



Recall, Recognise, Re-Invent: The Value of Facilitating Writing Transfer in the Writing Centre Setting

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Abstract

The Writing Centre in Maynooth University, Ireland, is proud of its learner-centred approach (Biggs 1999, Lea *et al.* 2003). In the Centre we begin where students are, by asking them about their writing concerns. We also appreciate the need to recognise and build on their approaches to writing, their effective writing processes and their writing achievements. We see this under the broader heading of 'writing transfer'. In this article, we outline our strategies to promote transfer and thinking about transfer with students before and after one-to-one appointments. In a small-scale research project we conducted, our research questions accentuated two potential principles of transfer, as noted in the *Elon Statement on Writing Transfer*, that '[s]uccessful writing transfer occurs when a writer can transform rhetorical knowledge and rhetorical awareness into performance ... [when they] draw on previous knowledge and strategies ... [and] ... transform or repurpose that prior knowledge, if only slightly', and that University programs can 'teach for transfer' (Perkins and Salomon 1988) through the use of enabling practices (*Elon* 2013: 4). Our work suggests that highlighting transfer in the writing centre context reinforces our learner-centred approach while also acknowledging the literacy archives with which our students present.

Introduction

The Writing Centre in Maynooth University adopts a learner-centred approach (Biggs 1999, Lea *et al.* 2003). As such, one-to-one sessions begin where students are situated in their learning. We also appreciate the need to recognise and build on our students' approaches to writing, their effective writing processes and their writing achievements. We see this under the broader heading of 'writing transfer'. Writing transfer is understood as the taking of knowledge or skills learned in one context and applying that knowledge or those skills to another context. Transfer, for many scholars, 'accurately describes the phenomenon of using prior knowledge in a routinized way and functions as an umbrella term, connecting Writing Studies research to other multi-disciplinary inquiries about transfer of learning' (*Elon* 2013: 1). In practical terms, in relation to writing, this could be writing for a new audience, with a different purpose and in another genre and/or context. We note also at the outset that transfer is a contested term. Although there are other terms in use, such as integration, transitions and so on, transfer is the term that will be used throughout this piece largely because it is with the emerging literature of writing transfer that we connected in our research.

In the course of our work with students in the writing centre, we became aware that there was a gap with regard to the realisation by students that writing is potentially a transferable skill. As a result, we conducted a small voluntary survey with students attending the writing centre to assess how best to promote transfer in this setting. Our interest in researching transfer in the writing centre was influenced by attendance, by one of the authors, at the Elon University Research Seminar (ERS) on 'Critical Transitions: Writing and the Question of Transfer'. Part of the ERS, which was held over three summers from 2011 – 2013, 'facilitated international, multi-institutional research about writing transfer and fostered discussions about recognizing, identifying enabling practices for, and developing working principles about writing transfer' (Elon 2013: 1). One of the outcomes of the ERS was the *Elon Statement on Writing Transfer*, which notes eight working principles around writing transfer. Our research questions accentuated one of these principles and associated enabling practices: that 'Successful writing transfer occurs when a writer can transform rhetorical knowledge and rhetorical awareness into performance ... [when they] draw on previous knowledge and strategies ... [and] ... transform or repurpose that prior knowledge, if only slightly', and that University programs can 'teach for transfer' (Perkins and Salomon 1988) through the use of enabling practices (Elon 2013: 4). Our day-to-day tutoring work suggests that highlighting transfer in the writing centre context reinforces our learner-centred approach while also acknowledging the literacy archives with which our students present. In this article, we outline our strategies to promote transfer and thinking about transfer with students before and after one-to-one appointments. We also position our work in relation to the literature on writing transfer, outline the student profile at Maynooth University, which is an increasingly diverse cohort, and discuss the ethos of the writing centre as learning centre.

Literature Review

In reviewing the literature that informed this research we identified three key areas that we believed merited consideration and which we hoped would help us to understand the extent to which we might facilitate transfer in the writing centre and, equally, why that might be a reasonable goal. To this end, our literature review addresses three areas, which impact directly on our work in the centre, and on our understanding of transfer. These are: the profile and needs of our students, with particular focus on access and the widening participation agenda; the writing centre as a learning centre; and, the literature on writing transfer.

