studies—students did not transfer, in part because they did not have key terms identifying and articulating different writing tasks and practices, and in part because they were thus unable to read across different writing tasks for differences and similarities. Without key terms adequate to the task, students defaulted to terms they learned in high school; such terms (e.g., expression, mistake) did not help them address their college writing tasks. In contrast, the students in the TFT course—working with the key terms in writing assignments, accompanying analytical reflective tasks, and a culminating theory of

writing (ToW) assignment—re-purposed, or transferred, what they had learned in the TFT course for new writing tasks in multiple kinds of courses across the curriculum, including in film, theatre, literature, biology, and chemistry.

The results of this first study demonstrated that the TFT curriculum helped students at one institution, a research institution in the southeast, successfully transfer writing knowledge and practice into new writing situations. In 2014–2015, the three original researchers were joined by two new researchers in a second iteration of this project, “The Transfer of Transfer Project: Extending the Teaching for Transfer Writing Curriculum into Four Sites and Multiple Courses,” supported in part by a CCCC Research Initiative Grant. The aim of this second iteration was to trace the efficacy of the TFT curriculum in several ways, two of which were keyed to site and course: in four sites—one the research institution in the southeast; second, a private research institution in the west; third, a suburban Hispanic-serving institution (HSI) in the northeast; and fourth, a public urban institution in the northeast with the highest percentage of students of color in the region; and in two kinds of courses—introductory writing courses; and upper-level courses, technical writing and professional writing, whose outcomes include writing for multiple contexts.

This second iteration of the study demonstrated, generally, that TFT supported students’ transfer of writing knowledge and practice in all four sites and in increasingly predictable ways. There are exceptions to this pattern, of course. Some students, typically students entering college with very strong writing skills and an impressive ability to read teachers, tend to parrot key terms without repurposing for new writing tasks; they do not transfer either TFT-based writing knowledge or practice, although they may nonetheless earn high grades in post-TFT classes requiring writing. Likewise, a very small percentage of students rely on their own key terms rather than adopting or adapting the TFT key terms; while these students may graft, or assemble, one or two TFT key terms onto their prior construct of writing, they rely on their earlier concept of writing and experience difficulty in repurposing writing knowledge and practice for new situations. Much like Reiff and Bawarshi’s border guarders and Wardle’s problem solvers, these students repeat old practices regardless of new rhetorical constraints and possibilities. At each of the study’s sites, however, most students remixed their key terms with the TFT terms as part of repurposing knowledge and practice for new writing contexts. In addition, students articulated well the nature of the repurposing process for them. In other words, the TFT initial findings were repeated in the second iteration with students on very different kinds of campuses and courses. As important, findings included four observations qualifying or extending this general finding, among them that when students are cued that transfer is a course goal, they don’t wait to transfer until a course is completed, but rather intentionally engage in more concurrent transfer than has previously been reported in the literature—using

what they learn in a TFT course in a just-in-time fashion, for example, in workplace settings, internships, and, especially, in classes across the curriculum, both lower and upper levels.

The third iteration of this project, the eight-institution Writing Passport Project supported by CCCC and the Council of Writing Program Administrators (CWPA) grants, includes three community colleges and five four-year schools (including the four schools described above) collectively offering introductory and upper-level writing courses. The Writing Passport Project also includes a study of TAs teaching a TFT FYC course for the first time and a TFT-supported internship. Projects at all sites shared the fundamental integrative features of the TFT curriculum: (1) content as represented in key terms, (2) a reiterative set of reflective activities, and (3) a final TOW assignment. In addition, all students—ranging from a high of ten students at one campus to two at another—and three TAs were interviewed with the same set of document-based core questions (adapted appropriately for the teachers) at the same five points across the two terms: three during the TFT course and two in the post-TFT course. Students and TAs also completed two exit surveys with the same core questions at the same end-points of the two terms. (This pattern was adjusted for interns, with three interviews and one-exit survey occurring at the beginning, during, and at the conclusion of the internship, respectively.) All faculty kept teaching logs (e.g., detailing their emphases in class; ways that students are responding).

For each site at all three iterations of this study, IRB approval was obtained, and complete participant data sets were collected; data included the ToW assignments, five TFT and post-TFT interviews,¹ and two exit surveys. Student participants from the first iteration numbered fourteen, from the second iteration thirty-four, and from the third iteration fifty, for a total of nearly one hundred students. Materials were coded multiple times: they were (1) deductively coded by two researchers using the TFT key terms and synonyms (e.g., “reader” for audience); (2) inductively coded by two researchers using a grounded theory approach for emerging themes (e.g., use of TFT concepts to frame out-of-school writing situations); and (3) coded by software for students’ self-identified key terms (e.g., expression, voice) that surfaced during the grounded theory readings.² Contextualizing the coding results were several data sources, including faculty teaching logs; maps of key terms that students created in some FYC classes; and students’ texts composed in the term following the TFT course. Collectively, these data were analyzed to inquire into the efficacy of the TFT curriculum in supporting students’ transfer of writing knowledge and practice as developed in two curricular sites—FYC and upper-level writing (ULW)—in TA preparation, and in writing internships.

