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Citation:

Smith, SV and Draeger, J and Scharff, L and Verpoorten, D and Devlin, M and Dvorakova, S and Lodge, J (2017) Exploring Metacognition as a Support for Learning Transfer. In: European Conference for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, 07 June 2017 - 09 June 2017, Lund, Sweden.

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Exploring Metacognition as a Support for Learning Transfer

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ABSTRACT: This poster addresses the conference theme of exploring how the scholarship of teaching and learning can contribute to transforming patterns of learning in students. The poster shares the process and findings of a research project (initiated via the 2015 ISSoTL International Collaborative Writing Group) investigating how metacognition might enhance the transfer of learning from one context to another.

‘Learning transfer’ refers to the ability to take what is learned in one context and apply it effectively in another. This topic is of importance because the ability to transfer one’s learning and be flexible to new situations lies at the heart of lifelong learning (Cronon,1998) and the employability of university graduates (Muhamed, 2012).

Because students are often unaware of the importance of learning transfer, and staff do not always explicitly articulate this expectation (Lightner, Benander, & Kramer, 2008), this poster explores the idea that metacognition might enhance the development of learning transfer and, as such, catalyse new ways of learning with students in a range of learning environments.

We define ‘metacognition’ as the intertwining of awareness (i.e., self-monitoring) and use of that awareness (i.e., self-regulation) around a process (e.g., writing, studying, learning transfer). Our exploratory study investigated whether students (N=118) and instructors (N=74) from five universities across the USA, Australia, the UK and Europe reported similar or different perceptions and behaviours relating to transfer and metacognition. Our survey data, some of which is illustrated in the poster, indicate that many instructors and a majority of students do not have a clear understanding of what learning transfer entails, and that there are many mismatches between instructor and student perceptions, attitudes, and behaviours regarding learning transfer. Significant correlations between thinking about transfer and thinking about learning processes and the likelihood to use awareness to guide practice, support further inquiry into the use of metacognitive practices to support learning transfer.

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