

SAM: THE STORY OF AN ENTREPRENEUR

Danica L. Schieber
Sam Houston State University
Huntsville, TX 77341
USA

ABSTRACT

Most instructors hope that when students leave their classrooms, they will be able to take some of that learning with them. However, much research on the transfer of learning shows us that most people/students do not transfer easily from one situation to the next. This project follows the case study of one participant who broke all barriers and was able to clearly achieve high road transfer from the business communication classroom to the workplace.

Key Words: business communication, transfer, entrepreneurship

INTRODUCTION

Most instructors hope that when their students leave the classroom, they will take with them what they learned. However, most research on this subject has shown that students do not fully transfer learning from one situation to the next. This project follows the case study of one participant who was able to achieve high road transfer from the business communication classroom to the workplace.

First, I discuss the relevant literature. I will then describe the methods of the study, the findings and discussion, and will end with recommendations for instructors.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Researchers have studied how students learn different types of skills in the business communication classroom (Grant, 2004; McPherson, 1998; Ortiz, 2013; Reinsch & Shelby, 1997; Rubin, 1996; Vogt, Atwong, & Fuller, 2005) and pedagogical approaches for the business communication classroom (Greenwood, 1993; Rogers & Rymer, 1998; Saunders, 1997; Sharp, 1995; Stevens, 1996).

Many studies also address how to promote transfer of learning in the classroom (Blakeslee, 2004; Bouelle, 2012; Conrad, Pfeiffer, & Szymoniak, 2012; Keifer & Leff, 2008; Remley, 2009), including how students can transfer knowledge from the writing classroom into other courses, or professional internships (Anson & Forsberg, 1990). In this study, I use Haskell's definition of transfer:

Transfer refers to how previous learning influences current and future learning, and how past or current learning is applied or adapted to similar or novel situations. Transfer, then, isn't so much an instructional and learning technique as a way of thinking, perceiving, and processing information. (2000, p. 23)

Traditionally, transfer theory for the individual has been dominated by the field of cognitive psychology. Early research includes work by Thorndyck (1924) who came up with the idea of participants being able to transfer effectively if the two contexts had "identical elements." This notion was later challenged by Judd (1939) who argued that the students who had a knowledge of general principles in that context were able to learn more quickly than those who did not. This idea was later used similarly by Bereiter (1995), who discussed a dispositional view of transfer, as a way of transferring habits of mind.

Perkins and Salomon (1988) later distinguished between what they termed low and high road transfer, depending on the similarity of contexts from which learners had to transfer knowledge. Low road transfer occurs between contexts with obvious similarities. In contrast, high road transfer occurs in dissimilar contexts, making it much more difficult to achieve. They further claim that high road transfer requires mindful abstraction from the original context and an intentional search for connections in a new setting.

Freedman and Adam (1996) found that participants learned very similarly in the classroom and in the workplace. In both contexts, the learners learned by participation (often writing). However, the purposes of each context were dissimilar. In the classroom, the purpose is to learn. In the workplace, the purpose was to advance the company or organization.

In many of these classroom studies, participants' coursework helped them learn and practice rhetorical strategies and practices, but very few were able to attribute specific transfer of learning to a single class. The inconsistent results of past research—only a few examples of successful transfer—suggests that there is more to learn about when and why transfer does or does not occur.

Artemeva, Logie, and St-Martin (1999) explained how a form of transfer was achieved when students in an engineering course were tasked with disciplinary writing, and were able to practice writing that they would use in their future careers. Later, Schieber (2016a) found that students were unknowingly able to transfer learning in a way that was invisible to themselves.

However, no current studies have analyzed the specific factors that may influence successful transfer for business majors, or followed them from the classroom to the workplace. This study adds to the on-going conversation about transfer of learning.

The Study Background

The study draws upon Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) methods (Pope-Ruark, 2012), by using empirical research to analyze different pieces of data, including a collection of student work, screencast reflections, and writing samples from the student's eventual workplace. The research in this study was taken from the author's dissertation research at a Iowa State University (Schieber, 2016b). This study received IRB approval on January 23, 2014, ID # 13-325.

Theoretical Lens

This study analyzed participants' writing and reflective work using a case study qualitative methodology, Activity Theory (Russell, 1997), and was informed by Grounded Theory.

Activity Theory gives us insights about how learners participate within an activity system (typically an organization or group, like a school or a job site). Within an activity system, "Activity

is oriented at a culturally significant object which also forms the motive of the activity” (Tuomi-Grohn & Engestrom, 2003, p. 28). Learning therefore takes place through the interaction that happens within activity systems. Activity Theory gives researchers the ability to analyze the system’s members, the rules they follow, and the tools they use. In a more community-based approach of Activity Theory, Beach discusses the concept of “consequential transitions” as a way to look at and describe transfer, while focusing on the “changing relationship between individuals and sets of social activities” (2003, p. 3). As these relationships can involve many different processes, the locus of learning shifts from individuals to the communities in which they participate. The organizations or communities and those who participate within them are constantly changing and moving, so participants also change within them. This experience becomes a transformation for the participant, who becomes part of the community based upon his or her experiences. However, for these transitions or changes to become actually *consequential*, the participant must be able to reflect upon them, or is somehow changed because of them.