The Role of Context as a Key Concept

The research on the three iterations of this project regarding the efficacy of the TFT curriculum has demonstrated that students' understanding of the contexts for their writing, and thus for successful transfer, occurs in different ways. One important practice that assists students in transferring writing knowledge and practice is the development of key terms. With appropriate writing vocabulary, students articulate the writing knowledge and practices they are developing, which supports the transfer, or repurposing, of such knowledge for different contexts of writing—both across the curriculum and out of school. These contexts, and students' *understanding* of context as a through-line for specific writing situations, provides students with a conceptual passport for developing a writing approach for each context. For students, who often perceive writing they do in a course as isolated both from other course work and from writing they do outside of school, context acts as a connector from one situation to another across multiple writing situations, including between courses in different disciplines. Such an understanding of context is crucial given the research on prior knowledge indicating that while students bring a variety of experiences, knowledge, and beliefs to their writing, they typically do not bring an understanding that writing is contextual and requires attention to rhetorical situation (Yancey et. al 2014). In the TFT curriculum, students learn the concept of context through multiple writing activities and especially in multi-genre projects, which encourage a conception of writing as contextually unique. This contextual understanding of writing, which disrupts students' prior knowledge that all "school writing" is the same and requires the same (or a similar) approach, provides a motive, a rationale, and a through-line for adaptation.

The Viability of Key Terms across Iterations: Providing a Vocabulary

In the first iteration of the research on TFT, we explored the ways students employed key terms as a mechanism for incorporating their prior knowledge of writing into a new understanding of writing. One participant, Rick, a first-year physics major, transferred quite successfully, but only after a series of setbacks helped him see the patterns across his writing. Struggling in the first-year TFT writing course, Rick couldn't understand the writing situation for an assignment, largely because he was more interested in expressing his perspective than in using the key terms to frame the writing assignment: the *rhetorical situation*, his *audience*, and the relationship of writing to *context*. When he received a poor grade, he didn't fully understand what he had done wrong, believing that as the writer of the assignment he should have complete freedom to say whatever he wanted. Several weeks later, when he was unsuccessful in writing his lab reports in a chemistry course—which were important to him given

his identification with science—he looked at his writing in *both* contexts and found connections between the two that helped him understand the concepts of rhetorical situation and audience. As he reflected on why his writing and chemistry assignments hadn't been as successful as he'd hoped, Rick employed the TFT conceptual framework: "I ended up focusing a lot more on the topic than on the research, which is what mattered. I explained too much instead of making it matter to them (the audience)."

In the second iteration of the research on TFT, we witnessed the same phenomenon, but from another perspective when students, again, reported on the value of key terms, but in this case by linking an in-school context with one outside of school. For example, Teresa, a dual Business/English major taking an upper-level technical writing course and also writing as a marketing manager in her workplace, found the key terms essential, even plugging them into her cell phone for easy reference, as she explained: "I keep [the key terms] in my phone actually. That's what I use to reflect on and then to think about what to write when I have an assignment at work." As important, Teresa reported that drawing on her key terms contributed both to the quality of her texts and to her confidence in the business context of her job creating marketing and promotional materials: "I'm doing all sorts of things in marketing . . . that are relevant to what we learned in our class. Even just my emails to other people [at the workplace] are so much better. And I just feel better about my planning in all my writing, at work or school . . . I'm using my theory of writing . . . and my key terms audience and purpose." In other words, Teresa drew on her key terms to frame writing in new contexts, among them a marketing context; doing so, she observed, helped her "just [feel] better about my planning in all my writing, at work or school" and develop a kind of agency.

In the third iteration of this research, an upper-level student, Carrie, believed—just as Rick did—that writers should be able to exercise complete authority in a writing task regardless of rhetorical situation. Carrie experienced a setback when she earned a C grade on the first major assignment in her technical writing course. Through engaging in the TFT-based technical writing course, however, Carrie developed a vocabulary allowing her to conceptualize writing more rhetorically, as an interaction among writer, audience, and topic:

Ever since I did badly on that [first assignment] I understand that it [successful writing] depends on the rhetorical situation, and that you have to know your audience, purpose, and the whole context to write something that will work in that situation . . . I do a lot of creative writing but that's different, and I just sort of shut off that side of me when I write in other classes. I think I can be creative with wording and that, but I'm not a creative writer in those situations.

Although students often write in different contexts, they don't always understand the different expectations accompanying those contexts. As suggested above, an important finding across these three research iterations is that an appropriate vocabulary and an understanding of the concept of context in writing are key, especially given how much contexts vary. These earlier findings also point to the ways the process of engaging with and using the terms can facilitate student agency as students transfer writing knowledge and practice to and from outside-school contexts. Such a process was articulated by Teresa, who, drawing on her key terms, read across the contexts of academic and workplace writing and adjusted accordingly. These potential adjustments, made between in-school and out-of-school contexts, give us insight into how students learn to understand contexts for writing as situated. Context as a conceptual through-line acts as a connector between situations that are like or unlike each other; context thus functions as a bridge for far transfer as defined by David Perkins and Gavriel Salomon (1992). Further, encouraging students to see context as simultaneously *a through-line and specific to the situation*, a perception contributing to a writing-transfer-mindset, may provide a means of effectively integrating writing into WAC courses more effectively. By providing students with the opportunity to develop a conceptual frame involving context with the idea that contexts are specific to situation, we as faculty can help students explore the similarities and differences from one writing situation to the next, especially writing situations they encounter upon entering a new discipline, a new sub-discipline, or even a new focus within a discipline. Such an exploration of similarity and difference, as recommended by the National Research Council's *How People Learn*, can help students develop a kind of intentionality about specific writing tasks as well as about what they can transfer from one writing situation to the next.