Student Profile and Needs

Worldwide there is a move to the massification of higher education and Ireland is no exception. The clear policy with regards widening access to higher education in Ireland is stated in the *National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030* (2011) – a publication of the Department of Education and Skills (DES) known as the Hunt Report. This report draws on Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) research and notes that 'Higher education has been a key component in broader national development strategies since the late 1950s' (DES 2011: 31). Furthermore, 'From a low base and a late start, the rate of expansion of higher education opportunities in Ireland has consistently been among the highest of all OECD countries in recent decades' (DES 2011: 31). As recognized in the Hunt Report, this growth was from strikingly low figures where concerns around the participation numbers and lack of equality in terms of access to, and participation in, higher education in the past in Ireland were not unfounded. Lack of participation was stark where, in '1960, 5 per cent of 18 year olds went on to higher education' (DES 2011: 31). The government's access and participation policy efforts over the past 30 years have had success in Ireland: 'Participation in higher education in Ireland grew rapidly over the 1980s and 1990s ... [and] ... Growth in participation in tertiary education was evident across all social classes over the period 1982 to 1997' (Smyth and Hannan 2007: 181). The growth purely in percentage terms has been significant: whereby in 1980, 20% of school leavers went to college, 'today the proportion is 65 per cent' (DES 2011: 31). In terms of numbers, in 1980 there were just under '15,000 new entrants to full-time undergraduate higher

education; by 2009 this had almost tripled, to 42,500' (DES 2011: 31). Ireland now ranks between 9th and 12th in OECD terms with reference to the higher educational attainment levels of its adult population with one third of adults qualified to higher education level; in addition, Ireland is '5th highest of all OECD countries in terms of the higher educational attainment levels of young adults aged 25 to 34 in 2007' (DES 2011: 31).

Aside from the historically low volume of students attending third level education, those students who did attend came from very similar privileged social groups. Patrick Clancy's pioneering work in this area in Ireland, through a series of reports on participation in higher education, provided the evidence of a situation which was anecdotally widely known, which is that students from lower-socio economic backgrounds and other non-traditional groups were less likely to go to college (Clancy 1982, 1988, 1995, 2001). Clancy's work undoubtedly influenced the policy development on this issue where there has been a gradual progression from the significant *Report of the Action Group on Access to Third Level Education* (DES 2001), which made a total of 78 recommendations with regard to students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds, mature students and students with a disability. This Department of Education and Science report also highlighted the democratic, social, and economic imperative to widen access to higher education. Subsequently, in August 2003, the National Office for Equity of Access to Higher Education (NAO) was established as a result of the Action Group's recommendations and it endorsed their national targets for entry rates by under-represented groups to higher education in its *National Action Plan 2005-2007: Achieving Equity of Access to Higher Education in Ireland* (2004). Further targets and policy directions were contained in the *National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education 2008-2013* (2008). However, in the Hunt Report it is noted, with reference to this Plan that, 'Despite the expanded opportunities for higher education in recent decades, inequality persists in Irish higher education' (DES 2011: 34). Though much has been achieved, Hunt acknowledges, at the same time, 'significant inequalities persist in the extent to which young people from different socioeconomic backgrounds access and derive benefit from higher education' (DES 2011: 34). Moreover, the disparities that exist represent 'a fundamental challenge for Irish education policy' (DES 2011: 35), which the country continues to address in its higher education policy, access supports and funding allocation. In our institution, Maynooth University, the sentiments of increasing access are echoed and the *NUI Maynooth Strategic Plan 2012-2017* notes that one of the strategic actions, under the 'Education' goal, is to 'sustain our success in widening participation in higher education, strengthening access programmes, responding to new needs, ensuring an inclusive curriculum, and mainstreaming and integrating our supports for student success' (*National University of Ireland Maynooth Strategic Plan 2012-2017*: 19).

