



CAMBRIDGE ENGLISH
Language Assessment
Part of the University of Cambridge

Research Notes

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The 2016 English Australia/Cambridge English Language
Assessment Action Research in ELICOS Program

A quarterly publication reporting on teaching, learning and assessment

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Editorial

Welcome to the May 2017 issue of *Research Notes*, which presents six classroom-based investigations by teachers who took part in the 2016 Action Research in English language intensive courses for overseas students (ELICOS) Program, supported by Cambridge English and English Australia. The articles examine the impact of learning-oriented assessment and technology on classroom practices, learner autonomy and teacher professional development.

Anne Burns' introductory article explores language teachers' identity as researchers using data from teachers supported by the Action Research in ELICOS Program since 2010. Burns summarises teachers' experiences of becoming teacher researchers, focusing on their feelings, challenges and personal development through undertaking action research (AR). She concludes that teachers' reflections on their own identity as teacher researchers has helped them to become 'change agents' in their teaching contexts and suggests that becoming a teacher researcher can have both anticipated and unexpected effects on both individuals and their learners and colleagues.

The following pair of articles on collaborative learning showcase the strengths of using technology to support language learning and learner autonomy. Lisa Mangion and Peter Stokes report on using Google Docs in the classroom to increase student collaboration in developing genre-based writing skills, following their observation that students do not have sufficient knowledge of Academic English genres to cope with the demands of university study. They adopted a genre-based teaching cycle and explored whether the joint construction of academic texts using Google Docs enabled students to grasp the genre-specific features of academic essays and research reports. The findings suggest that students collaborated with their teachers and each other to write suitable academic texts and that explicit modelling and teaching of features of academic writing is an effective way of initiating students into academic English language use. Next, Vishvani Campbell and Catherine Thorpe focus on the collaborative production of videos using smartphones, which arose from a desire to increase student motivation to participate in task-based, communicative learning through group work within and outside the classroom. They focused on how making group videos helped develop student autonomy and the impact on collaborative skills. Their action research was undertaken over five weeks with students writing, filming, and editing videos with teacher scaffolding and peer/teacher feedback at specific points. Campbell and Thorpe found that students engaged positively with producing videos and this was supported by students' higher than expected marks in end-of-course speaking assessments and a transfer of skills to other classes. A lasting impact of this project is its inclusion in the institutional curriculum and its planned extension to incorporate writing skills development.

The next two studies apply LOA principles to corpus studies of vocabulary and grammar. Sascha Mitchell's article focuses on enabling students to develop effective vocabulary learning strategies so that they can acquire and use academic vocabulary confidently. Two classes were involved in 10-week cycles in which students reflected on their current vocabulary learning strategies before being trained to use online corpus tools to explore lexis from Coxhead's (2000) Academic Word List. Students produced blog posts on using corpus tools and collaborated on weekly wordlists via a learning management system then Google Docs, whilst Mitchell assessed her students' vocabulary knowledge formatively and undertook mid- and post-cycle

questionnaires and interviews. Mitchell concludes that online corpus study was a positive experience for her students, with most feeling more confident about using a wider range of vocabulary learning strategies whilst also benefitting from using corpus tools. Also using corpora, Brooke Donnelly and Nicholas Falkinder discuss developing learner autonomy in academic writing through using corpora of learner and business texts to develop students' collocational and grammatical accuracy. Despite having to alter their action research project due to changes at their institution, Donnelly and Falkinder completed two AR cycles. In the first they identified inappropriate collocations and grammatical patterns in their students' writing, then led four workshops after class on using two corpus tools to help students edit their own writing. This was successful as students attempted to correct most collocational errors identified in their written work. For the second cycle, involving another class, the teachers introduced corpus tools in class and helped students to explore grammatical patterns, which resulted in students correcting some grammatical errors, although a lower proportion than in Cycle 1. Most students responded positively to a questionnaire about how easy they found working with corpora and whether they would continue to use corpora independently, and these outcomes have spurred the researchers to pilot a more scaffolded approach to using corpora with other classes, both for collocations and grammatical patterning.

We finish with two articles that focus on writing, considering peer review and award-based assessment. Fergal Fleming and Aida Barnhoorn explore whether online peer review can encourage learner autonomy and improve students' editing of short essays. They used an AR approach to change peer feedback timing and structure, using an online platform (Aropä) for randomly assigned peer review of first drafts of essays based on a checklist of required elements and guided practice materials. Instructional videos were also created showing how to use Aropä to review and incorporate feedback into essays, which were submitted and reviewed over a 3-day period. All students reflected on using the online platform for peer feedback and their comments were mainly positive, reporting that they gained confidence in accepting and giving peer feedback. In the final article, Melissa Reed considers how the award-based assessment of writing can improve grammatical accuracy and range. This project arose from her students' perceived lack of progress in writing and repetition of errors despite self- and peer-correction and teacher feedback, leading Reed to focus on developing individual study plans based on formative online assessments. Students completed weekly written assignments using the K+Tools learning management system, with the teacher providing a grade, feedback and recommended exercises. This was followed up with students in class twice a week and work outside of class. Teacher suggestions for activities were reduced over five weeks to encourage students to be more autonomous. Two cycles were completed, with the second being more student-led. These individualised programs helped students both to address weaknesses in their use of grammar and add to their grammatical range, more so than other students not following this approach.

This issue highlights the challenges and advantages of undertaking action research as experienced by the 2016 group (see page 7) which consisted of pairs (recommended for mutual support) and individuals. We will report on further action research studies in future *Research Notes*.

'No going back': Developing identities as teacher researchers

ANNE BURNS UNIVERSITY OF NEW SOUTH WALES, SYDNEY

Introduction

Over the last two decades much interest has developed in the way identity is embedded in both teacher and learner experiences of language education. Teaching and learning to teach a language involve profound cultural, social, personal, and emotional processes of constructing and reconstructing a professional persona as a teacher, that rest on previous personal histories and educational trajectories. Language teacher identity is intimately bound up with local, dynamic sociocultural contexts of learning where teachers intersect with the actors, contingencies, constraints, affordances, and ideologies of their workplaces.

Interest in language teacher identity has emerged rapidly in recent years as witnessed by the burgeoning number of publications (e.g. Barkhuizen (Ed) 2017, Beijaard, Meijer and Verloop 2004, Cross and Gearon 2007, Miller 2009, Varghese, Morgan, Johnston and Johnson 2005, Varghese, Motha, Park, Reeves and Trent 2016). However, there is still very little research available on language teacher identities as researchers (although see Banegas 2012, Edwards and Burns 2016, Trent 2010, Yuan and Burns 2016). In my experience of over 25 years of working with teachers who are becoming teacher researchers, I have come to realise that language teacher researcher identity constitutes a highly dynamic trajectory that situates teachers as 'dwelling in two inter-related spaces that are more often than not in a state of complex and unstable tension between one's role as a teacher and role as a researcher' (Burns 2017:136). In this article I provide some insights from teachers' perspectives of what it means to move into a teacher researcher role. To do so I explore recent data from teachers who have participated in the Action Research in ELICOS Program in Australia.

Theoretical considerations

When researchers begin to delve into the literature on language teacher identity they soon discover that trying to define identity is a 'murky' business (Barkhuizen (Ed) 2017:2). As Barkhuizen laments, part of the problem is that the construct of identity is informed by many theoretical approaches and understandings which have varied in prominence at different times – cognitive psychology, post-structuralism, sociocultural and dialogic theory, community of practice theory, social identity theory, ecological theory, critical theory, feminist theory and so on. What does seem to be widely recognised is that identity is not a fixed state of being but something that is fluid, dynamic, changing over time and socioculturally constructed through

contextualised discursive practices (Miller 2009). Identity is a complex compositive of being and becoming at the same time – a be(com)ing (Burns 2017) – that involves both the internal and external emotional and material worlds of teachers, that are sometimes in harmony and sometimes in tension. These worlds are impacted both by the personal and professional and by the wider cultural and social milieu in which teachers operate. They involve study of the self, and recognition and acknowledgement by others, which may affect one's sense of agency and autonomy as a teacher and/or a researcher. They incur a sense of who one is now and also of 'a possible self' of the future (Markus and Nurius 1986). The accounts that follow touch on several of these themes from the literature.

Teachers developing as researchers

Twenty teachers who had participated in recent years of the Action Research in ELICOS Program were asked to reflect through brief narratives on what they felt were some key responses to their personal experiences of entering into roles as teacher researchers. As examples, it was suggested that they might include areas such as challenges, personal development, or feelings experienced during their research process; however, in general they were invited to return reflections that were open-ended and personally relevant to them. The responses, submitted by 14 of the teachers, provide glimpses of what the processes of be(com)ing teacher researchers meant to these teachers. In the sections that follow I focus on three emerging areas: identifying as a researcher; identifying with students; identifying as a professional.

Being and becoming a teacher researcher

Teachers varied in the extent to which they identified with being a teacher researcher. Interestingly, some teachers, such as the two below, indicated that they had always, either overtly or implicitly, regarded themselves as researchers and that the Program had only served to intensify or consolidate this self-image:

I understood I was a researcher during my first BA. I remember that that particular group of teachers (as they wanted to be called instead of professors) always made sure that we read authors in the originals and not those who commented on the originals, they said that we were smart enough to understand the originals and that somehow made me feel close to them as if I myself were one of them and could research just like they did. I felt empowered and important and, most importantly capable and since then I have believed that I could be one of them.

I didn't feel the research in AR posed any significant challenge. In fact, it was almost a relief for me to be able to utilize that aspect of my working self . . . I spend every day teaching students how to research, but until I did the AR program I wasn't practising the process myself.

Another teacher indicated that they already felt a certain degree of confidence in their skills as a researcher but had shifted their perspectives on what could be considered the scope of research that could be available to them. These new perspectives on research seem to have helped them to embed themselves and their lives as teachers into the notion of researching, rather than seeing it from a more external perspective:

As I had already written a minor thesis for my Masters, I already felt like I had some skills as a "researcher", e.g. planning, writing, etc. However, I did feel that there was more "messiness" about doing research in your own classroom. I guess this is because you are so much more involved "in" the research as an action researcher, rather than an outsider, which I feel is more like "academic" research.

Yet other teachers referred to a growing sense of an evolving and expanding identity, of envisaging and incorporating more multifaceted dimensions into their roles as language teacher professionals. These shifts of identity were taking them in new directions within and beyond the classroom. They were explained as transitions or new discoveries about how one's identity could be envisaged by oneself and others:

I recently updated my Twitter profile description from "English Language Teacher" to "English Language Teacher and Researcher." I didn't think much about it at the time, but on reflection I guess this indicates a shift in how I see my role. I think after the AR program there's no going back - I'm now a teacher and researcher, and I'll bring a more critical eye to everything that happens in my classroom.

[AR] involves the transition from educator to investigator. Personally, I felt it extended on what I already do and have been doing in my teaching.

So on a personal level, I found out more about myself. I believe I have found my passion - and it is teacher research. It excites me, I want to do more, and more importantly, I want to help new teachers do more.

One teacher commented that for them gaining a sense of identity as a teacher researcher had been a protracted process and one that had required 'evidence' of legitimate research status through publication of the research. This legitimation had enabled the teacher to make a firmer claim about being a researcher as well as a teacher:

After completing my AR, I still didn't really feel like a "researcher" until I had seen my AR report published in [the Cambridge English journal] *Research Notes* and then [another journal]. Three years later, I definitely identify myself as a "teacher-researcher" and have a lot more confidence to convince others about the benefits of doing research too!

These reflections echo part of Barkhuizen's (Ed) (2017:4) definition where he explains that language teacher

identities (LTIs) change, 'short term and over time'. Whereas for some teachers their discursively constructed experiences, for example through early formal pre-service education, may already include the discourses of teacher-as-researcher (as may be increasingly the case in many university-based TESOL programs), for others their sense of themselves as researchers may be a question of 'what resources he or she has accumulated through past experiences inside and outside of the classroom' (Oda 2017:225) and how their identities have gradually evolved through longer-term pedagogical engagement.

Blurring the boundaries between teachers as learners and learners as teachers

Several of the teachers expressed their sense of their evolving identities as researchers in terms that foregrounded new and more profound insights about their learners. These insights had not only increased their confidence as teachers, but had also raised their awareness that being researchers in addition to teachers could better position them to serve, understand and open up to their learners. One teacher explained how, as a fairly new teacher, the preconceived 'theoretical' beliefs she had brought to teaching had been quite radically modified in the process of becoming a teacher researcher:

One of the biggest challenges for me as a teacher researcher was to let go of the preconceptions I held about my learners and my teaching. In the few years since completing my teacher training, I had developed notions of what I believed students liked or needed. These notions were derived mainly from course book materials and the general theory from my training. As an inexperienced teacher I sometimes made "safe" choices based on these preconceptions. Participating in research and exploring individual classroom environments has given me the self-confidence to make my own more informed choices on a class by class, or even learner by learner basis. This has helped me to respond to my students as individuals rather than just learners of English, and in turn has helped me to appreciate the diverse ways in which students benefit from learning a language, some of which can't be measured by a test.

Another teacher noted that their research enabled them to be more flexible about genuinely incorporating students' responses into the adjustments made to teaching approaches and materials. This teacher suggested that it was the process of data collection and analysis that had facilitated more profound insights about their students' role in mediating their teaching.

[Being a researcher] involved being more thorough in my preparation in what and how I am teaching and being conscious of the students' response and feedback and being more supportive to addressing their needs and negotiating with students throughout the process. As a researcher I am also conscious of collecting, collating and analysing data with it in mind to being flexible in how the results may vary depending on the students; and how the results may change the direction of the research.

A third teacher commented on how they became more respectful of students' achievements in the light of the demands the course was making on them:

[Doing research] put me more on the students' level, and helped me to realise how high my expectations of them were, and how well they were actually doing.

Some teachers also recognised the way their students' involvement in the research shaped their own learning as researchers as well as their students'. As one teacher noted 'The benefits of doing the research in my own classroom was that the students actually became part of the research as active participants.' Another commented that 'involving the students in the research process was fantastic, as they could see we were working with them and not on them'.

These accounts illuminate the way that teachers' self-image as researchers is co-constructed through interactions with their learners in the situated contexts of their classrooms. Their research 'with' their students and not 'on' them changes the nature of these interactions and enables them to see their students in a different light, as co-mediators of the learning process.