Adapting TFT to Upper-level Courses: Concepts, Vocabulary, and Agency

This connection between student agency and the development of rhetorical key terms was demonstrated by upper-level students in the third iteration of our study, where those in professional writing courses and internships often toggle between the conceptual impulse of TFT and the more immediate orientation of their in- and out-of-school writing. In making decisions about which of their diverse writing experiences and key terms were most relevant for a given situation, students developed a sense of writerly agency or authority over their own texts. Borrowing from Marilyn Cooper (2011), the definition of agency used here, as it emerges and is enacted in rhetorical situations, is

the process through which [people] create meaning through acting into the world and changing their structure in response to the perceived

consequences of their actions. [This] enables writers to recognize their rhetorical acts, whether conscious or unconscious, as acts that make them who they are, that affect others, and that can contribute to the common good. (420)

As students draw on key terms to articulate their writing experiences, they “recognize their rhetorical acts,” especially when writing in two very different contexts. In the TFT upper-level professional writing course, these contexts included the course itself and then another, student-selected context, ranging from workplace writing to self-sponsored and church-sponsored writing.

The TFT professional writing course studied here fits Sarah Read and Michael Michaud’s model for a “multi-major professional writing course” designed to support transfer of writing knowledge and practice into, out of, and across course and workplace contexts (427–8). Although Read and Michaud argue for a Writing about Writing (WAW) professional writing pedagogy, and although Teaching for Transfer mirrors many of the same investments—writing as a diverse, study-able phenomenon; the importance of authentic genres; and a general orientation toward metacognition—the cases below, which have emerged in the third iteration of the TFT research, show that it is not a general rhetorical education (whether through genre or client-based approaches) through which students articulate their writing transfer. Instead, students articulate writing transfer as an agentive process at the confluence of key concepts; integrated, directed reflection; theorizing writing; and multiple contexts. That said, the students here exhibit a messier, though more self-directed, use of their prior knowledge than has previously been reported. Like students in Josephine Walwema and Dana Driscoll’s study (2015), PW students Julie and Kyle engage in substantial theorizing of writing, but do so using both prior *and developing* knowledge across various domains of life. Instead of attending to documentation and source use as Walwema and Driscoll’s students, however, the TFT students focus their attention on how a wide range of texts and contexts—such as those from religious and civic life—are transformed through varied and developing sets of key terms for various purposes: from identity formation to just-in-time transfer. More specifically, for Julie, the TFT curriculum provided the terminology for her to maintain and more deeply articulate a writerly identity, while also moving her from a “technically oriented” writing practice to a more elaborated set of writing practices, where she began to develop and articulate specific differences between school-sponsored and church-sponsored writing. For Kyle, the TFT course provided a space to transform his prior knowledge, which is heavily inflected by self-sponsored writing, and to begin articulating a set of values for a civic life he understands as closely connected to his university education.

Julie, a twenty-one-year-old woman from Brazil, is an English major and a Professional and New Media Writing minor; and her extracurricular

writing—sponsored through her church—is integral to her changing understanding of writing and of ways different contexts call for different writing responses. As Julie began the TFT semester, her ToW was rudimentary, oriented to writing implements: “I have never been asked what I think writing is. In the time I was given to think about it, I decided that writing is just putting pen to paper. Or in the time we’re currently living, it’s putting fingers to keyboard.” In other words, having never thought about a definition of writing, Julie identified it as inscription of a material kind. The TFT key terms were unfamiliar to her, but she found them helpful precisely because they could help her frame and navigate different writing contexts: “[the TFT terms are] useful—because it goes situation to situation. And it’s not just ok, I have to follow this kind of format or set of rules. No, the exigence is different in every situation. The constraints are different in every situation. I feel like—I liked looking at it like that.”

Moreover, in taking up different writing tasks for her church, Julie explains quite specifically how these terms are useful:

So I work with kids and teenagers [at church] and I’m the communications person. With the teenagers, I’m the communications person, so whatever ideas or messages people need to convey to them . . . go through me. I have to kind of make it fit their teenager mind. I hear the idea, I say ok, here is what I need to say—I need to tell them this. But how am I going to make it in a way that going to make it appealing to them? So in that way there is a process, too. It’s not just like ‘oh, let’s tell them right away’. If I’m texting them I’ll start off like, we’re called boss and metro, that’s our name. I call them Metronians, I’m like ‘Happy Friday, Metronians’ or whatever. I’ll start off with song lyrics and stuff to get their attention and then I’ll do a who-what-where-when type of thing. Or I’ll send them a video. I’ll make them a video that displays the message. Or the graphic that I make; it usually has a picture: like if we’re doing a secret Santa, I’ll put a picture of Santa and him delivering presents. It’s not usually—not always words that I use, but pictures—as little words [sic] as possible because they are teenagers and they don’t want to read. If I send them a paragraph of stuff—of information—then they’re not going to read it.”

Drawing on a context she knows well, Julie interprets the key terms and concepts of the TFT in ways both appropriate and meaningful to her, and in describing her own experience, she demonstrates how she brings authority and agency to the task.

