Dynamic assessment and academic writing: Evidence of learning transfer?

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Overview

- Motivation for exploring learning transfer
- Theoretical frameworks
- Research context
- Data collection
- Analytical tools
- Key findings
- Conclusion and implications
- Any questions or comments?

Why explore learning transfer?

- Higher order skills and knowledge expected to be transferable

- ESP's central role in making communication skills transferable

- Limited research regarding transfer of learning in ESP (Cheng, 2007) cf (James, 2010)

- *ESP Journal* featuring only a few articles on learning transfer and *JEAP* seeming to have one

- Possibly no research on learning transfer yet carried out in ESP from a Vygotskian sociocultural theory perspective

What theoretical frameworks? (1)

- Two theories underpinning the study:
  - Vygotskian sociocultural theory (SCT) of learning
  - Hallidayan Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL)
- Complementary to each other

Theoretical frameworks (2): Vygotskian sociocultural theory (SCT) of learning
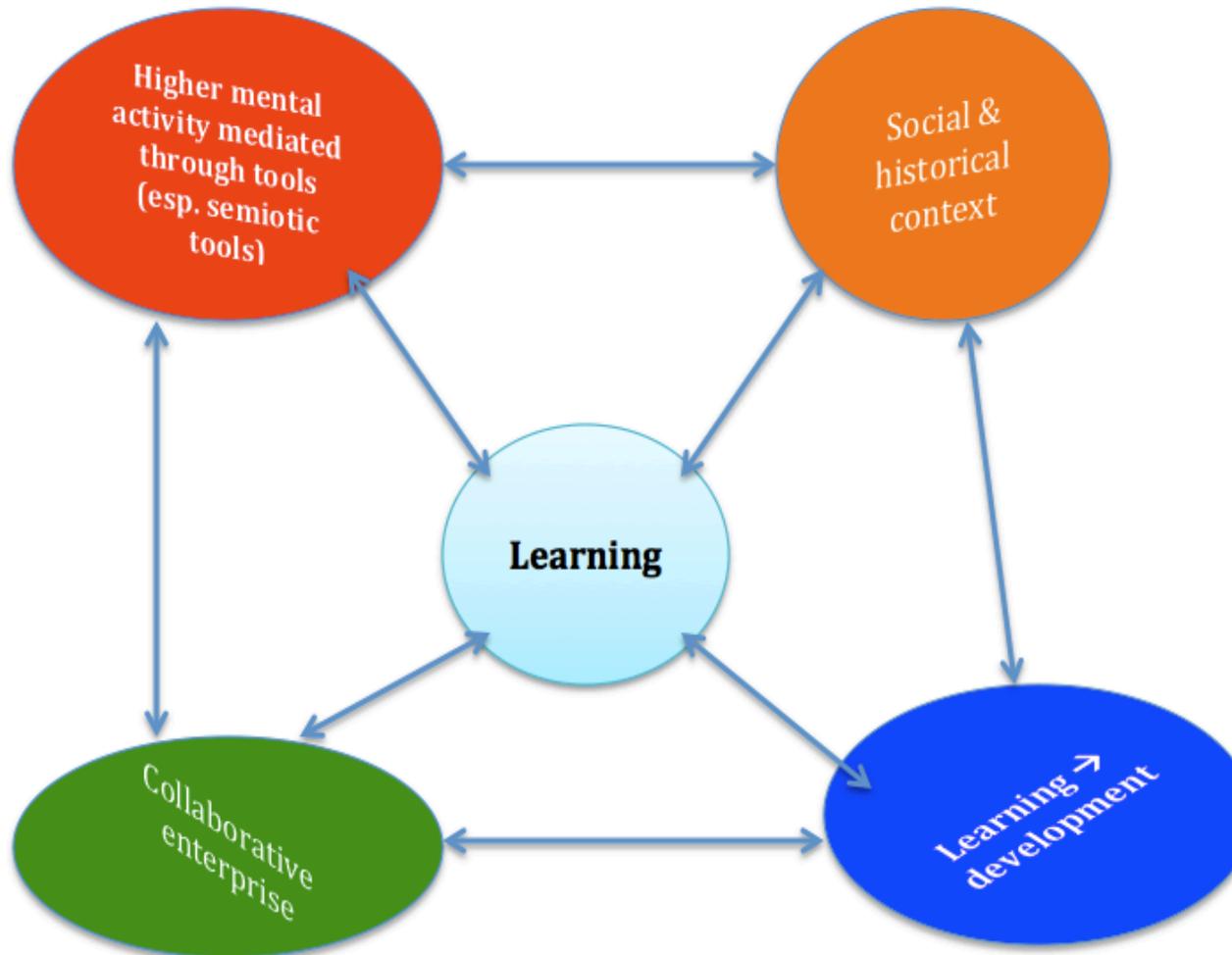
Theoretical frameworks (3): SCT-based Dynamic assessment (DA)