Identifying as a professional

Several teachers referred to the way their experiences had shaped or were beginning to shape their identities within their wider professional contexts. These experiences were both positive and negative, often reflecting elements of both tension and harmony. At the most immediate level of contacts with others, two teachers referred to their experiences of working as teacher researchers directly with another colleague, but from very different perspectives. For one this experience, expressed in terms of the co-authorship of the article they had written together for *Research Notes*, was enlightening:

Conducting research as a part of the AR program was the first experience I had of co-authorship. I not only enjoyed this experience, but learnt a tremendous amount about myself and the way I think through ideas.

However, for the other the sense of a continual struggle to gain agency and autonomy within the relationship was more prominent, albeit imbued with a feeling of being able to meet this challenge. At other times there was felt to be an imbalance in the motivation and engagement of the research partners, which although manageable, had clearly had an effect:

Also two people think and create differently, so you are challenged by working collaboratively together and I'm proud to say we did achieve this, but it was challenging at times and required one person often to give in to the other's way of doing things.

My research partner wasn't as eager or as motivated as I was. This within itself did bring about some issues but nothing that got in the way of our research.

Other teachers related that their growing confidence in their teacher researcher identity was fuelled by colleagues in their environment, other than their research partner, who gave them recognition and acknowledged their new status:

I knew what I was doing even if I weren't sure where it would lead me and I feel that I was regarded in a different (positive) way by my students, colleagues and management.

Some however, lamented what they saw as a lack of understanding of their emerging researcher identities among teacher colleagues. One teacher expressed their disappointment at the restricted sense of professionalism they observed around them and the instrumental motives for doing research that were attributed to them; interestingly this indifference seems to contribute to their resilience in adhering to their new identity:

... at times it was difficult to get any recognition from our colleagues. The idea that there was research in progress and we were either seeking their cooperation through completing a survey, taking part in a focus group or providing feedback on new material was comical. It was hardly ever viewed as research or professional development, how could it be we shared the same staffroom! Unfortunately for many it was regarded as "doing it to get a contract/work - brownie points" so to speak! Never stopped me though!

These kinds of sentiments were, unfortunately, echoed by others: 'Negativity from teachers who asserted "teachers are not researchers";' exclaimed one of the teachers, while another stated that 'The main challenge of doing AR for me was the school I was working at, and not feeling that anyone else there could really identify with or support what I was doing in the AR program.' However, within particular institutional environments, recognition of the teachers' researcher identities in the wider managerial context or in the more immediate collegial context varied considerably. While for some their sense of identity as researchers seemed to be clearly acknowledged by their colleagues and managers, as in the earlier comment above, for others it was their managers who did not appear to provide any recognition of their emerging researcher identities:

Feeling that I'm not taken seriously - but it's helped me not to care, because other TEACHERS take me seriously and they matter more.

The managers didn't seem to think this [the topic of my research] was very important, and I was even teased for my interest in such "boring" things!

The volatile nature of the ELICOS industry (Stanley 2016) and changes in workplace management could also mean that previous managerial acclamation of a researcher identity could also quickly disappear: 'Changes in staff mean that you're no longer the Golden Ones.'

Perhaps the most telling reflections on their sense of teacher researcher identity in relation to their professional community came from teachers who were spreading their wings to the wider ELT world, beyond their teaching centres and even beyond the country. One teacher referred to the fact that they were now 'working and talking with others in other faculties around our university', something that had not been part of their practice before participation in the Program. Two teachers were particularly proud of presentations they had given at international conferences and the positive feedback which helped to consolidate their sense of themselves as authentic members of a teacher researcher community and even as providers of advice about research to other teachers:

Presenting findings to colleagues around the world, seeing that we have similar issues and discovering that they have taken on our approach – by far the best professional development project I have done. After each presentation, the comments were generally the same, “I love the idea and I am going to try something similar with my students” or “You are so excited and passionate about this, you have motivated me – I think I will look into doing research”. That you can’t buy!

The [teacher researcher colloquium at an international conference] was a great platform to present our research and to formalise it through publications. It was also fantastic for motivation and support.

One other teacher shared with me a message recently received from an international conference accepting their presentation, including their response to this news:

Dear . . .

Thank you for submitting an abstract(s) for the . . . Conference on English Language Teaching. We are pleased to inform you that your paper has been accepted . . . Congratulations!

I’m over the moon! =)

These comments highlight the relational nature of identity, one’s sense of how one is positioned by and within different communities that construct teachers’ personal and professional environments. It is within these environments that actual lived experiences are formed and actors create the opportunities to be part of the communities they wish to join. As Xu’s biographical account of becoming a teacher researcher relates, being part of the community ‘will generate a sense of belonging, which enhances participation and performance’ (2017:123). Likewise Burns refers to ‘contextualised forms of “finding recognition” (of being legitimated) that is personal, but also collegial, and institutional’ (2017:134).

Conclusion

Be(com)ing a teacher researcher represents a significant shift in language teacher identity construction. McNiff (2002:23) points out that action research adds an additional layer of teacher learning about teaching as it constitutes ‘an enquiry of the self into the self’. Action research enables teachers to position themselves ‘strategically’ (Somekh 2006) in relation to their teaching and to develop self-conscious and metacognitive ways of thinking about and critically evaluating their practices. Through action research teachers are in a better position to (re)construct themselves as agents of change in their classrooms and potentially in their wider educational settings and, most importantly of all, to maximise the learning outcomes for their students. The studies that follow in this issue of *Research Notes* all illustrate how teachers in the Australian ELICOS sector used their experiences of conducting research to position themselves as change agents in their classrooms and their teaching centres. They highlight what they learned along the way about themselves as teachers and, more importantly, about

their learners. Their papers all offer examples for other teachers about how they too could develop identities as teacher researchers in their own working contexts and offer new and innovative approaches in their classrooms.

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Participants of the 2016 English Australia/Cambridge English Language Assessment Action Research in ELICOS Program



Back (L-R) English Australia Professional Support and Development Manager Sophie O'Keefe, Catherine Thorpe, Peter Stokes, Fergal Fleming, Aida Barnhoorn, Melissa Reed, Sascha Mitchell, Vishvani Campbell

Front (L-R) Lisa Mangion, Allen Blewitt from Cambridge English, Key Reference Person Anne Burns, Brooke Donnelly (Nicholas Falkinder absent)

Using cloud computing to increase collaboration in developing writing skills

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Introduction

Learning the English writing skills needed for university study involves the acquisition not only of academic vocabulary and grammar, but knowledge of the processes of academic writing, and familiarity with academic genres. While many students of academic English we have taught seem to have a sound grasp of the rules of

English grammar, and a good vocabulary with declarative knowledge of the meaning of many English words, we noticed that the application of this knowledge to writing in the rhetorical structures of university texts is often a challenge.

We have found that explicitly modelling and teaching students the features of the genres they are expected to read and write by following the genre-based teaching-

learning cycle is an effective way to initiate students into university English language use. In particular we wanted to experiment with one aspect of this cycle and also to use Google Docs¹ to support students to use a collaborative process of writing.

Context and participants

Our action research (AR) was carried out at University of Wollongong (UOW) College, which is attached to the University of Wollongong, in New South Wales. English courses are offered in 6-week blocks, including English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and the Direct Entry Program (DEP), which are provided to students as a condition of their offer of enrolment if they don't meet the English language requirements for entry into a university degree. This research was conducted across three 6-week blocks, involving three EAP classes and two DEP classes, a total of five class groups and 73 students.

In the first program, EAP, classes occur at three levels, with the third level, Academic Skills 3, corresponding to the B1+/B2 level on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR, Council of Europe 2001). Three class groups from Academic Skills 3 were included in the research. In the second program, DEP, the main course is English for Tertiary Studies (ETS), which also has three levels: ETS1, ETS2 and ETS3. Upon completion of the DEP program, an aggregate mark from students' assessments at the three levels determines whether they will enter the University of Wollongong Undergraduate and Postgraduate courses. In our research, an ETS2 and an ETS3 class were included. These two classes correspond to the B2/C1 level of the CEFR. The three EAP classes were taught by Peter,

while the ETS classes were taught by Lisa. Both teachers had taught these courses previously. The linguistic and educational background of the various student groups are summarised in Table 1.

Research focus and questions

In this teaching context, many of the students seem to have a good depth of knowledge of English grammar, vocabulary and syntax. As young, often professionally experienced or tertiary-educated adults, many of the students are confident in using their own strategies and processes to undertake a writing task. What seemed to us to be an area of weakness was students' ability to apply their knowledge and confidence to producing writing that conforms to the expectations of the academic genres they are required to produce as part of their English language courses at UOW College, and in their subsequent university degrees. To address this, we applied the genre-based approach, as it 'makes plain' the culturally specific ways that language is used in different contexts (Hyland 2007:150). The genre based approach involves following a teaching cycle with three main stages: Deconstruction of models of the target genre, Joint Construction of a text in the genre, either with peers or the teacher, and finally, Independent Construction, where the student produces their own text in the genre (Dreyfus and Macnaught 2011:78). We saw Joint Construction as 'a crucial intermediate link' (Dreyfus and Macnaught 2011:78) between students noticing patterns in language use and producing independent writing that conforms to or uses those patterns, and we were particularly interested in how to provide more guidance as teachers in this process. While it may seem expedient to move immediately from

Table 1: Participants

EAP – Academic Skills 3	Cycle 1	Cycle 2	Cycle 3
Number of students	15	12	14
Number female: male	5:10	3:9	5:9
Students repeating the course	2	3	1
Age range	19–33	18–33	18–22
Country of origin	China Saudi Arabia Oman Kuwait Vietnam	China Iraq Thailand Vietnam Japan Sri Lanka	China Japan Vietnam
ETS – English for Tertiary Studies	Cycle 1 (ETS2)	Cycle 2 (ETS3)	N/A
No. of students	16	16	–
Number female: male	10:6	5:11	–
Students repeating the course	2	3	–
Age range	19–30	18–36	–
Country of origin	China India Saudi Arabia Nepal Pakistan	China India Pakistan Bangladesh	–

¹ www.google.co.uk/docs/about/

Deconstruction to Joint Construction with peers without the involvement of the teacher in the writing process, Humphrey and Macnaught point out that involving the expertise of the teacher in this stage can be important to avoid the 'cycle of problem sharing' (2011:103), where the expertise to complete the task is not available in the group of peers.

Teacher-led Joint Construction, however, has at times been a challenging activity to facilitate, and encouraging student participation in Joint Construction has been the focus of much pedagogical trial and error in our classrooms. It was thought that applying the systematicity of an AR project to this experimentation would provide greater insight into how to use teacher-led Joint Construction to teach academic writing in the tertiary context. In addition to exploring the use of teacher-led Joint Construction in academic writing instruction, we also wanted to explore how we could integrate technology into the writing process. Students' near-universal access to wifi-connected smartphones, and the availability of cloud computing applications such as Google Docs, has opened up possibilities for sharing and collaborating. The aim of this project was to explore how to capitalise on these opportunities to improve students' writing. There has been some interest in exploring how Google Docs could be used to extend collaboration outside of the time constraints of lessons by moving collaboration online (for example, Suwantarathip and Wichadee 2014). Rather than shifting collaboration to an online space, however, we were more interested in exploring how Google Docs could be used to improve the collaborative environment of the physical classroom. The two key areas of focus for our research were as follows:

1. Will students participate meaningfully if Joint Construction is led using Google Docs?
1. Will the participation in Joint Construction using Google Docs help students to grasp the features of the genre they will write for their assessment?

Intervention and data collection

Our intervention involved setting up a Google Drive folder for a class, providing models to deconstruct in the form of Google Docs saved in the folder, and creating a Google Doc on which the whole class collaborated to jointly construct a writing task. Since we were teaching two different classes with different levels of students, assessment requirements, and teaching loads, our AR cycles varied; 6-week cycles were carried out with ETS2 and three were carried out with Academic Skills 3. At the end of each 6-week cycle students moved on to the next level of study and each of us started with a brand new class of students. Throughout the research process, we both wrote journal entries after most lessons, reflecting on our lessons, our thoughts and feelings and perceptions of successes and failures.

The intervention was carried out using the same procedures across each of our research cycles. At the

beginning of their course, students were introduced to Google Drive. A class folder was created, and students signed up to a Google account and if they didn't have it installed already, downloaded the Google Docs app onto their mobile phones or tablets. Model texts in the target genre, which was an expository essay for the Academic Skills 3 group and a research report for the ETS2 group, were uploaded into the folder as Google Docs and deconstructed in class discussion. Directly after this phase, students were asked to write a text in the target genre, which gave us a snapshot of student performance pre-intervention. This was later compared to the text they produced independently, after the intervention at Joint Construction phase, in order to ascertain the change, if any, in the grasp of genre shown in students' writing post-intervention.

The teacher-led Joint Construction stage of the teaching-learning cycle, which was the focus of this AR followed Deconstruction. Students worked with each of us to collaborate in writing an essay or research report in a Google Doc that was shown using a data projector and accessed and edited on students' own devices. In the first cycle of research, in the ETS2 class taught by Lisa, an attempt was made to elicit individual contributions from the students. This was found to be quite time-consuming, and the variation in students' typing speed, their confidence in using the app, the reliability of their wifi connection, and other issues interfered with the flow of the lesson. Peter used a different approach in the Academic Skills 3 class, creating small groups of mixed nationalities and ability levels. This approach was found to be more successful, so it was also adopted in the ETS2 class and in the subsequent cycles of research. Each group was given set tasks to complete, such as writing a specific part of the essay or report.

As the text was being created, we each contributed to the writing process and encouraged the whole class to review each contribution to make improvements and ensure that the parts of the text fitted together as a cohesive whole, thus scaffolding both the writing of the text and the giving of feedback. The 'suggesting' function of Google Docs was used when students were making contributions to or editing the task of another student or group. This feedback enabled students to revise and improve their work, whilst deepening their understanding of the specific text type and its language features, such as the use of cohesive devices and creation of complex sentence structures. All documents shared with the class were able to be accessed by the students outside of class hours. This flexibility provided students with specific models for their text types, and the chance to improve their own writing through practice at home. All Google Docs documents developed and written in class during the intervention were kept within a class folder. This class folder could be accessed by students both outside and inside the classroom. This meant that we also had access to these documents which provided us with an editing history showing student contributions, corrections and engagement with the

tasks. A sample of this editing history can be found in the Appendix. We also used Screen Capture software and video recording to show students' interactions within Google Docs, including their various contributions, revisions and collaboration.