I also use a Case Study qualitative method, as it involves a detailed description of the setting and the individual, followed by analysis of data for themes that emerge (Stake, 1995). As Stake notes, “The name ‘case study’ is emphasized by some of us because it draws attention to the question of what specifically can be learned about the single case” (1995, p. 443). It seemed appropriate, as case studies are often characterized by the researcher spending considerable time with the participants in the site (in my case, in the classroom), and encourages reflection and revision to understand what is happening with the participants (Stake, 1995). According to Stake, there are five requirements of case study research: “issue choice, triangulation, experiential knowledge, contexts, and activities” (1995, p. 444). All of these were used as described below.

METHODS

Here I describe the research questions, the participants, and the data collection and analysis process. My research questions that came out of the literature in this area are:

1. Through what school experiences did the participant learn and develop the rhetorical strategies he used?
2. Which factors within the various activity systems influenced the participant’s abilities to effectively transfer learning/rhetorical strategies from the business communication classroom to the workplace?

The Research Site and Participant Information

The main site of this study was my own classroom for a business communication course, which was a linked course between the English department and the College of Business. I chose this site because I had the opportunity to get to know the students and participate in class discussion with them. This allowed me to understand them better than I would have with a class that was not mine. I was able to study four of the students enrolled in the class. In this paper I focus on one of the four. This allowed me to focus more fully on all of Sam’s writing in his various documents for different situations.

It is important here to note my own positionality as a teacher-researcher, as an instructor’s power over students may limit participants’ candor and lead them to try to impress the instructor with their responses. Another problem with the teacher-researcher position is that it is natural for instructors to want to view their students’ work as very positive, or to want to portray their own class as highly influential to their students. These limitations can be alleviated by careful member checks, and by the use of diligent self-reflection during the analysis process.

My knowledge of my students has helped me understand how they write and react to new situations. I am aware, however, that this dual role could influence me when collecting data and analyzing student work for evidence of transfer. I did have a better understanding of my students and their writing processes and their past writing experiences, but, aware of my potential biases, I carefully avoided all use of any prompts that may have seemed to be leading questions. For example, I never asked my participants if they felt they had “transferred learning” from any past experiences or asked them to describe their “rhetorical strategies.” Instead, I endeavored to use more neutral language, like “How did you know how to do this? What did you struggle with? How did you figure out how to solve the issue that you faced?”

I also endeavored to remediate biases that may have surfaced in this study by the use of member-checks with my participant. Because I did not collect data until after the course was finished, it is less likely that my participant was simply trying to please me with his answers, as his grades had already been posted. I also gave my participant the opportunity to retract or re-record his screencasts at any point during this study (he declined this offer). I also used member checks at the end of the study to make sure that I didn’t include anything that my participant would rather not have included (from his course work or his workplace).

To get a better sense of how my participants were able to transfer across contexts, I triangulated by collecting a range of data, including multiple assignments from the beginning of the semester to the end, and two screencasts. While there are many ways to research instances of possible transfer, the methodological affordances of having students discuss their work in a screencast, from the comfort of their own home, should not be underestimated. Students were able to scroll through their documents, and explain any struggles that they had writing them, or how they learned to write them. I have found that this method of data collection may make participants feel more comfortable than using text-based interviews, as they can record a screencast from almost anywhere they wish, and they do not need the interviewer to be present or hovering over their shoulder. Screencasts also afford the researcher the opportunity to gather two types of data simultaneously—both verbal and textual. I was able to get to know my students and their writing, and to be a part of the activity system of the classroom. This gave me a better understanding of my own participants, and how they write in new contexts (classroom and workplace).

Participant

Sam (a pseudonym) was an agricultural communications major. He was very outgoing and always participated effectively in class. He was always prepared and had something helpful to add to the class discussion. He took the course during his last semester before graduation. Sam had previously taken part in two internships with an agricultural company, working in sales. He was interested in entrepreneurship, so during his time at university, he joined the entrepreneur club and took classes relevant to starting a business. After graduation, he and two friends started their own agricultural support/communications business, which they had begun planning as undergraduates. When they first graduated, Sam and his co-founders worked only part-time at their company, while holding full-time positions elsewhere. But by the time I checked in with him two years later, they had all left their other positions and were working full-time for their new business.

This project examines Sam’s written work and reflections, throughout the semester and later in his post-graduation job at the company he helped to found. I analyze how Sam writes, how his writing changed over time, and how he may have transferred classroom learning into new writing situations.

While examining Sam's writing and screencast reflections, I focus on his use of rhetorical strategies in the activity systems. I analyzed how successfully he applied the following strategies:

- multiple audience awareness
- addressing variable audience needs
- sense of purpose
- organization
- professional appearance
- style (Ford, 2004).

I began by coding the instances of rhetorical strategies in order to discover similarities and differences between the activity systems of school and work/internships. The categories that I used here are from Ford's (2004) research, where she studied engineering students and how they transferred rhetorical skills from her class to other classes. The rhetorical strategies that Ford (2004) used are features of writing that are commonly taught and graded by professional writing instructors, and were included in my assignment rubrics. To analyze Sam's use of rhetorical strategies, I examined only his written work during the semester and at his post-graduation job.

Coding

I started by coding all of Sam's documents by his use of the rhetorical strategies. At first, I thought it might be helpful to count the instances of each—for example, how many times did Sam clearly show he was addressing variable audience needs? However, simply counting instances of those usages does not give us an idea of his actual learning of the strategies and how they can be used effectively. Instead, I turned toward a more holistic grading approach, wherein I thought in terms of a grading rubric that measures writing from "needs work," to "fair," to "good," to "excellent." Using this basic rubric throughout the study would also show if his skills had improved over time.

