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# Transfer in the Writing Center: Tutors Facilitating Students' Understanding of Transfer

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Understanding of Transfer

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ABSTRACT

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Transfer, a highly researched topic in composition studies, is a topic of increasing interest to those in writing center studies. Writing centers are an ideal location for the application of transfer because tutors can provide more opportunities for guided practice, application, reflection, and metacognition in a one-on-one setting; thus, students may learn more effectively, through application, the writing skills they may receive via instruction in their classrooms. Previous writing center studies have implemented transfer-focused curricula to help tutors better facilitate transfer in their tutorials. These curricula have focused on training tutors to understand and apply transfer to their tutorials, but they have not invited tutors to assess how transfer has impacted or influenced their previously learned tutoring strategies. Though researchers have lectured on transfer, incorporated activities to increase understanding of transfer, and required readings on transfer, we have not yet understood how tutors understand and value transfer in relation to their tutoring strategies and, more importantly, meeting student needs. The curriculum presented here builds on tutors' prior knowledge about tutoring and builds in ample opportunities for tutors to engage with transfer theory, adapt their understanding into their tutoring, and reflect regularly on and assess their application of understanding transfer. This study examines tutors' responses to the curriculum, one tutor's tutorials throughout the duration of the curriculum, and one tutor's discourse-based interview responses. The results of this study indicate that tutor involvement is vital to understanding what transfer looks like in the writing center and that writing centers will benefit from providing tutors with a broad understanding of transfer that tutors can then incorporate into their understanding of effective tutoring practices.

Keywords: transfer, writing center, transfer-focused curriculum, transfer-focused tutor training

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**Introduction**

Transfer, already a highly researched topic in composition studies, has recently emerged as a topic of increasing interest to those in writing center studies. As defined by Robert Haskell, transfer is how "previous learning [can influence] current and future learning" and "past or current learning [can be] applied or adapted to similar or novel situations" (23). Writing center scholars have enthusiastically endorsed the pairing of transfer with writing center studies: Bonnie Devet states that "transfer studies and writing centers are made for each other" (141); Heather Hill tells us that "the writing center is [a] powerful place for the facilitation of the transfer of writing-related knowledge" (98). Pat Bromley et al. state that "the additional shift in research focus from the classroom outward and from internal to external factors creates a prime space for writing centers to contribute to transfer conversations." Because writing centers are a resource beyond the classroom and the discipline, they can be critical to helping students transfer their knowledge to future situations. Writing centers are an ideal location for the application of transfer because they provide students with more opportunities for guided practice, application, reflection, and metacognition in a one-on-one setting with a tutor who can cue transfer abilities within the student, further cementing writing skills the student may have learned in classes or building new skills that the student can apply in the future.

Writing center transfer studies have focused on student dispositions related to writing tasks, the ability of tutors to transfer tutoring knowledge to future situations, and the benefits of teaching transfer theory to tutors (Bromley et al.; Driscoll; Driscoll & Harcourt; Hill). Devet recently stressed the need for writing center professionals (WCPs) to utilize the transfer knowledge gained by educational psychology and composition studies. Though Devet argues "that centers already teach for transfer every day," a more thorough understanding of transfer can

help writing center directors know "why training techniques are successful and how they can be improved" (120). Hill, one of the first WCPs to publish her experiment with transfer-focused tutor training curricula, states that because "transfer often needs to be 'cued, primed, and guided' to be successful (Perkins & Salomon, 1989, p. 19), WCPs need to continue focusing on writing centers as key sites for the facilitation of transfer," (78).

Following Hill's work, a growing number of WCPs have experimented with implementing and assessing transfer-focused tutor education (Cardinal; Hahn & Stahr). These efforts, described below, have focused on how transfer can meet writing center goals of helping students become better writers, but less emphasis has been placed on tutors' understanding and use of transfer in tutoring sessions to meet students' needs. Additional limitations include the brevity of these experimental curricula and their delivery in place of tutors' initial training or without clear connection to tutors prior knowledge and experience about tutoring writing.

To address these limitations, I collaborated with the director of the Brigham Young University (BYU) Research & Writing Center (RWC) to design and implement an extended transfer-focused training curriculum in the RWC. This curriculum not only drew on tutors' prior knowledge of tutoring to inform their understanding of transfer, but also invited them to develop and apply what they felt was an appropriate and feasible notion of transfer to their individual sessions with students. This notion of transfer differed from descriptions of transfer used in current writing center publications on transfer-focused tutor training. The results of this curriculum provide WCPs with an expanded view, strongly influenced by tutors' experiences and perspectives, of what transfer might look like in writing center sessions and in transfer-focused training curriculum.

**Previous Writing Center Transfer Curricula**

In response to the call for more transfer-focused, writing center research, Hill's recent empirical research has strongly influenced subsequent studies. Hill taught a one-hour transfer theory course to three tutors. This course consisted of five transfer techniques: "having a high level of initial learning; being able to see the similarities and differences between learning situations; understanding key concepts about writing. . .; being able to use metacognitive reflection; and promoting certain dispositions towards learning, such as active learning and motivation" (79–80). Through a combination of lecture and discussion, Hill discussed with the tutors ways they might help students engage in these transfer techniques. No prior reading was required. After one semester, Hill compared these tutors' tutorials to three other tutors not in the course, looking for specific moments of transfer talk. Transfer talk is found in "moments when tutors [engage] students in talking about their previous knowledge or in talking about how their current learning connect[s] to future tasks," thus "cu[ing]" or "guid[ing]" the student to transfer (Hill 85, 78). Hill discovered that the tutors who had received transfer theory training explicitly discussed transfer over six times more frequently than the tutors who hadn't received the training, while implicit discussion of transfer was about the same between the two groups. Hill concluded that although tutors talk more about transfer-related topics when they've received transfer training, all tutors missed opportunities to promote transfer, and she advised further research to enlarge our understanding of how tutors' strategies and students' writing practices change when tutors receive more than a one-hour course on transfer theory.