After the teacher-led Joint Construction phase, students worked in groups to jointly construct the same text type, affording them the opportunity to again engage in the collaborative writing process and give feedback, but without the involvement of the teacher, unless needed. Finally, the Independent Construction phase of the teaching cycle also involved the summative assessment of the courses, and acted as a post-intervention indication of students' progress as a result of this project. Students were asked to complete a survey at the end of the 6-week course, which consisted of a range of closed and open questions asking them to reflect on the use of Google Docs in the classroom. These allowed us to gain an understanding of students' perceptions of the feedback they were given throughout the interventions.

Findings

Students can participate meaningfully in Joint Construction using Google Docs

Overall, the use of Google Docs to complete teacher-led Joint Constructions across both levels and classes suggests that the app has great potential to allow successful whole class collaboration in writing. Students actively contributed to the construction of the expository text paragraph and report in class. The editing histories of the Joint Construction Google Docs show that students not only wrote the parts of the structure that they were directed to complete, but also edited other students' writing, at times without being instructed to do so.

While the editing history shows that the largest proportion of the ETS2 report text was written by the teacher (see the Appendix), this may be more indicative of the need to tailor the amount of support to the needs of the students, with the teacher contributing input that was needed to scaffold the creation of the text, rather than an indication of limited participation of students. Video recordings revealed that students also made significant verbal contributions to the construction of the text, and these were recast by the teacher into accurate academic English when written in the text, showing how Google Docs could be used to provide another form of feedback.

Small groups are an essential part of student collaboration and student engagement

The use of small groups seemed to be an effective way to guide students' contributions and encourage participation in Joint Construction. It was noted in lesson observations that weaker students were often disengaged from the process when they were placed in large groups, whereas

in the small groups of three they became active group members. Also, in small groups, students were more likely to work together and provide feedback on each other's writing. Frequent mention was made in our teaching logs of our surprise at the consistency with which students were engaged and on task, with Lisa noting in the second cycle of ETS, J² did not have enough battery life on her phone to write on the Doc, so she used the classroom PC to correct the mistakes of her group while P wrote the rest of the section. We were amazed at the will to work around a problem and keep at it. We were also surprised to note that our expectation that stronger students may take over a group was not supported by the observations. In fact, the level of noise and discussion noted in our lesson observations and audible in video recordings suggested that students collaborated actively. For example, they argued about how to best apply our feedback, and sought clarification on structure, content and language. Students' survey responses also suggested that they enjoyed the process of writing using Google Docs. One student wrote: 'I wish all teachers will use it'.

Students are unconcerned with public feedback

One of our concerns was how students, particularly those with less confidence, would respond to writing in a shared space and being given feedback publicly. However, quiet students seemed to be able to find their voice through the use of Google Docs as a means of communicating and sharing ideas. Student responses to the survey questions suggested that our fears about their discomfort with public feedback were actually not reflected in their own attitudes. In response to questions about how they felt having their mistakes corrected during the class, comments like 'I think that it is a kinda encouragement' and 'I came here to improve my English . . . no one is actually perfect, including others in my class' were common. In fact, 23 out of 24 ETS2 students stated that they did not feel uncomfortable or embarrassed having their work corrected publicly. The immediacy of the feedback received during the process of writing was also noted by students as a particular advantage, with comments such as 'I can correct my mistakes in class itself', showing how valuable the timing of feedback was to students.

Students gained a better understanding of the target genre

The project also suggested that leading Joint Construction using Google Docs can improve students' grasp of academic genres. Pre- and post-intervention, students in the Academic Skills 3 classes were given a paragraph to write within a set time based on the argumentative genre taught in class. Throughout the Joint Construction phase, the feedback to the students targeted three critical areas: structure, logical selection and development of ideas, and the use of cohesive devices. Pre- and post-intervention writing samples were then analysed according to these three categories. The data revealed positive relationships

² Students have been given false initials.

between the use of Joint Construction and students' grasp of all three elements of the genre, as can be seen in Table 2. In terms of structure, the post-intervention writing samples revealed student gains in structural competence. The error rate of students who made five or more structural errors declined by 10.3% and the rate of those with three to four errors declined by 6.9%. However, students making one to two errors increased by 13.8% and students with no errors by 3.4%. Furthermore, gains in the logical development of ideas were evidenced by a drop of 34.5% in students writing unrelated points or only partially addressing the questions, and there were gains of 27.6% and 6.9% in students creating logically supported and developed arguments. Finally, students showed marked improvements in the appropriate use of cohesive devices within academic texts. Therefore, it can be concluded that students' grasp of genre improved through the use of Joint Construction.

Conclusion and reflections

Based on our AR, we would highly recommend using Google Docs to facilitate teacher-led Joint Construction in academic writing classes. The students engaged with the process and enjoyed writing. For the students in the classes we studied, the public nature of the writing process was motivating, encouraging and informative and did not cause the students embarrassment. This outcome may be relevant to students whose language levels are above intermediate level and therefore are confident in their ability, and to classes where there is no great disparity between ability level. Also, the use of small groups may support students in making contributions and therefore can be recommended for ease of lesson organisation. In future, we are interested in exploring further the nature of the interactions between students and teacher in the Joint Construction phase, as perhaps more planning of the micro-interactions of the classroom could ensure that

teacher feedback during Joint Construction encourages rather than limits students' responses (Dreyfus and Macnaught 2011:79). It would be interesting to see how the integration of technology can be used to disrupt or augment common teacher-dominated pedagogic exchanges such as 'Initiation-Response-Feedback' or 'Initiation-Response-Evaluation' (Dreyfus and Macnaught 2011:79).

This project gave us the opportunity to explore an aspect of our pedagogical practice in a systematic, thorough, and, perhaps most importantly, collaborative way. While teaching writing was already the focus of our thoughts and, at times, anxiety and frustration, it was quite a different and certainly rewarding experience to apply methodical observation and analysis to the process. We benefited from the insights we shared in our conversations with colleagues in our teaching centre and found those conversations rewarding in themselves. We were reminded that our teaching should not be an activity confined by the four walls of our classroom, but that we are in fact part of a network of professionals whose expertise and innovations can be validated by conducting research and asking questions.

As well as pushing us to communicate with our peers, the project prompted us to seek more input and feedback from our students, which was at times unexpected and insightful. As teachers of EAP, we guide students to produce academic research and writing, and our foray into research for academic publication has been an opportunity to reflect on our own writing processes, the gaps in our knowledge of the practices of academic research, and the feeling of being apprenticed into challenging uses of our language skills. It was encouraging that students expressed respect for and interest in our research, giving us a sense of pride in our professional knowledge. Thus, the project was an opportunity to experiment and 'play' with new technologies and methods, but also to receive acknowledgement for the work that we do as teachers.

Table 2: Academic Skills 3 student writing sample data

Criterion	Argument: claim, supporting reasons. Examples presented are logical	Argument tangential or unrelated to the question	Partially addresses the question with weak development and selection of ideas	Addresses the question but some aspects not well developed	Addresses the question with relevant examples and supporting reasons
Pre-intervention		17.24%	72.41%	10.34%	0%
Post-intervention		13.79%	41.38%	37.93%	6.90%

All structural elements are present	5 or more parts incomplete/missing	3 to 4 parts incomplete or missing	1-2 parts incomplete or missing	Complete structure
Pre-intervention	24.14%	65.52%	10.34%	0
Post-intervention	13.79%	58.62%	24.14%	3.45%

Correct use of cohesive devices					
Percentage increase	150-200%	100-149	50-99%	1-49%	0%
Student percentage	6.9%	10.3%	37.9%	27.6%	17.2%

Please note: Student percentages are based on a total of 29 student samples.

References and further reading

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Appendix: Excerpt of editing history of ETS2

The shaded highlighting indicates the teacher's contributions, while the bold indicates the contribution of another group of students.

The bar chart depicts changes in students enrolled in full time study, distance learning and part time study throughout the period from 2008 to 2014. The number of full time and distance learning students increased dramatically while enrolments of part time students increased gradually. In 2008 the number of students enrolled in distance learning study was 400 and increased to approximately 800 in 2011 and reached 1500 in 2014. **Full time students started at 1000 in 2008, and experienced an increase which reached 1800 in 2012. After that, the rate of increase became lower and went up to 1900 in 2014.**

Using technology to develop learning-oriented assessment and autonomy in students

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Introduction

One of the major issues in our classrooms is the lack of student motivation. This permeates the whole course and affects how the students respond to class activities and independent learning. They generally appear to be uninterested in the coursework, the topics, the processes and the formative assessments. In addition, they are very dependent on their teachers which means that they seem to find it challenging doing any independent learning outside class. Collaborative group work looks like an unfamiliar concept to most of the students. In contrast, the students love their smartphones and often use these for social media and games in L1 to the detriment of their study of English. Furthermore, these students seem to respond more readily to kinaesthetic activities than other types of learning tasks. In this article, we describe our action research (AR) project, which investigated whether these usually unmotivated and unresponsive students could be inspired by the task of using their smart phones to make a short video about a topic of interest and whether they could complete the video in a collaborative group, independently and with no mark awarded at the end of the activity. We were interested to see if these students could incorporate their enjoyment of technology into a learning context where

they would be researching, communicating and videoing using English.

Background to the research

We decided to make narrative genre a requirement for the video. This would then put the onus on the students to tell a story. We felt that by asking the students to structure the video in this way, they would have to engage in the topic in a different way than simply making a presentation or going through a list. They had to act as well as write a script. This brought unexpected benefits for the students for their speaking assessments, which will be discussed later in the article. We followed Mazur's advice (2016) by making the project challenging enough for the best student to complete.

Context and participants

The participants in this research were on a pathway to second-year degree study at Monash University via the Monash College Diplomas programme where they would complete first year Monash University coursework but in smaller classes and with some language support. They all had conditional entry into their Diploma courses and

had to succeed in the Monash English Bridging course for Diplomas (MEB Dip) which is where our research took place. We each taught a class on Thursday and Friday of the 15-week course. Each class also had a Monday to Wednesday teacher (our co-teachers) whom we worked closely with, and who also added to our data collection through their own observations of the students' behaviour in class.

The MEB Dip course has two entry points depending on the language proficiency of the students. Those with a lower English level must complete a 15-week course of which the first five weeks is language focused (Module 1) and then the final 10 weeks of the course is assessment based (Module 2). Students with a higher *IELTS* score are only required to complete the 10-week assessment module.

We selected the 15-week students for our research because in our experience they seem to face more challenges in adjusting to the course compared to the 10-week students. Since Module 1 is formative, they are not as determined to improve their language level, because for many of them English seems to be viewed as a subject to pass rather than as a means for communication. This assumption is likely to be because of their previous experiences in examination-driven educational systems. Consequently, the majority of them have difficulties adapting to the task-based approach adopted in our course. Part of this difficulty is that they frequently have problems with group work and completing the steps in a process or with revising work. Also, because there would be only one MEB Dip course within the timeframe of our AR project, we would only have one opportunity to do a 'maxi-task' or a 'collection of sequenced and integrated tasks that all add up to a final project' (Nunan 2004, cited in Castañeda 2013:47).

There were 18 students in each class comprising a total of 36 participants. They ranged in age from 16 to 26 with the majority being high-school graduates in their late teens. Thirty-three of the students were from the People's Republic of China, two were Vietnamese and one was Indonesian. Twenty-four of the students were on a pathway to a Diploma in Business, and of the remaining twelve, four were going into Arts, Science and Engineering respectively.

Research focus and questions

Our main focus was on assisting our students to make the educational shift to task-based, communicative learning which incorporated group work.

The research questions (RQs) we developed to guide the research were:

1. How can making a video in a group help students develop their autonomy?
1. What impact does making a video in a group have on student collaborative skills?

Naqvi and Al Mahrooqi suggest that Student-created Digital Videos (SCDVs) 'strongly enhance pedagogy in

the area of student engagement and autonomy' (2016:51). Cope and Kalantzis also support the use of video, arguing that it can contribute to new ways for learners to engage with content, new ways of self-expression, and new ways of connecting with others (2007:76). In terms of the learning environment, Cotterall (1995, cited in Chia 2005) contends that '[L]earners become more efficient in their learning if they do not rely on their teacher to provide them with resources or solve their problems' (1995:317). Therefore, we believed that it was vital to build self-reflection into the research to encourage the students to think critically about their work and more crucially to solve problems by themselves.

Thus, we decided to devise a video task that would emphasise a collaborative and autonomous process of learning which we hoped the students would find stimulating and would help them adjust to the new learning environment. Similarly, we anticipated such a task could engage the participants through group work, topics that would interest them based on issues and experiences encountered by international students, and would involve a process that could be evaluated at different stages.

Action research process

Because there was only one major cycle opportunity in our AR, we planned the processes, materials and scaffolding very thoroughly. The research began in Week 1 of the course and the students were asked to make their videos with their smartphones over the following three weeks and then to present their final videos to the other participating class along with another class on the final day of Week 5. The students organised themselves into groups of three and chose a topic useful for international students from a list provided by the teacher (see Appendix 1). Each group had to choose a different topic so that there were 12 unique videos.

They designated roles such as scriptwriters, actors and camerapersons according to their interests and skills. The first activity, used to give them knowledge of the English storytelling genre, was in the form of a jigsaw discussion and writing activity where different groups wrote the beginning, middle and end of a story that included characters and a scenario (see Appendix 2). There were templates for storyboarding the video (see Appendix 3).

We needed to scaffold the activities in order to support the students' learning, but since the research was centred around independent, collaborative group work, we did not assist them with all the activities. We provided the students with model student videos and links to instructional videos for them to access in their own time so they could learn how to edit their videos, and as teachers, we only gave them guidance as to where to find information (see Appendix 4).

Built into the process were key points where the students would provide each other feedback on their planning stages using a set of criteria provided by the teacher. The students were then to use this feedback to revise and improve

their work. These feedback points occurred during the storyboarding and before the final editing of the videos. We also contributed to the feedback.

To collaborate with members in the group they used Google Docs¹, WeChat², emails and face-to-face discussions. They could choose the communication system they preferred, but because the filming took place outside class time, the groups had to decide how and when they would work together. Some students lived a long distance from the campus and had to resolve, in consultation with their group members, how they would coordinate their filming. For the most part, the students enjoyed getting together on the weekends or after class to do the filming, as they usually did not have many opportunities to socialise outside the classroom. One student remarked at the end of the project: 'I enjoyed the experience at the same time we finish our homework and we also enjoy ourself making the video.' Many other students also said that they enjoyed videoing over the weekends.