Documents Collected

I collected documents from the course and from the workplace. They are described in the following paragraphs.

Course documents

To collect data from my participant, I used the Learning Management System (LMS) Moodle in our course. All of his assignments were handed in electronically through the LMS. The University's LMS staff saved and stored the LMS data on the university server, so all participant data was safe and confidential, and allowed me to access Sam's assignments for the purposes of this study after the semester was complete and final grades had been posted.

First as teacher, I was able to gather the following documents from Sam as an overview of his student work from the beginning to the end of the semester:

- Messages packet – The first major assignment from my Business Communication class was a messages packet, in which students wrote negative/positive messages for various audiences. Students were given a fictional situation, where they have to act as managers and solve a mix-up in shipping. In the scenario, two products are mixed up and sent to the wrong customers. Students have to write documents not only to the customers, but also to the shipping manager and their supervisor. They also draft a change in policy for the entire company, so this mistake does not occur again. They have to give each

audience member the information that they need, and decide the most effective genre for doing so, such as email, memo, or business letter.

- Proposal – This document detailed his idea for the final project. Instead of working with an outside client, Sam chose to research and write about a business opportunity.
- Progress report – This document detailed Sam’s progress in the final project, specifically, what he had already finished and what still needed to be worked on.

it To get a better idea of what the activity system of our classroom looked like, I have mapped out here:

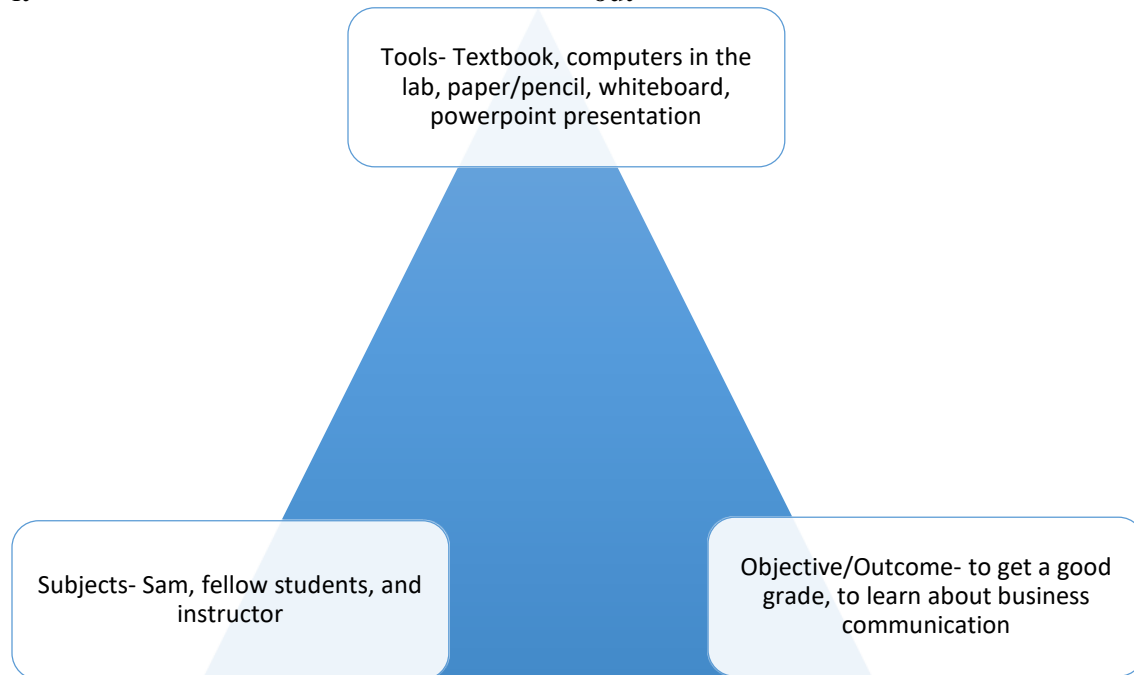


Figure 1: *Classroom activity system*

The tools and objectives of this activity system were typical of most classrooms. However, the activity system of a classroom is very different from most workplaces, where the objective is not to get a good grade and learn about communication, but to grow as a company.

Company documents

For Sam’s workplace communication, I analyzed the following documents:

- An email that Sam wrote for his company, trying to recruit teachers to speak or present at a course they were offering.
- A memo that Sam wrote for his customers, informing them of some updates in their technology.
- A screencast reflection on those two pieces, where he describes both of them for me.

To get a better idea of Sam’s new activity system (the new company), I mapped it out here:

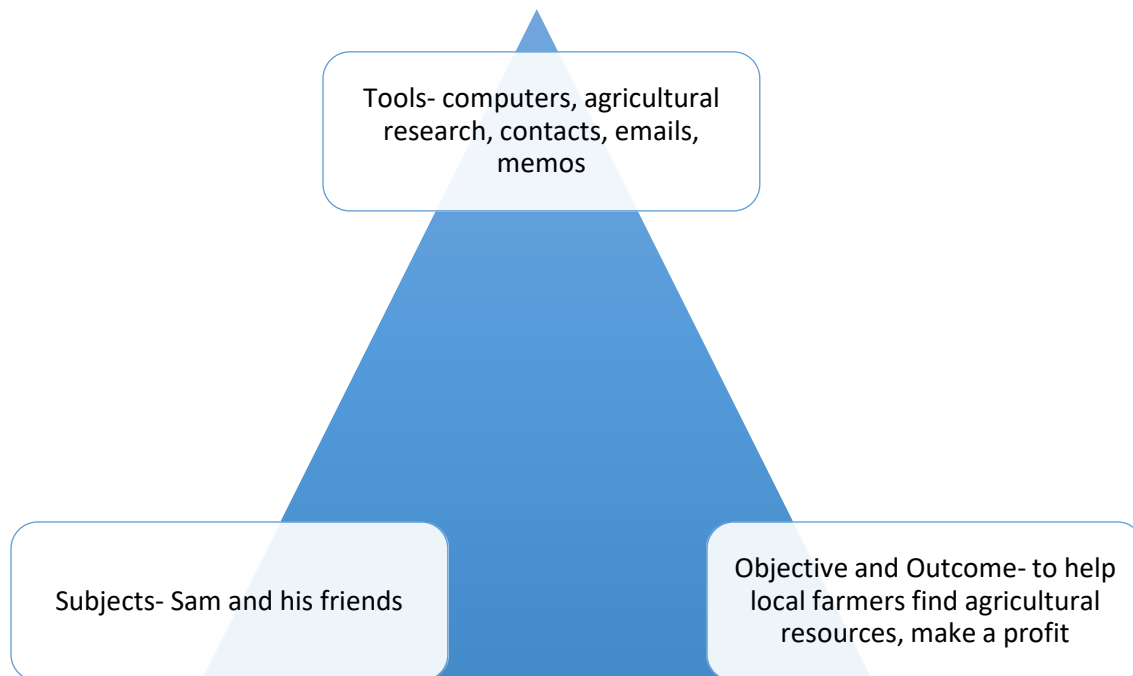


Figure 2: *Activity system of Sam's workplace*

RESULTS

When I first began analyzing Sam's work, I noticed that the Rhetorical Analysis themes I found were very different from those of his fellow participants. The first theme that emerged was an improvement in audience analysis. The second theme was innovation and entrepreneurship. The first two themes address the first research question, and the third theme, motivation, addresses the second research question. I focus on these three themes that emerged as they were the rhetorical strategies that he used most often.

Theme 1: Audience Analysis and Varied Audience Needs

At the beginning of the semester in Sam's classroom writing, he gave most of his audience members straightforward information in a basic way. While he was never writing in the "poor" or "needs work" categories, he typically fell into the "Good" category. An example of Sam mostly addressing his audience's needs is from this excerpt from a letter to his fictional customer (from the Messages Packet):

Within three business days you will be receiving a package containing the Modem Mediocre L driver for your Delappc computer. This Modem Super L is not the correct order that you placed on January 25, 2013 with TechCo, LLC.

He was able to clearly and directly address what his customers needed to know regarding their orders. He did not employ the use of any buffers to soften the news; he simply gave the customer clear information about what had happened. Later he was able to improve his audience-based writing even more.

Sam had a clear use of you-attitude (language that focuses on the intended audience), and had an overall professional tone, as we can see in this other letter excerpt from the Messages Packet:

In the event you decide not to keep the Modem Super L driver, TechCo offers you an online store credit of \$1500.00. Please see enclosed postage label and shipping instructions for returning the Modem Super L driver if this is the route you choose.

Sam also used a clear and concise style of writing, keeping most of the pieces of communication brief and to the point. He did not waste time, but again wrote fairly well for the audience's needs. By the end of the semester, Sam had moved from "Good" to "Excellent" with his audience-focused writing. When I analyzed his final project Proposal, I noticed how carefully he had laid out the information for his reader, which seemed to show he was anticipating audience needs. Any questions that I had on his project (as his then instructor) were answered by his detailed information.

Later, when I analyzed the documents from his new job, Sam also made his purpose in writing apparent for the reader at the beginning of each message. He wrote to his audience members, "You are receiving this email because you or someone recommended by you taught a portion of the class (name omitted) last March."

Sam later reflected (in his screencast) that his whole purpose was to find teachers who could possibly teach this course that his company was offering. He said, "I was looking, again, for them to be a part of this school and so my main goal was to give them the dates, which you can see it in here, and then just the reason itself why they're being emailed, right here at the top." Sam knew it was important to give his audience the reason for writing at the beginning of the message, so he focused on that.

In his workplace screencast, Sam also noted that his company would "periodically send out memos to our customers, just to update them on a few things." He continued, "This is for some updates and development things." He wanted to make sure that the company kept in good contact with their customers to maintain a positive working relationship with them. Whether he realized it or not, Sam was focused on his audience's needs, and was also expanding his activity system to accommodate those new members.

Sam also knew that his emails should be concise, and noted, "what I did was just threw in this quick sentence at the end, trying to move forward the communication." He didn't want to waste his audience's time, and so he made his main point quickly, and then ended with what he wanted the reader to do (also known as a call-to-action). Again, these documents were audience-focused and well written.