Kyle, the second PW student, is a twenty-four-year-old white man from Haverhill, Massachusetts, who worked his way through community college before transferring to the university, where he maintains a high GPA as a double major in English and Political Science. It was not always so rosy. Kyle identified his socio-economic

background—“very poor, sometimes homeless”—as formative of both his personal and educational identities. The first draft of his Theory of Writing for the TFT course, posted to his blog, was in some ways more philosophy than definition, which is perhaps not surprising for a student whose interests include political philosophy:

Outside the literal pen-on-paper definition, the answer can get very personal. [. . .] Personally, I find writing to be one of the most in-depth and differing modes of communication that human beings have at their disposal. [. . .] writing gives the opportunity to edit, revise and perfect what the author is trying to say. Due to this, the ideas are more fleshed out and focused, which can benefit all parties involved and thereby result in a more expansive and fulfilling form of communication.

Kyle sees context in another way: writing is larger than the classroom and there is the opportunity for agency, but he also understands that it's up to the writer to determine what's appropriate in “differing” situations. In addition, Kyle identifies some intellectual influences he draws from as a writer: “Reading Kurt Vonnegut has made me value humor in writing, Bob Dylan powerful imagery, and my left-leaning politics creates a lens as well. And so, the questions [about writing] don't *have* definitive answers, so I don't *know* they're accurate.” He concludes by saying, “I have simply no idea what kind of a writer I am.”

Kyle's first Theory of Writing assignment was preceded on the blog by his self-sponsored four-thousand-word review of Noam Chomsky's 2017 book *Who Rules the World?* with an epigraph from Kurt Vonnegut: “Do you realize that all great literature is all about what a bummer it is to be a human being?” He then explained the connection of these reviews to his general intellectual disposition, one in which citizens should be informed and engaged across disciplinary boundaries. Kyle developed and then felt called to pursue—by conversations with friends, in reading and music, and in particular by the political campaign of Bernie Sanders—an active political life connecting to his burgeoning “left-leaning politics.” As the review suggests, Kyle as both citizen and political science major saw language, and metaphor especially, as a dimension of writing English and Political Science share. These two concurrent contexts shape his observations:

You can be very effective with metaphors or something else when it comes to imagination and style. A lot of that is coming out of my Lincoln class, he's really good with metaphors and illuminating his political thought. But sometimes [metaphor is] like the whole point of creative writing. So if you're mixing them together, I guess creativity would be really important.

In other words, as a double major, Kyle routinely operates in two disciplinary contexts, and he is able to identify commonalities between them, like metaphor, that are also and at the same time employed differently. Moreover, in summarizing what he had learned about writing, Kyle read across the different assignments of the TFT course and provided a view of writing informed by key TFT terms he specifically connected and by his valuing of both the practical and the philosophical:

Through our projects, especially projects 2 and 4, the practice of really focusing on a wide variety of audiences taught me how the term “purpose” is an extraordinarily important aspect of writing. Specifically, the second project made me imagine people I’ve never interacted with before, which helped me identify more with my audience, because I had to assume personalities, reactions, etc. Purpose helps a writer, no matter whether people are writing for form, problem solving, etc., which makes their writing more effective. This is not something I put much stock in before this class.

In addition, Kyle understands his Theory of Writing philosophically—as a living theory:

In this way, taking what I’ve learned in this class, I can apply it alongside all the other knowledge I’ve accumulated so far. Also, in this way, my theory of writing changes for *every* class, because I’ve concluded that the “theory of writing” we discuss so much in this class is added to and changed throughout our entire academic and writing life. So, I will apply my theory of writing . . . to every class, because it is constantly changing and, obviously, affects how people write.

Given what seemed like an abundance of experiences defining this TFT upper-level course—including previous writing experiences, TFT, upper-level writing content, writing in other classes, and co-curricular and self-sponsored writing—Kyle and Julie illustrate how students tend to choose among these experiences and exercise authority when making decisions about the TFT content that seems most salient to them. Put another way, Julie and Kyle help us understand how students weave together an understanding of writing from sources they identify, including those from the classroom but not exclusive to it, and how engaging in such decision-making can foster a sense of writerly agency that allows students to navigate across WAC contexts with appropriate knowledge of writing that can be repurposed for those contexts.

Writing as Interns: Contexts, Key Terms, Learning, and Reciprocity

The role of context in writing transfer was also particularly important for upper-level students engaging concurrently in internships and in classes on campus, in the third iteration of our research. The internships and classes were thus inherently inter-contextual, providing an intersection of contexts that may be of special importance for transferring writing knowledge and practice. In addition, because the earlier TFT research had not included internships, an important focus of this part of the study was to ascertain if and how TFT might help students transfer from their school writing into their internship and from their internship into other sites of writing.

Three students participated: here we focus on one, Cassidy, a twenty-one-year-old white female college senior with multiple majors—one in Editing, Writing, and Media (EWM) with a minor in professional communication, and a second major in humanities, including a focus on art history. The first step in the study was to have Cassidy, like her peers, complete two individualized ninety-minute TFT-based workshops. The internship curricular approach to TFT thus differed considerably from classroom versions: rather than engage in a semester-long series of TFT reading and writing activities, the interns participated in two workshops distilling the TFT curriculum and engaging them in related transfer-oriented activities. The first TFT workshop focused on two areas: students' prior knowledge and beliefs about writing, and an introduction to the three signature components of the TFT curriculum, key terms, reflective practice, and a Theory of Writing (ToW). About half of this first workshop focused on key terms that the students brought with them into the study—Cassidy identified the writing key terms she used to define writing and mapped them—and the rest of the workshop introduced her to the three components of the TFT curriculum. The second workshop was also divided into two parts. The first half engaged Cassidy in responding to and then discussing a heuristic designed to help her consider how she might both learn from and contribute to the internship, as the image suggests; and the second part asked her to identify two very different writing situations she was currently in, and articulate what these two situations/tasks had in common and how they differed, a practice intended to encourage her to think, as an expert, about how writing situations can be both alike and different, as recommended by *How People Learn* (as noted above), and thus how reading across them could help her consider what might be successfully repurposed from one to another.

