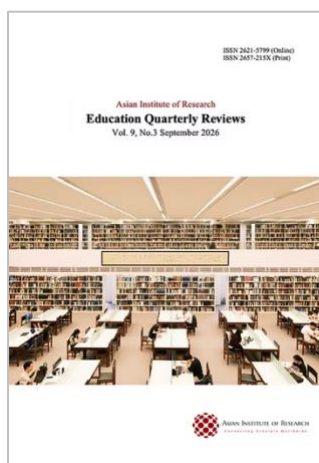




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Idea Transformation: Naming the Missing Process in Source-Based Writing

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Abstract

Source-based writing tasks require students to do more than locate relevant information in a text. They require students to convert that information into understood meaning before expressing it in written language. This paper argues that the process connecting these two acts, here termed idea transformation, is an overlooked educational concern that has not previously been examined as a unified teaching objective. The paper draws on classroom evidence from a cohort of twenty-nine Cambridge O Level English Language students participating in a targeted intervention programme at a Sixth Form College in Brunei Darussalam. Two sources of evidence are examined: the cohort's first internal comprehension assessment, which revealed a consistent pattern of retrieval without transformation across twenty-nine scripts, and a single directed writing lesson, in which one student made the missing process visible in a precise and observable moment. The theoretical framework positions idea transformation within established scholarship, drawing on Kintsch's (1988) construction-integration model, Anderson and Krathwohl's (2001) distinction between remembering and understanding, and Bereiter and Scardamalia's (2013) account of knowledge telling and knowledge transforming. The paper argues that students who stop at retrieval are not failing to read or to write. They are missing the intermediate act between the two. The discussion considers what this absence looks like in the classroom, what the existing literature reveals about why it occurs, and what teaching must do if it is to make idea transformation visible and necessary. The paper concludes by proposing that naming this process is the first step towards teaching it deliberately.

Keywords: Idea Transformation, Reading-Writing Relationship, English Language Teaching, Directed Writing, Knowledge Transforming

1. Introduction

Text-based writing tasks are a central feature of the Cambridge O Level English Language examination, and directed writing is among the most demanding of these tasks. Students are required to read two source texts, extract relevant information, and produce a coherent written response in a specified format, typically a letter, report, or email, addressed to a named audience. The task demands more than reading comprehension and more than writing competence. It demands something between the two: the capacity to take an idea from a text and make it one's own before committing it to paper. For many students at the secondary level, this intermediate capacity is precisely what is missing. They can read. They can write. What they cannot consistently do is transform retrieved information into understood meaning before committing that meaning to paper.

This observation emerged from a directed writing lesson conducted during the 2026 O Level English Language Intensive Programme at a Sixth Form College. The cohort comprised twenty-nine students resitting the Cambridge O Level examination, the majority having obtained grades D and E in the October/November 2025 sitting. During one lesson, the researcher observed a female student working on a directed writing task. The student read Text A, identified a relevant sentence, and highlighted it. She then turned to Paragraph 2 of her planning scaffold, which carried the sentence starter: *Firstly, one important point is...* She copied the highlighted sentence directly into her response, with very little change in wording. The student knew precisely where the idea belonged. She placed it correctly. What she did not do was process the idea before placing it.

The observation was not surprising in isolation. What made it significant was that the student had not failed the task by any surface measure. The information she selected was relevant. The paragraph was structurally correct. The sentence starter was in place. She had done everything the scaffold asked of her. And yet the response demonstrated information transfer rather than idea transformation. The idea had moved from the source text to the answer sheet without passing through the student's own understanding.

Assessment data from the cohort's first internal assessment, a school-based comprehension paper, confirmed that this pattern was not confined to one student. Students appeared increasingly capable of locating and retrieving information from texts. The transition from retrieval to interpretation, however, remained inconsistent. Across twenty-nine scripts, teacher commentary returned repeatedly to the same observation: students could identify relevant material, but could not yet explain it, develop it, or express it in language that was demonstrably their own. The challenge was not comprehension in the decoding sense. It was comprehension in the meaning-making sense, the capacity to hold an idea long enough to understand it before writing it down.