Theme 2: Purpose and Professional Appearance—Entrepreneurship

During my study, Sam was the student who most embodied what we might call the entrepreneurial spirit, and did so by using the rhetorical strategies of clear purpose and professional appearance. Because Sam's purpose was eventually to own his own business, much of his work was in pursuit of that, although I was unaware of this fact during the class. As Drucker notes, "the entrepreneur always searches for change, responds to it, and exploits it as an opportunity" (1985, p. 28). Entrepreneurs have to be aware of new opportunities in the market, and understand how stakeholders will be involved. Sam's final project for the business communication class was actually an entrepreneurial pitch project that he did on his own, without any other group members. Instead of finding an actual client in the area to work with (for example, most classmates worked with new local businesses to address a business communication problem), Sam came up with a unique business idea that he could undertake on his own or pitch to a local food vendor. He had a creative idea of promoting and researching a new food stand business near campus that would sell

what he called “pizza cones,” which was a small pizza, but in a cone shape for easier street food eating.

Sam showed a creative entrepreneurial spirit in this final project. Not only did he propose to create a new project (instead of addressing an already existing communication need), he also researched everything that would be needed to go into it. His proposal for this project was detailed, more so than the typical proposal handed in by an undergraduate. For example, Sam created a complete timeline of research (similar to a Gantt chart) and included estimated time that it would take to complete each item, as well as the contact information for each item of research.

He ended his proposal with this call to action: “With your approval I will proceed with moving forward and accomplishing the aforementioned tasks, as well as including any additional ideas and thoughts you may have.” Sam was confident that with his careful research and hard work, he could actually start this business, or even convince a street vendor to try selling this new food idea. The extensive research that Sam had put into this project surprised me. Not only did Sam look into the equipment costs and actually complete and document a trial run of cooking the product, he also compiled the information for the street vendor licenses and permits, and state requirements for health inspections. His creative and entrepreneurial ideas in this project stuck out in what typically was a local, client-based writing assignment.

When I analyzed his workplace documents for professional appearance, I found that Sam had to create many documents on his own for his new company, but knew that creating a professional look was imperative. One thing that Sam did to make his documents look professional was to create a logo and add it to each piece of documentation. In his screencast, he described how he set up his letter to clients: “so there’s contact information here, a logo, a logo here, and then, at the very end, it would list the three account managers, and our respective contact information.” To preserve his company’s privacy, the logo and contact information were deleted from his documents that he shared with me. However, Sam did use proper memo formatting, had a clear subject line, and organized his information by using bullet points. He notes in his screencast that he was able to set up the correct format of the documents because of the business communication class he had taken, noting,

... honestly, I went straight to the uh, files that I had saved from my English 302 class (business communication) that I took while at Iowa State University. And I brought in the format. Those classes, those files were taken pretty recently for me as well, and the format right here especially was one thing that I was really struggling with. Being able to cross-reference those documents made it really easy.

I discuss his use of formatting further in the next section.

Theme 3: Motivation

One factor that helped Sam immensely with his ability to transfer learning was his high level of motivation. After the class was finished, Sam did things a little bit differently than other new graduates, because he actually started his own small business with two friends immediately after graduation. He shared with me two documents that he wrote for his new company, the email and letter.

Because Sam did not have a set format to use or templates that someone higher up in the company had used previously, he had to go back to things he had learned in my class to invent new document templates for his company. In his screencast he noted, “the format right here especially was one thing that I was really struggling with. Being able to cross-reference those documents made it really easy... So, this truly was kind of a start from scratch, as far as our

company goes.” Sam knew he needed to make his documents look credible to be taken seriously as a new company, so he used templates and formats that he had learned in class.

Sam was resourceful when writing to his clients for his new company. In his workplace screencast Sam noted that, “I copied and pasted and put together, but it was a really simple email.” Because it was a genre that he was very familiar with and it was something that he had worked on previously in my class, he knew how it should be basically set up, but did re-use material that he had previously written, by copying and pasting it into the new email. However, Sam did have to organize the information and make sure it was clear for his audience, and had it separated into two body paragraphs, plus an opening and a closing. Sam was starting to create his own artefacts for his activity systems.

The way that activity systems communicate shapes the way they function. Winsor reminds us, “The vocabulary of the discipline and the workplace served as a tool into which knowledge had been distributed” (2004, p. 20). However, because Sam and his friends were creating their own new activity system in their company, there was no standard communication practice to start from. There were certain genre conventions, so Sam knew he could draw from those to create a new “standard” for their company. As he noted in his workplace screencast:

For the most part, these headings, those were just decided on by myself, uh, got a little bit of feedback from my co-workers, but in this case, this is for a company that I started as a student, so there really wasn’t someone above me to say, ‘hey, here’s our usual memo format, why don’t you just click and drop in the, copy and paste in the information, and then go?’ So, this truly was kind of a start from scratch, as far as our company goes.

The nice thing was I did have that template, if you will, or that idea from my English class. And then right here at the end, knowing how to, if I do have to do paragraphs, very quick and concise, this one isn’t that long, umm, but for the most part it just gives a general overview of what we are looking for as a company (workplace screencast).

Even though they were starting completely from scratch, Sam knew that if he used a professional-looking template for business documents that would be sent out to clients and potential clients, they would be taken seriously as a professional company. That professional identity was obviously very important to them, and they knew it would help to build their client base.

In their research on motivation and transfer, Pugh and Bergin noted three main effects of motivational factors on transfer: they can “influence initial learning in ways that either support or hinder transfer...influence the initiation of transfer attempts...[and] influence persistence on transfer tasks” (2006, p. 156). We can see evidence from Sam’s work that shows he was highly motivated to transfer what he had learned in my class directly to his new company’s documentation needs.