- DA is based on Vygotsky's (1978) notions of Zone of Proximal Development and mediation

- **Definition of DA**: an "approach to understanding individual differences and their implications for instruction … [that] embeds intervention within the assessment procedure" (Lidz and Gindis, 2003 p. 99).

- **Goal of DA**: Identify learners' **Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)** and actual ability and help them to move to the next level of **ZPD**; focus on process and not on product; concerned with future rather than the past

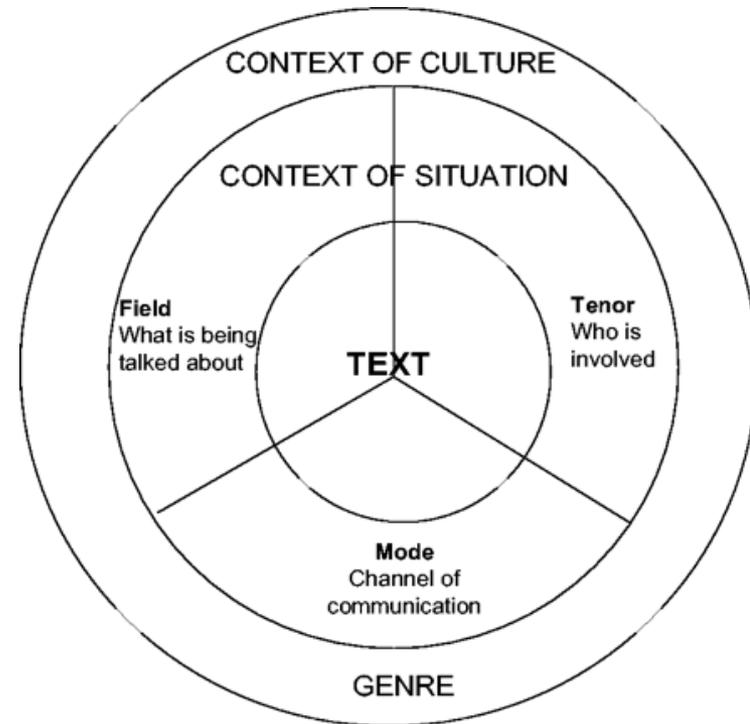# Theoretical frameworks (4): Systemic functions linguistics (SFL)

Language is

(1) used for functional purposes;

(2) context-specific;

(3) used for making meaning; and

(4) a semiotic process which involves making choices (Eggins, 2004, p. 3)

Theoretical frameworks (5): SFL-based genre theory (Martin & Rose 2007)

- **Definition**: 'staged, goal-oriented social processes' (Martin & Rose 2007)

- Texts/ genres have different **functions** in different social contexts (e.g., narration, argumentation). Such functions/ purposes are realised through **register** variables - **field** (subject matter), **tenor** (reader-writer relationship) and **mode** (medium of communication).

CONTEXT OF CULTURE

CONTEXT OF SITUATION

Field
What is being talked about

Tenor
Who is involved

TEXT

Mode
Channel of communication

GENRE

So, what is *learning transfer*?

- *Learners' ability to recontextualise their learning in a new context*

- Two terms used in DA: *transfer* (Brown and Ferrara, 1985) and *transcendence* (Feuerstein et al., 2002)

- Both terms interchangeably used in DA though it is argued that *transcendence* more robust and in line with Vygotskian SCT (Poehner, 2007)

- *Transfer* chosen due to no mediation (dialogue) in relation to the third assignment

What learning transfer types?

- **'Near transfer'**: the transfer of skills and knowledge from the first two assessment tasks to a similar assessment task (i.e., a SWOT or STEP analysis)
- **'Far transfer'**: the transfer of skills and knowledge from the first two assessment tasks to the assignments written for business studies modules

What research context?