Maynooth University is particularly dedicated to serving non-traditional groups and has gained a reputation in this regard where it frequently attracts students from non-traditional cohorts, especially mature students. In the University we acknowledge no absolute definition of non-tradition recognizing the inherent difficulty in characterizing a group by what it is not (Field *et al.* 2010). However, in practical terms, non-traditional entry, which has its own funding mechanisms and associated supports, is defined as mature entry (students over 23 years of age) and 'access' student entry (students who enter college through alternative routes due to designated disadvantaged backgrounds). Though globally many universities regard any student who is the first in his/her family to attend university as being 'non-traditional', in Ireland this is not the case. At Maynooth University, the Maynooth Access Programme (MAP) figures indicate that in 2013-14, 28% of the full-time undergraduate student population were mature students, students with disabilities and school leavers from socio-economic disadvantaged backgrounds. Thus, Maynooth University has the highest rate of mature student entrants in the Irish university sector, with over 14% of entrants being mature students compared to a national average of 10%. In addition, Maynooth University has one of the highest participation rates of students with disabilities in the university sector. That rate has increased from 3.7% in 2008/09 to over 5% in the current academic year. Finally, the number of students entering Maynooth University through the Higher Education Access Route (HEAR programme), which is a college and university admissions scheme for school leavers from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds, has increased by 250% in the last 5 years. Indeed, Section 5.2 of Maynooth University's Performance Compact states that 'almost one quarter (24%) of new entrants to NUI Maynooth,

compared to 19% for the university sector, come from non-manual, semi- and unskilled socio-economic backgrounds' (*Mission-Based Performance Compact* 2014: 16).

In Ireland, in our University as elsewhere, such diversity in the student population has implications not only for entry routes but also for the process of moving from second level to third level; as Hussey and Smith note: 'The greater diversity in today's expanded pool of students means that there will inevitably be greater diversity in the way they make these transitions' where the latter denotes a range of transitions (Hussey and Smith 2010: 155). With regards the widening participation agenda and the increasingly diverse student population, the necessity to be mindful of the heterogeneous nature of student cohorts is brought clearly into focus. Our students do not come to higher education from similar backgrounds or with similar experiences of education; they arrive with an abundantly broad range of interactions with both formal and informal learning. As such, they are transferring learning and writing skills, knowledge and attitudes from different starting points towards various writing processes, purposes and outcomes. In this rich learning environment, where one wishes to support students in building on their prior learning, and in this case also on their prior writing, teachers need to be cognisant of what students bring to the learning situation. Equally, we suggest that students must be aware of what they possess that they can recall, recognize, re-use, re-invent, and re-purpose in their approaches to writing. Thinking in this manner, we see the need to consider the specific learning environment we create in the writing centre and the potential for transfer in that space.

The Writing Centre as Learning Centre

A European writing centre colleague, Katrin Girgensohn, notes, with reference to work by Grimm (1996) and Bushmann (1991), the proliferation of writing centres in colleges and universities in the United States, at more than 90%, alongside the observation that they remain 'so few and are often institutionally invisible' in Europe (Girgensohn 2012: 127). While this is a notable comment in and of itself, what is of concern to us in this article is not the frequency of provision of writing centres but rather their ethos and modus operandi. Stephen North in his seminal essay 'The Idea of a Writing Centre' notes that writing centres are one manifestation, albeit a 'polished and highly visible' one, of a 'dialogue about writing that is central to higher education' (North 1984: 440). As such, the writing centre is a space where speaking and writing are facilitated and supported as central elements to learning in formal education 'because they afford the learner with the ability to reflect, think, compose and rearrange as well as respond spontaneously' (Andrews and Smith 2011: 8). In the writing centre, the deep learning and higher order skills, so desired in our higher education sector, can occur where 'writing is both a process of doing critical thinking and a product communicating the results of critical thinking' (Bean 2001: 3). O'Sullivan and Cleary (2014: 52) reiterate this idea, with reference to the extant literature, noting that 'it is in the process of writing, and in the discovery of that process, that learning happens (Murray 1973; Emig 1977; Berlin 1982)'. They suggest that the 'inductive, non-intrusive model of student peer-tutoring practiced at the Regional Writing Centre at the University of Limerick, based on the model proposed by Ryan and Zimmerelli (2006, 2010), encourages students to engage with their own writing and learning in a non-threatening, approachable and positive manner' (O'Sullivan and Cleary 2014: 52). O'Sullivan and Cleary record that the writing centre in their university appears to be a 'transformative learning environment for the tutors and their peers', and they cite the qualities that this environment contains (O'Sullivan and Cleary 2014: 62). Girgensohn also notes the learning nature of writing centres reflected in the principles which guide her work and that of her tutors including that 'tutoring sessions aim to help students to help themselves,' that tutoring sessions are 'student-centred', that they depend on 'collaborative work' and that the tutoring 'consists of respect and encouragement for the writer's autonomy on the one hand and on collaborative construction of knowledge on the other' (Girgensohn 2012: 131-132).