Cardinal furthered Hill's study by leading two 90-minute tutor training meetings that focused on using transfer talk through interactive learning activities, rather than the lecture and discussion methods (2–3). Cardinal found that "active learning approaches and explicit modeling of transfer talk" were particularly helpful in training tutors about transfer (9). However, Cardinal

also discovered that the tutors' own prior learning about tutoring prevented them from understanding how transfer theory enhanced their prior knowledge about good tutoring strategies. Hahn and Stahr, also responding to Hill's research, incorporated transfer-focused reading assignments into their respective tutor training programs. As a result, their tutors thought more about ways to incorporate transfer talk into their tutorials, particularly backward transfer, or transfer that focuses on relating prior learning to current tasks (10–11). One program incorporated a question on their student intake form that asked students to think about how the assignment they brought in related to previous assignments. Based on the students' answers (or lack of answers), Hahn and Stahr found that students often do not recognize similarities between assignments. Tutors are in a position to help students better engage in backward reaching transfer by helping students recognize similarities.

Building on this research, I have designed a more extensive transfer-focused tutor training curriculum that supplements rather than replaces tutors' initial and ongoing training. Previous research has focused on training tutors to understand and apply transfer to their tutorials, but they have not invited tutors to assess how transfer has impacted or influenced their previously learned tutoring strategies. While researchers have lectured on transfer, incorporated activities to increase understanding of transfer, and required readings on transfer, we have not yet understood how tutors understand and value transfer in relation to their tutoring strategies and, more importantly, meeting student needs. My curriculum builds on tutors' prior knowledge about tutoring and builds in ample opportunities for tutors to engage with transfer theory, adapt their understanding into their tutoring, and reflect regularly on and assess their application and understanding of transfer, thus inviting tutors to share their understanding of how transfer relates to their previous knowledge of effective tutoring strategies. The data generated by this

curriculum provide a deeper perspective on tutors' experiences and perceptions of transfer training and its relationship to their prior tutoring knowledge in order to assess the effectiveness of transfer-focused tutor training. This more extensive understanding of transfer will allow WCPs to develop and implement more effective transfer-focused training curriculum relevant to tutor needs.

*Tutor-focused Transfer Training Curriculum*

My research project addresses the following research question: What effect does transfer-focused training have on tutors' understanding of transfer, perceived value of transfer talk in improving tutoring sessions, and use or application of transfer talk? To answer this question, I developed a training curriculum that emphasized transfer, transfer talk, prior knowledge, genre, rhetorical situation, and metacognition. These last four topics were chosen to provide tutors with specific concepts and techniques they could use to help students engage in transfer and because the tutors' initial training familiarized them with these terms in a writing center setting (Devet; Hill; Ianetta & Fitzgerald). After choosing these topics, I designed the lesson plans and led the training meetings (except for the fourth meeting, which was led by the writing center director) meant to teach the tutors about transfer and help them apply transfer talk to their tutorials. The tutors knew that I had previously worked as a writing tutor at the RWC. They knew that I was a graduate student conducting a study as part of my master's thesis. They also knew that I was also a graduate student assistant administrator in the RWC while I was conducting this research. These factors, I believe, allowed the tutors to see me as more of a peer than an authority figure, which I hope allowed them to be open during meeting discussions. However, viewing me as a peer may have also influenced tutors to 1) view the training as less important or 2) tell me what I wanted to hear about the curriculum's influence on their tutoring. Two factors likely encouraged

the tutors to fully engage in the curriculum. First, the tutors' participation was their experiential learning project for the semester, a form of ongoing training required of all writing tutors, and second, the writing center director was also present at most of the trainings. Regarding the second concern, the tutors knew that I would be reviewing their recorded tutorials in between meetings, which likely encouraged tutors to be honest when discussing their impressions about the curriculum's impact on their tutoring during our meetings.

Altogether, the tutors participated in six biweekly training meetings over the course of a 15-week semester. The final training meeting was a reflection on the curriculum's impact. During the meetings, tutors reflected on how the previous meeting's training had informed their tutoring, applied the new topic to a tutorial transcript, and then were invited to or made plans to implement that training into their tutoring. Each tutor was responsible for audio-recording one of their tutorials between each meeting. In Table 1, I provide a brief outline of the training meetings. Following the table, I provide a description of the training meetings to show the tutors' extensive involvement in each meeting to provide context for the findings. This description can also aid in future transfer-focused training curriculum design.

Table 1: Transfer-focused training curriculum topics and schedule

| # | Date | Topic |
|---|------|-------|
| 1 | Jan 22 | Defining transfer |
| 2 | Feb 5 | Tutor prior learning: writing concepts that help students engage in transfer Transfer talk: explicit and intentional |
| 3 | Feb 26 | Transfer talk: initial learning, dispositions, prior knowledge |

| 4 | Mar 12 | Transfer talk: genre, rhetorical situation |
| 5 | Mar 26 | Transfer talk: metacognition |
| 6 | Apr 9 | Reflection |

In preparation for our first meeting, tutors read chapter 2 from Robert Haskell's book *Transfer of Learning*¸ which provides a basic definition of transfer and related terms and examples to explain how transfer occurs. Tutors discussed how this definition applied to their own experiences with writing and tutoring. This session ended with an invitation for the tutors to consider what has helped them transfer their learning and then think about how they could apply that to their tutoring sessions.

Prior to the second meeting, tutors reviewed some of their initial training reading assignments that had been assigned to them by the writing center director. These readings were chosen because they highlighted the concepts we would discuss later in the curriculum. This was done so that tutors could make a clear connection from their previous training to the transfer training, thus identifying ways that transfer can enhance good tutoring strategies, rather than seeing transfer and tutoring strategies as two disparate processes. Tutors also reviewed Haskell's definition of transfer and were introduced to the concept of transfer talk and Hill's definitions of explicit and implicit transfer talk. Hill defines explicit transfer talk as "tutors . . . consciously asking students to engage in transfer talk," meaning that tutors had "explicitly asked students to reflect on their previous or future writing experience and relate it to their current writing situation" (85). Implicit transfer talk is defined as "when tutors engaged students in transfer talk without specifically meaning to. . . . the tutor would mention things that students would have previously learned about, but did not necessarily ask the students to talk explicitly about that

previous learning" (85). Key differences between these definitions are 1) explicit transfer talk is conscious whereas implicit is unintentional, and 2) explicit transfer talk invites student involvement through discussing writing concepts whereas implicit does not. After being introduced to these terms, tutors were provided with a sample tutorial script and invited to revise the script to incorporate explicit transfer talk. To end, tutors were asked to consider how they might use explicit transfer talk in their own tutorials.