- Part of a larger study (Shrestha 2011) conducted in an open and distance learning institution

- Four participants from an ESP module for business studies undergraduates

- Kristie (traditional tutor feedback on previous two assignments) – non-DA

- Amina, Lou & Natasha (DA-based interactive feedback provided on previous assignments)

What data collected?

- Third assignment for the study

- Four business studies assignments

- Three actual business studies assignments (two Level 3 & one Level 2)

- One assignment designed by the researcher: student did not continue her study

- Genre: case study analysis - *the study of an organisation by applying a business model or framework (Shrestha, 2011)*

What analytical tools?

- Notions of transfer from SCT/ DA

- Textual (linguistic) analysis of assignments to track learning transfer: textual and ideational metafunctions

- SFL genre analysis (genre, generic stages & technicality) (Martin, 1993, Martin and Rose, 2007)

- Conceptual development ('scientific' concepts as noted by Halliday and Vygotsky)

- The above two focused on in previous two assignments

What findings? 'Near transfer' (1)

Kristie (non-DA)

- A SWOT analysis of the market for Google's new smartphone called *Nexus One* – a similar task to the previous two assignments

- **Generic stages**:

- *Assignment 2:* Orientation^ Description … Component 4^ Conclusion

- *Transfer Assessment*: Orientation^ Component 1^ Component 2^ Component 3^
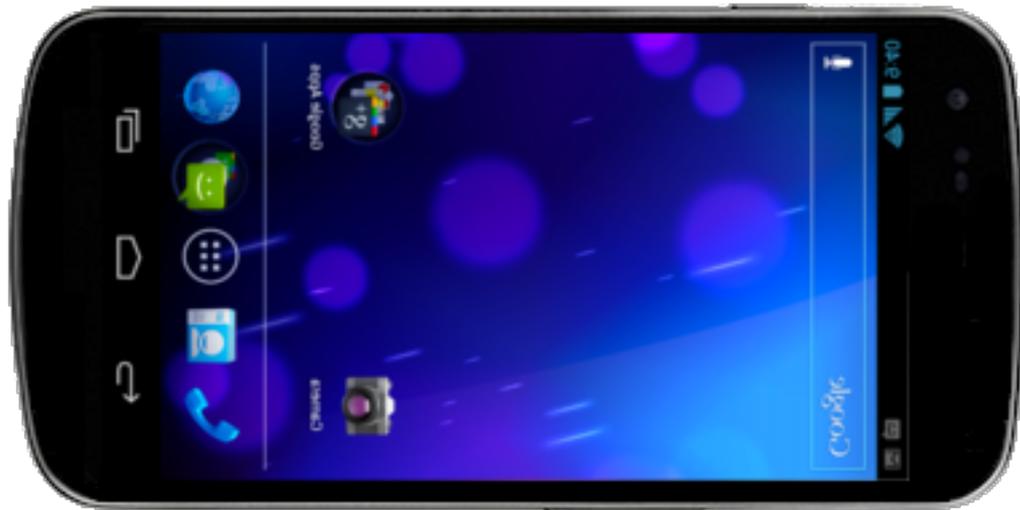
What findings? 'Near transfer' (2)

macro-Themes: consistent in all three assignments

- *The launch of Google's Nexus One mobile phone was hotly pursued by mobile techno fans after attempts to keep it a secret failed. Would the promise of even more advanced technology at a finger tip ensure its success and overtake its competitors? Using the SWOT analysis framework we will look at the various aspects of this new product in details. (Transfer Assessment)*

hyper-Themes: no hyper-Theme in *Assignment 2*, evidence in *Transfer Assessment*.

- *hyper-Theme (Component 2)*

P4 One of Nexus One's weakest point is probably its uninteresting appearance in the high-tech world and many will be disappointed by its "nerdy" appearance…

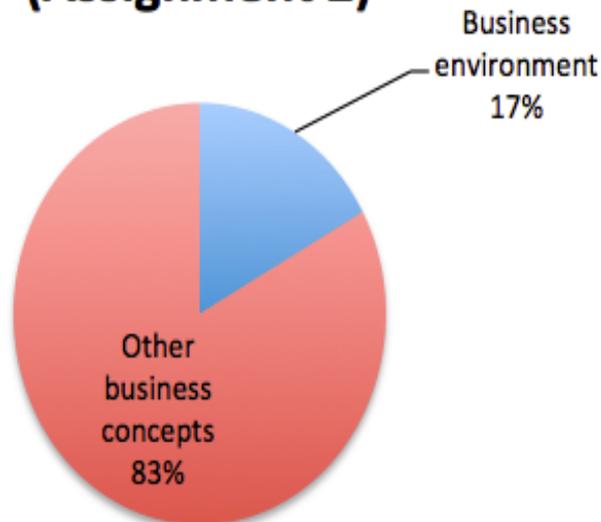# What findings? 'Near transfer' (3)

