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Writing at work*:
Transfer of genre knowledge to research writing in the medical field

Background and Aim

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Transfer is often defined in terms of "transfer of knowledge" and "knowledge transformation" (Donahue, 2017). Transfer is a complex concept, operationalized as:

- "near" vs. "far" transfer: refers to the proximity (similarity) between tasks
- "low-road" vs. "high-road" transfer: refers to transfer of well-practiced routines in familiar situations vs. the deliberate, effortful abstraction and search of connections i.e. *mindful* transfer (Perkins & Solomon, 1992, p. 6453).

In writing, transfer requires a clear conceptualization of writing knowledge is (Donahue, 2017). We conceptualize this knowledge as "genre knowledge" (Tardy, 2009). (Fig1).

The metacognitive facet of transfer has surfaced repeatedly in genre pedagogy and writing research: "transfer happens through awareness and metacognition" (Anson & Moore, 2017, p.333, emphasis in the original).

Our aim is to investigate metacognition (Fig. 2) and its role in students' ability to transfer and adapt genre knowledge to research writing tasks.
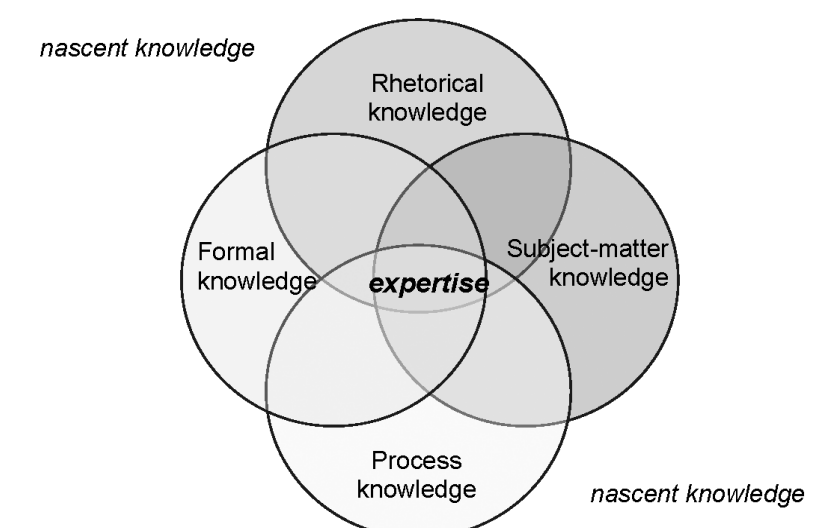

Figure 1. Integration of genre knowledge.

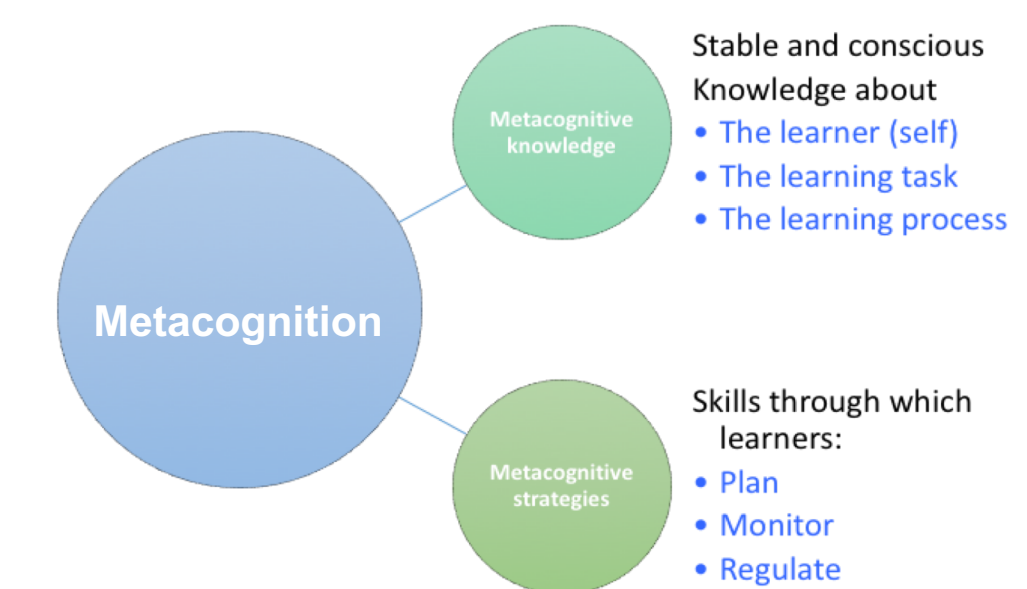*From Building Genre Knowledge by Christine Tardy (Parlor Press, 2009). Used by permission.*

