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LEARNING THAT TRANSFERS

Designing Curriculum for a Changing World

Foreword by John Hattie and Afterword by Yong Zhao

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Shifts in Practice

How Can We Set the Foundation for Learning That Transfers?

"For me, the child is a veritable image of becoming, of possibility, poised to reach towards what is not yet, towards a growing that cannot be predetermined or prescribed. I see her and I fill the space with others like her, risking, straining, wanting to find out, to ask their own questions, to experience a world that is shared."

—Maxine Greene

Why does this chapter matter?	Shifting certain practices accelerates and increases the power of learning transfer.
What will I be able to do by the end of this chapter?	I will be able to reflect on my teaching habits and apply strategies that facilitate shifts in practice.

Picture a classroom where students are busily editing proposals for ways to make the school campus a more inclusive and supportive community. They are in small groups giving and receiving feedback on the latest draft of their proposals. There's a palpable buzz in the air as students swap ideas and offer insight. Most of the walls are being used as visual thinking spaces, covered in sticky notes, connecting lines, and sketches of their early ideas. The classroom looks like a design studio in full swing of a new project.

The students' body language is a picture of engagement. They're leaning forward, moving sticky notes around, jotting notes in their individual notebooks, using animated gestures and excited voices, and actively listening to their peers. Groups are combining concepts from a variety of fields: restorative justice, civil rights, home design and décor, scale drawings, and mental health. Students are using design thinking and problem-solving protocols to enhance their proposals—just like their professional counterparts would. Next week, they will present their ideas at the local school board meeting. Their excitement is electric.

They began with this compelling question: *How can we make the school campus a more inclusive and supportive community for all?* They applied different disciplinary concepts to this question, pausing to think like a historian, scientist, mathematician, and artist, with the help of guest speakers and mentors from the local community. Then, each student pursued a specific aspect of the project that appealed to their interest and passions. Now, each small group is coming together to synthesize their findings into a single proposal.

This is just one example of what learning looks like when transfer is the focus. Although most of this book is centered on curriculum design, many areas need reframing—in

some cases dramatically—in order to truly unleash the power of teaching for transfer. This chapter provides explicit shifts and considerations to set a strong foundation for learning that transfers.

THINKING PROMPT

Before we move on, let's reflect on the following questions:

- What do you think is the primary role of the **student** in your classroom? The role of the **teacher**?
- What is the role of **curriculum, instruction, and assessment** in your classroom?
- What is the role of **parents, leaders**, and the **larger community** in your classroom?

My current thinking:

_____

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CHAPTER STRUCTURE

This chapter focuses on seven key shifts in practice that are necessary for learning transfer to take hold in formal schooling. Several Next-Day Strategies assist in immediate application of these shifts, and the rest of the book takes a closer look at each shift for more comprehensive adjustments in teaching routines and habits.

- The Roles of Students and Teachers
  - Fostering Self-Directed Learning
  - Establishing Teacher Credibility
- The Roles of Curriculum and Instruction
  - From Subjects to Disciplinary Literacy
  - Expansive Framing to Facilitate Transfer
  - Mental Organization Aided by Iterative Learning
- The Role of Assessments
- The Roles of Leaders, Parents, and the Community
  - The Learning Transfer Spectrum
- The ACT Model in Action

The list in Figure 2.1 lays out the essential shifts in practice necessary to lay the foundation for learning that transfers. As you read each one, consider how well your current practice matches up, and where you might have room for growth.

Figure 2.1   Essential Shifts in Practice

Shift #1: Students	1.	The role of the students is directors of their own learning.
Shift #2: Teachers	2.	The role of the teacher is designer of transfer-focused lessons.
Shift #3: Curriculum	3.	The goal of curriculum is to build transferable, organizing schema of both disciplinary and modern literacies.
Shift #4: Instruction	4.	Instruction honors students' prior knowledge and experiences to foster conceptual connections that transfer.
Shift #5: Assessments	5.	Assessments are a system of feedback about the quality of teaching and learning.
Shift #6: Leaders and Parents	6.	Parents and school leaders partner with teachers on the long-term growth of students so that they can live meaningful lives.
Shift #7: Community	7.	Community members collaborate with teachers so that students can transfer their learning to real-world situations.

SHIFTS #1 & #2: THE ROLES OF THE STUDENT AND THE TEACHER

Each section of this chapter begins with a comparison between a *non*-transfer-focused classroom (Classroom A) and a transfer-focused classroom (Classroom B). Comparison between two contrasting scenarios points attention to the unique features at hand, which is why we so frequently ask students to sort examples and non-examples of concepts in the acquire phase of learning, and why this chapter uses this technique through each section to demonstrate the shifts necessary for learning that transfers.