Using a heuristic to set the (learning) stage

- Who are you as a student?
- Who are you as a student in this class/experience?
- Who are you as a person in this class/experience?
- What do you have to contribute?
- What do you have to learn?
- What key ideas can you draw on as you both contribute and learn?

The key terms students used to describe and define writing were especially important for the internship participants in the study given the literature on upper-level students and interns. Based on their study of interns, for example, Neil Baird and Bradley Dilger recommend that “Instructors need to be mindful of relationships between classroom practices and transfer” (708). Such practices, of course, can be expressed in the key terms crossing both classrooms and internships, especially when classes and internships are concurrent, as was the case for this study. And to assure that students’ (prior) classroom conceptions and practices of writing were included, the study began, as explained above, by inviting both. In addition, for this study an even wider net was cast: participants were invited throughout the study to consider all contexts of writing as sources of writing knowledge and practice—past and present schooling experiences, workplace experiences, civic writing experiences, and personal writing experiences—and as Cassidy’s experience will demonstrate, some of those non-school sources were especially informative for these participants. Key terms for interns are also especially important because, as Doug Brent’s (2012) internship study demonstrates, without the vocabulary of key terms, interns can experience difficulty “explaining in detail on what prior experiences they might be drawing” (708), a finding echoing that of two other studies of upper-level students, the Hilgers, Hussey, and Stitt-Bergh’s (1999) study and the Jarratt et al. (2005) study, both of which reported that while students had elaborate writing processes, they lacked a language useful for describing the writing concepts or practices they called upon. In this context, Cassidy’s key terms, and the ways they shifted during her internship, provide evidence of the impact of introducing TFT key terms to interns, who can draw on them both to describe their experience and to facilitate writing transfer.

Three patterns in the development of Cassidy’s key terms are worth observing. First, her key terms shift over time: the key terms she identified in fall 2017 were completely replaced by a new set as the spring 2018 term concluded, although as the internship progressed, some terms began to repeat, suggesting some stability to them.

Second, in explaining the sources for her key terms, Cassidy points to four contexts: classes current and past, the internship, the study itself, and her own experience, this last a function of her sense of agency. Third, Cassidy also transfers writing knowledge and practice from her internship into a co-curricular experience and is quite specific about the internship writing practices she employs in the co-curricular setting.

Cassidy's initial eight key terms for writing—paper, ink, inspiration, skill, language, ideas, vocabulary, and rhetoric—constructed writing as a material practice with *paper* and *ink*, bringing together *language* and *ideas* through *vocabulary* and *rhetoric*, with the help of writerly *inspiration*. As important, only one of the terms, rhetoric, was related to the eight TFT key terms, which, as mentioned above and borrowing from *How People Learn*, are conceptual in nature: rhetorical situation, purpose, audience, context, genre, reflection, discourse community, and knowledge.

Table 1

Cassidy's Key Terms Fall 2017-Spring 2018 (TFT terms in bold)

Fall 2017	January 2018	March 2018	April 2018
paper	rhetorical situation	media	media
ink	audience	genre	genre
inspiration	exigence	exigence	exigence
skill	Syntax	process	process
language	grammar	language	
ideas	Writer	writer	writer
vocabulary		revising	
rhetoric		reflection	reflection
		conventions/manipulation	

Cassidy's terms began changing, however, as her internship progressed. In January, having been introduced in the fall to the TFT terms, Cassidy shared a seven-word writing vocabulary that is more conceptual in nature, including both TFT terms—*rhetorical situation*, *audience*, *exigence*—and other terms—syntax, and grammar—while the terms for materiality and the author disappeared. In March, Cassidy listed nine terms, all of which continue to be conceptual in nature, with two terms repeated (in italics): *exigence*, *writer*, media, genre, process, revising, reflection, language, and conventions/manipulation; writer re-appears from the fall list and exigence from the

January list, while syntax and grammar, which could be included in language, drop out. The March list in that sense seems a function of a honing and consolidation process. By the end of April, Cassidy's key terms are largely a conceptual distillation of the March list, and this list, at six terms, is the shortest one: writer/composer, exigence, genre, media (through which the writing is created), process, and reflection. Half of the terms—exigence, genre, and reflection—are TFT terms. And not least, in identifying these terms, Cassidy also voluntarily defines three of them. Media, she says, is the platform or surface “through which the writing is created”; process is “the writer's creative process of putting their ideas into language and molding it into the media, not the mechanical process of editing and revising. Those things go under reflection, in my view”; and reflection “Encompasses editing, revising, etc., but also introspective reflection because writing is constrained by the composer's knowledge and abilities and is influenced by their world-view and beliefs.” In sum, Cassidy's key terms shift over time; they include TFT terms but are not exclusive to them; they are consolidated and distilled; and as her definitions indicate, they are nuanced.