Our third meeting transitioned from transfer talk generally to specific concepts that can help tutors incorporate transfer into their tutorials. Tutors first reflected on how transfer talk had played a role in their tutoring. Next, we defined and discussed prior knowledge as a way to invite students to consider their previous writing experiences. Prior knowledge can be a "crucial first step in scaffolding a writing tutoring session" for "figuring out where the writer is in terms of a particular skill set or knowledge base" (Ianetta & Fitzgerald 66). Based on Cardinal's practice of incorporating transcript revisions to invite active participation, tutors revised a sample transcript to create a dialog that engaged the student in transfer talk by discussing the student's prior knowledge. The tutors were invited to use similar language in their own tutorials.

The fourth meeting focused on genre and rhetorical situation as ways to engage students in transfer talk. Similar to previous meetings, tutors first reflected on how the previous training impacted their tutoring. Genre was defined as "typified rhetorical actions based in recurrent situations" (Miller 159), and rhetorical situation was defined as audience, purpose, timing, and appropriateness. Tutors again revised a transcript to incorporate transfer talk focused on genre and then created a list of questions that could be used to lead to a discussion. Tutors then set goals to apply their questions to their tutorials.

Our fifth training meeting began by following-up with the tutors' goals from our previous meeting which were focused on using genre as a way to engage in transfer talk. The new concept for this meeting was metacognition, which was defined as "having an awareness and understanding of one's own learning and thought processes" (Hill 82). Tutors again revised a transcript to incorporate transfer talk focused on metacognition. Tutors set goals to incorporate that language into their tutorials.

Prior to our final training meeting, tutors completed a brief survey about their impressions of the training's effect. The final training meaning was structured around questions concerning what the tutors found valuable with the curriculum, how the curriculum affected their tutoring strategies, and how their understanding of transfer and of tutoring changed as a result of the curriculum.

**Methods**

The purpose of this research is to implement and assess the impact of a transfer-focused tutor training curriculum on the effectiveness of tutoring sessions in the writing center, as measured by writing tutors' incorporation of transfer talk in their tutoring sessions and by tutors' discussion of transfer's usefulness during training meetings. Data collection included audio recordings of training meetings and tutorials, surveys distributed to tutors, and an interview with a tutor. This data was collected over the course of the semester and analyzed qualitatively to assess the impact of the training curriculum on tutors' understanding, value, and application of transfer. Collecting data from multiple sources aided in triangulating data analysis, which was heavily informed by Hill's coding scheme for identifying evidence of explicit and implicit transfer talk in writing consultations (see Appendix A). The research was IRB approved, and all participants gave informed consent.

*Participants and Setting*

Five undergraduate writing tutors from the RWC participated in this study. These tutors were considered experienced, meaning they had at least two semesters of writing center tutoring experience. Their initial and ongoing training as well as the culture of the RWC acculturated them to writing center values of meeting student needs and creating safe spaces for students to learn and develop as writers. The transfer training curriculum was an option for writing center tutors to participate in as part of ongoing training. At the beginning of the semester, all writing center tutors were emailed a list of ongoing training options by the associate coordinator of the writing center, with transfer-focused training being one of those options. The tutors responded by indicating their interest level. Six of the forty tutors on staff selected the training as their first or second preference and were invited to participate; this number matched the number tutors who participated in Hill's study; midway through the semester, one tutor withdrew due to a scheduling conflict with the transfer-focused training meetings. The five remaining tutors participated in the duration of the study. Twenty-one undergraduate students also participated by receiving writing help in the RWC from one of these five writing tutors, who invited them to participate and had them sign a consent form.

The RWC is a campus-wide supplemental instruction program that employs approximately 50 undergraduate students as writing tutors and serves approximately 15,000 students per academic year. BYU is a private religious institution operated by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints with an undergraduate population of approximately 30,000 undergraduate students and slightly less than 3,000 graduate students. According to the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education, BYU is a doctoral university with high research activity.

*Data Collection*

Data collection consisted of audio recordings of six 50-minute, biweekly training sessions; 21 writing center tutorials, ranging from 15 to 60 minutes; and one 30-minute, discourse-based interview with one writing tutor. A discourse-based approach allowed me to present excerpts from the tutor's audio-recorded tutorials and ask questions about the tutor's choices and intentions regarding transfer talk in those excerpts (Prior; Roozen). All tutors completed a 12-question, end-of-semester survey, which consisted of demographic, Likert-scale, and open-ended questions to measure the tutors' perceptions of the impact of the training curriculum on their tutoring strategies.

To answer my research question, I chose to analyze the training meeting recordings and tutor transcripts from one tutor whom I later interviewed, as this would help me address the impact of transfer-focused tutor training on tutors' perceptions and strategies. I transcribed two training meetings and all six of Nicole's (a pseudonym) tutoring sessions and her interview. Nicole was chosen because she had attended all training meetings and completed all recordings. While the other tutors participated in the training meetings, they were only able to record two to four tutorials. One other tutor recorded five tutorials, but she had received prior tutor training outside of the RWC. My purpose was to explore and illustrate the impact of the training on one of the tutors in order to develop a tentative hypothesis for how the curriculum may have affected the other tutors.

*Analysis*

I collaborated with the writing center director on preliminary coding of Nicole's first two transcripts for evidence of explicit and implicit transfer talk based on Hill's coding scheme. Because we found little to no evidence of transfer talk in these first two transcripts, we shifted

our coding to focus on language that reflected tutors' understanding of transfer as reflected in the training meetings, such as specific questions that might lead to transfer talk. We employed a holistic coding method because it allowed us to see basic themes related to transfer across units of data and allowed us to work with large amounts of data in a short period of time (Saldaña 142). This method provided a holistic view of the data which will prepare us to later refine our data analysis with more specific coding methods. After we collaboratively and preliminarily coded Nicole's final transcript, which indicated possible evidence of implicit transfer talk, I conducted a discourse-based interview with Nicole to help us see how her understanding of transfer was affecting what she was doing.

