
“Transfer over time” is a qualitative research study that exposes and clarifies that transfer of learning into usable application does continue well beyond the typical assessment intervals but only when participants choose to continually apply, reapply, assess, reassess, and apply again. Baldwin, Ford, and Blume (2009) reviewed the contents of 61 field studies and found that the mean segment of time between training and summative assessments to gauge knowledge transfer is fifteen weeks. Depending upon the difficulty or gravity of the knowledge/skill, fifteen weeks is not an ample period of time for the recipient to fully incorporate the knowledge into their routines/actions. As the idea of transfer over varying, especially extended periods of time was the goal of Yelon, Ford, and Golden (2013), they chose to further investigate the actions of autonomous learners. Autonomous learners are more likely to introspective, adaptable, and conscientious.

The authors engaged in a qualitative research study that included in depth interviews with eight physicians following a one year faculty fellowship training, in order to analyze transfer and individual processes the physicians followed to improve transfer. What made this study unique is the length of time between the training and the assessment. Yelon, Ford, and Golden (2013) chose four physicians to interview nine or ten years after the training, along with two physicians two years after the program and another two physicians three years after the program. The interviewees were given the guidelines and questions prior to the interviews to allow for careful reflection and accuracy, and thoroughness of the interview process. Their findings illuminated the fact that the interviewees began applying the elements of their training almost immediately. The interesting aspect of the study is the enduring maturing and assimilation of the training into all areas of their professional life and personal life as well. They found the physicians continually assessed for quality and improved and modified their work as necessary. The training became a way of living their life. The interviewees enumerated there were five components that lead them to continue utilizing their initial knowledge: “attitude toward the job, freedom to act, support for action, belief in the efficacy of the knowledge and skill learned, and the positive consequences of applications”. (Yelon, Ford, Golden, 2013, p.54) The underlying, unifying element between the results and the attitudes of the interviewees is caring conscientiousness. They respected themselves, they respected their work, and they strove to be the best they could be and to give the best they could to their work.
As an educator the whole idea of transfer is the reason for our existence. If we teach a math class or train a group of employees on the importance of safety, the measure of our worth is transfer. If the learners do not find the information relevant and therefore ignore the training, then as instructors we have overlooked and left out something for the learner to make a connection with to initiate the spark that can lead to transfer. I know personally, I treat my students’ failures as my own. As a trainer we need to think beyond the first assessment. True learning and transfer is measured months and years in the future. Transfer and application of knowledge is at the very heart of life. Learn from your experiences and mistakes by applying what you have learned to other component of your life and the lives of others. While the article does target a very specialized population of learners that by nature are intrinsically motivated, as educators we can glean kernels of truth and application to our specific training populations. No matter what the topic of training is, our goal as a trainer/educator must be first understanding the learner and second designing the material to have relevance to the learner that grabs their attention and makes them take notice. If the learner is involved then they are more likely to take a vested interest in the training and transfer will occur.

I can’t tell you anything that I really learned in elementary school, nothing inspired me. Junior High was my gateway to the joy of learning. In seventh and eighth grade, I had the most wonderful group of teachers that helped to solidify my desire for learning and my worldview. The first teacher that made a massive impression on me was my seventh grade Algebra teacher, Mr. Lynch. He opened my eyes to a world of interactive learning (not technology) but questions, answers, and seeking out the unknowns. Once his class was over, I assimilated the idea of solving for ‘x’ or the unknown into every aspect of my life. Life is one big algebra problem and the more variables we can apply the more successfully we can solve the equation. Transfer may take time to be assimilated into a person’s thought processes on a regular basis. What is abundantly clear is that training and transfer needs to be assessed over the long term in order to see and truly understand the effects and transfer of training and these results can be utilized and applied to understand and improve training.


Stolovitch and Vanassa have developed a method for improving performance which incorporates the use of ‘FlexGaming’. ‘FlexGaming’ involves a form of simulation that lends itself to various training ventures but especially to training that involves safety issues and protocols; training that is notoriously mundane and laborious. The ‘FlexGame’ allows for adjustments and adaptations to the simulation in order to further the training process to new situations and quandaries to better prepare learners and enhance performance. Stolovitch and Vanassa utilized the learning theories of Lewin (e.g. Lewin, 1951), Piaget (e.g. Flavell, 1963) and Dewey (e.g. Dewey, 1938,1958) to apply experiential learning to the safety training process of the Canadian Pacific Railway (CP Rail) employees. Any performance gap in safety can have disastrous results. Their goal is to use the ‘FlexGames’ simulations to impart technical safety training and ultimately to reduce the gap by improving learning transfer. Anytime a learner can physically or virtually act upon a situation, they can learn from the interactive experience unlike the typical ‘teach at’ didactic training devoid of simulations. For the sake of the CP Rail, the game they devised was a track with various ‘real life’ technical and situational tasks to interact with, learn from, and practice with. Stolovitch and Vanassa tested and surveyed learners on their experience and performance of the game. The results showed a marked improvement in knowledge transfer and learner buy-in and involvement.

The ‘FlexGame’ simulation trial at CP Rail enumerates the value of adjustable simulation gaming for technical safety training. All companies have safety and or technical training that must be completed on a regular basis. The training is there for a reason because it is important to the progress and safety of the employees and the companies. Incorporating a method of training that will increase learner inclusion and performance can only create a win-win situation for any company, school, or private venture. Working at a federally funded school, I am supposed to be privy to a plethora of rules and regulations regarding student information, safety, and diversity issues. Every year I receive an email from a gentleman who is in charge of making sure that every teacher completes four trainings a year that pertain to safety and student issues. I hate to admit this but the trainings are delivered in a PowerPoint that is less than
inspiring and I know that once the PowerPoint ends, I click ‘next’ and a certificate is printed out and I know that I won’t be bothered by that gentleman for another year. I did take the time to listen to the trainings the first year; however, I don’t anymore. If I were given a simulation to utilize the information in or differing circumstances that test my knowledge and intuition then I would actually have the opportunity for ‘experience’ rather just regurgitation or full on avoidance. Game based learning is not a new concept but it is gaining in popularity for varied learning situations. People learn by doing and experiencing and the idea of ‘FlexGame’ or similar simulations could be implemented into any number of learning/training situations with positive results for employees and businesses. I make an effort to apply ‘real life’ applications during my instruction; however, I am going to make a concerted effort to apply more.