We'll begin by comparing the roles of students and teachers in the two classrooms. What do you notice about the differences between Classroom A and Classroom B in Figure 2.2? Jot down your thoughts in the column on the right.

The first difference refers to the key shift toward *student ownership* of learning. Classroom B highlights the importance of students clearly understanding how learning works and how to monitor their understanding along the way. It also highlights the value of students setting goals and transferring their learning to situations that interest them, all of which contribute to student ownership of learning.

Through the massive school closures and shift to online learning due to COVID-19, we saw vividly that many students had become dependent on the teacher standing over them or guiding their every physical and intellectual move. We can help our

students find joy in the learning journey and to become the directors of this journey with important shifts in practice.

Shift #2 highlights the tools that teachers can leverage in motivating students beyond games or scores. Our true powers lie in establishing credibility, strong teacher–student relationships, a trusting classroom and school culture, and high-quality curriculum and instruction, as shown in Classroom B. **Teacher credibility**, that is, students' beliefs in the teacher as knowledgeable, trustworthy, enthusiastic, and accessible, has the power to significantly increase student learning (Fisher, Frey, & Smith, 2020). Let's briefly explore concrete ways to build both student ownership and teacher credibility in the following sections.

Figure 2.2   Key Differences About the Role of the Student and Teacher

Key Differences	Classroom A	Classroom B	What Do You Notice?
Shift #1: Students	Students enter this classroom and wait for the teacher to give them instructions on what to do. When they get stuck, they sit quietly until the teacher is available to help direct them on what to do next. They believe that learning is about collecting bits of information and proving they have retained them on an assessment task.	Students in this classroom know what it means to acquire, connect, and transfer their understanding to new situations. They set their own goals and determine their next steps in the learning journey. They monitor their understanding and know specific steps to take when they get stuck.	
Shift #2: Teachers	The teacher in this classroom spends a lot of time thinking about how to engage students, such as setting up elaborate games, decorations, or hands-on activities to sort of trick students into learning while they are having fun. She sometimes feels frustrated that her students lack motivation and uses grades or scoring as motivators for students to put in effort on assignments.	This teacher establishes credibility by demonstrating competence and dynamism. She articulates high expectations, creates a culture of thinking and collaboration among her students, and builds strong relationships with them. She curates powerful learning experiences that allow students to transfer their understanding to novel situations that interest them and impact the world.	

Fostering Self-Directed Learning

In today's complex and changing world, students must learn how to learn, as they will have to continue learning far into their adult lives (Davies et al., 2011). Three critical pieces for fostering self-directed learning include a classroom culture of collaboration, risk-taking, and intellectual growth. Students must be open to learning with and from their peers, learning from mistakes, and monitoring their thinking.

The table in Figure 2.3 is one that we currently use to think about our roles and one that we share directly with students. As you read through the table, picture what that might look like in your classroom.

A common theme across the examples in Figure 2.3 is the importance of centering intellectual growth in the classroom. Everything that we do should aim to engage students' brains. This is achieved through establishing a culture of thinking, risk-taking, a sense of safety where mistakes are embraced as moments to grow and learn. Teachers can also empower students by demonstrating our own thinking, how we learn from our mistakes, and ways our thinking evolves as a result of monitoring, questioning, and yes, even changing or revising our understanding.

Figure 2.3   Student and Teacher Roles in a Transfer-Focused Classroom

Student Role	Teacher Role
DIRECTOR of their own learning **DETECTIVE** of their own thinking **COLLABORATOR** with peers and teachers **PATTERN SEEKER** through diverse ideas and experiences	**DESIGNER** of empowering lesson plans **DETECTIVE** of student thinking **EVALUATOR** of their own impact on learning **CURATOR** of diverse resources and experiences

Might look like

- Co-constructing success criteria
- Setting goals
- Monitoring their thinking
- Self-questioning
- Self-regulating
- Selecting among strategies
- Providing self- and peer-feedback
- Applying feedback
- Deciding what to investigate next
- Adjusting learning behavior

Might look like

- Establishing a collaborative, safe culture
- Establishing credibility
- Making thinking routine
- Modeling thinking
- Modeling risk-taking
- Modeling learning from errors
- Cognitive coaching students
- Providing and soliciting feedback
- Adjusting instruction

NEXT-DAY STRATEGY

Facilitate a short discussion with your students about what "learning" means and what it looks like to learn. Ask them to think of a time when they have figured something out or had a light-bulb moment, when something suddenly became clear, and have them share their experience in small groups. Perhaps share an example of your own learning journey with a particular topic—such as learning how to bake, paint a room, or learn a language. Share the habits of mind you had—such as goal-setting, determination, reflection, collaboration, planning ahead—and how each influenced your learning. Then, ask your students which habits of mind they would like to apply to learning in the classroom.