During this process, I met regularly with the writing center director to discuss the topics and themes that emerged in each training meeting. I kept a record of our conversations through analytic memos, which provided a record of how tutors were responding to the curriculum over time. To corroborate that record, I reviewed the recordings of the training meetings and transcribed the first and last training meetings to gain an accurate representation of the tutors' responses to and reported application of transfer talk throughout the training. This latter approach allowed me to triangulate my analysis of the transcripts with tutors' reports (Prior).

**Results**

The results are presented in two main categories: first, an overview of tutors' response to the training based on a synthesis of their comments in the training meetings; second, a detailed focus on one tutor's application of transfer talk in tutoring sessions based on discourse-based interview responses. In both cases, I will present the results chronologically in order to show how tutors' understanding of transfer, perceived value of transfer talk, and application of transfer talk changed over time in response to the curriculum.

*Transfer Training Overview: Tutors' Emerging Understanding and Revised Applications of Transfer*

In this section, I present an overview of the tutors' changes in understanding transfer and value of transfer talk as it unfolded over the course of the curriculum. In summary form, the results develop as follows: Transfer was initially a difficult concept for tutors to grasp, but they eventually articulated a concrete definition that they felt clearly related to tutoring. Likewise, tutors were somewhat skeptical of the usefulness of transfer talk, though again, over the course of their biweekly meetings and discussions, they articulated examples of transfer talk that they felt improved their tutoring and met student needs, based on their tutoring experiences. As an example of tutors' actual integration of transfer talk, we will look at Nicole's tutorials in the next section. Ultimately, tutors found that transfer was beneficial because it helped them be more mindful about their tutoring strategies.

Tutors' Initial Understanding of Transfer

During the first training meeting, transfer seemed to be an abstract concept for the tutors to define, although they were able to describe experiences where they felt they had transferred their own learning. At one point, a tutor asked if transfer and application were synonymous. Another tutor answered by pointing to Haskell's phrase of "carrying over previous learning to new situations," which the tutors collectively agreed that it meant apply. This definition is somewhat basic compared to the tutors' descriptions of their own transfer experiences. One tutor, for example, shared her experience of learning that public speaking is like writing an essay and then reading it out loud, which indicates more thoughtful adaptation than application. As far as transfer's relationship to their tutoring, they saw transfer as "kind of essential" to their tutoring

strategies because "it's our goal, probably." By the end of the meeting, the tutors settled on their definition for transfer as "carry over" and "application."

When invited to review their definition of transfer during the second meeting, tutors again reverted to application as the best, most tangible definition, especially in a writing center setting. Tutors reflected on their previous training and then discussed what tutoring strategies encourage students to transfer their knowledge. Strategies noted by the tutors included using metacommentary while reading the student's paper, reading aloud, creating an awareness of the rhetorical situation, and praising students for effective application of writing principles. When talking about these principles, tutors noted that these were things that students could do on their own, but tutors did not mention discussing with the student how they might apply these skills in future situations, indicating that simply using these strategies would be sufficient to encourage students to transfer their knowledge.

When introduced to the concept of transfer talk, both explicit and implicit, and asked how they might apply this concept, tutors emphasized the importance of letting the situation determine whether they would engage the student in transfer talk. In this second meeting, tutors were tasked with rewriting a sample tutorial script to include explicit transfer talk. While looking at the examples, one tutor described the difference between implicit and explicit as "explicit [means] you get an idea of what they know, and you can fill in the holes, whereas implicit you don't know what they know and don't, so [explicit transfer talk] helps you be more aware, and [the student], too." Even though tutors were able to accurately define explicit transfer talk, they still did not feel it was appropriate for every tutorial. The tutors suggested that they would use the condition of the student's writing as a gauge for whether transfer talk was appropriate, and

they would base their conversation of writing principles on the student's paper rather than asking about the student's abstract knowledge of writing terms.

Additionally, tutors felt that the student's paper was a more effective and appropriate way to assess the student's prior knowledge, rather than asking the student directly, as illustrated by Hill's sample questions for engaging in explicit transfer talk (see Appendix A). For example, rather than ask a student to talk about if they understand the purpose of transitions, they might ask a student about how they feel their own transitions are or aren't effective. This process of asking for examples rather than definitions was important to the tutors because they felt examples helped them maintain the peer-to-peer relationship, whereas asking students directly felt condescending. Tutors also felt definitional questions were less effective because definitions can be more abstract and less applicable to the task at hand; potentially, a student can define a term but not understand how well they are implementing it into their own writing. While the tutors identified benefits of explicit transfer talk when looking at the decontextualized examples in training meetings, they tended to privilege implicit talk that invited students to consider recent, class-based experiences or examples from their current paper to demonstrate their knowledge rather than discuss an abstract writing principle, though whether they would engage in transfer talk at all was still dependent on the situation and student needs.

Tutors' Revision and Application of Transfer Talk

In our third meeting, I invited the tutors to focus on Cardinal's definition of transfer talk that specifies "helping writers adapt learning" (3). Tutors responded by revising their definition of transfer to focus on *adapt* rather than *apply*, which allowed them to consider future-oriented knowledge in addition to applying prior knowledge to current tasks. One tutor said, "I like the word *adapt* because it implies growth, I think. You can apply the basic principles of like the five

paragraph to a longer essay, but to make it effective you need to adapt that strategy so that it fits within the requirements of newer essay." Considering adaptation within the context of transfer helped the tutors to consider the implications of transfer for helping students better utilize their knowledge instead of misapply it. This focus on adaptation also seemed to help tutors have a firmer understanding of what transfer looks like; students must effectively incorporate their prior knowledge so that it appropriately meets the expectations of their new writing task and consider how their knowledge might apply to future tasks.