- **Conceptual development (genre knowledge & business studies concepts)**:

  – framing the case study analysis genre using the SWOT framework further developed

  – macro-Theme sustained, generic structure and hyper-Themes further developed
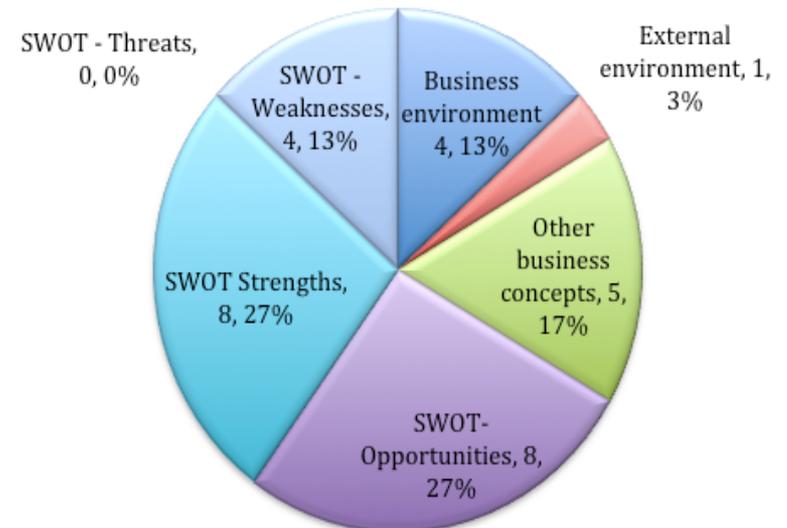
What findings? 'Near transfer' (4)

- **Conceptual development (genre knowledge & business studies concepts):** (2) technicality - compared with assignment 2; use of more relevant technical terms; further development

Kristie - Technicality (Assignment 2)

Business environment 17%

Other business concepts 83%

Technicality - Kristie's transfer task

SWOT - Threats, 0, 0%

SWOT - Weaknesses, 4, 13%

Business environment 4, 13%

External environment, 1, 3%

Other business concepts, 5, 17%

SWOT Strengths, 8, 27%

SWOT-Opportunities, 8, 27%

What findings? 'Near transfer' (5)

Categories	Examples from Kristie's transfer text
External environment	*its [Google's] competitors*
Business environment	*the price versus technology world of competition between manufacturers, the SWOT analysis framework*
SWOT Strengths	*firmly established, reduced price*
SWOT Weaknesses	*uninteresting appearance, a much less interesting proposition*
SWOT Opportunities	*a definite opportunity, great design improvements on existing phones on the market*
Other business concepts	*the extra expense, new product*

What findings? 'Far transfer' (1)

Amina, Lou (both Level 2) & Natasha (Level 3) – DA students

- Varied and much more complex assignment tasks than the first two assignments but the same genre: *case study analysis*

- Example task (Lou's *Transfer Assessment*):

Using tools and concepts from Units 1–4 of Block 3 (including, if you wish, the analysis referred to in Part 1 of this assignment), write a report which identifies the key challenges facing an organisation with which you are familiar. (2000 words)

What findings? 'Far transfer' (2)

- **Generic stages**: mostly appropriate for a case study analysis; sustained from the last assignment
- **macro-Themes**: sustained in Assignment 3 but varied in quality
- Example macro-Theme (Amina):

There are various ways of thinking about the business environment. Each theory helps to understand how the businesses interact with each other and with the environment. Some theories explain the changes in external environment and others focus on how businesses can become successful. One of the theories is a STEP Model, which describes the business environment by focussing on four factors as follows,

- – Social
- – Technological
- – Economic
- – Political

I am using one of the factors, social, to describe my organisation. (Assignment 2)

- **Macro-Themes (Amina's *Transfer Assessment*)**

In this report I am analysing the company in which I am working as customer service assistant named as Alliance Boots UK. Boots is a best place to work, according to the criteria we are agreed in our Forum. This criterion is based on our priorities in a work place. We have agreed to six points, we would like to see in our chosen company, as follows; culture, training, money, flexible work, location and rewards and recognition. The role of work I have chosen is a store manager. All the information about the company is taken by the company website and my personnel experience of work there.

