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Mapping the Questions: The State of Writing-Related Transfer Research

Article Title

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Abstract: The following article maps the questions, methods, contexts, and theories presented in published scholarship on writing-related transfer. While not exhaustive, this review attempts to capture representative samples with a focus on recent publications. The article then highlights a multi-institutional research initiative that aims to flesh out the field’s “map” and suggests additional areas for exploration.

Early maps of the American West were notoriously incomplete; while charting the rivers and pathways that had been explored, cartographers could only make (often incorrect) inferences about the (often vast) spaces in-between. Rivers that appeared to branch in one spot and rejoin each other in another might actually be completely different bodies of water; similarly, mountain cuts that seemed from a distance like viable paths through mountain ranges might reveal other barriers from different perspectives. As more people explored and claimed new uses for the land, maps gained more detail: territorial boundaries, tributaries to previously mapped rivers, viable routes through mountain ranges, section boundaries, railroad lines, and other markers of the three-dimensional details the maps attempted to represent. With new land survey methods, these maps became more comprehensive and better predictors of what subsequent explorers would find.

Like early maps of the American West, mapping the research on writing transfer reveals both pockets of detail and gaps in disciplinary knowledge. Even the pockets of detail often come with the limitations inherent in mapping: they typically reveal one moment in one