When tutors reflected on their use of transfer talk in tutorials, their responses highlighted the way that consciously thinking about transfer guided them to be more mindful about their tutoring strategies. One tutor said, "I had [transfer] on my mind, and so sometimes I'd think, 'Oh, is what I'm doing right now going to help them retain what I'm saying?' I caught myself doing more modelling and pointing out like patterns like as a conscious thing rather than just like, 'Oh, this a good strategy to use.' It's like, 'This will help them be able to replicate it.'" Other tutors shared similar experiences and noted that students had more positive dispositions towards learning. Though the tutors' responses are self-reported, it is clear that thinking about transfer provided the tutors with a way to be more thoughtful about their tutoring strategies and help students to be more engaged in that process.

Although tutors expressed enthusiasm about how transfer affected their tutorials, they seemed unable to incorporate transfer talk into sample tutorial scripts. For example, one tutor explained that by inviting the student to consider adopting the rhetorical strategies of the author who they were analyzing in their paper, the student would then think about this experience in future papers and be able to apply it again. However, the hypothetical conversation she provided only focused on the student's current paper. Other tutors provided similar examples of how

simply talking about a writing principle would hopefully store that principle in the student's memory so that they would recall that principle for future use. They did not describe using explicit language to help students make those connections. This is a continued manifestation of their initial, limited perspective on how to use their tutoring strategies to encourage transfer.

When reflecting during our next meeting, tutors demonstrated continued resistance to the examples of explicit transfer talk that they had previously encountered. They emphasized the importance of using transfer talk in a way that was more specific and less leading in order to preserve their peer relationship with the student. One way to go about this was to ask prior knowledge questions that focused on the student's current class. This way, the student would have a specific area of prior knowledge to draw on rather than having to consider too many prior learning experiences. The tutors also indicated that it was better to ask about students' experience rather than asking them generally what they know about a writing principle. One tutor commented on how broader questions might frustrate students. Speaking from a student perspective, the tutor said the student might think, "You're obviously seeing something wrong with what I'm doing; just tell me what I'm doing wrong so we can talk about that rather than, like, wasting time with me telling you about [what I know]." This comment indicates that students may be displeased when they can't see the purpose behind the discussion. When considering whether it might be helpful for tutors to preface the questions they're asking by explaining why they're asking them, tutors felt that that, too, would create a rift between student and tutor by making the tutor seem more like a teacher rather than a peer. Tutors' overall suggestion was to ask more narrow and specific questions so that students don't feel that they are being interrogated.

Tutors then created their own examples of effective transfer talk, which indicated that tutors were beginning to see beyond the immediate task of the student's paper. Asking questions like "What have you learned in class about writing this kind of paper?" or "How is this assignment similar to or different from other kinds of writing you've done?" or simply stating, "My goal is to help you feel more comfortable and confident with writing new types of assignments" demonstrated that the tutors were considering more tangible ways to invite students to draw on prior knowledge and prepare to adapt that knowledge to new situations. However, tutors still struggled to create an explicit transfer talk discussion as a result of those questions; they still manifested the same thinking that simply talking about a principle will encourage transfer. As stated by one tutor, "If you say something about the genre or about this kind of writing then they'll tuck it away in the writing for psychology or literature review file [for example] in their brain, right, so they can access that later." The tutor felt that discussing the genre generally would be sufficient for priming the student to think about how they might write in that genre for their paper and possibly future papers. Later, another tutor suggested that she could simply tell the student, "Hey this is relevant in this larger situation" without elaborating on the discussion that might lead to. Even though transfer-focused discussions were still vague, the tutors recognized the effectiveness of reviewing what was learned in the tutorial and explaining how the student can apply those principles to other papers. While tutors were thinking about ways that the current tutorial could transfer to future situations, they seemed to feel that mentioning a principle would be enough to help students make connections rather inviting students to participate in a transfer discussion.

In our fifth meeting, tutors shared experiences that reinforced the idea that the situation and the student affect their implementation of transfer talk rather than automatically using

transfer talk in every tutorial. While reflecting on the previous weeks' implementation of transfer talk, tutors discussed tutorials where they either did or did not engage the student in transfer talk. With some tutorials, tutors reported being able to draw on the students' prior knowledge to engage them in discussions about genre. In other tutorials, the tutors felt that transfer talk either didn't align well with the students' current needs or students didn't have prior knowledge that could help them understand the current genre they were working in. Tutors, then, were allowing their understanding of transfer talk and their perceptions of students' needs and dispositions to inform their tutoring strategies. This was evident as tutors discussed transfer questions that could help students engage in metacognition. While tutors generated effective questions, they also indicated that there is a balance with asking questions, meaning that asking too many questions at once might cause the student to feel like their answers weren't what they tutor wanted to hear and that something is wrong with their writing. However, one tutor mentioned that the way tutors ask questions can affect whether the student feels like the tutor is fishing or is genuinely interested. She referred to previously learned tutoring strategies and suggested that tutors can pair questions with motivation or an explanation of why they're asking or even use a phrase like, "just out of curiosity." Then questions become less interrogative and more conversational. Along with using previously learned tutoring strategies to inform their use of transfer, the tutors also felt that transfer helped them be more cognizant of the strategies they use during tutorials, which also enabled them to better focus on the student as a writer instead of only the student's paper, a point that they elaborate on at the end of the training curriculum.

Tutors' Emerging Enthusiasm for Transfer

During our final meeting, tutors described transfer more confidently and in more concrete language than they had previously. They first reverted to Haskell's definition and then put it into

their own words by saying, "It's more about take what they know, add to it, and then send them on their way using it. It's more all-encompassing than just the moments that you're with them . . . it's helping them grow what they have." This description is much fuller than the tutors' initial definitions of "application" and "carry over." When describing what transfer talk might then look like in a tutorial, tutors again emphasized that it depends on the tutorial. One tutorial described his use of transfer talk like this:

> I think it varies. Like there are some tutorials where I'll have it like very much in the front of my head: transfer talk. . . . I'll be finding ways to incorporate it . . . naturally in what's going on, maybe not as, you know, as aggressively as the explicit transfer talk from the [examples] we looked at. In other ones it will be something that I have to kind of remind myself to pull out. So those ones will be a little bit more kind of blatant as in so, you know, we're talking about one thing, then it's, 'So what do you know about this?'