These progressive lists of key terms tell one story, but when in April, Cassidy was also asked about the sources for her key terms, she tells another story that both complicates and enriches the first. Three of the terms, she says—exigence, genre, and process—come from past or current classes and, sometimes, from other contexts as well, but not from TFT. *Exigence*, although a TFT term, has another source for Cassidy: it “certainly comes from my Rhetoric courses in college, though I'd like to qualify that I'm not simply regurgitating what I've learned. I believe the writer or composer must feel some kind of exigence to produce writing”; here Cassidy also asserts her agency in distinguishing between “simpl[e] regurgitate[ion]” and her belief. Genre, another TFT term, has multiple sources, though Cassidy does not cite TFT: it “is something we talked about in many of my courses, but it mostly comes from my Peer Tutoring in the [Reading Writing Center] RWC and [Digital Studio] DS class and my internship,” both of which Cassidy was engaged in during the spring. Speaking specifically to her internship writing, Cassidy referred to the influence of genre on shaping writing even when the content is the “same”: “In my internship, writing a social media post is vastly different than writing about the same topic for a blog post, which is very different from taking the same content and writing it in an opinion editorial.” And the term process comes from a very specific class, the Peer Tutoring class. Interestingly, although Cassidy does not cite the TFT curriculum or the fall workshops as sources for exigence or genre, these two terms show up in multiple contexts: the TFT term exigence is a theoretical term from multiple courses, and the TFT term genre emerges from both a course and the internship.

Other terms have other sources. Writer/Composer, which was introduced in the March list, is, according to Cassidy, “a given because without a writer, writing could

not come into existence on its own.” Media, also introduced in the March list, comes from Cassidy’s experience, as she explains: “Media comes from my experience because writing can take countless forms and doesn’t necessarily have to be pen to paper. In my internship, I mostly write digitally.” Here, we see Cassidy citing her own experience as a source and as a kind of agency, and we also see her consolidation of earlier terms: the paper and pen (ink) of her initial list have been consolidated into media, a term that also speaks to her internship writing. And like genre, above, reflection also has two sources. One is, again, Cassidy’s experience: “from experience I knew that writing is constrained by the writer/composer’s experiences, knowledge and world-view, and that editing and revising results from writers/composers reflecting upon their writing.” A second source is the study itself: “I’d say the study helped me put a name to the concept and think critically about it, since I never really thought about it in terms of ‘reflection’ before”—a perception that has been articulated through all iterations of the larger TFT research project. Students report in their interviews that one of the benefits of the TFT curriculum is the vocabulary helping them describe and theorize writing knowledge and practices. Moreover, in this case, Cassidy cites multiple sources for her terms, and while half of the terms are TFT terms, she attributes only one of these, reflection, to the study. As important, Cassidy’s final list of key terms, like those of other successful writers from the first iteration of the research (Yancey et al.), is a remix of terms, in her case including one from TFT; two appearing in TFT (and in other contexts for a useful kind of redundancy); and three from her own experience.

As Cassidy explains, her writing experiences are highly contextual and often complementary: a term like genre that appears in several contexts and is useable can be particularly salient. But multiple contexts also provide opportunities to see differences. Thus, when asked if she needed to adjust what she had learned in her coursework to write successfully in the internship, Cassidy drew on two terms from her earlier lists—language and audience—to explain that indeed she had:

The analytical and academic language I’m used to using in school doesn’t cut it in the communications field, because the goal of communications for a company or organization is accessibility. The audience must understand the messages we relay to them. Specifically, my clients’ audiences are high schoolers, young adults, troubled youth, and lower-income families. However, because some of my clients rely on federal funding, some of our communications efforts have targeted policy-makers and legislators. In these instances, the language we used was closer to what I’m used to writing in school.

Here, Cassidy as an expert in these contexts explains how they are both similar and different: the content may be the same, but the *audience* will affect what *language* is used in communicating the content, and some audiences, like those providing *federal*

funding, are closer to academics than to *young adults* and *troubled youth*. And when contexts are similar, Cassidy doesn't hesitate to draw on, or transfer, writing knowledge and practice that has been successful elsewhere. Thus, when asked if she had transferred writing knowledge and practice from the internship into other contexts, she responded affirmatively:

My internship has mostly taught me about digital writing genres, so I've definitely used the skills I've learned in my role as public relations chair for the Skeet and Trap club. For example, I learned that the most effective way to write Instagram posts so they're seen is to include 30 hashtags, the maximum allowed by Instagram. I learned this through the social media guidelines at work. I've used this tip every time I've drafted Instagram posts for the club. I learned how to draft press releases, opinion editorials, blog posts, and newsletters, and I will certainly transfer these skills to future employment in the communications field.

We have much to learn from Cassidy. She, like her intern colleagues in this study, was a key-term reviser; and like her intern colleagues and other successful writers in all the iterations of the TFT project, was a key-term remixer, bringing together selected TFT terms with her own for a unique set of key terms. She drew from multiple contexts concurrently—classes, co-curriculars, the internship, and her own experience—finding in those contexts rich resources for transfer of writing knowledge and practice and for writerly agency based on articulated inter-contextual experience. Put simply, Cassidy has a writing-transfer-mindset.