Because it was essential for the students to work collaboratively and independently, as teachers, we were mainly facilitating the students' work and providing scaffolding for their learning. Because of this, the students learned from each other, and built up collaborative skills throughout the project in order to finish the videos by the deadline. The knowledge that their videos were to be shown to their peers was a huge motivator to their desire to do a good job. One student said in the final interview: 'I want to watch the other group's video on Friday. I'm curious about the other group's videos.' This student also said that he felt relieved when he had seen the others' videos as his group's measured up to the standard.

Data collection

There were several areas of data collection. All of the participants were expected to complete five online questionnaires during the 5-week project. We also interviewed two students from each class in Weeks 2 and 5. As well as this, the researchers collected information from the shared Google Docs that the students used as a communication platform. Students' work in the form of storyboards, pre-edited and final videos were also collected. In addition, we kept weekly reflective researcher journals as recommended by Burns (2010).

The majority of the questionnaire responses were in the form of closed yes/no questions with accompanying open questions asking the students to explain their answers. We were able to probe deeper during the face-to-face interviews.

We began with two questionnaires about the students' backgrounds in education and group work. Because the students were expected to work independently in their groups to make a video, we wanted to know how much

group work they had done in their own countries and whether this had been true collaboration or not. The subsequent questionnaires followed up these points and were supplemented with the two sets of individual interviews (see Appendix 5 for the Week 1 background questionnaire).

Findings

The students overwhelmingly found the project to be a positive experience. When asked in the final questionnaire 'Did you find this a worthwhile task?' only one participant gave a negative response. The reason given for this response was: 'It's hard to say. It took us too much time.' All of the other students felt that they had benefited from the experience.

As well as the positive responses from the students who worked on the task, these students performed exceptionally well in the final speaking assessments of the course. The students in both of the research classes topped the final role-play (speaking in pairs) assessment with many of them obtaining distinctions. In other words, these students outperformed the 10-week students who had entered the course with better English language proficiency skills, which was extremely unusual. The two classes of participants also attained high grades in the final discussion assessment (speaking in groups of four), and this may indicate that the participant students were able to transfer what they had learned through making the video to their overall speaking skills. In contrast, their writing assessments did not reflect any overall improvement and this might have been partially due to the lack of time spent on the scriptwriting aspect of the video task.

The transfer of skills was a surprise to us as teachers. In our experience with this cohort, transference of skills was rare, but the first instance of this occurred in Week 2 of our project. Our co-teachers informed us both that our students had performed particularly well in a set curriculum activity where the students were required to go to the front of the class and tell a traditional story from their own culture or talk about a news item for two minutes. The co-teachers were amazed at the quality of the storytelling by the students, and the confidence with which they spoke. Only three students did not perform as well. They did not make eye contact, spoke for only about 30 seconds and seemed uncomfortable. These students had arrived late to the course and so had missed the jigsaw storywriting activity the previous week. This was apparently the only difference in their learning experience.

Another task that students in both classes performed well in was an activity where students had to design a product to market to consumers. Both co-teachers as well as the course coordinator were very impressed with the creativity demonstrated by the students. Some of their product

¹ www.google.co.uk/docs/about/

² web.wechat.com/

designs have been uploaded onto the new MEB Dip Moodle site, which is an online educational platform used at Monash University, as exemplars for students to follow.

The overwhelmingly positive results have meant that the video project has been included in the new curriculum for the MEB Dip. Since the course is now 20 weeks long, the video task will be able to be expanded into a 9-week project. This will leave room for more scaffolding and activities, which will help with the scriptwriting. We are hopeful that this will assist with the overall writing skills for the students. The students have just started the project this year (2017) and the teachers have informed us that they are very excited about doing it in the course.

The last words about the outcomes should belong to the students. When asked 'What are you enjoying about the task?' some of the student reflections were: 'It is a fun way to learn'; 'Sharing ideas, learning from other people'; 'Learning how to make a video'. When asked what they had learned, responses included: 'I think I have learned a lot during the project. First of all, I have learned some skills, such as how to write a script and edit a video. In addition, group working is the most significant thing that I grasped during the project. Although there were some problems and disagreements happened, I got more from these things.' Another response was: 'During the project, I have learnt a lot of knowledge and my English listening and speaking skills are improved to a higher level. I also know many friends here, which makes me feel warm and no longer lonely in Australia.'

Discussion

Since the AR project was ostensibly around collaborative, independent learning, we asked our four interview subjects how they defined 'working in a group' in order to understand how this was done in their home countries. The students had had a wide variety of experiences. One student said that in China they had almost no group work in class, except in Year 12 when this student was tasked with performing a play in a group. The students involved had different roles and there were 4–6 in a group. This student also did videoing in a group to earn some money in China where she made a marketing video for a friend's invention. Interestingly, because this student had knowledge of editing, she became a mentor in her class and taught the other students in her group how to use the editing software, which was familiar to her. Then these students, in turn, taught the other groups in the class. The other interviewees described a fairly non-collaborative process: 'In China teacher ask us to work with others outside class. I like to work alone'; 'In China sometimes teacher put us in five students one group, teacher did not believe in it so students don't focus on it'; 'Group work in China – students can choose to work in a group or not.'

When asked about negative aspects of working in a group in their home country in the initial questionnaire, 21 out of the 32 responses cited laziness of individuals or arguments

between group members as the most problematic issues. Other answers included too much chatting and needing too much time to complete tasks.

At this time, we interviewed our four individual students, two from each class. One participant answered the question, 'What did you enjoy about the task?' with: 'Working in a team. Process of our video because it belonged to us. It's unique.' Another interviewee said: 'It's a fun test. In China, I don't have some tests like this. I very want to watch the other group's video on Friday. I'm curious about the other group's videos.'

By Week 3, the students were overwhelmingly enjoying working in a group and only one participant answered that they were not. This participant and one other answered the question 'Do you think everyone is working well in the group?' by saying that other people were not working hard. It is interesting to note that 100% of the participants felt they were contributing to the group, including the three or four who were complained about.

The students had finished their raw videos by Week 4 and were editing them and adding special effects and music. They were asked 'What are you finding most difficult about creating a video?' And the responses (27 total) were again around acting (2), editing (7), creating a story (6) finding a place to video (3) or other general concerns about 'taking photos' or not having enough time to 'make it nice'. Three felt that there was nothing difficult. The students were also asked in this questionnaire to 'name three things that you felt you were learning by doing this task'. There were 27 respondents, so this meant there could be 81 possible responses. Nineteen of the participants felt they were learning how to work in a group. Four mentioned English skills: speaking (2), listening (1) and grammar (1). Of the remainder, most mentioned technical or creative aspects of making the video including 'insert the tape'. There were, however, other responses such as 'happy', 'logic', 'approval' and 'Amusing new thing. . .'. One respondent left these three questions blank. It is interesting to note that now that the project was nearly finished, when the students were asked again about what problems they were having while working on this task, only two mentioned group work.

However, in Week 5 after completing a task that demanded collaboration, the students were asked 'What was the most difficult aspect of creating a video?', and the responses made no mention of the laziness of group members which was given in the Week 1 background questionnaire as the main issue in the home country. In fact, 100% of the respondents said that they had made a contribution to the video. What just under half of the students found most difficult when they were reflecting on the video project were technical aspects of the video-making process (16 of the 36). Of these answers, editing the video was considered the main issue, although acting and 'choose place to go shopping' were also mentioned. The next most difficult aspect of creating a video was given as group communication issues with 12 respondents citing this

as very challenging. It seems that although the students had devised ways of making decisions within a group, the participants were still learning how to manage these issues. In one student's final interview, this issue was articulated very poignantly as the student reflected not only on the video project, but also on his life:

Communicating is the biggest one, and we can think of more ideas and accept others. Maybe in the past I didn't accept other's suggestions well and when working in a group you must accept other's suggestions, so this is practise to accept other ideas. I think I always had somebody suggest things to me in high school, but I didn't accept them so I missed so many things, so I have learned to accept more in the future.

In addition, by Week 5, when the project had been completed except for the final video presentation event, the students were asked 'What was most enjoyable about creating a video?' and over half said that it was working with others in a group. Therefore, although the participants found this very challenging, they also found it rewarding. One of our interviewees mentioned that he liked that he was out videoing with his friends on the weekend instead of doing nothing. Other responses included: 'I have learned some new skills'; 'The most enjoyable is about we can get a video which just belong to us'; and one student answered: 'choose many clothes'. When asked for the final time what they felt was the most difficult aspect of making a video, almost half still felt that coping with differences of opinion in a group was very challenging. Three said there was nothing difficult, and the rest cited a variety of technical aspects such as editing.

We also asked our individual interviewees what they thought they were learning about creating a video and one responded: 'Researching software for editing. Can help with speaking: improve personal statement because we have to act so need to improve pronunciation. We can learn how to be resilient.' This response reflected the need for the participants to problem-solve independently – this student was able to find the word 'resilient' in his translating dictionary, and felt that this was a valuable attribute.

Conclusion

The making of a narrative video with students in an academic pathway program was discussed in this article. All the students in two classes participated in the project regardless of their individual language levels. By giving the participants an intensive project that ensured collaboration in groups of three, and independent work outside class, they demonstrated that they had the capacity to complete the project despite encountering problems and facing challenges. The participants also transferred the skills they learned while doing the task to their formative and summative assessments. Our assumptions about what this cohort of students was capable of doing were brought into question and it was extremely rewarding to see how much

they could accomplish independently given an engaging task and enough scaffolding support. It is also gratifying to know that we have made a difference for many students because our research has led to the inclusion of the task in the Monash English Bridging Diploma curriculum. We found engaging in this AR program a stimulating and educative experience. It has informed our teaching and provided us, as well as our colleagues, with valuable tools that can be implemented in the classroom. As English Language Intensive Courses for Overseas Students (ELICOS) teachers, we need to constantly examine our teaching methodologies and seek innovative ways to challenge our students so that they can be ready for the future.

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5. pop02 tutorial – editing video with an android smartphone:
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6. How to use Videolicious app to create digital story/presentation:
www.youtube.com/watch?v=gRIW71AaClc
7. How to Edit Video on Mobile Phone:
www.youtube.com/watch?v=jx4kgzn7dRE
- C. Free music
Melody loops: www.melodyloops.com/?gclid=Cj0KEQiAvJS3BRDd44fjndyii6MBEiQAN4EkPUoXg5XLJMloBTw6Zb7dTjqK7vZCAIPJq_zhWilwJUQaAmB_8P8HAQ
- D. Free sound effects Free sound: www.freesound.org/browse/tags/sound-effects/
- E. Supplementary demos and instructions for making videos
Tips for Recording Video on your Phone: www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cj0Blhyx9kc

Appendix 5: Week 1 background questionnaire

Have you ever worked in groups in secondary school?

How often did you work in groups?

Several times a month

Once a month

Twice a year

Once a year

Never

How many students were in your group?

3

4

5 +

Did each person take on a role in the group?

Yes

No

Did you all work on the activity together?

Yes

No

Did you enjoy working in a group?

Yes

No

Give a reason for your answer.

Give one benefit of working in a group.

Give one negative of working in a group.

How can you overcome the negative aspect of working in a group?

Applying LOA principles to a corpus-based approach to vocabulary study

SASCHA MITCHELL QUEENSLAND UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY INTERNATIONAL COLLEGE, BRISBANE

Introduction

I have observed that most students in my English for Academic Purposes (EAP) classes at Queensland University of Technology International College (QUTIC) note the importance of developing their vocabulary as a key aspect of improving their academic language skills. However, many of these students also remark that learning academic vocabulary is difficult, lamenting that they often cannot remember word meanings or are unable to effectively use academic lexis in their writing or speaking. These challenges are further compounded through the inclusion in the curriculum of the Academic Word List (AWL).

The AWL (Coxhead 2000) is a list of high frequency non-discipline-specific academic words in English. It tends to be presented to the students as a decontextualised list of words with a few practice activities that primarily consolidate only receptive vocabulary knowledge. In addition, students and teachers often become busy with other aspects of the course which means that vocabulary learning and revision are often given low priority. This tendency encourages superficial teaching and learning of the lexical set. However, the curriculum expects students to use these words fluently in their academic writing and they regularly do not meet these expectations. Thus, the goal of my action research (AR) was to help learners develop more effective vocabulary learning strategies and engage

more deeply in the learning process so as to better acquire the AWL for use in the EAP class and in their future faculty courses.

Context and participants

QUTIC offers courses in General English (GE), EAP and other university pathways courses. For this project I worked with EAP students. EAP classes are divided into three levels; EAP 1, EAP 2, EAP 3, each of which are 12 weeks in duration. Upon successful completion, students studying in the EAP 2 (Direct Entry level) program, will progress directly to undergraduate or postgraduate courses in the university that require an *IELTS* 6.5 band score or equivalent.

Two EAP 2 classes were involved in the project which ran for two cycles. Each cycle was 10 weeks in length. The first cycle took place between March and June. The second cycle commenced in July and finished in October. A total of 30 students from these classes participated in the AR. Demographic details are in Table 1.

Table 1: Participants

Participant information	Cycle 1	Cycle 2
Number of students	14	16
Age range	18–38	19–39
Background	China, Taiwan, Thailand, Mongolia, Saudi Arabia, India	China, Taiwan, Thailand, Mongolia, Saudi Arabia, Brazil

The main reason I targeted this level of EAP for AR was because these students were 12 weeks away from progressing into their faculty courses where they would be expected to work autonomously and where they would have content instruction only, without any more language instruction. Thus, I hoped that whatever language learning strategies they could acquire during the EAP course would set them up for continued independent language study during the next stage of their education at QUTIC.

Research focus

Successful vocabulary acquisition requires multiple exposures to a word as well as knowledge of several aspects of a word (Nation 2011). While I have observed that EAP students usually understand the benefits of extensive reading and listening for vocabulary development, many do not invest enough time or effort in learning words deeply. Technology can be utilised for deeper lexis study via corpora.