We add our voice to that of our colleagues here and echo that the writing centre for us is essentially a learning space. We see this in how our writing centre evidences what research into teaching and learning in higher education tells us about sound and effective pedagogy and learning-conducive approaches and environments. In Maynooth University we hope to translate this in the writing centre,

where we aim to be a model of good practice in teaching and learning in higher education. Philosophically and practically we are learner-centred in that the curriculum, the learning outcomes, the pace and the motivation are driven by the learner in a personalized learning experience (Prosser and Trigwell 1999, Lea *et al.* 2003, Cannon and Newble 2000, Knox and Wyper 2008). We employ approaches which promote deep learning through active, engaging methodologies (Biggs 1999; Felder and Brent 1996) in a friendly, collaborative learning environment where student and student, and student and tutor, work together on enquiry, co-enquiry and problem based approaches to learning (Hmelo-Silver 2004, Barrett and Moore 2011). The centre houses writing expertise, helps learners to scaffold their writing in order to change writing processes and products, promotes transfer in writing (Moore 2012) and recognises academic writing as a higher education threshold (Meyer *et al.* 2010, Farrell and Magennis 2013). The centre is accommodating of student learning preferences and open and positive towards the diversity of the student population. It strives to be a place of inspiration, motivation, confidence building and enjoyment. It is a caring, supportive and nurturing learning environment committed to establishing empathy and facilitating the transformative nature of education (Rogers 1961, Blackie *et al.* 2010). In the writing centre, our tutors, some of whom are peer, some expert, work with learners to make and find meaning in order to better understand the world, their place in it and their potential contribution to it (Barnett 2012). Tutors and learners do this together through the process of developing writers and writing while addressing the calls from stakeholders and policy makers for the need to 'stimulate active, not passive learning, and to encourage students to be critical, creative thinkers [...] (Boyer in DES 2011: 52-53).

Our contention is, with reference to these qualities, that the writing centre is essentially a learning space and as such an important site for the facilitation of transfer.

Writing Transfer

Discussions on transfer have encompassed many perspectives. In *The Trouble with Transfer: Lessons from a Study of Community Service Writing*, Nora Bacon posed the following questions:

What exactly is the relationship between the knowledge students develop in school and the knowledge they need in other settings? Do the skills and knowledge we value here have value in the community and the workplace as well? Do students learn them well enough to make use of them? Do they transfer automatically, or with effort, or not at all? (Bacon 1999: 53)

Our conversations around transfer and our reading in the area uncovered for us the difficulties with the term and its essence. Wardle (2012) notes, in her article which introduces a special 'transfer' issue of *Composition Forum*, that 'Researchers inside and outside of composition studies struggle with the problem of transfer of knowledge. She stresses that the 'phenomenon is complicated' with much scope left for further research into the area. The gaps that do exist include challenges around the language that we use to describe 'transfer', including the term itself, which Wardle notes we have 'problematized but continue to use' (2007). Hence, the terminology and the research around transfer is in flux as researchers seek a tighter term and greater explanation of what we mean by transfer. While we acknowledge this fluidity, we believe transfer can happen and we sought to learn more about where it might occur in the writing centre and how it might be facilitated.