The existing literature addresses aspects of this problem from several disciplinary directions, but the specific process connecting these two moments, what happens between locating an idea and writing it down, has not been sufficiently named or examined as a unified teaching concern in source-based English language writing. Bereiter and Scardamalia (2013) distinguished between knowledge telling and knowledge transforming in written composition. Kintsch (1988) separated what a text says from what a reader constructs from it. Flower and Hayes (1981) described writing as a problem-solving process in which meaning is built rather than transcribed. Wittrock (1974/2010) argued that learning occurs only when learners generate meaningful relationships between new information and prior knowledge. Wiggins and McTighe (2005) demonstrated that genuine understanding requires explanation, interpretation, and application. Anderson and Krathwohl (2001) located remembering and understanding as distinct operations.

Bereiter and Scardamalia (2013) and Flower and Hayes (1981) have each examined what the writing process requires of a learner. Kintsch (1988) and Wittrock (1974/2010) have each examined how readers construct meaning from text. Wiggins and McTighe (2005) and Anderson and Krathwohl (2001) have each examined what genuine understanding looks like and what it demands of a learner. What none of these bodies of work has addressed directly is the point that sits between them: the moment in which a learner must stop receiving an idea and begin doing something with it. This paper proposes that this process, observable in classroom practice and supported by existing theory, can be usefully named and examined: idea transformation, defined here as the conversion of retrieved information into understood meaning before that meaning is committed to writing.

Two questions drive the inquiry. The first is conceptual: what is idea transformation, and where does it sit in the sequence that connects reading to writing? The second is practical: what does its absence look like in the classroom, and what does this suggest for teaching? The paper is organised as follows. The theoretical framework section draws on the reading and writing literature to define idea transformation and position it within existing scholarship. The discussion section returns to the classroom evidence, drawn from both the cohort's first internal comprehension assessment and a subsequent directed writing lesson, and examines both in the light of the theoretical framework. The conclusion draws the argument to a close and considers what it means for classroom teaching and for future research.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 *Reading Comprehension as Construction*

A reader who locates a relevant sentence in a source text and a reader who understands that sentence have not necessarily done the same thing. This distinction, which lies at the heart of the problem this paper examines, is supported by two bodies of theoretical work: Kintsch's (1988) account of how readers construct meaning from text, and Wittrock's (1974/2010) account of how learners generate meaning from new information.

Kintsch (1988) proposed that reading comprehension involves two related but distinct operations. In the first, a reader builds a representation of what the text says, drawing on the words, sentences, and propositions the text provides. In the second, this representation is integrated with the reader's existing knowledge to produce a fuller, more personalised understanding of what the text means. A reader who completes only the first operation has processed the text at a surface level. A reader who completes both has constructed meaning from it. The difference between these two outcomes is not visible in the text the reader produces immediately after reading. It becomes visible only when the reader is asked to explain, apply, or restate an idea in language that is demonstrably their own.

Wittrock (1974/2010) approached the same territory from an educational direction. Learning, he argued, is not the reception of information but the generation of meaningful relationships between new information and what the learner already knows. A learner who receives new information without generating such relationships has not yet learned in any meaningful sense. The information has been encountered; it has not been made one's own. Wittrock described this generative process as active and deliberate: it requires the learner to engage with new material, to connect it, elaborate it, and integrate it into existing understanding. Passive reception, however attentive, does not produce the same result.

These two accounts establish a principle that is foundational to the argument developed in this paper. Understanding is not a condition that results automatically from reading. It is a process that the reader must perform. The student who reads a source text, identifies a relevant sentence, and copies it into a written response has engaged with the text at the level of retrieval. Students may appear to have read successfully because they can locate a relevant sentence, but location is not the same as comprehension (Tovani, 2000). That student has not yet performed the operation that Kintsch (1988) and Wittrock (1974/2010) each describe as essential: the active construction of meaning from what has been read. What is missing is not attention, and it is not effort in the surface sense. What is missing is the internal process by which retrieved information becomes understood meaning. That process is what this paper sets out to define.