This tutor acknowledges that his use of transfer talk still does not align with the explicit examples that the tutors were introduced to. However, he does feel that consciously thinking about transfer helps him adapt transfer more naturally to the specific setting and student. In addition to talking more confidently and concretely, tutors also saw the importance of both drawing on prior knowledge and applying it to the current situation and adapting current knowledge to future situations, but they found it more natural to discuss future application than prior knowledge. Prior knowledge questions were harder because the tutors weren't used to asking those kinds of questions, and those questions felt like they could be especially broad and/or condescending because the student could draw on any previous knowledge but possibly feel like they weren't giving the answer the tutor was "fishing" for. However, tutors also acknowledged that they "really can't make any assumptions about prior knowledge." Future

application was easier because the tutors know that the student will have more papers to write, and in some cases, they know what papers the student will be writing in their particular class. As one tutor put it, "We know more what their writing future looks like than we do about their writing past, so it's easier for us to comment on."

Tutors' perceptions of student response to their transfer tutorials were positive. Tutors felt that students understood that transfer is a natural step in the learning process, and transfer talk helped to make future application more practical. Sometimes students were predisposed to engage in that learning process, but other times, as noted by one tutor, "students need us to show them that 'Hey, what you're learning right now can help in the future.'" While tutors are aware that some students are motivated to learn while some are not, the tutors noted that when they were focused on transfer, they were better able to help all students focus more on the learning experience instead of only their paper.

Overall, the tutors felt positively about the transfer training and saw transfer as an effective way to focus their tutoring strategies. One tutor said the following when describing how transfer has impacted her tutoring:

The implications were similar to stuff to things that I learned before, but like the new way of like framing it or thinking about it kind of helped me challenge my own assumptions and my own like go-to strategies that I use when I'm tutoring and assess whether or not they were helpful or whether or not like I should change and do something different. Cause I've been like, I've been working at this job for a while and so I think it helped me get a little bit like unstuck from my normal tutoring pattern and like continue like learning and growing as a tutor just cause I was like challenging those assumptions.

Transfer, then, seemed to be a way to remind tutors to encourage student learning in addition to helping students with their papers. Rather than detracting from prior training, tutors saw transfer as a tool to utilize their training and help students understand what they had learned and then hopefully carry that knowledge with them to future tasks.

*A Closer Look: One Tutor's Experience*

Although the previously reported findings from the training meetings provide the tutors' thoughts on how they applied transfer to their tutorials, that data was only self-reported. Looking at one tutor's tutorials will provide a more in depth look at actual application of transfer talk, which will also address the latter part of the research question. In this section, I present findings from one tutor's tutorial transcripts and her discourse-based interview responses to her tutorials. These findings are also presented chronologically so that the changes she made in her tutoring strategies throughout the semester can be aligned with the changes of the tutors' responses to the training. This tutor, Nicole (pseudonym), received all six trainings and recorded five tutorials throughout the semester. Nicole's first few tutorials did not indicate any change in regards to transfer talk. Later tutorials, particularly her final tutorial, contain transfer talk that mirrors the kind of language discussed in the training meetings. Supplementing transcript analysis with Nicole's explanation of her thinking and tutoring process reveals evidence of transfer informing her tutorials, thus indicating how transfer training affected her tutoring strategies.

In one of Nicole's initial tutorials, she worked with a student mainly on sentence level issues. Understandably, as this was an early tutorial, there is no clear evidence of transfer talk. In her interview, Nicole and I reviewed this a potential moment of transfer talk from that tutorial:

Student: Can I say "is when"? Does that sound better? "Tartuffe gets arrested."

Nicole: Oh yeah. That's good. Yeah. Now that makes sense. And then maybe just one more sentence at the end that ties all of those examples back together. Like how did you introduce this one? Okay. Why it's not propaganda. So maybe just saying like it's now you can see that it's obvious that there's more to Moliere's like point of view than just the church or something like that. I don't really know what I'm talking about, but you know what you're talking about.

Student: K, I'll just like do like dot-dot-dot-dot.

Nicole: Yeah.

Student: Insert.

Nicole: And you can insert something. End sentence. Good. As long as you don't forget.

Student: I won't, I won't.

At this point, Nicole refers back to a previous point in the paper to revise a later part. After reviewing this moment of the tutorial, Nicole said that were she to go back and incorporate transfer talk, she would engage the student in a discussion about transitions. The tutor describes that discussion as looking like this: "If we were like farther in the essay, I'd probably go back to one of the places where her transitions worked and . . . I'd probably point out, 'You did this one well . . . Why did you make these choices here?' Or, 'Why were these easier to transition?' And then maybe go back to the example and then see if returning to the one that she did correctly would help." The tutor's description of what she would do differently reflects the way that the tutors had revised transfer talk to focus more on examples rather than asking students to explain their knowledge of writing principles for the purpose of maintaining a peer-to-peer relationship. Instead of Nicole saying, "Tell me about what you know about transitions," an example of explicit transfer talk, she instead would choose to ask the student to consider an earlier example

from her paper in order to engage the student in her prior knowledge. The tutor's ability to revise this moment to incorporate transfer talk confirms the tutors' perceptions that the curriculum was effective.

In Nicole's next two tutorials, there was no indication of transfer talk, even though the tutors had been practicing implementing transfer talk into sample tutorials. However, in both tutorials the tutor or student noted places in the paper for the student to refer back to and revise after leaving the writing center. Nicole and I reviewed the following moment together:

Nicole: Hmm. I'm wondering what a clearer way to do that would be.

Student: Yeah maybe I could say something like...

Nicole: You could even refer to it as "this development."

Student: Oh that's true.

Nicole: Or something like that.

Student: That's a good idea.

Nicole: I can circle it, and then you can come back to it.

Student: Okay. I like that.

When Nicole discussed this moment of marking the paper, she saw this as potentially "creating a transfer moment for later" by "encouraging [him] to remember what we talked about." The tutor hopes that this will cause the student to then "think back on what they knew then and then what they know now. And hopefully those are different." Although the tutor doesn't explicitly discuss with the student what he will do when revising, she does make it clear that she expects the student to revise a specific part of his paper, which is more explicit than the tutors' previously mentioned tactic of mentioning a topic with the hope that a student will remember and apply it. Even though this does not look like explicit transfer talk, the tutor acknowledged that transfer is

informing her practice of helping the student to remember what was talked about in the tutorial and then apply the information in the future.