Sam had to start out writing documents “from scratch” as he said, and didn’t have prior documentation to lean on, except from the business communication course. He was motivated to do well with his company, and this seemed to have influenced how he learned in my classroom. He knew that he would need this kind of writing knowledge in order to look professional.

Another thing that Sam noted in his screencast was, “There have been (sic) a lot of trial and error.” Sam did not simply try to write a document once and then send off that first draft. He knew that he would go through revisions, and he wanted to revise drafts until they were ready to send out. This is similar to the third motivational factor noted by Pugh and Bergin, which is that motivational factors can “influence persistence on transfer tasks” (2006, p. 156). If Sam hadn’t been so motivated to help his company succeed, he would not have been so persistent with his writing, to try to make his client-facing documents more professional.

Sam also certainly had the opportunity to transfer his knowledge (the second motivational factor) from the business communication classroom to his new job, because it was obvious that he would need to communicate with his new clients. Sam was able to see the big picture of how his work in the business communication classroom could later help him in his new company. This opportunity to see how the work would need to be transferred from one context to the next was a key part of Sam's motivation.

It seems that motivation was indeed a very big factor for Sam, and that all three of the motivational factors noted by Pugh and Bergin (2006) were relevant in his situation.

DISCUSSION

To review, I'd like to come back to my research questions:

1. Through what school experiences did the participant learn and develop the rhetorical strategies he used?
2. Which factors within the various activity systems influence the participant's abilities to effectively transfer learning/rhetorical strategies from the business communication classroom to the workplace?

For the first question, we look at the first two themes. Sam clearly reported using many of the strategies that we used in my classroom. He brought up the issue of formatting specific documents, and noted that he went straight to his files from the business communication course to help him write new documents for his company. Sam also had a strong motivation for using past strategies and file formats. Out of all of my participants, Sam is the only one who explicitly stated where he learned specific strategies and was able to reference them very clearly. He also noted why he used them and how that knowledge helped him. First, he discussed formatting, and then noted how he learned specific writing strategies:

Just the format in general, uh, knowing how to do things, honestly, I went straight to the uh, files that I had saved from my English 302 class (business communication) that I took while at ISU. And I brought in the format. Those classes, those files were taken pretty recently for me as well, and the format right here especially was one thing that I was really struggling with. Being able to cross-reference those documents made it really easy... The one thing that I do remember in keeping things together with the memos is pretty short and sweet and then breaking it up, rather than having this all be paragraphs... The nice thing was I did have that template, if you will, or that idea from my English class (taken from workplace screencast).

This is unique, because Sam clearly stated that he had learned these specific strategies in the business communication classroom, and intentionally used those same strategies to write in his new job. This is a very clear example of Sam successfully using high road transfer, from one activity system to the next. Sam was an unusual participant, because he took my class fully knowing that he would need to use the skills that I was teaching him. Therefore, his learning was intentional and purposeful. Clear examples of high road transfer have been relatively rare in past literature (e.g. Fallon, Lahar, & Susman, 2009).

Sam also exhibited what Beach calls "consequential transition," one that is "reflected on, struggled with, and shifts the individual's sense of self or social position" (2003, p. 42). He consciously reflected upon his decisions with his new company, worked with his friends to create and keep their company going, and showed a clear sense of company identity. This transition was consequential for Sam, as it helped him become a business owner.

Sam's experience is similar to one of Ford's participants, who discussed transfer of specific genres:

In their interviews students talked about transferring knowledge of genres and formats from their technical communication course more than anything else. When asked what he learned in his technical communication course and whether or not he relied on this knowledge for writing assignments in the engineering course, one student claimed the following: “I learned how to write a memo, instructions, and reports.” After I asked this student to specify what he had learned about these various genres, he replied “I learned how to format them, you know, what you should include.” This student did not mention defining purpose or considering audience as part of these genres. (2004. p. 309)

Although Sam mostly focused on the format and organization of the particular genres that he intentionally transferred, he is unique among my participants in that he considered audience to be incredibly important as well, as he notes the purpose for each document was to inform the audience of a change or to make a request. Sam clearly had prepared to write documents for his business’ audience, and knew and understood that audience very well. This makes his instance of high road transfer even more impressive, as he was able to not only transfer specific genres and formats, he also transferred rhetorical strategies such as careful organization and audience analysis. Sam was what Nowacek would call an “agent of integration,” someone who is “actively working to *perceive* as well as to *convey effectively to others* connections between previously distinct contexts” (2011, p. 38). Sam was able to intentionally transfer learning effectively from my business communication class to his new business, and he was able to clearly explain that connection in his workplace screencast. Sam had a positive outcome from this integrative experience, as he used this knowledge when starting his own business. It is important to note that Sam successfully was an agent who was intentionally integrating learning for his own purposes and to make a clear connection from one activity system to the next.

I urge researchers and instructors not to underestimate the importance of motivation as a factor to promote transfer of learning. Sam was an excellent example of the significance of extremely high motivation. He wanted his new business to be a success, and he knew he had many resources available to him on campus. He therefore took advantage of those resources, and intentionally transferred as much learning as he possibly could to his new community. Sam’s motivation to start his business likely explained his differences in transfer from his fellow classmates. Many researchers (Bergmann & Zepernick, 2007; Dias, Freedman, Medway, & Paré, 1999; Freedman, Adam, & Smart, 1994) have argued that the classroom cannot really prepare students for the workplace, as all learning is situated; however, this particular case study shows that it is possible under the right circumstances. This may impact how we interact with and explain strategies to our students in the business communication classroom.