Corpora have been increasingly used indirectly to help inform dictionaries and course materials in recent decades, yet direct corpus use by English language learners is far less common (Özbay and Kayaoglu 2015). There is,

however, growing awareness of the benefits of direct corpus study in the language classroom (Yoon 2011). Corpus-based investigations can help learners become language detectives because it requires them to 'develop cognitive and metacognitive skills such as noticing, hypothesising and verifying' (Yoon 2011:131) which can facilitate long-term acquisition of language. In other words, via an inductive learning approach, the use of corpora helps learners hone their critical thinking skills (Phoocharoenil 2012) and encourages them to take charge of their learning. It therefore enhances learner autonomy (Johns 2002).

Nation (2011:537) suggests that one of the means of expanding a learner's vocabulary size is to 'inform learners of vocabulary growth goals and use tests to help them see where they are at present in their vocabulary knowledge'. Thus, studying corpora connects well with principles of learning-oriented assessment (LOA) (Carless 2007) which aims to engage learners more deeply in the learning process and promote skills and strategies for lifelong learning.

From this understanding, two main research questions (RQs) were created:

1. To what extent will a corpus-based vocabulary program, utilising LOA principles, affect students' vocabulary learning behaviours?
1. To what extent will the vocabulary program promote AWL acquisition? What effect, if any, will it have on students' academic writing skills?

There are two key features to this AR project. The first is to train students in the use of corpus consultation methods, and online corpus tools. The main tool is FLAX¹ (Witten, Wu, Franken, Brine, Brown and Fitzgerald 2013). This training is done to encourage deeper learning of words and engagement with vocabulary. The second aspect of the AR is to embed this training approach in principles of LOA, by promoting students' self-assessment of learning strategies, creating tasks to promote new learning, and developing classroom tests to monitor progress.

The action research cycles

Cycle 1

I began with a Vocabulary Learning Strategies (VLS) Questionnaire distributed in class to initiate student reflection on current strategy use and to set vocabulary learning goals. Throughout the first 5 weeks of this cycle, using the week's selection of the AWL, I created scaffolded tasks to train students in direct corpus consultation. These tasks were situated in either the computer lab or in classrooms and took approximately 30–60 minutes per week. Handouts helped students navigate FLAX to complete various vocabulary tasks focused on collocations, a combination of two or more words that are commonly used together or that are likely to co-occur, and colligations,

¹ flax.nzdl.org/greenstone3/flax

the way in which word classes commonly co-occur on a syntactic level (see Appendix 1 for samples of some handouts). Of all the available online tools I felt that FLAX would engender the greatest amount of learner buy-in because it is extremely user-friendly, has an attractive interface, and requires no prior knowledge of corpus consultation terminology (e.g. *lemma*). Immediately after their initial FLAX training I asked students to write a brief blog post to reflect on the usefulness of corpus tools for language learning and in so doing, continue to promote their critical awareness of vocabulary learning strategies (see Appendix 2 for the blog post prompt).

On a weekly basis, students were responsible for collaboratively creating an AWL Class Wordlist using the university's Learning Management System (KMS): Blackboard wiki. This wordlist required information relating to definitions, part of speech, pronunciation, word family, collocations and example sentences (see Appendix 3 for an example). For the duration of the cycle, I divided students into five groups. Each group had responsibility for the same number of weekly words which meant that the load of investigating vocabulary was shared equally.

I also gave students weekly formative assessment of these words. Every Thursday, there was a short paper-based spelling and pronunciation test. On Fridays, students were given a 15-minute paper-based word families and sentence creation test (see Appendix 4). Scores were recorded, feedback given and progress tracked for these tests. On the following Monday, students played a Kahoot² review of the previous week's words. Each Kahoot had 15 multiple-choice questions testing knowledge of various aspects of the lexical sets. In the second half of Cycle 1, I transferred responsibility for the Kahoot to student groups. Each week, one group was tasked with developing and administering the Kahoot quiz for the rest of the class. Groups were encouraged to use the AWL Class Wordlist, FLAX and dictionaries, and to ensure a wide range of question types that tested various aspects of word knowledge. Weekly winner prizes were awarded, and two prizes were awarded at the end of the cycle; one for the overall winner, and another for the most improved.

A mid-cycle survey was used to engage students in self-evaluative practices, which is an important element of LOA. Students were asked to evaluate their degree of vocabulary skill development thus far, set goals for the remainder of the course, and also to evaluate the usefulness of FLAX. At the end of the cycle I gave the students a reflective writing task relating to vocabulary learning and a second VLS Questionnaire, both of which I hoped would foster reflection on changes to students' strategy use. Semi-structured exit interviews were conducted with six volunteer participants at the end of Cycle 1 and follow-up interviews were conducted three months after the cycle's completion with four of the six exit interviewees. A follow

up survey was sent three months post-cycle, receiving eight responses.

Cycle 2

The second cycle was similar to Cycle 1 but with modifications based on findings from Cycle 1 and student input. I abandoned the VLS Questionnaire as I observed from Cycle 1 that students got more out of discussion than questionnaire completion and the data from the pre- and post-Cycle 1 questionnaire did not offer any clear trends or significant findings. In the first week of Cycle 2, therefore, students instead discussed strategies for effective vocabulary learning in groups, after which they wrote a reflective paragraph about academic vocabulary learning, strategy use and learning goals. The AWL Class Wordlist was moved to Google Docs³ as it had more functionality than the Blackboard wiki system which did not allow synchronous input. The formative weekly quizzes were more staggered through the week so that spelling tests occurred mid-week, word family tests on Thursday and sentence creation on Friday. Students requested to play Kahoot in team mode rather than individually. The mid-course survey was modified slightly to elicit more detailed feedback. Follow-up interviews were conducted with three Cycle 2 participants one month after the cycle's completion.

Data collection

In both cycles, I gathered qualitative data from student reflective tasks including the blog posts, surveys and reflective paragraphs, as well as from student interviews and personal observations. Quantitative data was collected from the formative weekly paper-based quizzes and Kahoot, and scores on summative writing assessments which included an assignment due in Week 10 of the 12-week course and two timed essay exams; Writing Test 1 (WT1) held in Week 9 and Writing Test 2 (WT2) in Week 12. In Cycle 1 only, I used the VLS Questionnaires as a source of data and was also able to gather six sets of homework writing not related to my AR (see Appendix 5 for an example).

Findings

In relation to RQ1, the data show that, for the most part, the AR intervention positively influenced students' vocabulary learning behaviours. At the onset of each cycle, the most common strategy used by the students was memorising translated definitions and spelling. However, by the end of both cycles, all participants described changes to their strategy use, remarking on the importance of investigating word families, collocations (and colligations) and of trying to use rather than merely memorise word meanings:

² getkahoot.com/

³ www.google.co.uk/docs/about/

Because I have been learning new strategies and new tools to extend my learning.

I learned about several methods, how to use vocabulary, how to built up sentences and how to get more appropriate words for particular purposes.

Before, I just memorized the meaning of words and saw one or two sentences. I didn't really know how to use them and other forms of them. But now I can use websites such as FLAX to realise the word families and frequent collocations which enables me to deeply master words.

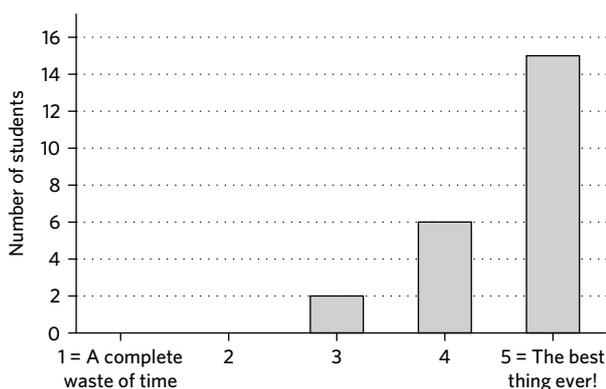
Overall, students reported feeling more confident in their ability to learn and use academic vocabulary. They felt they had a better understanding of what it meant to 'know' a word, or they had a better 'toolkit' to use for vocabulary study.

At the beginning of the research, all students also reported having no former experience of consulting a corpus or with FLAX. However, after corpus training, students were generally highly optimistic about the usefulness of FLAX. One of the questions on the mid-course survey asked students to describe FLAX to a student who had never seen nor heard of it before. The combined Cycle 1 and 2 responses to a mid-cycle survey question about FLAX are shown in Figure 1. Most students used positive language to describe the tool, as exemplified below (see Appendices 6 and 7 for all responses).

It will help you take charge of native language.

It can help you to familiar with the collocations about words and know about the word families, which may help you to get a higher scores in you writings and have more effective communications.

Figure 1: Combined Cycle 1 and 2 responses to the mid-cycle survey question: How beneficial/useful do you think FLAX is for your academic vocabulary learning? (n=23)



Furthermore, I observed many students using FLAX voluntarily for vocabulary and writing tasks in class via their phones. All six students interviewed at the end of Cycle 1 planned to use FLAX as one of their main reference tools in their future studies. Moreover, all students who participated in the post-cycle follow up interviews (N=7) and survey (N=8) reported continued use of FLAX for their language

learning and particularly for assistance with their writing tasks.

The paper-based weekly quizzes seemed to have some positive effect on students' vocabulary study behaviours. Comments from the interviews support this view.

[B]ecause every week we have AWL list to study and teachers give us test every week, so i'll push myself to study it.

In the first word family quiz, I only got 1.5 marks, but in week 10, I can get 7.5 marks. It was a big improve for me.

Five out of six interviewed students from Cycle 1 commented that in particular, the feedback from the sentence creation quiz was extremely useful and motivating for them. One student also reported that, more than any other vocabulary activity, she liked the sentence creation test teacher feedback best. Feedback for these quizzes included a score, written corrective feedback and praise for effective collocations/colligations or contextualisation. Where possible it also included tips and/or encouragement about how to improve in future quizzes. The student remarked that seeing a smiley face or a positive comment about her improved score encouraged her to try harder week by week. Another interviewee said he liked the 'test' aspect which was familiar and motivating for him.

Most students enjoyed playing Kahoot each week according to my observations, and it was evaluated positively in surveys, reflective writing tasks and interviews in both cycles:

Kahoot is the most interesting way to study academic words because we can remember the words deeper through the interactive game.

More interestingly, all the interviewed students remarked that being responsible for its creation was particularly useful to their learning as it meant they had to think deeply about the task, which resulted in far better consolidation of the target lexis. They also referred to it as a 'game' rather than a 'test' and so, I believe, viewed it as a tool for learning rather than a tool for measurement. I also believe that because this task actively involved the students in the assessment process it helped 'promote the kind of disposition they need to be lifelong learners' (Carless, Joughin and Mok 2006:396).

The second research question pertained to the degree of AWL acquisition and the possible effect on writing skills. In the end-of-cycle reflective writing, all students positively self-evaluated their degree of improvement in their vocabulary skills. Seventeen of the twenty-six students directly referred to 'improvements' in their vocabulary knowledge with the remaining nine students making indirect references with statements such as 'I can fully understand how to use the vocabulary'.

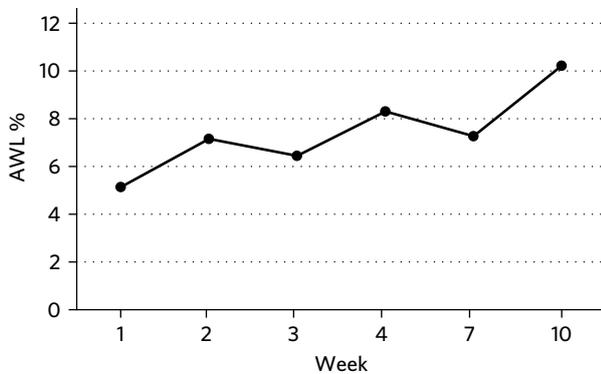
Most students' scores on weekly quizzes showed some increase over each cycle, but more promisingly, there was some qualitative improvement in many of the students' writing fluency, grammatical accuracy and/or degree of

sentence complexity in the sentence creation tests. Eight of the nine Cycle 1 interviewees mentioned that the teacher feedback on this sentence creation quiz was extremely useful to help guide them in terms of their writing. This response indicates that the task was considered to be assessment for learning rather than merely assessment of learning:

Because I have practiced repeatedly and have been corrected my errors form teachers, I could remember and use academic vocabulary.

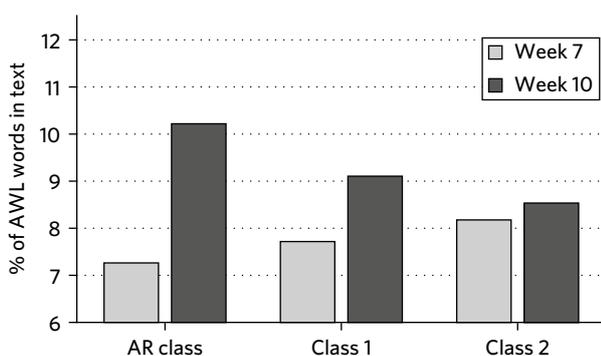
Six additional writing samples were collected over Cycle 1, which were non-AR related curriculum tasks. These cumulatively showed a slow gain in percentage of AWL words used per writing sample over time (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Percentage of AWL words used in student writing samples in Cycle 1



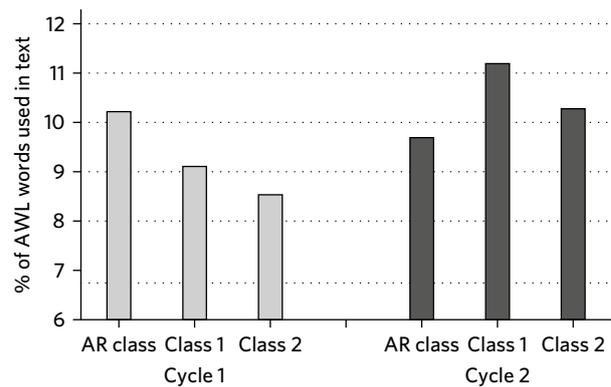
Also in Cycle 1, I compared two sets of writing (a formative Week 7 assignment and a summative Week 10 assignment) from my class with two other classes (termed Class 1 and Class 2). The results revealed that my students used the smallest percentage of AWL words in the Week 7 task, but showed the greatest increase in use of AWL by the Week 10 task, which was the highest percentage of AWL word usage of all three classes (see Figure 3).