During the tutor's final recording, Nicole used language that reflected the training meetings discussions about what transfer talk might look like. Nicole and I reviewed the following excerpt from that tutorial:

Nicole: Cool. You're using pretty, um, advanced vocabulary.

Student: Oh yeah?

Nicole: So I think you should feel good about that. When you got docked last time, was there anything specifically that they kept docking?

Student: No.

Nicole: Okay. Just...

Student: I think the one thing I struggle with is articles. Sometimes I just forget about it.

Nicole: Well, yeah. 'Cause Korean doesn't have them, right?

Student: No.

Nicole: Yeah. It's like, how are you supposed to know? That's really hard. Yeah. I noticed a couple of times where that was the case.

Student: Oh yeah?

Nicole: But not a ridiculous amount, so we can go through and look at that.

When reflecting on this moment in the tutorial, Nicole said,

I think transfer definitely informed that one 'cause I already could see the problem that she was misusing 'the,' or not using it, but I wanted to see if she was aware of it. And so then when she confirmed that, then I was able to . . . tie two instances to the issue rather

than just, 'Oh, you need to fix this.' But like, 'someone else pointed it out first, so

remember that happened. Now we're going to tackle it again here.'

The tutor acknowledges that she was consciously intending to help the student make connections

to prior experiences so that she could then build on that experience with the student. While the

tutor does not engage the student in a lengthy discussion about articles, the tutor does cue the

student to think back on something she may have learned before. Certainly, this moment

resembles more transfer talk than Nicole's previous tutorials, although it still may not be defined

as explicit transfer talk because she does not engage the student in a discussion. However,

transfer is affecting Nicole's decisions, and she accomplished what she wanted to in this

moment.

Towards the end of the tutorial, Nicole again uses language described by the tutors as

transfer talk.

Student: It really bothers me every time I write. I'm not sure about like "a" and "the."

Nicole: Yeah, it'd be really hard. I think the more that you write, it will become more

natural to you.

Student: Yeah, mhmm.

Nicole: But, um, hopefully as you go forward with future assignments, you can kind of

remember when you talk about it with native speakers.

Student: Yeah.

Nicole: "How did she say it? Oh yeah, she said it this way so I can hear that's right."

Student: Mhmm. Yeah, mhmm.

Nicole: It's hard though, I understand.

When reflecting on this moment, Nicole stated that she was thinking about transfer because she mentioned the future. Her intention was to give the student something to take with her. Were she to go back to this moment, the tutor said that she would have liked to ask the student more about her previous learning about articles so that she could better gauge where the student was at. This moment at the end of the tutorial again mirrors the tutors' thoughts on reviewing what was learned in the tutorial and helping the student see how they can apply it to the future, as Nicole intentionally utilized a transfer principle in her tutoring so that the student can leave the tutorial with a tool to help her with her article usage.

**Discussion**

The tutors who participated in this expanded transfer-focused training curriculum reported more effective application of their tutoring strategies based on their understanding of transfer. I attribute this outcome to three factors of the curriculum's design: First, its drawing on tutors' prior tutoring knowledge and experience, which helped avoid the challenge Cardinal faced with tutors not understanding the relationship between transfer and tutoring strategies. Second, the expanded length of the curriculum, both in terms of the number of sessions offered (6) and the duration (15 weeks), gave tutors a consistent, structured experience in which they regularly learned a concept together, applied it in their individual tutoring, and returned to collectively discuss and reflect on the effectiveness of the given concept to facilitate transfer. Third, the design of the curriculum invited tutors to be actively involved in assessing the value of transfer talk and in generating feasible applications of transfer in their tutoring sessions.

The results of this study indicate that involving tutors in transfer research is vital to understanding what transfer in the writing center looks like. Because transfer talk was prominent in transfer training research, it became a main focus of my own curriculum. Tutor involvement

has helped me see the limitations of using transfer talk as the only way to assess whether tutors are incorporating transfer into their tutorials. The tutors were skeptical of using explicit transfer talk in their tutorials because they felt that it disrupted their peer relationship with students; however, tutors still perceived benefits in their tutoring as they became more conscious of using transfer. They revised transfer talk to allow for prior knowledge to be assessed not only through discussion with the student but also through students' papers and recent class experiences, which tutors felt would better maintain their peer status. When looking at Nicole's tutoring transcripts for actual use of transfer talk, there was no evidence of explicit transfer talk, as defined by Hill. However, Nicole highlighted moments where transfer was playing a conscious role in her tutoring decisions, which were missed when I initially coded only for explicit or implicit transfer talk. Yet her tutorial does not fall into Hill's definition of implicit transfer talk because her strategies were intentional, not accidental. Rather, her use of transfer aligned with the tutors' discussions about the importance of maintaining a peer relationship and choosing tutoring strategies based on the situation and student needs. Although transfer talk seemed like it would help me easily identify transfer, it did not account for tutors' conscious implementation of other strategies meant to help students transfer.

WCPs and tutors both know that writing centers aim to help students become better writers. Tutors, however, recognize that that goal is not always the student's goal or even need when they enter the writing center. Yet the tutors in this study, while their actual use of explicit transfer talk has yet to be fully analyzed, discussed how thinking about transfer while they were tutoring not only helped them to focus their tutoring strategies more effectively, but also increase students' receptiveness to learning along with addressing their immediate paper needs. These discussions indicate that transfer talk is not the only way to utilize transfer when it comes to

meeting student needs and helping them become better writers, indicating a need for a broader understanding of transfer in the writing center.