Transfer as a concept merits unpacking, and in Rhetoric and Composition, scholars researching transfer, as Moore (2012) observes, borrow from work by Perkins and Salomon (2012), Beach (2003), Tuomi-Grohn and Engestom (2003), Meyer and Land (2006), and Russell (1997) in their consideration of the term. Moore's review of the concept, in her own words, 'attempts to capture representative samples' of published scholarship on writing-related transfer 'with a focus on recent publications' (Moore 2012). Her article presents a clear map of the work done in this area and outlines the larger traditions and conceptual frameworks that underpin writing-related transfer incorporating activity theory, threshold concepts, transitions, and concepts around transfer itself, including high road

and low road, near and far transfer, and transfer-related strategies such as hugging and bridging. We direct any reader interested in a clear, concise overview of transfer to this work.

In our consideration of transfer for this paper, we note one point from Moore's 2012 article before referring to her work in the *Elon Statement on Writing Transfer* (2013) in the methodology section of this paper. Of particular interest is Moore's concern with the difficulty around the notion and the language of transfer. Moore reassures the uninitiated that the title of her article, *Mapping the Questions: The State of Writing-Related Transfer Research*, 'suggests that the field has settled on "transfer" as the preferred term to describe applying knowledge or skills learned in one context to an alternate context' (Moore 2012). However, she goes on to note that rhetoric and composition continues to use 'an array of terms, including transfer, transitions, integration, and generalizations' (Moore 2012). In our research, where we are concerned with transfer in the writing centre, we see transfer essentially as learning, where learning is a change from one state to another in one's knowledge, skills and/or attitudes. This definition echoes Mann's where she differentiates between learning and schooling/study introducing notions of power. Mann notes that the term 'learning' 'captures the implicit, and to a certain extent, natural psychological processes which lead to change in conception and understanding, whereas 'study' refers to the practices - such as reading, note-taking, essay writing and so on, which universities require students to do for the purposes of achieving and assessing this learning' (Mann 2008: 11-12). In her work *Study, Power and the University*, Mann explores the tension 'between learning and studying - how the institutionalization of learning as studying brings power into play in the student experience of, and engagement with learning' (Mann 2008: 11-12). For us, transfer is about learning, which is why it should be learner-centred, in terms of recognizing who the learner is and what they are bringing to the table, as well as in terms of creating a learner-centred environment where transfer can occur, such as in the writing centre.

Rationale

Woods and Skrebels (2011), referring to Lanham (2007) remark on students' creation of an individual 'literacy archive' made up of literacy practices which they bring from, amongst other places, home and work, what Ivancic and Satchwell (2007: 101) call 'other domains of their lives'. They suggest that students encounter 'new forms of writing almost unannounced subject by subject, as a gradually accumulating basket of forms (an academic 'literacy archive') with which they become familiar as if by osmosis' (Woods and Skrebels 2011: 40). We propose that, if students are to be successful writers in this academic world, they need to be able to draw on existing knowledge, skills, processes and attitudes around writing, and to build on them in order to fulfil the higher education writing requirements.

In our work in the writing centre in Maynooth University we were interested in pursuing a piece of research which reflected our ethos as a learning centre and which recognised and built on what students bring to writing in terms of developing approaches, their effective processes and writing achievements. We saw this as research into transfer in the writing centre where our work was underpinned with the *Elon Statement*, particularly:

- That 'Successful writing transfer occurs when a writer can transform rhetorical knowledge and rhetorical awareness into performance. Students facing a new and difficult rhetorical task draw on previous knowledge and strategies, and when they do that, they must transform or repurpose that prior knowledge, if only slightly' (*Elon* 2013: 4).
- That University programmes can teach for transfer [...] [through] enabling practices including [...] 'asking students to engage in activities that foster the development of metacognitive awareness' [and] [...] 'explicitly modeling transfer-focused thinking' (*Elon* 2013: 5).