These findings also align with current literature on entrepreneurship. Frese and Gielnik (2014) created a model of entrepreneurship that focused on the actions and characteristics of entrepreneurs, to help researchers understand the relationship between psychology and entrepreneurship. The model is an action-characteristics model of entrepreneurship, and according to the authors shows “...personality, motivation, education, and cognitive factors do not affect success directly but only indirectly through the entrepreneurs’ actions” (Frese & Gielnik, 2014, p. 428). By looking at the activity systems, it seems as though Sam has followed this particular model in his path to entrepreneurship: from Cognitive and Social Preconditions (his undergraduate education), to Motivational/Affective Antecedents (his passion for creating his own company), to Action Characteristics (personal initiative to create his own company), and finally to Entrepreneurial Success as a new business owner (for a more detailed visual of the model of entrepreneurship, please see P. 429 in Frese and Gielnik). This is important to understand because

each entrepreneur has unique characteristics, but Sam clearly showed that his path to entrepreneurship began with his education. His motivation was something that kept him going throughout the difficult process of starting a business. Activity Theory helps us to see how the two activity systems of school and work can be connected by motivation.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The importance of motivation should not be overlooked or underestimated. Sam was highly motivated to transfer learning from the business communication classroom to his new company, because he could clearly see how he would use that learning and how important it would be for him. This high level of motivation made Sam a unique student, but is also a model that instructors can learn from and use in the classroom with other students.

Recommendations for instructors include making the possibility of transfer more transparent for students. One way that instructors can do this is by clearly explaining to students, before and after they complete an assignment, that they will be able to transfer the skills they learn to a job or other class situation. For example, instructors teaching any kind of memo assignment can explain to Accounting majors that the CPA exam includes a section that asks test-takers to write a clear memo. If instructors are giving students clear examples of future use they will be more likely to want to remember that information/learning experience. Spinuzzi also encourages students to “take part in an AN [Activity Network] outside of the English classroom, perhaps as apprentices, interns, or participants in a workplace” (1996, p. 345). We should encourage students to start thinking of other activity systems and how they might interact within them, so they can really start to prepare to be a part of a new activity system. It may help to bring up in a class discussion how different some classes are from one another (Dias et al., 1999; Nowacek, 2011).

Similarly, many instructors also use reflections after a major writing assignment, encouraging students to make those metacognitive connections themselves. Instructors can ask reflection questions like: “How do you see yourself using this in the future,” “What specific technique did you learn from this assignment that you can take with you to the next one,” and “What is one thing that you want to work on before the next writing assignment?” Making these connections explicit will not only increase student buy-in, but will also increase the possibility that students will be able to effectively use what they have learned in a later context. Students should also be encouraged to share their reflections with their fellow classmates. I have found that when students share their reflections either orally in class or even by making some kind of collaborative visual in the classroom where everyone writes one thought on the board, it can help make the ideas more concrete for students.

I also recommend that instructors have their students take it a step further. Have students interview a professional in their field to see how the things they are learning in the classroom are directly or indirectly used in the workplace. They can then draw out the activity system of the interviewee’s workplace. Responses should be shared and presented to the class, so the entire class can see the value and importance of what they are learning. This can be used to increase motivation, especially for students who may not only have that inner entrepreneurial motivation.

REFERENCES

Anson, C., & Forsberg, L. L. (1990). Moving beyond the academic community, transitional stages in professional writing. *Written Communication*, 7, 200-231.

- Artemeva, N., Logie, S., & St-Martin, J. (1999). From page to stage: How theories of genre and situated learning help introduce engineering students to discipline-specific communication. *Technical Communication Quarterly*, 8, 301-316.
- Blakeslee, A. M. (2004). Bridging the workplace and the academy: Teaching professional genres through classroom-workplace collaborations. In J. M. Dubinsky (Ed.), *Teaching technical communication: Critical issues for the classroom* (pp. 348-371). Boston, MA: Bedford/St. Martin's.
- Beach, K. D. (2003). Consequential transitions: A developmental view of knowledge propagation through social organizations. In T. Tuomi-Gröhn & Y. Engeström (Eds.), *Between school and work: New perspectives on transfer and boundary-crossing* (pp. 39-61). Oxford: Elsevier Science.
- Bereiter, C. (1995). A dispositional view of transfer. In A. McKeough, J. Lupart, & A. Marini (Eds.), *Teaching for transfer: Fostering generalization in learning* (pp. 21-34). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Bergmann, L. S., & Zepernick, J. (2007). Disciplinarity and transfer: Students' perceptions of learning to write. *Writing Program Administration*, 31, 124-149.
- Bourelle, T. (2012). Bridging the gap between the technical communication classroom and the internship: Teaching social consciousness and real-world writing. *Journal of Technical Writing and Communication*, 42, 183-197.
- Conrad, S., Pfeiffer, T., & Szymoniak, T. (2012). Preparing students for writing in civil engineering practice. Proceedings of the 2012 American Society for Engineering Education Conference. Retrieved from <http://www.asee.org/public/conferences/8/papers/3661/view>
- Dias, P., Freedman, A., Medway, P., & Paré, A. (1999). *Worlds apart: Acting and writing in academic and workplace contexts*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Drucker, P. F. (1985). *Innovation and entrepreneurship: Practice and principles*. University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign's Academy for Entrepreneurial Leadership Historical Research Reference in Entrepreneurship. Available at SSRN: <http://ssrn.com/abstract=1496169>
- Fallon, D., Lahar, C. J., & Susman, D. (2009). Taking the high road to transfer: Building bridges between English and Psychology. *Teaching English in the two year college*, 37(1), 41-55.
- Ford, J. D. (2004). Knowledge transfer across disciplines: Tracking rhetorical strategies from a technical communication classroom to an engineering classroom. *IEEE Transactions on Professional Communication*, 47, 301-315.
- Freedman, A., & Adam, C. (1996). Learning to write professionally: 'Situated Learning' and the transition from university to professional discourse. *Journal of Business and Technical Communication*, 10, 395-427.
- Freedman, A., Adam, C., & Smart, G. (1994). Wearing suits to class: Simulating genres and simulations as genre. *Written Communication*, 11, 193-226. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0741088394011002002>
- Frese, M. & Gielnik, M. M. (2014). The psychology of entrepreneurship. *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology & Organizational Behavior*, 1(1), 413-438.
- Grant, T. (2004). Assessing and teaching competence. *Business Communication Quarterly*, 67, 412-429.
- Greenwood, R. E. (1993). The case study approach. *Business Communication Quarterly*, 56(4), 46-48.
- Haskell, R. E. (2000). *Transfer of learning: Cognition and instruction*. San Diego, CA:

Academic Press.

Judd, C. H. (1939). *Educational psychology*. New York: Houghton Mifflin.

Keifer, K., & Leff, A. (2008). Client-based writing about science: Immersing science students in real writing contexts. *Across the Disciplines*, 5, Article 8.

McPherson, B. (1998). Student perceptions about business communication in their careers. *Business Communication Quarterly*, 61(2), 68-79.

Nowacek, R. S. (2011). *Agents of integration: Understanding transfer as a rhetorical act*. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press.

Ortiz, L. A. (2013). A heuristic tool for teaching business writing: Self-assessment, knowledge transfer, and writing exercise. *Business Communication Quarterly*, 76, 226-238.

Perkins, D. N., & Salomon, G. (1988). Teaching for transfer. *Educational Leadership*, 46(1), 22-32.

Pope-Ruark, R. (2012). Exploring scholarship of teaching and learning approaches to business communication research. *Business and Professional Communication Quarterly*, 75, 237-251.

Pugh, K. J., & Bergin, D.A. (2006). Motivational influences on transfer. *Educational Psychologist*, 41(3), 147-160.

Reinsch, N. L., Jr., & Shelby, A. N. (1997). What communication abilities do practitioners need? Evidence from MBA students. *Business Communication Quarterly*, 60(4), 7-29.

Remley, D. (2009, January 19). Intersectional computer-supported collaboration in business writing: Learning through challenged performance. [Special issue on Writing Technologies and Writing Across the Curriculum] *Across the Disciplines*, 6. <http://wac.colostate.edu/atd/technologies/remley.cfm>

Rogers, P. S., & Rymer, J. (1998). Business and management communication cases: Challenges and opportunities. *Business Communication Quarterly*, 61(1), 7-25.

Rubin, J. R. (1996). New corporate practice, new classroom pedagogy: Toward a redefinition of management communication. *Business Communication Quarterly*, 59(2), 7-19.

Russell, D. R. (1997). Rethinking genre in school and society: An activity theory analysis. *Written Communication*, 14, 504-554.

Saunders, P. M. (1997). Experiential learning, cases, and simulations in business communication. *Business Communication Quarterly*, 60(1), 97-114.

Schieber, D. L. (2016a). Invisible transfer: An unexpected finding in the pursuit of transfer. *Business and Professional Communication Quarterly*, 79, 464-486.

Schieber, D. L. (2016b). Learning transfer from the business communication classroom to the workplace. *Graduate Theses and Dissertations*. 15095. <https://lib.dr.iastate.edu/etd/15095>

Sharp, H. M. (1995). Challenging students to respond to multicultural issues: The case-study approach. *Business Communication Quarterly*, 58(2), 28-31.

Spinuzzi, C. (1996). Pseudotransactionality, activity theory, and professional writing instruction. *Technical Communication Quarterly*, 5, 295-308.

Stake, R. (1995). *The art of case study research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Stevens, B. (1996). Teaching communication with ethics-based cases. *Business Communication Quarterly*, 59(3), 5-15.

Thorndyck, E. L. (1924). Mental discipline in high school studies. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 15, 1-22, 83-98.

Tuomi-Gröhn, T., Engeström, Y., & Young, M. (2003). From transfer to boundary-crossing between school and work as a tool for developing vocational education: An introduction.

In T. Tuomi-Gröhn & Y. Engeström (Eds.), *Between school and work: New perspectives on transfer and boundary-crossing* (pp. 1-15). Bingley, UK: Emerald.
Vogt, G., Atwong, C., & Fuller, J. (2005). Student assessment of learning gains (SALGAINS). *Business Communication Quarterly*, 68, 36-43.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Danica L. Schieber is an Assistant Professor of Business Communication at Sam Houston State University. She also serves as the Academic and Community Engagement Coordinator (ACE) for the College of Business Administration, encouraging students and faculty to work with real clients in the local community. Her research interests include business communication pedagogy, transfer theory, and the rhetoric of financial reporting documentation.