

Title: “Do We Need to Know This for the Test?”: The Never Ending Battle of Transfer of Learning With College Students

Authors:

Lindsay Robinson
Graduate Research Assistant
Educational Leadership and Policy Studies
Iowa State University
N005 Lagomarcino Hall
Ames, IA 50011
Phone: 515-294-4030
Fax: 515-294-1279
E-mail: lrob@iastate.edu

Barbara Licklider
Associate Professor
Educational Leadership and Policy Studies
Iowa State University
N247B Lagomarcino Hall
Ames, IA 50011
Phone: 515-294-1276
Fax: 515-294-1279
E-mail: blicklid@iastate.edu

Jan Wiersema
Lecturer
Electrical and Computer Engineering
Iowa State University
N005 Lagomarcino Hall
Ames, IA 50011
Phone: 515-294-4030
Fax: 515-294-1279
E-mail: bwiersem@po2.aea12.k12.ia.us

“Do We Need to Know This for the Test?”
The Never Ending Battle of Transfer of Learning With College Students

Abstract

One major goal of higher education institutions is to prepare students for productive citizenship for the real world. Students learn information in the classroom that should be useful in their future lives. However, students do not always readily grasp the connections between what happens in the classroom and real-life situations, much to the frustration of their professors. Thus, the inability to transfer information from the classroom to new situations continues to be a critical concern for college students and educators. This report first discusses the inability of students to transfer material from the classroom to real life situations, explains the key characteristics of transfer of learning, and how it happens.

The heart of this paper describes an approach taken by a university to address the issues of transfer and to improve the current curriculum to promote positive transfer of student learning. Key to the success of improving transfer is educating the educators – about what transfer is, why it is important, and how to design learning environments that promote transfer of learning. Observational data of faculty actions and analysis of reflections of the faculty involved provide insights to effective ways to help faculty master this critical concept about learning. These findings inform those who lead faculty development for faculty seeking to help students more frequently and successful use in new situations tomorrow what they study in classrooms today.