Teaching for Transfer Across the Curriculum: Some Concluding Observations

Recent writing transfer research suggests, as we explain above, that what we do in our classrooms can influence students' transfer of writing practice and knowledge. That is what instructors hope for, but it also reminds us that curriculum design is fundamental to helping students in this effort. Of course, research has studied what such a curriculum might look like. For example, inquiring into the utility of two different curricula in supporting students' development of writing knowledge--—one, a Writing about Writing (WAW) approach somewhat like the TFT approach and the second a rhetorically informed theme-based curriculum—Carol Hayes and her colleagues found that “different WAW curricula can produce different impacts” and that across all the curricula genre seemed to be a particularly different concept for students to theorize and apply: “It may . . . be that given the complexity of genre as a concept,” they say, “an explicit writing studies curriculum might be necessary to teach it effectively” (80). Another study focused on how much course time and student

engagement such topics might require to be successful. Thus, in identifying why a particular curricular approach with upper-level students didn't succeed, Walwema and Driscoll explain that what might seem like a reasonable commitment is in fact too little: "we are unconvinced that several in-class activities, one homework assignment, and one reflective piece were enough for meaningful change."

By way of contrast, focusing on a curricular approach for writing in chemistry, one with considerable success in helping students succeed in that context, Susan Green and her colleagues credit the TFT curricular approach as a major influence on its design:

The assignment sequencing, in-class activities, peer review sessions, and teaching materials were all informed by Yancey, Robertson, and Taczak's (2014, 138–39) key suggestions for teaching transferable writing skills. Specifically, they encourage instructors to: (1) be explicit about the conventions of writing in a given discipline; (2) demonstrate, rather than explain, these conventions; (3) tap into students' existing knowledge; (4) teach writing as a composing process, rather than simply an end product; (5) teach reiteratively, reinforcing the concepts and practices of effective written communication across assignments and activities; and, finally, (6) help students develop metacognition, or thinking about their own learning, so that they recognize the role of strategies like sequencing assignments and peer review in their development as writers and learners. (112)

In part, that is the claim here: that the TFT curriculum, unique in bringing together a discreet set of key terms, systematic reflection, and students' Theory of Writing, asks students to engage in this set of interlocking concepts and practices as an *ensemble*. Moreover, the claim is also that in doing so, students develop a writing-transfer-mindset.

The value of the Teaching for Transfer curriculum for WAC courses is premised on what it can offer students: helping them develop a vocabulary of conceptual key terms with which to frame new writing situations. Helping students develop a writing-transfer-mindset, in other words, is possible. More specifically, if students are going to transfer writing knowledge and practices across the curriculum and into the disciplines of the university, as well as into external contexts, faculty across disciplines may want to consider the following key ideas and find appropriate ways to incorporate them into their own classrooms:

- *Identification and inclusion of key terms: Key terms give students a vocabulary by which they can begin to understand writing concepts and practices, create or strengthen a writing identity, and generate a theory of writing for*

use in future contexts. Faculty may not be able to employ all eight of the TFT terms presented here, and, alternatively, they may want to include other writing terms, for instance, visual display of information. Such was the case in the TFT-influenced chemistry class, as Green et al. explain: “We regularly reinforced both the concepts of *chemistry* and of *communication*. Concepts such as *significant figures*, *readability*, *accuracy*, *genre*, *audience*, and *purpose* appeared across our handouts, and instructors used them repeatedly to explain and support the activities” (115). Here, then, the TFT key terms genre, audience, and purpose were remixed with the discourse community terms—specific chemistry terms significant figure, readability, and accuracy. As important, faculty will want to discuss and demonstrate the key terms in the context of writing in their discipline as well as asking students to do likewise.

- *Opportunities for students to revise and remix their set of key terms.* Asking students at various points throughout the semester to revisit their key terms helps them to create a structure for their thought process(es) as they connect learning about writing in different contexts—both in- and out-of-school writing contexts—and encourages students to identify relationships between and among their key terms as a way to understand what the writing situation is asking of them.
- *Opportunities for students to write in multiple contexts at the same time and for students to think of writing comparatively, with one writing situation compared to another for identification of similarity and difference as a tool for transfer.* As Thaiss and Zawacki observe, when students have double majors, as we saw with Kyle, those contexts often overlap and inform each other. What the TFT curriculum adds is the chance for students to trace similarities and differences across contexts by design. Moreover, as we saw with Cassidy, our students engage in multiple *kinds* of contexts, often concurrently, in courses and in co-curriculars, internships, and the workplace; tracing similar and differentiated practices across these contexts is every bit as important. In sum, when students explore their writing across contexts—like Rick learning about audience in English by understanding the concept of writing for an audience in chemistry, Kyle seeing metaphor as a similarity in political science and creative writing, and Cassidy reworking the same material for both troubled youth and federal grant makers—they have more opportunity to find meaningful and relevant connections across those contexts and to make their own knowledge about writing.

The potential of TFT for WAC, of course, is that students will become better writers and will write more effective texts. That potential also lies in its ability to help

students create a greater sense of agency *as* writers, regardless of context. Key terms provide a stability by which students can articulate, and within that articulation recognize, how writing situations function, inside the classroom and outside of school as well. Students begin to understand that writing can, in fact, live outside the narrow context of writing a text for a grade and/or only within the institutionalized context of school. The potential of TFT for WAC, in other words, lies in helping students develop a writing-transfer-mindset. The future of writing across curriculum and across college, and thus the development of students as writers who can adapt and write in and among multiple contexts, includes, we believe, a more deliberate move towards teaching for transfer of writing knowledge and practice. Our hope is that the research and recommendations presented here will assist in such an effort.