Figure 3: Average percentage of AWL words used in Week 7 and Week 10 assignments per class in Cycle 1



In Cycle 2, I was not able to collect the same range of writing samples. Instead I was only able to analyse students' Week 10 assignments. Unlike in Cycle 1, my class in Cycle 2 used the smallest percentage of AWL words compared to two other classes (see Figure 4). This analysis only looked at quality of AWL words used in writing tasks, however, and did not investigate the quality of lexis use. If time permitted, a deeper analysis of quality could include such things as the degree of lexical accuracy or diversity, or the proportion of collocations used.

Figure 4: Average percentage of AWL words used in the Week 10 assignment per class in both cycles



Further analysis was conducted of Cycle 1 and 2 summative writing scores. There were three sets of scores: WT1 (a timed writing exam done in Week 9 of the 12-week course), the Week 10 assignment, and WT2 held in Week 12. I was only able to investigate overall scores for these writing tasks, not specific scores relating to the language use criterion of the tasks. There was, overall, little difference in assessment scores across classes, though encouragingly the scores for my class and Class 2 did improve across all three summative writing tasks. This result at least indicates that the AR intervention did not have any adverse effect on my students' writing (see Figures 5 and 6).

Figure 5: Scores on summative writing tasks per class in Cycle 1

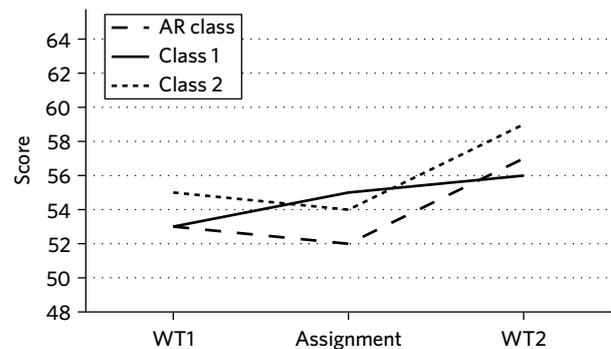
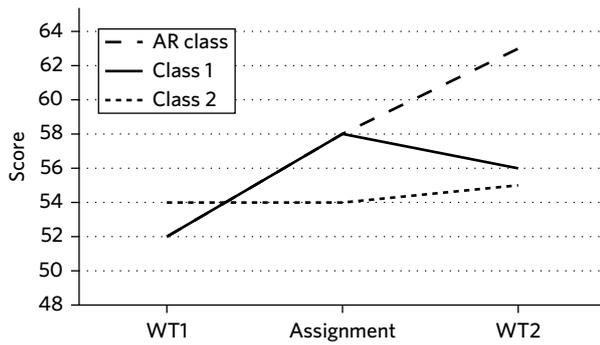


Figure 6: Scores on summative writing tasks per class in Cycle 2

Conclusion and reflections

Overall, students responded very encouragingly to my AR intervention. Most, but not all students made positive changes to their study habits, reported improvements in their vocabulary skills, and used a greater percentage of academic words in their writing. However, these changes did not substantially influence overall writing test scores. Therefore, drawing firm conclusions about the effects of this AR on student learning is challenging. One reason to explain these results is time. I had fewer teaching days than expected with which to implement the intervention. Time was also an issue for students who regularly remarked that one of their biggest reasons for not studying vocabulary thoroughly was a lack of time. Additionally, time is needed to allow students to become fully comfortable with new learning strategies, and for vocabulary to be fully consolidated before the effects of any vocabulary learning intervention can yield reliable results. It is likely that a 10-week cycle does not allow enough time for noticeable improvement.

I believe that corpus-based study can be highly advantageous for students studying EAP. However, it requires motivated, reflective learners who are comfortable with an inductive learning style and who are willing to adjust their mindset and study behaviours. Further, online corpus study is potentially the type of tool that can help enable students to be lifelong learners of vocabulary. Yet without a systematic approach that is meaningfully presented and practised it is not likely to have the degree of uptake it deserves. Thus, embedding corpus tools and methods within an LOA framework is essential. Much more could have been done to this effect in my AR. I believe that two 10-week cycles may not be adequate. I hope to look further into how to better implement principles of LOA in a vocabulary program to encourage less motivated or effectual students to experience the same benefits that the more diligent students reported.

This AR has deepened my awareness of learner differences, among other things. These differences cannot be pigeonholed into generalisations about culture, gender or age and it can be challenging to accommodate all learners' study preferences. Reference to empirical research can aid teachers to navigate such challenges. Unfortunately, however, there is often a lack of connection between Teaching English to speakers of other languages (TESOL) research and theory, and what actually occurs in classrooms, and teachers have little time to review and discuss current research findings or reflect on their own classroom experiences. Thus, the use of a teacher research approach to guide teaching practices is important. I firmly believe that AR is an excellent conduit and that more needs to be done by management or from the grassroots level at the institution to bridge this gap.

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Appendix 1: Example handouts for FLAX training

1. In the learning collocation section, using the BAWE corpus, look up *assume*. What's the most common collocation? _____
2. Open the window with the example sentences. What word and grammatical pattern tends to most commonly come after the collocation? _____
3. What verbs tends to come before it? _____
4. What often comes before the verb? _____
5. Take a minute to further investigate this *assume* collocation in either the *Book Phrases* section or the *British Academic Written English collections* section. Then try to create your OWN sentence using the collocation, following the common grammatical pattern (colligation) identified above.

11. Now type '*considerable variation*' into the *Book Phrase* section and search for the most common word patterns following it. Follow the links until you can't go any further. In the table, write the colligation (grammatical pattern) you find. Add some specific examples where you can. Then look for the most common verb preceding *considerable variation* and add this to the table as well.

_____ + <i>adj + variation</i> + _____ + _____ + _____ ...				
	considerable variation			

12. Using information from the table, create your own sentence about a topic related to this week's theme of *IT and technology* or your assignment topic.

13. Look back at Q 7. Notice that b) and c) collocations are the same words in different forms? paraphrase your sentence in Q12 using the collocation from c)

These sentences come from our class's concluding paragraphs to a problem solution essay about large cities. The underlining indicates collocation issues. Use FLAX to improve the sentences.

1. Overcrowded megacities experience hard difficulties, particularly in developing countries.

Grammatical pattern: adj + difficulties _____

Possible collocation(s): _____

2. It is clear that people should be seriously aware of these potential drawbacks so that they can develop

Appendix 2: Blog post prompt

In a paragraph or in bullet point form, reflect on the use of corpora and FLAX to study AWL collocations. You can use the questions below to guide you.

How familiar were you with FLAX before EAP 2?

Do you think it looks too difficult to use, or might be quite useful with more training?

So far, how much effect do you think it might have on your vocabulary knowledge? Do you think it might have an effect on your other skills?

What did you find easiest about FLAX and corpus consultation?

What do you find most challenging about FLAX and corpus consultation?

Appendix 3: Example of AWL Class Wordlist Cycle 1

Word	Gr	Pron	Definition (& synonym/antonyms)	Example sentences	Word family	Collocations
appropriate	a. (used frequently) vt.	oOoo	a.: which is proper for other people or issues (suitable/right) vt.: to use sth properly. (allow)	(a.) We feel that this may be helpful to Principals in deciding the appropriate action to take within their own colleges. (vt.) In these circumstances the company would be wise to obtain access to appropriate option pricing software to satisfy itself on pricing.	(n.) appropriateness (adv.) appropriately (a.) inappropriate	appropriate action/time appropriate to use appropriate to the needs
conduct	n. (used frequently) vt.	(n.) Oo (v.) oO	n. (U): behaviours (behaviour) vt.: to show the way to someone (manage, lead)	(n.) A code of conduct designed by television professionals and viewers will be drawn up. (vt.) A semiconducting material, its ability to conduct electricity, is one which lies between a conductor copper and an insulator rubber.	(a.) conducted (gerund n.) conducting	code of conduct professional conduct conduct electricity

Appendix 4: Example word families and sentence creation test template

AWL 1 Quiz	Word family				Score: /10
	Dictated word	Noun	Verb	Adjective	
1.					
2.					
3.					
4.					
5.					

Dictated word	Sentence creation	Score: /10
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		

Appendix 5: Cycle 1 example student homework writing task from Week 2

There are two advantages of group work. First, people who joined a group have more ideas than working themselves. To elaborate, group members could share their idea when they start a project and discuss with each other, and more ideas mean more opportunities in many areas such as business, operation and education. In addition, individuals would become efficient and finish a project better in a group. When an orientation has been settled, people in a group also have been divided. After that, they can work in their department that they are expert in. For example, in order to educate students well, most of schools decide to use a teacher group, so teachers could concentrate on one subject and do their best. In contrast, if just one teacher teaching all subject, even decrease their teaching time, they cannot deal with all. In summary, group work take advantage from ideas and efficiency.

However, group work also has many disadvantages. First, people in a group might be disturbed from others, so they could not concentrate on one thing, especially their own idea. In other words, group members exchange their idea to each other, and people always be influenced by these. For example, a group aim to design a product and one of them has an excellent idea but so innovative, then when they hear about others, they might doubt themselves and give up. Furthermore, group members might have argument sometimes. Perhaps they have distinct ideas; perhaps they show too many control; perhaps they laugh at others; all of these could trigger argument. When it happened, the group might be split and unfinished this work.

Appendix 6: Cycle 1 responses to mid-cycle survey question asking students to describe FLAX

8. How would you describe FLAX to a student who had never heard of or used it before?

(12 responses)

It is acutely useful for learning word collocation, family and synonym.

it will help you to take charge of native language.

The useful tool which can help us well aware the methods of particular word when we have to write in academic situation.

easy way to gain word family with examples.

theory of language, 24/7 language assistance

very appreciately

It is convenient and quick to find out every academic word family and correct usage of collocation, it also give excellent example sentences to help you understand how to use the word. I think it is the best choice to learn academic words by flax.

most useful English website

a effective tool to learn the vocabularies comprehensively

Flax is an awesome self-study tool of vocabulary collocation, family words, synonyms and antonyms.

Useful

Appendix 7: Cycle 2 responses to mid-cycle survey question asking students to describe FLAX

11. How would you describe FLAX to a student who had never heard of or used it before?

(9 responses)

Flax is a useful website for us to learn the collocation and give you a idea how to make a sentence for a word you never know.

a website help you a lot on learning word collocation

I would describe as an essential to tool to improve academic vocabulary, because it include the word frequency and collocations, which makes it easy to memorize and understand.

helping to find good collocations

by giving demo

I will show how to use the FLAX and describe the uses such as word family, learning resources, and so on.

learn words collocations.

it is excellent website to study the English language

it can help you to familiar with the collocations about words and know about the word families, which may help you to get a higher scores in you writings and have more effective communications.

Encouraging autonomy in student writers through corpus tools

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Introduction

This project sought to determine whether English language learners preparing to write at a university level could independently edit their writing to improve collocational and grammatical accuracy following instruction in the use of corpus tools. Positive results were found for lexical collocation but there were limited improvements in colligation (grammatical collocation). Discussion of the project and findings will be followed by reflection on the practicality and effectiveness of corpus instruction as a method of helping learners build independence in their language development.

Context and participants

The intended context for the project was a 15-week university direct entry English for Academic Purposes (EAP) program consisting of five weeks of academic writing instruction (known as DEC 15) followed by 10 weeks of general EAP, academic skills and test preparation (known as DEC 10). Classes in this program, which enables students to enter university courses directly upon successful completion, consist of students from mixed disciplines for the initial five weeks of writing input (DEC 15). For the following 10 weeks (DEC 10), students are then streamed into disciplinary groups. Our focus was on the Business stream, as this group comprises the largest cohort.

The writing curriculum throughout the 15-week period is informed by genre pedagogy. It is our informal observation that students seem to develop an improved overall control of the rhetorical structures and moves associated with particular genres but that there seems to be little improvement in accuracy and expression. Students are often adventurous with their choices of vocabulary, which is certainly to be encouraged, but because of what we have perceived to be a lack of familiarity with the collocational and grammatical relationships of these choices, there is often a significant level of inaccuracy and a lack of 'natural' expression in the writing.

The students in the cohort we worked with are almost exclusively Chinese, at a high B2 level on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR, Council of Europe 2001). The majority had previously completed undergraduate studies in China and were seeking entry to largely postgraduate coursework masters' programs. Entry is conditional on demonstration of overall English language proficiency deemed equivalent to an *IELTS* Academic band score of either 6.5 or 7.0, depending on the program. For our centre to recommend their entry to the university, they are required to demonstrate that level of proficiency by achieving an aggregate score from an assessment battery of several instruments over the final 10-week period.

Theoretical background

We approached the focus on collocation and colligation within the framework of learning-oriented assessment (LOA). The central concern of LOA is to ensure that assessment enhances student learning. LOA is concerned with transferable real life learning processes, the development of long-term autonomous learning strategies and the promotion of student engagement with feedback (Boud and Falchikov 2007, Carless 2007). As the course we were concerned with is heavy in content and assessment, leaving very little room for teacher-driven, targeted input and instruction, our aim was to look at how we might better utilise feedback on written assessments to encourage learners to correct inappropriate collocation and grammatical patterns in a way that might promote independent learning for current and future contexts.

There is a wide body of research into writing instruction which suggests that direct use by students of both general corpora and, more particularly, smaller specialised corpora, can assist with independent composing and editing and also resolving language-related questions and problems, particularly with collocational and colligational patterns (see, for example, Chambers 2005, Daskalovska 2015, Kennedy and Miceli 2010, Lee and Swales 2006, Yoon 2011). However, the evidence from these studies also suggests that students need a period of training, or apprenticeship, in how to make effective independent use of this resource for writing. In addition to native speaker

corpora, learner corpora have been usefully employed to inform pedagogical interventions by identifying ways in which learner language use may differ systematically from native speaker production, through comparison with data from native speaker corpora from the target context (see, for example, Belz and Vyatkina 2008, Cotos 2014, Mendikoetxea, Murcia Bielsa and Rollinson 2010, Rankin, 2010).

We aimed to combine these approaches by first building a small corpus of our learners' assessment tasks and then looking at this in comparison to the business sub-corpus of the corpus of British Academic Written English Corpus (BAWE)¹ (see Nesi, Gardner, Forsyth, Hindle, Wickens, Ebeling, Leedham, Thompson and Heuboeck 2005). The BAWE consists of student assignments and was chosen as a basis for our research, since we reasoned that student writing is a more realistic and achievable target for our students than professional texts. In this way, we hoped to potentially identify specific areas on which to target feedback on written assessments and to develop learning activities. We then aimed to increase student engagement with feedback by having them work on improving their writing using the business sub-corpus as a reference tool.