Methods

We wished to examine how we might promote transfer and thinking about transfer with students before and after one-to-one appointments in the writing centre. To this end, we asked participants two questions about transfer, one at the beginning of the one-to-one appointment in the Writing Centre and one at the end of the appointment. The questions were as follows:

- Question One (Pre-appointment): 'What writing outputs or processes have you encountered before that will help you with this writing assignment?'
- Question Two (Post-appointment): 'What have you learned about writing today that you think you might be able to use in another context?'

The answers to the questions were recorded on a short paper-based questionnaire. Also recorded was the participant's Course/Programme Title, their year of study and whether they were a traditional student, a mature student, an access student and/or an international student.

The research cohort was made up of students who attended the writing centre between April 2014 and June 2014 and who agreed to take part in the research. We surveyed 40 students, just over 72% of whom were undergraduates, with the remainder postgraduates at Masters or Doctorate level. Half of the 40 respondents were traditional students i.e. those who have come through standard routes directly from second level education. The next, 32.5%, were mature students, and the remainder international and access students. The latter category includes both traditional and mature students. 80% of respondents were in either their first or second year of study. In terms of the cohort's relative representation of the university's student population, as noted previously, our mature student population is approximately 14% of the overall undergraduate group; hence, our research cohort represents twice that percentage with regard to mature students. However, the 32.5% is representative of the percentage of mature students who generally attend the writing centre; in the academic year 2014-15, 35% of those students attending the writing centre were mature students.

Findings

Question one

As a result of the variety in responses to Question One, as well as diversity in levels of detail provided by participants, answers were categorized in order to identify common threads. Broad themes which emerged with regard to what students bring to writing included: direction from second-level education; advice from the writing centre; guidance from other specific training as provided by other university offices such as the library and 'learning to learn' programmes; as well as advice from individual departmental third-level course preparation. In addition, there were those who stated that they had no prior frame of reference for helping with writing assignments.

Responses among traditional students, who make up the largest percentage, were mixed. One might expect that traditional students, when reflecting on the question, would acknowledge the writing assignments done at second level or High School as preparation for the process of writing in third level education; students in second level are familiar with essay writing and many of the writing assignments with which students present to the writing centre are essay type. However, this was not necessarily the case. In this traditional cohort, only 25% acknowledged skills gained in second level education in relation to writing processes. In all, 36% of all respondents felt that they had no prior encounters with writing processes. Notably, mature students were more likely to acknowledge the lack of attention to the writing process during their previous education experiences. The assistance provided by university offices, individual departments or indeed, the writing centre itself, was more

often claimed as the instigator of conscious writing practices in these cohorts, with 60% of traditional students and 62% of mature students stating this to be the case.

With international students, there were varied experiences of writing processes and in particular, writing styles and expectations. Some students recorded good preparatory experience of writing at second level while others acknowledged the role of Maynooth University in assisting them with assignment and essay writing work.

Question two

With regard to Question Two, students noted many areas of learning in relation to transfer, which were categorised. These included 'Planning', 'Writing Context', which included structure, genre, style (including referencing) and audience, as well as 'Writing Mechanics' which included punctuation and grammar. In some cases, a blend of all of these topics was noted.

The majority of students, 52.5%, indicated that they would bring what they had learned about contextual matters, especially structure and referencing, to their next writing assignment. The next most frequently identified potential areas of transfer were divided equally between planning and mechanics, 17.5% of respondents respectively. Planning included discussing strategies for beginning an assignment, thinking about what is to be said and about how to ensure that one is addressing the question being asked, as well as plotting an answer. Mechanics included specific punctuation difficulties, grammar concerns and clarity of concepts and expression. The remainder of the respondents hoped to tap into their new knowledge with regards writing resources or with the overall stages of a writing project when presented with their next writing assignment. Comments from students about what they had learned and which they could use again included:

- 'To do a draft and come back to it';
- 'I have learned how to catch the reader's attention using more active than passive sentences';
- 'I have learned to simplify and break down my points';
- 'I [...] got useful information about structuring parts of my work. This will surely help me in future essays';
- 'the benefit of free writing for reading and writing';
- '[...] to listen to myself reading the essay'.