2.2 *The Reading-Writing Relationship*

If reading comprehension is a constructive act, then the move from reading to writing is not a simple handover of content from one activity to another. It is a continuation of the same meaning-making process under new demands. This is the central claim of the reading-writing relationship literature, and it is directly relevant to understanding what idea transformation requires.

Tierney and Pearson (1983) argued that reading and writing are both acts of composing. A reader, like a writer, is not a passive receiver of meaning but an active maker of it. Both reader and writer draw on prior knowledge, set goals, make decisions about what matters, and revise their understanding as they proceed. This framing displaced the older view of reading as reception and writing as production, and proposed instead that the two activities share underlying processes of meaning construction. Shanahan (1988) built on this by demonstrating that reading and writing draw on overlapping bodies of knowledge and that students benefit from instruction that treats them as mutually informing rather than as separate and sequential skills.

What this means for the source-based writing task is significant. A student who reads a source text and then writes from it is not completing two separate activities in sequence. Reading to write is a single, integrated act of meaning-

making in which the knowledge constructed through reading becomes the material from which written meaning is built. Spivey (1990) described this as the constructive work of a reader who is also a writer. Drawing on multiple source texts to produce a new text, the writer performs three operations: organising the material into a structure, selecting what is relevant, and connecting source content with knowledge already held. These are not mechanical operations. Each one requires the writer to make a judgement about meaning. Selecting requires the writer to understand what is relevant and why. Organising requires the writer to see how ideas relate. Connecting requires the writer to bring prior knowledge to bear on new material and to generate something that was not present in the source.

What the existing literature on the reading-writing relationship establishes, then, is that the movement from retrieved information to written response is not a transfer but a transformation. The source text provides the raw material. The writer's task is to remake that material into new meaning. When a student copies a retrieved sentence into a response without processing it, the movement from reading to writing has occurred, but the transformation has not. Retrieval has occurred, and so has writing. What has not occurred is idea transformation: the work that must happen between them.

2.3 Writing from Sources

The literature reviewed in the preceding sections establishes that reading comprehension is a constructive act and that writing from sources requires the reader to become a maker of new meaning. What the source-based writing literature adds is a detailed picture of what students actually do when they attempt that transition, and how consistently they fall short of it.

Howard, Serviss and Rodrigue (2010) examined the researched writing of eighteen college students and found that none of the papers included a summary of any source. Instead of writing from sources, students were writing from individual sentences selected from those sources. They located a sentence, reproduced or lightly altered it, and moved on. The central question their study raises is one that goes unanswered in the writing itself: does the student understand what has been read? The behaviour they documented, working at the level of the sentence rather than the level of meaning, places the writer in a position where genuine engagement with a source idea never has to occur.

Keck (2014) provides empirical detail of the same pattern across a larger corpus of student summaries. Novice writers, both first-language and second-language, relied more heavily on reproduced source language than experienced writers. Their paraphrases remained close to the original in wording and structure, representing what Keck describes as near copies rather than substantive revisions. The progression from near copy to substantial revision is not merely a linguistic one. It reflects the degree to which the writer has processed the source idea rather than borrowed its surface form.

Shi (2021) examined the same territory from a different angle, focusing on what professors considered acceptable paraphrasing. The professors in her study consistently required evidence that the student had understood and interpreted the source, not merely reproduced it with surface changes. What they were looking for, though they did not use this term, was evidence of content transformation: proof that the writer had engaged with the idea rather than transferred the words. Pecorari (2003) showed that much inappropriate source use stems not from an intention to deceive but from an absence of the means to do otherwise. Students who patchwrite, reproducing source language with minor alterations, are not always avoiding the work of understanding.

Across these bodies of research, a consistent finding emerges. Students who work too closely with source language are not simply making a technical error in citation or paraphrase. In many cases, the issue is developmental rather than deceptive. When reading is reduced to answer-hunting, students learn to treat the text as a container of ready-made responses rather than as material for thought (Gallagher, 2009). What their writing reveals is the absence of an intervening process: the one by which a retrieved idea is held, examined, and rebuilt as the writer's own understanding before it becomes the writer's own words. That process has not been sufficiently examined as a unified educational process in its own right.