What findings? 'Far transfer' (3)

- **hyper-Themes**: sustained but most of them appropriate;

- Examples from Lou's assignments

- Assignment 2:

P2 One of the strengths that Vodafone has is delivering new products and better operational performance.

- Transfer Assessment:

P3 In this section it is important to understand the meaning of external analysis and what it means for the organisation.
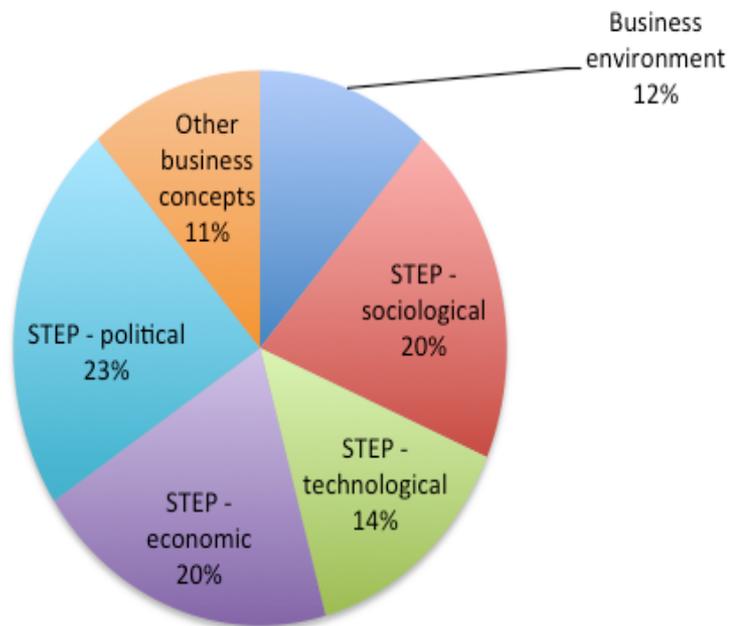
What findings? 'Far transfer' (4)

- **Conceptual development (genre knowledge & business studies concepts):** (1) case study analysis genre knowledge transferred though varied; (2) technicality (business studies concepts) – varied among three students Natasha being the most successful in applying these concepts
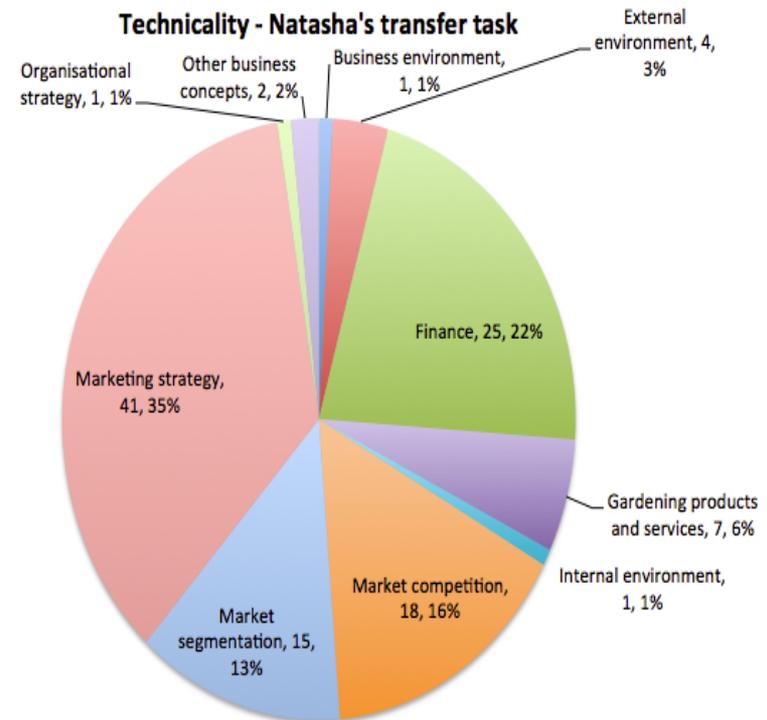
What findings? 'Far transfer' (5)