Notes

1. The two institutions on a quarter system employed two (rather than three) interviews during the TFT term.
2. All of the double coding for the third iteration of the study is complete; we are currently creating an inductive coding scheme for this data set.

Works Cited

- Baird, Neil, and Bradley Dilger. "How Students Perceive Transitions: Dispositions and Transfer in Internships." *College Composition and Communication*, vol. 68, no. 4, 2017, pp. 684–712.
- Beaufort, Anne. *College Writing and Beyond: A New Framework for University Writing Instruction*. Utah State UP, 2007.
- Bransford, John D., James W. Pellegrino, and M. Suzanne Donovan. *How People Learn: Brain, Mind, Experience, and School*. National Academy Press, 2000.
- Brent, Doug. "Crossing Boundaries: Co-op Students Relearning to Write." *College Composition and Communication*, vol. 63, no. 4, 2012, pp. 558–92.
- Cooper, Marilyn M. "Rhetorical Agency as Emergent and Enacted." *College Composition and Communication*, vol. 62, no. 3, 2011, pp. 420–49.
- DePalma, Michael-John. "Tracing Transfer across Media: Investigating Writers' Perceptions of Cross-contextual and Rhetorical Reshaping in Processes of Remediation." *College Composition and Communication*, vol. 66, no. 4, 2015, pp. 615–42.
- Driscoll, Dana L., and Josephine Walwema. "Activating the Uptake of Prior Knowledge Through Metacognitive Awareness: An Exploratory Study of Writing Transfer in Documentation and Source Use in Professional Writing Courses," *Programmatic Perspectives*, vol. 7, no. 1, 2015, pp. 21-42.
- Green, Susan, Zornitsa Keremidchieva, Heidi Zimmerman, Amy Rice, Leah Witus, Marc Rodwogin, and Ruth Pardini. "Developing Students' Multi-Modal and Transferable

- Writing Skills in Introductory General Chemistry.” *The WAC Journal*, vol. 28, no. 1, 2017, pp 106–22.
- Hayes, Carol, Ed Jones, Gwen Gorzelsky, and Dana Driscoll. “Adapting Writing about Writing: Curricular Implications of Cross-Institutional Data from the Writing Transfer Project.” *WPA: Writing Program Administration*, vol. 41, no. 2, 2018, pp 65–88.
- Hilgers, Thomas, Edna Hussey, and Monica Stitt-Bergh. “As You’re Writing, You Have These Epiphanies’: What College Students Say about Writing and Learning in Their Majors.” *Written Communication*, vol. 16, no. 3, 1999, pp. 317–53.
- Jarratt, Susan, Katherine Mack, Alexandra Sartor, and Shevaun Watson. “Pedagogical Memory and the Transferability of Writing Knowledge.” Writing Research Across Borders. 24 February 2008, Phelps Hall, UC Santa Barbara, CA. Presentation.
- McCarthy, Lucille Parkinson. “A Stranger in Strange Lands: A College Student Writing Across the Curriculum.” *Research in the Teaching of English*, vol. 21, no. 3, 1987, pp. 233–65.
- Perkins, David N., and Gavriel Salomon. “Transfer of Learning.” *International Encyclopedia of Education*, vol. 2, 1992, pp. 6452–57.
- Read, Sarah, and Michael J. Michaud. “Writing about Writing and the Multimajor Professional Writing Course.” *College Composition and Communication*, vol. 66, no.3, 2015, pp. 427–57.
- Reiff, Mary Jo, and Anis Bawarshi. “Tracing Discursive Resources: How Students Use Prior Genre Knowledge to Negotiate New Writing Contexts in First-Year Composition.” *Written Communication*, vol. 28, no.3, 2011, pp. 312–37.
- Taczak, Kara, and Liane Robertson. “Reiterative Reflection in the 21st Century Writing Classroom: An Integrated Approach to Teaching for Transfer.” *A Rhetoric of Reflection*, edited by Kathleen Blake Yancey, Utah State UP, 2016, pp. 42–63.
- Thaiss, Chris and Terry Myers Zawacki. *Engaged Writers and Dynamic Disciplines: Research on the Academic Writing Life*. Boynton/Cook, 2006.
- VanKooten, Crystal. “Identifying Components of Meta-Awareness about Composition: Toward a Theory and Methodology for Writing Studies.” *Composition Forum*, vol. 33, 2016, compositionforum.com/issue/33/meta-awareness.php.
- Wardle, Elizabeth. “Creative Repurposing for Expansive Learning: Considering ‘Problem-Exploring’ and ‘Answer-Getting’ Dispositions in Individuals and Fields.” Introduction. *Composition Forum*, vol. 26, 2012, compositionforum.com/issue/26/creative-repurposing.php
- Wolfe, Joanna, Barrie Olson, and Laura Wilder. “Knowing What We Know About Writing in the Disciplines: A New Approach to Teaching for Transfer in FYC.” *The WAC Journal*, vol. 25, no. 1, 2014, pp. 42–77.
- Yancey, Kathleen Blake. *Reflection in the Writing Classroom*. Utah State UP, 1998.
- Yancey, Kathleen, Liane Robertson, and Kara Taczak. *Writing Across Contexts: Transfer, Composition, and Sites of Writing*. Utah State UP, 2014.