2.4 From Retrieval to Understanding

The three bodies of literature reviewed so far establish that reading comprehension requires active construction of meaning, that reading and writing meet in source-based tasks as a single meaning-making process, and that students working from source texts frequently operate at the level of retrieval rather than transformation. What remains to be established is why retrieval is not enough, and what the literature on writing and understanding reveals about the demand that source-based tasks actually make of a learner. This is where the argument arrives at its theoretical core.

Bereiter and Scardamalia (2013) distinguished between two fundamentally different approaches to written composition. In knowledge telling, the writer moves directly from retrieved content to written output. The topic and genre provide the retrieval cues; what comes to mind is written down; the text grows through a process of successive addition rather than problem-solving. The approach is efficient and produces text that can appear complete and structurally correct. What it does not produce is writing that has been genuinely worked through. In knowledge transforming, by contrast, the writer operates across two spaces simultaneously: a content space, in which beliefs and understanding are examined, and a rhetorical space, in which the demands of the written text are negotiated. These two spaces interact. A decision about how to express an idea raises a question about what the idea actually means; that question, once answered, changes what is written. It is through this interaction that writing becomes a process of building understanding rather than a process of depositing what is already known.

The student observed in the 2026 classroom was operating in the manner that Bereiter and Scardamalia (2013) describe as knowledge telling. The source text provided the retrieval cue. The scaffold provided the structural prompt. The sentence moved from page to page without passing through the writer's own understanding. The content space was never entered.

Anderson and Krathwohl (2001) provide a complementary account from the perspective of educational taxonomy. In their revision of Bloom's original framework, remembering and understanding are distinct operations. Remembering involves retrieving relevant knowledge from long-term memory. Understanding involves constructing meaning from what has been retrieved, making sense of it, being able to explain or interpret it in one's own terms. A learner who retrieves correctly but cannot yet explain, interpret, or apply what has been retrieved has completed the first operation but not the second. The source-based examination task requires both. The assessment data from the 2026 cohort's first internal assessment, a school-based comprehension paper, showed students performing the first with increasing reliability whilst the second remained inconsistent.

Wiggins and McTighe (2005) make this visible from a curriculum and assessment perspective. Genuine understanding, they argue, is demonstrated when a learner can explain a concept in their own words, interpret its significance, and apply it in a new context. These are not simply higher demands placed on the same knowledge. They are qualitatively different operations that require the learner to have done something with the retrieved information: processed it, inhabited it, made it theirs.

What Bereiter and Scardamalia (2013), Anderson and Krathwohl (2001), and Wiggins and McTighe (2005) each describe, from different disciplinary positions and with different frameworks, is the same essential gap. This gap requires the learner to convert what has been retrieved into meaning that is genuinely held before that meaning can be expressed in written language.

Between the moment a student locates an idea in a text and the moment that idea appears as expressed meaning in a written response, something must happen. That something is what this paper identifies as idea transformation: the process by which retrieved information is converted into understood meaning before it is committed to writing. The discussion that follows returns to the classroom evidence, drawn from both the cohort's first internal comprehension assessment and a subsequent directed writing lesson, to examine what idea transformation looks like in its absence, and what its absence means for teaching.

3. Discussion

This paper is a conceptual practitioner inquiry. The classroom evidence presented here is not formal research data gathered through a planned methodology. The evidence is used in a different and specific way: to make visible a classroom process that existing literature has approached from several directions but has not named as a unified teaching concern. The twenty-nine scripts from the cohort's first internal comprehension assessment are drawn on as illustrative evidence of a pattern that the theoretical framework helps explain. The individual student moment from the directed writing lesson is used in the same way: not as a case study in the methodological sense, but as a precise and concrete instance that makes the argument visible at the level of a single learner at a single desk. The paper's contribution is therefore conceptual. It proposes a name and a theoretical position for a classroom process that teachers observe regularly but have not had precise language to address directly.