Research questions

To guide our research, we developed the following questions:

1. What can a comparison of a corpus of learner assessment tasks with a corpus of discipline-specific student writing tell us about our learners' use of language in academic writing?
1. How successfully can students solve inappropriate collocational and colligational patterning highlighted in feedback on written assessments by investigating answers in a corpus of discipline-specific student writing?
1. How likely are students to continue to use the corpus tools as an independent resource after finishing the program?

The last question reflected our interest in assisting our students' development of autonomous learning.

Intervention

Unanticipated administrative changes to the DEC program prior to and during the project necessitated changes to our original plan. The following section outlines the project as originally conceived and as it was ultimately carried out.

¹ www.coventry.ac.uk/bawe

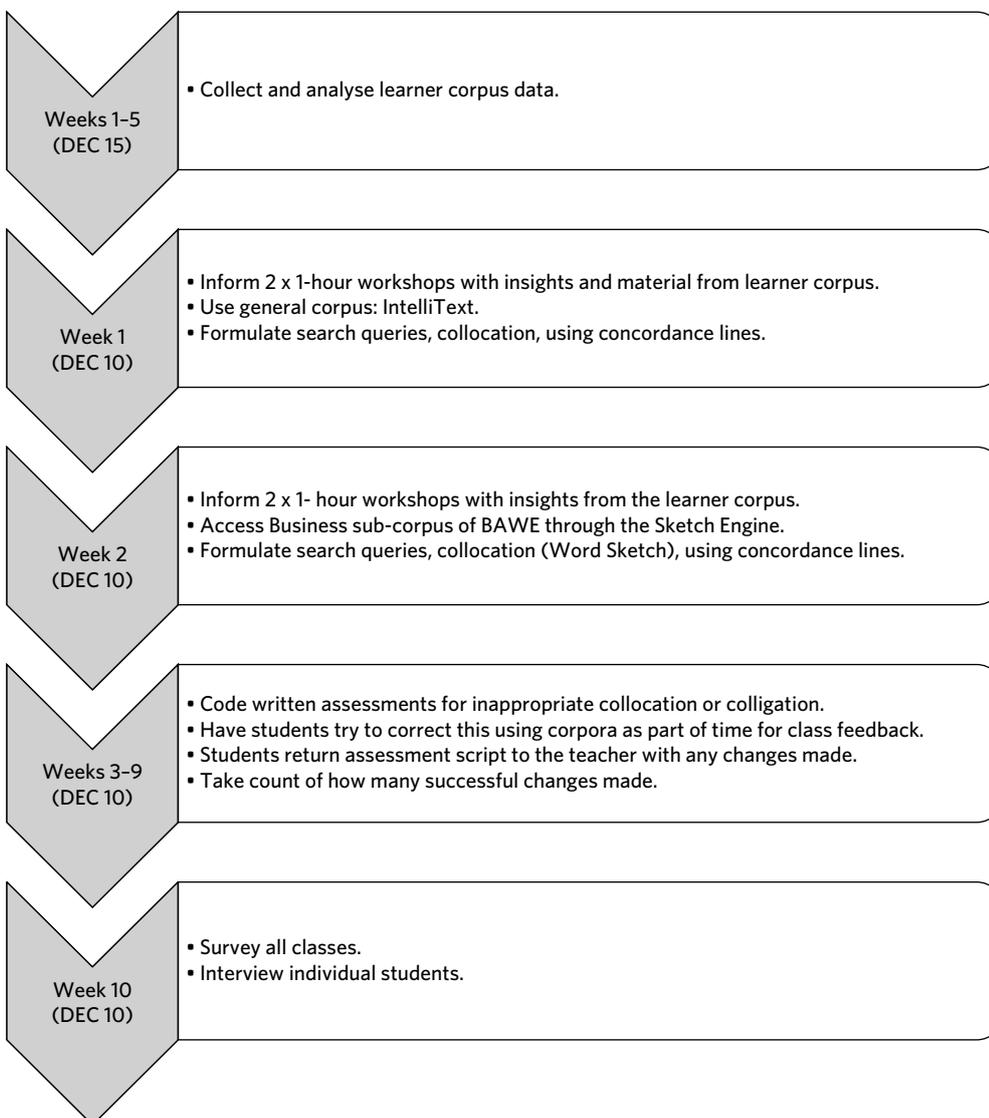
Project as planned

Figure 1 shows the project as we originally conceived it. We had intended to collect scripts from the initial 5-week writing component to compile the learner corpus and then use this data to inform our intervention with four classes of up to 18 students in the Business stream over the next 10 weeks.

The tools we employed were IntelliText², which accesses several large general corpora, and the Sketch Engine³, which provides access to BAWE. The Sketch Engine also provides a 'Word Sketch' which gives the most common collocational and grammatical relationships of a word as found in the corpus. The rationale for using both a general and a specific corpus was that if students were unable to find what they needed in the smaller business or academic corpora, they could refer to a large general corpus as a second step.

Unanticipated and last minute administrative changes to the DEC program meant, however, that we were unable to collect scripts during the five weeks of DEC 15 for the learner corpus as planned. Classes were also redistributed into mixed disciplinary groups for Weeks 6–10 of DEC 10, instead of remaining in the disciplinary streams on the basis of which we had planned the project. These realities meant that we were ultimately unable to use the learner corpus data to inform any of the intervention. Also, because we ultimately had to work with two different groups of students, it was impractical to collect writing from and follow up with the original participants while working with the second group. This meant the intervention was carried out differently with the two groups as described in the next section.

Figure 1: Original plan for the project



² corpus.leeds.ac.uk/itweb/htdocs/Query.html

³ the.sketchengine.co.uk/open

Project in practice

Since we were unable to follow the plan we had originally developed, the project was carried out with two different groups of students with input given to the two groups in different ways. The first group consisted of 17 participants from two business stream classes in Weeks 1–5 of DEC 10. Workshop input was conducted jointly and we each collected data from our own class. The second group consisted of 16 students in a Graduate Academic Skills (GAS) class. The GAS class was an unstreamed academic skills program for students who had already achieved their required English language proficiency score for entry to university. These students were not assessed for entry at the completion of their program. Data was collected by one teacher and analysed jointly.

We had originally planned to conduct four input workshops outside of class time in the first two weeks of DEC 10, to familiarise students with use of a reference corpus and concordance lines, using extracts of inappropriate patterns from the learner corpus as material for the students to investigate. However, as we were unable to collect the learner data to use for workshop material, we endeavoured to ensure that the material we used was relevant to the students' target context. We sourced material from simple online searches of the highest frequency lexical words in the business corpus that also appeared on the Academic Collocations List (Ackermann and Chen 2013). The workshop topics are given in Table 1.

Table 1: Workshop topics

Workshop 1	Introduction to IntelliText and how to find collocations
Workshop 2	Use of IntelliText to correct collocation errors in a paragraph
Workshop 3	Introduction to the Sketch Engine and how to investigate grammatical patterns
Workshop 4	Use by students of both tools to work on samples of their own writing

Data collection

In Weeks 1–5 students' writing was coded for inappropriate collocation and grammatical patterning. After the workshop input, the students were asked to work independently at

Figure 2: Example of alternative word task

also required at the same time. These situations make damage to the city. If continue this way.

Figure 3: Example of grammatical pattern task

home to search the corpora for the word indicated and find

Traditional culture in China encourage men own their own business.

an alternative to the highlighted word (see Figure 2) or a grammatical pattern (see Figure 3) that was appropriate in the context of their text.

Unfortunately, this approach meant that not all students returned their scripts and we had no way of verifying if they had actually used the corpus to make the changes. Students seemed to find the collocation functions easy to use but very few attempted to make grammatical changes using concordance lines. As a result, and given our subsequent knowledge that the classes would change, we made the decision to exclude colligation from our data collection for this 5-week period and focus on it in the following 5-week period.

In Weeks 6–10, as a result of our experience in the first five weeks, no workshops were run for the new class. Students were introduced to the corpus tools in the classroom and worked in class time on improving a set of inappropriate grammatical patterns from their own writing, using both the corpus interfaces with teacher guidance where necessary. These were collected at the end of class and we counted the number of successful changes. In Week 10 we administered a questionnaire to the GAS class anonymously during class time. The same questionnaire was sent to the original DEC participants via email (see the Appendix).

Findings

The data showed that Students in the DEC class in Weeks 1–5 attempted to correct 79% of a possible 193 changes in collocation (see Table 2). Of the attempted changes made, an impressive 71% of these were successful changes in the context of the text.

Table 2: Collocation changes by DEC class

Collocation changes	Number	Percentage
Number of possible changes	193	-
Number of attempted changes	153	79%
Number of successful changes	108	71%

The students in the GAS class however, had far less success with identifying grammatical patterns than the DEC class

had with collocation, despite working in the classroom with our support where necessary. After brief in-class training in how to consult the corpus tools, students were given a set of sentences on two separate occasions. The sentences, with inappropriate grammatical patterns, were taken collectively from the students' own writing. Each student worked independently on the same set of sentences, with the teacher's assistance where necessary, to find the appropriate grammatical pattern by consulting the corpora. Students made successful changes in only 48% of the first set of sentences, and 25% of the second set of sentences. The outcomes from these activities are illustrated in Table 3.

Table 3: Colligation changes by GAS class

Colligation changes	Set 1	Set 2
Total number of possible changes	12	18
Average number of successful changes per student	5.7	4.58
Percentage of successful changes	48%	25%

These results were disappointing, however this may be partly explained by the fact that we gave the students a limited amount of time to make these corrections and many did not finish making corrections to each set.

A total of 20 of the 33 participants responded to the questionnaire, which consisted of 12 items with a 5-point answer scale from 'completely agree' (5) to 'completely disagree' (1). Items covered areas such as how easy students found the corpus tools to use overall (for collocation and for grammar), whether the students wanted more teacher instruction and training, and whether they would continue to use the corpus tools independently for writing. Responses were overwhelmingly positive, with 97% of respondents indicating that they found the corpus easy to use for collocation and 100% confirming that they intended to continue to use the corpus tools independently. The least favourable response was for the item 'I understand how to use the corpus effectively to fix problems with grammar', with 12.5% of students disagreeing with this statement.

Conclusions

We were impressed by the success rate of 71% in collocation, especially in light of the fact that the students made these corrections independently without any teacher assistance. This outcome would certainly seem to justify taking the time to train students in how to consult a corpus for collocation. However as one student remarked in the questionnaire, 'What's the difference between using these websites and a collocation dictionary?' Another student noted that it was sometimes 'hard to work out which word I need'.

We would argue that the value of the corpora is that students are able to view multiple examples of actual use. However, both the corpus interfaces used in this project initially give only lists of potential collocates for

the word entered. It is necessary to click on one of these potential collocates to actually view the concordance lines with the words in context. We observed that when investigating collocation, students rarely went beyond the initial collocation lists to consider the samples. This lack of engagement with the corpus data beyond the potential collocation lists may provide an explanation for the student observations above that there is no apparent difference between a corpus and a collocation dictionary, and also that it can be difficult to work out which word is needed.

The students in the first group also appeared to avoid using the concordance lines to independently work on grammar at home, with virtually no independent attempts to correct areas of grammar that we had indicated in feedback. However, only one workshop of one hour was given to examining specifically how to consult concordance lines for colligation before we asked the students to work independently. These observations suggest that the students found working with concordance lines difficult. Indeed, it has been observed that students can find working with concordance lines both overwhelming and tiring (Belz and Vyatkina 2008). This outcome also suggests that more comprehensive training is needed with scaffolded teacher support for students in how to approach and interpret concordance lines.

The lack of success in improving grammar in the GAS class was also disappointing. The training was covered in only a half-hour session in class, though the students did subsequently work with our assistance. As one student observed: 'It's hard to do grammar like this'. Another reason for this lack of success with grammar may have been that the students seemed to need more time to make corrections than we had made available. When working with the second set of 18 sentences, no student managed to complete more than 10 in the time available. These observations suggest that the students need more structured guidance in how to work with the concordance lines and that this work, at least initially, takes them some time. Despite these limitations, student responses to the questionnaire were overwhelmingly positive and all indicated that they intended to continue to use the tools in the future as a writing resource.

Krishnamurthy and Kozem (2007) argue that careful piloting is important when introducing teaching approaches based on corpora into the classroom and this point was certainly made clear from our experiences in this project. Our research allowed us to pilot a corpus-based approach from which we learned some important lessons. On reflection, holding extra-curricular workshops and asking the students to carry out their corrections at home was not a practical or productive choice. We adopted this approach because of the time constraints imposed by an overly full curriculum and institutional pressures to ensure that no class was perceived by the student cohort to be receiving any additional instruction or input. However, in making this choice, we believe we lost something of the 'action' in action research. Not all students attended the workshops as these were voluntary, which then limited the amount of class time we could allocate to giving

feedback and helping with problems the students may have had in executing or interpreting their searches, from which all may have benefited.

However, the independent success the students achieved with collocation and their positive responses to using the reference corpora are encouraging. Certainly, the use of corpus tools is not intuitive and it would seem that an alternative and more comprehensive and scaffolded approach to corpus training would be more effective, particularly for investigating questions of grammatical patterning. This training could involve incorporating regular instruction into class time so that students can work with teacher support, though in an already crowded program, this would consume valuable class time. Alternatively, to minimise the impact on class time, flipping the content through instructional videos on the centre's learning management system (LMS), with follow-up class activities may be an alternative. Clearly, teaching students to consult a corpus takes time, and a further question to potentially investigate is whether and how students continue to use the corpus reference tools as they move into their university study, and whether their use of tools justifies the time and resources needed for corpus training.

Next steps

In this project, we aimed to ascertain whether our English language learners could successfully make corrections to collocation and grammar in their writing by independently consulting a reference corpus. Our intention to inform that instruction with the creation of a corpus of learner texts was not achieved within the timeframe of the project, although we have since built an initial corpus and are in the process of developing it further.

We will continue to analyse our learner corpus in comparison to an analysis of the business corpus in order to inform and target our feedback and learning activities. We are particularly interested in using extracts from the learner corpus for students to compare with selected examples from the business corpus, as had been our original intention. Using teacher-selected examples from the learner and business corpora, given to the students as worksheets, may allow us to provide a more scaffolded approach with greater opportunity for focus and guidance in using and interpreting concordance lines before asking students to do independent searches of the corpora to answer their own or given queries.