Rather than focusing on whether tutors are using implicit or explicit transfer talk, transfer training would benefit from focusing on transfer more broadly. For instance, explaining Haskell's six levels of transfer, which range from nonspecific transfer to displacement or creative transfer (29), would help tutors understand the different types of transfer that can occur and give them a broader sense of what transfer could look like in a tutoring session. Tutors can then use their judgment of student engagement and ability to help students progress at the level appropriate to them. For example, tutors' description of effective transfer talk aligned with Haskell's second level, "application transfer," which is "applying what one has learned to a specific situation," and Haskell's third level, "context transfer," or "applying what one has learned in a slightly different situation" (29). Rather than being constrained by one method of incorporating transfer, having exposure to different levels of transfer will help tutors be more mindful about their tutoring practices and more responsive to specific tutoring sessions without the pressure of using explicit transfer talk, thus helping them preserve the peer relationship and focus on student needs.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

This study indicates that extensive training and tutor perspectives can help WCPs gain a broader understanding of what transfer looks like in a writing center context. Based on my experience, I suggest focusing transfer training on Haskell's (2001) levels of transfer, inviting tutors to engage more in metacognition, and investigating student responses to transfer.

By focusing on Haskell's levels, tutors could identify what each level might look like in the writing center and how they might engage a student those levels. In line with Cardinal's

findings about tutors' responsiveness to transfer-focused activities, I suggest inviting tutors to revise or create sample tutorials that encourage engagement in each level of transfer. As tutors consider ways to incorporate transfer, they can draw on their knowledge of effective tutoring strategies and decide how those strategies can help lead students to transfer. Tutors may also discuss how different levels of transfer can be used to engage students with varying dispositions and needs. Focusing on these levels of transfer will help tutors see multiple options for engaging students in transfer instead of only employing transfer talk; their tutoring strategies can be tailored to meet student needs and help them improve their writing abilities. A possible research question focusing on Haskell's levels in tutor training might look like the following: How does an understanding of Haskell's levels of transfer affect tutors' application of previously learned tutoring strategies?

I also suggest helping tutors to be more metacognitive about their tutoring by reviewing and revising their own tutorials, as Nicole did in her interview. This would require tutors to have access to their tutorials, whether through a recording or transcript, so that they could accurately review the tutorial before revising. This review and revision process will help WCPs better understand tutors' perceptions of effective transfer. As in Nicole's case, sometimes transfer was occurring in ways not evident in the tutorial. If WCPs can talk with tutors to discover where transfer is at work besides in transfer talk, our understanding of transfer in the writing center can be broadened and developed into a more complete understanding. By incorporating these aspects of reflection into tutor training, WCPs might ask, What motivates tutors to change their use of transfer in tutorials after reviewing and revising their previous tutorials?

Finally, as has been noted previously (Hill), students' perspectives on whether the writing center helps them to transfer their learning is yet to be understood. Future research with transfer

training curriculums could focus on students' expectations of the writing center, reasons for coming to the writing center, and perceptions of and actual writing abilities before and after visiting the writing center. Researchers might assess students' responses through survey data and through discourse-based interviews with students and their papers that they brought to the writing center, which would likely yield a more fruitful understanding of students' abilities. A possible research question might be, What impact do transfer-focused tutorials have on students' perceived and actual ability to learn writing principles and apply those principles to future writing tasks? These considerations will help WCPs better determine whether our goal of helping students become better writers aligns with student goals and whether transfer is a way for students, tutors, and WCPs to achieve—or modify—those goals.

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Appendix A

The following table is reproduced from Heather Hill's article "Tutoring for Transfer: The Benefits of Teaching Writing Center Tutors about Transfer Theory" published in *Writing Center Journal*, volume 35, number 3, 2016 (see pp. 86–87).

**Table 1: Examples of Transfer Talk**

**Genre**
Definition: Whenever a genre name was mentioned.
Explicit: "Have you ever written a literary analysis before?" followed by a discussion of what the student was taught about the genre conventions of literary analysis.
Implicit: "So, this is the argument essay from Dr. [X's] class?" without further discussion of the genre of argument essays.

**Mechanics**
Definition: Items of grammar, punctuation, spelling, etc.
Explicit: "Tell me what you have been taught about verbs," followed by a discussion of the student's knowledge of verb use.
Implicit: "I see some subject/verb disagreement here," with no explicit discussion of what students know about subject/verb agreement.

**Disciplinary Knowledge**
Definition: When the disciplinarity of writing was discussed or when disciplinary knowledge was discussed in relation to writing.
Explicit: "Tell me what you know about writing for Psychology," followed by a discussion of the disciplinary writing conventions of Psychology.
Implicit: "Well, it's Psychology, so you'll have to use APA," without any explicit discussion of writing for Psychology or the use of APA.

**Writing Concepts**
Definition: Any time writing concepts such as thesis statements, or organization, or evidence, etc. were mentioned.
Explicit: "Tell me what you know about writing a thesis statement," followed by discussions of what the student had previously learned about writing thesis statements.
Implicit: "What kind of evidence are you using?" without any discussion of what the student had been taught about evidence use.

**Points Towards Future Writing**
Definition: Any time the current writing assignment was discussed in relation to possible future writing situations.
Explicit: "Tell me how you might be able to use this same strategy for your next paper," followed by a discussion of how the current writing project might positively affect future writing projects.
Implicit: "Well, they will want it that way in Lit Analysis as well," without explicitly talking about how the writing strategies would need to be employed in the Lit Analysis class.

**Previous Writing Experiences**
Definition: Whenever past writing situations were mentioned, more generally.
Explicit: "Tell me how you were taught to write papers in high school," followed by explicit discussions of what the student had been taught in high school about academic writing (in general).
Implicit: "This would probably be similar to how you wrote papers in composition," but without explicit discussion of how the student might be able to use what she learned in composition.

**Process**
Definition: When the process of creating a paper was mentioned (i.e., invention, drafting, revising, etc.).
Explicit: "What strategies have you used in the past to help you come up with paper topics?" followed by a discussion of what the students had been taught about brainstorming.
Implicit: "You might want to do an outline to help you organize more effectively," without any discussion of what an outline is or whether the student had ever been taught to use outlines.

**Other**
Definition: Transfer talk that didn't seem to fit within any defined category. For example, analogies where tutors would compare the writing to other non-writing situations students may be familiar with, or discussions of vocabulary words, or other literacy issues like close reading, etc.
Explicit: "And what does that mean: 'intertextuality'?" followed by a discussion of what the students had been taught about using intertextuality in her paper.
Implicit: "You'll really have to read critically," without further discussion of what critical reading is, etc.