Fig. 2. Metacognition theory

Participants, RQs and Data

This poster presents part of the data collected over 2 years in a longitudinal project on writing transfer with PhDs (see Negretti & McGrath, 2018, for a pilot). Specifically this is data obtained from doctoral students in the medical field, who "write at work" as they engage in research writing, addressing both academics and professionals. Our data comes from three sources: two course tasks aimed to foster metacognition of genre knowledge, and interviews conducted with these professionals 6 months to a year after the conclusion of the course. **Here, we present the interview data: 9 Interviews (30min-1hr).**

RQs: If/How students in medical sciences are metacognitive of the genre knowledge developed through a genre-based writing course? Do they engage in high-road transfer of this knowledge? Which facets of genre knowledge are transferred?

Preliminary Findings

Metacognition of genre

P1: "Because I've discovered during the course that I wrote a lot like cautious (hedges)"

P2: "I don't write long introductions. In my research field… it's a little bit of hard science, so we don't like to write a lot. Especially the introduction. The counter-claim method I liked very much. I use this in my article, actually."

P3: "I try to always remember who are the people I'm talking to."

P9: I never really thought about the idea of flow and the need to create a story before, about the fact that writing has a social dimension beyond grammar and style. I also noticed that now I also look at texts and read in a different way. I notice how other writers have made choices in their "disposition"

High-road transfer

P1: "but here I was more confident. I removed may and could. They were like, "Can you really say this?" And I was like, "Yeah, I can".

P3: (in intro) "I try to show that yes, everybody says that but if you look at the territory, it's not so obvious. … I've looked at this journal, and then I asked myself, okay, what is the person side I'm talking to? I said, no, they're a fair accustomed then I took away this part.

P9: There was a different need to create a niche. This aspect of positioning.. Now I am writing the Kappa, is much freeer; I can take a more personal tone and display my professional identity as a midwife as well as my scholarly identity as a clinician. I will be able to create more of a story. With (last article in the thesis) and the kappa, I have given more attention to this aspect of flow and storytelling, to address also people who "work on the floor".

Facets of genres knowledge

P1: "If you write too much (hedges), then you don't know anything and you're not sure of anything. If you write too much, then maybe you draw to five different conclusions. Yes, that's very tricky, actually"

P3: rhetorical moves and genre analysis: "This makes our study unique … it's not everybody that do it. I define what we did and what was the purpose of our study in the introduction.

P9: Through the course, I discovered for instance that you need to adapt to different audiences and journals, and there is much variation

P4: before it was like a huge mountain you know? I learned that you don't have to start with sentence one either. You can start somewhere in the middle actually You can make a sketch in the head. And then you can start somewhere

Conclusions

The interiew data suggests that most of these doctoral students face the need to address academics in their immediate circle of research, academics in neighboring fields, and practitiones professionals in the workplace. This varied audience requires them to engage in **high-road transfer**, i.e. to make deliberate choices in terms of how to adapt their writing to each situation. These choices include various facets of genre knowledge, but esp. rhetorical dimensions—how to meet the audience expectations in formulating arguments and creating a research space for the research, as well as formal dimensions such as lexicon and use of qualifiers. High-road transfer also seems to connect to the participants' metacognition of how they engage in the writing process and how they engage with the conventions of research genres in their field, including formal aspects of writing such as paragraphing, flow and cohesion. Even if all of the participants developed metacognitive knowledge of some aspects of their own genre use, not all of them have had to engage in high-road transfer. Our next step will be to triangulate this data with the other data collected.

Bibliography

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