3.1 *What the Evidence Shows*

The evidence presented in this section moves across three levels, each doing different work: the examination demand, the cohort pattern, and the individual classroom moment. The Cambridge O Level English Language Principal Examiner Report (Cambridge Assessment International Education, 2025) establishes the external expectation that candidates should use source material rather than reproduce it. The cohort evidence shows that this expectation was not yet being met consistently by the 2026 O Level Intensive Programme students. The individual student example then makes the missing process visible in a single, concrete moment.

The report does not merely identify a general weakness in student writing. It names the demand of the task. Directed writing requires candidates to read one or more source texts and produce a piece of writing, such as a letter, report, or speech, that draws on and develops the information provided. Success therefore depends not only on locating the correct information, but on reshaping that information for a new purpose, audience, and form. In comprehension and summary tasks, weaker responses were characterised by lifting from the source and narrative retelling rather than explanation and development. The report provides the examination standard against which the classroom evidence in this paper can be understood: the examination expects students to do something with what they find, not simply place it on the page.

The cohort evidence shows how this demand appeared in practice. Across the twenty-nine scripts of the 2026 O Level Intensive Programme first assessment, a school-based comprehension assessment administered at a defined point in a targeted intervention programme for students working towards examination resit, the same pattern appeared repeatedly. Students were able to locate relevant information in the source texts. They could identify useful points and position them within a written structure. Yet their responses frequently remained close to the wording of the source. Where explanation was attempted, it often restated rather than developed the original point. Where independent expression was expected, the language of the source text reappeared with minimal change. Sentences from the source texts appeared in student responses with small grammatical adjustments but without any visible attempt to restate the idea or extend it. The difficulty was not that students could not find information. The difficulty was that retrieved information did not consistently become understood meaning before it entered the written response. This is what the first assessment, as a school-based assessment, made visible: not an absence of effort, but an absence of a specific process.

This pattern became visible with particular clarity in the work of one student during a subsequent directed writing lesson. The student read Text A, identified a relevant sentence, and highlighted it. She then turned to the paragraph scaffold and copied the highlighted sentence into her response with very little change in wording. The scaffold provided a sentence starter designed to guide the student into expressing an idea in a structured paragraph. At this point, the student had already located the relevant idea. The next expected move was not writing, but transformation: holding the idea, making sense of it, and preparing to express it in her own language. Instead, she moved directly from the highlighted sentence to the scaffolded paragraph. Looking across the classroom at that moment, the same pattern was visible in other responses: highlighted sentences transferred into scaffolded paragraphs with little evidence of intervening thought.

The significance of this moment lies in what did not happen. The student had not failed to read the text. She had not failed to identify relevant material. She had not failed to place the point in the correct part of the response. What was missing was the intermediate process between retrieval and expression. The idea moved from the source text to the answer sheet without passing visibly through the student's own understanding.

The evidence points towards a problem this paper identifies as distinct and overlooked. Copying, weak paraphrasing, and limited sentence control are the visible symptoms. The deeper issue is the absence of a middle step in source-based writing: the process this paper has named idea transformation.

3.2 Reading the Evidence through the Theoretical Framework

Locating source material and placing it into a written response is not the same as transforming it. The theoretical framework helps explain why that distinction matters. The issue is not simply that students copy. The more important concern is that the task sequence may allow students to stop at retrieval, whilst the examination actually requires them to move beyond retrieval into understood expression.

Raymond's (1988) discussion of cloze procedure is useful here because it shows how a reading task can appear simple whilst concealing more complex demands. In a cloze task, the student reads, identifies a missing word, supplies an answer, and moves on. The task may support scanning, prediction and reconstruction, but it can also encourage a narrow form of completion if it is used mechanically. The risk she identifies is that a task may appear to develop comprehension whilst stopping short of the meaning-making that comprehension requires. In the same way, a directed writing scaffold may help students locate and place information, yet still leave unaddressed the process by which an idea is held, tested, understood and expressed.

Kintsch (1988) helps explain why this matters. Reading comprehension is not simply a matter of recognising words or locating information. It requires the construction of a mental representation in which ideas are connected, interpreted and understood in relation to one another. When a student moves directly from a highlighted sentence to a written response, what is missing is not the words. What is missing is the constructed meaning that should stand between reading and writing. Anderson and Krathwohl (2001) sharpen this distinction further. In their revision of Bloom's taxonomy, remembering and understanding are distinct processes. Retrieving information from a source text is an act of remembering. Converting that information into an idea the learner can explain, develop and express is an act of understanding. The student in Section 3.1 completed the first process. The second process did not visibly occur.