- Conceptual development (genre knowledge & business studies concepts): (2) technicality (business studies concepts) – varied among three students Natasha being the most successful in applying these concepts

- Natasha's technicality:

Technicality - Natasha's Assignment 2
- Business environment 12%
- STEP - sociological 20%
- STEP - technological 14%
- STEP - economic 20%
- STEP - political 23%
- Other business concepts 11%

Technicality - Natasha's transfer task
- Organisational strategy, 1, 1%
- Other business concepts, 2, 2%
- Business environment, 1, 1%
- External environment, 4, 3%
- Finance, 25, 22%
- Gardening products and services, 7, 6%
- Internal environment, 1, 1%
- Market competition, 18, 16%
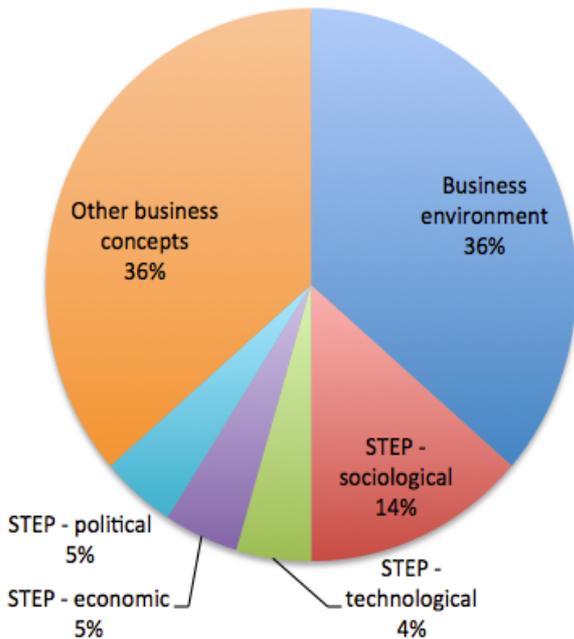- Market segmentation, 15, 13%
- Marketing strategy, 41, 35%

What findings? 'Far transfer' (6)

- Amina's technicality: Assignment 2 and *Transfer Assessment*

Technicality - Amina's Assignment 2

- Business environment 36%
- Other business concepts 36%
- STEP - sociological 14%
- STEP - political 5%
- STEP - economic 5%
- STEP - technological 4%

Technicality - Amina's transfer task

- Workplace culture, 22, 16%
- Employment, 22, 16%
- Flexibility, 19, 14%
- Location, 12, 9%
- Other business concepts, 15, 11%
- Recognition, 16, 11%
- Salary, 15, 11%
- Training, 17, 12%
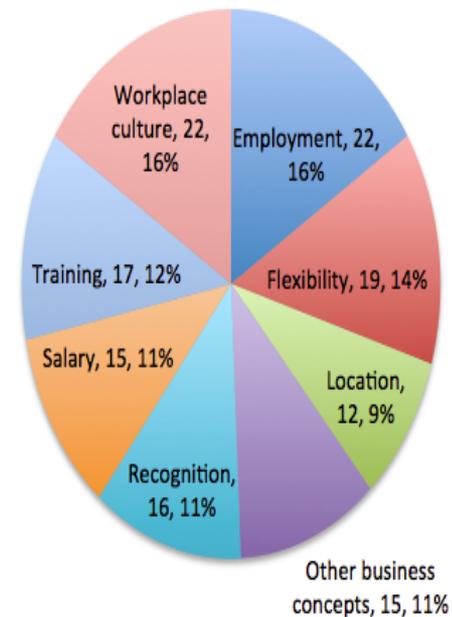
Conclusions and implications

- While the non-DA student appeared to have developed her skills and knowledge further, the DA students sustained them in the transfer assessment
- DA students' independent performance varied
- DA students were able to transfer academic writing skills (textual meaning) more successfully than business studies concepts (ideational meaning) to a more complex assessment task
- Non-DA students' further development in transfer assessment suggests a greater amount of mediation (dialogue) being beneficial for cognitive development enabling learning transfer
- Academic writing and conceptual development is a dynamic and lengthy process
- Focused mediation (targeting ZPD) can help students to internalise academic writing and conceptual development, thus maximising learning transfer
- Academic writing teachers need to concentrate on both academic writing and subject knowledge to enable learning transfer

Questions & comments?

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