Discussion

Our findings suggest that there is a lack of personal awareness amongst students who visit the writing centre around what they are bringing to third level education as part of their 'literacy archive', that might be useful to them in this new context. This may translate as a missed opportunity to transfer, that is to 'transform or repurpose' prior knowledge. The lack of awareness was illustrated initially by the difficulty displayed by students in speaking about writing, when attempting to answer the first research question. Where an awareness did exist, it often only served to highlight a perceived deficit: 36% students declared that they had no writing processes that they could use in the alien higher education setting. They commented:

- 'I cannot think of many skills from secondary school [...] when I did English in school they taught me to copy what's said in the book and what the teacher says and to re-write it in an exam/essay.'
- 'Difficult to answer. Haven't given writing processes a lot of thought.'

The central part of our work in the writing centre is to help students to become better writers. An element of that work is to help students to understand their own writing processes and to learn more about themselves as writers. Past experiences, competency, self-efficacy and disposition all

contribute to who our students are as writers. If we are truly committed to beginning where students are, to being learner-centred, we must recognize and highlight the diversity that all students bring to writing as well as valuing it. In this way, we can claim to be equipping our students for Barnett's super-complex world (Barnett 2012: *passim*). In practical terms, this means listening to students and alerting them to the existence of connections between their literacy archive and the task in hand. While we are not underestimating the challenge associated with facilitating students' development as agile, flexible writers, what we suggest is that acknowledging that transfer may occur can be empowering and strategically significant.

The crux of our work in this research revolves around the *Elon Statement on Writing Transfer* (2013) which affirms that transfer can happen and that while no two writing occasions are exactly alike (or rarely are), writers can still carry forward important writerly skills, practices, and approaches. We suggest that addressing the area of transfer among our student body may bring advantages for students both as emergent-scholars and writers. It may contribute to an enquiry-based outlook for students around learning generally as well as knowledge of oneself as a writer. This in turn may translate to knowledge of oneself as a learner, connecting again with the well-documented links between writing, critical thinking and learning. Our research suggests that the metacognitive processes involved in articulating what might or might not be transferred, from one writing situation to the next, contribute to the students' capacity to reflect on their learning and to develop a language to discuss both their learning and their writing. In our view, this introduction to a new discourse community is part of the normalization of the higher education setting particularly for those students from non-traditional backgrounds.

As mentioned earlier, Maynooth University is particularly dedicated to serving non-traditional groups and is a national leader with regard to access. Our students arrive with a broad range of interactions with both formal and informal learning. As a result, we must be cognisant of the diversity that students bring to the learning situation. We respect the fact that students' prior experiences and knowledge impact greatly on how they perceive the University. We echo Mann's statement that the 'institutionalization of learning as studying brings power into play' (Mann 2008: 11). This is evidenced in writing also where much of the prescribed writing in third level is high risk and summative. Students are rarely invited to self or peer review their work for grading purposes and the power associated with what constitutes good writing and who is a good writer frequently lies outside of the student's grasp. A conspicuous raising of awareness and valuing of students' contribution to, and judgement of, their writing suggests a shared, co-enquiry approach to learning. In this collaborative venture, students would be encouraged and enabled in their various writing projects to recall, recognize, re-use, re-invent and re-purpose.

Conclusion

We recognise that from this research we cannot prove definitively that transfer does occur as a result of heightened awareness. What we did observe, however, was a heightened awareness of the potential for transfer, a much greater fluency in the discourse around writing, and a genuine commitment from writing centre staff to acknowledge that all students bring literacy archives with them into higher education on which they can build.

As a result of this research, it is our intention to continue to work with students on transfer. Our work in promoting transfer is part of our commitment to empowering students to recognise that what they bring to the University contributes to the institution as a learning community and we hope, helps to build their sense of belonging. We trust that the work in the writing centre will be part of a transfer continuum rather than merely a step or bridge from one context to another. As a result, our aspiration is that it will be an element of transformative learning that is nurtured in our centres and institutions but which continues long after the formal education process ends.

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