Bereiter and Scardamalia (2013) name the writing behaviour that results. Knowledge telling describes the practice of retrieving what is known or found and committing it directly to the page without the transformation that genuine composition requires. The student who highlighted a sentence and copied it into a scaffolded paragraph was not yet composing in the fuller sense. She was telling. This behaviour is consistent with what Howard, Serviss and Rodrigue (2010) describe as patchwriting: the reproduction of source language with only minimal alteration, a pattern more accurately understood as a developmental limitation than as deliberate copying. The idea moved from the source to the answer sheet without passing through the generative process that writing, at its most purposeful, demands.

Rahman et al. (2021) extend this concern from task design to assessment culture, drawing on the established concept of washback: the effect that high-stakes assessments have on teaching and learning (Alderson & Wall, 1993). Their work on washback shows that assessment systems can shape what teachers emphasise and what students learn to value. When assessment pressure rewards visible completion, correct selection and examination performance, classroom practice can become increasingly task-driven. Students may learn to look for the answer, reproduce the answer and move on, because those behaviours appear to satisfy the immediate demand. In such a context, the absence of idea transformation is not only an individual weakness. It becomes part of a wider pattern in which assessment conditions may encourage students to complete the task without fully engaging with the meaning of the source.

Gabut et al. (2026) deepen the argument by distinguishing surface learning from deeper engagement. Surface learning relies on memorisation, reproduction and minimum task completion. Deep learning requires students to connect, organise and understand ideas. The student who copies a highlighted sentence into a scaffolded paragraph is not necessarily unwilling to think. She may be using the strategy that the learning environment has made most familiar: find the relevant information, place it correctly, and produce an acceptable-looking response. From the outside, the answer appears organised. From the inside, the idea has not yet been transformed.

These sources help interpret the evidence in a way the evidence alone cannot. Raymond (1988) shows what a task can miss. Kintsch (1988) and Anderson and Krathwohl (2001) explain what is missing at the level of meaning and understanding. Bereiter and Scardamalia (2013) name the resulting writing behaviour. Rahman et al. (2021) show how assessment pressure can reinforce incomplete task behaviours. Gabut et al. (2026) show how students may come to rely on surface strategies when those strategies appear to work. The classroom moment described above therefore points to more than copying. It reveals an unnamed gap in the teaching sequence: students are taught to find information and to write answers, but they are not always taught how to convert the information they have found into meaning they genuinely understand.

This is why idea transformation matters as a concept. If the missing process is not named, it is difficult to teach directly. Students may continue to be corrected for copying without being shown what should happen instead. The problem is therefore not only that students reproduce source language. The deeper problem is that the intermediate act between retrieval and written expression has remained insufficiently visible as a teaching objective.

3.3 What the Evidence Means for Teaching

The evidence and the theoretical framework have established what is missing. What remains is the practical question: if students are stopping at retrieval, what must teaching insert between finding and writing?

The answer is not simply a new technique. It is a different understanding of what the writing task requires. Elbow (1973) argues that writing is not the transcription of ideas that already exist in finished form. It is the process through which meaning grows. When a student moves directly from a highlighted sentence to a written response, she is treating writing as transcription. The idea is already there, in the source text. Her task, as she understands it, is to place it correctly. What Elbow's argument makes visible is that this understanding of writing misses the generative middle: the space in which the writer holds an idea, works with it, and arrives at an expression that is genuinely her own. That space is not incidental to purposeful writing. It is where transformation happens.

The pedagogical implication is therefore specific. Teaching must make the generative middle visible and necessary. One way to do this is to remove the source sentence from view at the point of writing. If the student cannot see the original, she must reconstruct the idea in her own language. Reconstruction is not paraphrase practised as a technique. It is the act of holding meaning long enough to express it. That is where idea transformation becomes observable and, importantly, where it becomes teachable as a classroom step rather than an assumed outcome.

Khan et al. (2025) caution, however, that task redesign alone is insufficient. Their study of assessment reform in Malaysia shows that even well-designed tasks intended to promote deeper engagement with meaning can be neutralised by the surrounding system. When assessment conditions continue to reward completion and correct selection, when teacher training does not address the gap between retrieval and expression, and when institutional expectations remain focused on examination performance, students and teachers alike will orient their practice towards the visible surface requirement. The teachable middle step that this paper identifies requires not only different tasks but different teacher understanding of what those tasks are for, and assessment conditions that make meaningful engagement with the idea visible and valued.

4. Conclusion

This paper has argued from a specific and bounded position. The evidence is drawn from one cohort, in one institution, at one point in the programme. The framework is built from existing literature rather than from a designed empirical study. These are not weaknesses to apologise for. They are the honest boundaries of a conceptual paper that has identified a focused and specific problem: the absence, in classroom practice and in the existing literature, of a named process connecting reading to writing. What the paper opens is a question for further investigation, specifically, how idea transformation can be taught, observed, and strengthened across different source-based writing contexts within English language education. That investigation is the work that follows.

What the paper has established, within those boundaries, is this. Between the moment a student locates an idea in a source text and the moment that idea appears in a written response, something must happen. That something has a name. Idea transformation is the process by which a learner converts retrieved information into understood meaning before committing that meaning to writing. It is not a new mechanism of the mind. It is an overlooked educational process, observable in classroom practice and supported by existing theory, that sits between retrieval and expression and has not previously been examined as a unified teaching concern.

The first research question asked what idea transformation is and where it sits in the sequence connecting reading to writing. The answer the paper has built is as follows. Reading comprehension, as Kintsch (1988) established, is not completed by locating a relevant sentence. It requires the construction of meaning from what has been read. Writing from sources, as Spivey (1990) and the reading-writing relationship literature demonstrate, is not a transfer of that located material onto the page. It is a continuation of the same meaning-making process under new demands. Idea transformation is what must occur between these two acts: the moment at which the learner stops receiving an idea and begins doing something with it. In Anderson and Krathwohl's (2001) terms, it is the passage from remembering to understanding. In Bereiter and Scardamalia's (2013) terms, it is the entry into the content space that knowledge transforming requires and knowledge telling bypasses. It sits between retrieval and expression, and it is precisely there that the students in the 2026 cohort were stopping short.

The second research question asked what the absence of idea transformation looks like in the classroom, and what this suggests for teaching. The answer is visible in two kinds of evidence. Across twenty-nine scripts in the cohort's first internal comprehension assessment, retrieved information entered written responses with minimal processing. The language of the source text reappeared with small adjustments but without any visible attempt to restate, develop, or extend the idea. In a subsequent directed writing lesson, a single student made the missing process concrete: she read, highlighted, and copied, moving directly from the source text to the scaffolded paragraph without passing through understanding. What was absent was not effort and not attention. What was absent was the intermediate act between finding and writing.

For teaching, this absence points to a specific and addressable gap. Elbow (1973) establishes that writing is not transcription but generation: meaning grows through the writing process rather than preceding it. If that is so, then teaching must make the generative middle visible and necessary. The practical implication is not a new technique but a reorientation of what the writing task is understood to require. Removing the source sentence from view at the point of writing is one way to make the intermediate act unavoidable: the student must reconstruct the idea in her own language, which is precisely where idea transformation becomes observable and teachable. Khan et al. (2025) caution, rightly, that task redesign alone is insufficient where assessment conditions continue to reward visible completion over meaningful engagement. The teaching implication this paper identifies therefore requires not only different tasks but different understanding of what those tasks are for.

The contribution this paper makes is not empirical. It is conceptual. It proposes a name for a process that classroom teachers observe repeatedly but have not had precise language to describe or address directly. Students are corrected for copying. They are told to use their own words. What they are rarely shown is what must happen in the space between finding an idea and writing it down. Naming that space, and positioning it within an established theoretical framework, is the first step towards teaching it deliberately. That is what this paper has attempted to do.

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