To identify areas in which our students are performing both differently and, indeed, similarly to the patterns found in the business corpus, we are now examining frequency and keyword lists and the most common patterns occurring in these lists in each corpus (Baker 2006). In addition, we intend to look at the discursive and interpersonal features of our learner corpus in comparison to those found in the business corpus. Our searches in these areas will be informed by the items identified by Hyland (2005). We would like to expand

the learner corpus to include samples of student writing for all genres taught in the program, with larger sample sizes, and if possible build a corpus of the program teaching materials for comparison of input and output language.

Reflections

Despite feeling that we had lost the heart of the project without the learner corpus data, the action research process was nevertheless an instructive and valuable experience. It was a reminder that the kind of changes we faced are a reality that teachers need to constantly manage, and that even the most comprehensive and best laid of plans will likely need to be modified in the face of changing circumstances. The value of the action research process was that it allowed us to systematically evaluate the methodology and learning activities we brought to the classroom, as well as their outcomes for the students. The evidence and insights this process provided is invaluable and will certainly inform and shape the next steps of our project, as well as giving us inspiration for future projects.

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Appendix: Student survey

Please rate the following on a scale of 1 to 5:

	1	2	3	4	5
	Completely agree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Completely disagree
1	I find it easy to make corrections using the corpus.				
2	I understand how to use the corpus effectively to fix problems with grammar.				
3	I find it easy to use the corpus to fix problems with collocation.				
4	I find it easy to use the corpus to fix problems with prepositions.				
5	I enjoy using the corpus to make corrections.				
6	I need the teacher's help to use the corpus.				
7	I want more instruction in how to use the corpus.				
8	I will continue to use the corpus independently for writing.				
9	I will continue to use the corpus independently to check/find collocations.				
10	I will continue to use the corpus independently to check/find prepositions.				
11	I will continue to use the corpus independently to check grammar patterns.				
12	Do you prefer the Sketch Engine or the IntelliText? Why?				
13	Any other comments?				

Online peer review to encourage deeper learning, learner autonomy and improved feedback

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Introduction

In our teaching context, we noticed that students were submitting unedited essay drafts, and not adequately incorporating elements of essay structure discussed and practised in class. As a result, we became interested in how the process could include more effective peer review tasks. We observed that existing peer review strategies were not effective, as they were scheduled simultaneously with teacher feedback sessions, and thus did not feed forward

effectively into the learning cycle. This, in turn, affected student engagement and motivation. Students perceived peer feedback to be neither relevant nor implementable, as the essay had already been submitted to the teacher, and formal revisions were no longer possible.

Negative perception of peer feedback is not uncommon. Rollinson (2005) states that despite the benefits of peer feedback, its value is frequently questioned by students and teachers alike. He notes that students in particular

may see peer feedback as a 'poor alternative' to teacher feedback, and thus tend to discount its utility. We felt that by changing the schedule, shifting the feedback out of the classroom and onto a structured online platform, and providing guidance on how best to give and receive peer feedback, we could encourage students to become more critical readers and writers, and to gain confidence in the peer feedback process. This approach would also, as Keppell, Au, Ma and Chan (cited in Carless, Joughin and Mok 2006:397) put it, 'facilitate in empowering students'; when the teacher steps back from peer feedback interaction, it results in more meaningful learning.

Context

At the University of Tasmania (UTAS), UTAS Access 6 (UA6) is the penultimate 5-week unit in a series of courses aimed at preparing students for university and providing a direct-entry pathway to degree programs. UA6 is an exit point for students planning to study at an undergraduate level who require the equivalent of an *IELTS* band score 6 overall with no band less than 5.5. It is also a pre-requisite unit for UTAS Access 7 (UA7), which is an exit point for all other university degree programs requiring a higher level of English. Classes average between 15 and 18 students of predominantly East or South East Asian and Middle Eastern origin. The primary writing task in UA6 and UA7 is a short discussion essay of 450 words. During the course, students complete three practice essays before being assessed on an essay written under examination conditions. The short essays are used to assess a student's ability to produce academic-style essays which include a clear structure with a thesis statement, in-text citations to support ideas, paraphrasing skills and the development of a cohesive argument.

The process we were interested in implementing would also allow for a blended learning approach, as well as refocusing teacher feedback. First, integrating an online peer feedback platform reflects current research showing that students appreciate flipped classroom and blended learning approaches, and that these approaches can assist in increasing learner autonomy (Wanner and Palmer 2015). Second, there is also evidence that online collaboration and feedback leads to significantly increased perceived levels of learning (Zlatović, Balaban and Kermek 2015). In English as a second language (ESL), there is evidence that peer feedback can help students develop their writing skills. Both Rollinson (2005) and Berggren (2015) found this to be true, with Berggren (2015:67) stating that it can 'result in an enhancement of the student's ability to write'. Rollinson (2005) found that self-editing skills also improved in ESL learners who had participated in peer feedback tasks. This development of writing skills could be further facilitated by peer feedback because it has the potential to allow one-to-one teacher feedback to focus on language rather than the essay genre structure, which could otherwise dominate these sessions. The ability for the teacher to focus on language is a direct result of using online peer feedback as an extra teaching tool, which Tsvitanidou and Constantinou

(2015) believe helps teachers to provide more timely and individualised feedback.

Research focus

Our aim, therefore, was to explore the impact of integrating an online peer feedback phase, focusing on genre structure, after students had completed their first draft and before they submitted their final draft to the teacher. We hoped that this approach would not only lead to increased learner autonomy and self-editing practices, but also provide for more focused and efficient teacher feedback.

Accordingly, we developed the following research questions (RQs):

1. How can an online platform facilitate peer review of first draft essays to allow for timely feedback that feeds forward into an improved final draft for submission?
1. Will this approach improve students' grasp and use of a genre-specific structure?
1. Will it allow the teacher to focus more on language aspects of feedback?

Action research (AR) cycles

Our first step was to identify an appropriate online platform that was user-friendly and would allow for timely feedback. As the current UTAS learning management system (MyLO) is yet to implement a peer feedback tool, the best solution seemed to be a platform called Aropä, developed by the University of Glasgow. Aropä is free, user-friendly for both students and teachers, easy to set up, and relatively flexible in setting up rubrics for assignments. It also assigns essays randomly and anonymously, and allows for data collection.

For the first of our two 5-week research cycles, we developed a rubric that focused on required structural and cohesive elements of the short essay task, with scope for comments on each main section (see Figure 1). This provided students with a model process and a detailed 'checklist'. Lee (2007) recommends modelling and using a checklist set-up to give students more confidence in providing feedback on skills that they themselves are still in the process of acquiring. We felt this scaffolding could also aid in ameliorating difficulties with what Carless (2014:965) refers to as the 'decoding and uptake of feedback messages which can often seem cryptic or opaque'. The scaffolding would also help overcome the many cultural interferences. Given that many of our students are from Confucian backgrounds and tend to be reticent about giving critique, the checklist removes subjectivity, so that students may be perceived by each other as assisting rather than critiquing (Carson and Nelson 1996, cited in Rollinson 2005:26). As the checklist was developed from the assessment rubric, it also allowed students to interact with criteria on which they would later be assessed. Boud and Falchikov (2006) believe that this interaction with criteria is essential for successful outcomes.

Figure 1: Sample questions from feedback rubric

Introduction	
1. Does the introduction include a background section (with references)?	Yes No
2. Does the introduction include a sequence of ideas that reflects the topics of the body paragraphs?	Yes No
3. Does the introduction include a thesis statement that clearly answers the essay question?	Yes No
Comments on the introduction:	

We also created a suite of instructional materials. Some of these were used in class by the teacher to introduce the process, but the materials were mostly accessed by students independently via MyLO. The most crucial of these materials was a paragraph-level exercise to give students guided experience in providing peer feedback. For peer feedback to be successful, students would need guided practice and to see an example of effective work. Boud and Falchikov (2006) note that it is good practice as it allows students to understand what is required. They also emphasise the importance of students then *practising* what is required. The in-class activity developed for the project allowed for this practice as it required students to analyse three paragraphs, give feedback on them and determine

which one was the model paragraph. Following this task, students then gave peer feedback on a pre-prepared paragraph in class under the guidance of the teacher. This Week 1 activity was critical for the implementation of the process in Week 2 (i.e. providing independent feedback on a classmate's essay).

Because we wanted to minimise the teacher's role in the process, make the peer feedback student-driven, and foster independent learning, online support was needed. On the university platform already used in the unit, we created a series of instructional videos showing how to access Aropä and upload a draft essay, how to review an essay, and how to incorporate feedback into a second draft (see Figure 2). The videos allowed students to review the process of peer feedback from Week 1 when completing their own peer-review in Week 2. The videos showed screenshots of an essay as well as the checklist with commentary provided for decisions made. We found through MyLO learner analytics that the majority of students accessed at least two of these four videos.

Each cycle included two practice essays that were submitted for peer feedback at the draft stage. Once submitted, students were allocated two essays to review.

Figure 2: List of online support materials for students accessible via the learning management system

Aropä log in page ✓
Click here to log on to Aropä. Use your student number for Username and UA6416 as the password. Please change your password when you log in the first time.

Uploading your essay to Aropä for peer review ✓
Having trouble uploading your essay to Aropä? Can't remember how to do it? Here is a video to help.

Peer Review Demonstration ✓
To help you prepare for the Aropä Peer Review, watch the video on how to do a peer review.

Reviewing an essay in Aropä ✓
This video will show you how to use Aropä to do a peer review.

Receiving peer feedback in Aropä ✓
Watch the video for instructions on how to view feedback on your essay from a classmate. Use this feedback to review your essay before you submit your essay to the teacher.

We felt that assigning two essays would not only maximise the chances of each student receiving at least one review, but also provide for different perspectives on each draft. As Table 1 shows, the timing was very tight, with the whole process (from being given the essay topic through to submitting a second draft to the teacher) effectively taking place over only three days. Despite this constraint, the majority of students from each cycle uploaded both essays for review, and completed reviews of two other students' work per essay.

As explained further below, after each round of peer feedback, students were surveyed, anonymously and online, regarding their participation in the experience. During the first research cycle, two main issues were identified from the comments on the surveys. First, some students became confused when they received contradictory feedback. Second, they lacked confidence in making specific comments. For the second cycle, we provided further input and scaffolding in these areas through more online support, class discussions, and a list of possible comments to adapt and integrate.

Finally, an opportunity arose during the second cycle to workshop the process with a group of Chinese teachers studying a unit on teaching methodologies. First they were walked through the process as students, using a piece of reflective writing they had completed that week. They were then taken 'backstage' to show them how, as teachers, they could use Aropä to set up their own classes and assignments for peer feedback. They finished by using Aropä to generate a survey regarding its potential utility in their classrooms.

Data collection and analysis

Data collection consisted of several approaches. We surveyed students after each round of feedback to ascertain how comfortable they were with the process and how useful they perceived it to be; we analysed suggestions made by students on Aropä and the extent to which these suggestions were implemented in the final draft; and we compared the final marks from the summative assessment to other classes not participating in the project.

Additionally, students in the second cycle were asked to write a reflection on the process.

Student surveys

Student surveys (see the Appendix) were mainly focused on:

1. How comfortable students were sharing their work with classmates. Consistently, the overwhelming majority indicated that they were at least reasonably comfortable. Less than 2% of responses over the four surveys indicated that they did not like sharing their work.
1. How useful students perceived the peer feedback they received to be. On average, 39% felt the feedback was 'very useful', and 44.1% found it 'useful'. It is interesting, however, that in each cycle the proportion indicating 'very useful' dropped significantly from Week 2 to Week 3 (53.9% vs 12.5% and 53.9% vs 40% respectively). This outcome could be because by the second essay, students were more confident with structure, so there were fewer areas on which to receive constructive feedback.
1. Whether students revised their essays following peer feedback. For both cohorts in Week 2, the response was 100%.

The surveys also provided scope for additional feedback, which was generally positive, with comments such as 'I like peer review, through which I can improve my writing skills with others' comments' and 'It can help me to improve my English writing'.

Comparisons and analyses made with Aropä data

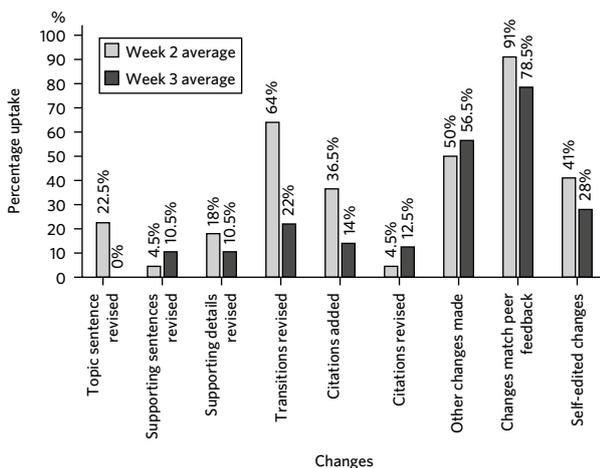
Figure 3 compares the average changes made over the two cycles to different elements of the Week 2 and Week 3 practice essays. There are several features worth noting here. First, a very high percentage of changes made matched peer recommendations (91% for Week 2 and 78.5% for Week 3). This finding indicates a high level of confidence in peer feedback, which we assume was inspired by the high level of input and scaffolding associated with the process. Second, there was an overall drop in changes made in Week 3 compared to Week 2, which is possibly due to an increased grasp of structure after the first round of practice essays and feedback,

Table 1: Weekly practice essay timetable

Monday and Tuesday	Weeks 1 and 2: In-class reading to be used as essay sources.
Tuesday	Week 1: Input on using Aropä and in-class guided feedback practice. Students view instructional videos re: accessing Aropä and uploading files if necessary (at home). Weeks 1 and 2: Essay topic analysis and planning (in-class). First draft completed and submitted to Aropä by 8am Wednesday (at home).
Wednesday	Teacher monitors Aropä essay submissions and follows up with students who failed to submit (in class). Students view instructional video re: providing feedback (at home). Students complete peer feedback x 2 and submit by 8am Thursday (at home).
Thursday	Teacher monitors Aropä feedback submissions and follows up with students who failed to submit (in class). Students view instructional video re: receiving and incorporating feedback (at home). Students complete second draft, incorporating peer feedback, and submit to MyLO by 8am Friday (at home).
Friday	Teacher provides one-on-one feedback on second drafts.

meaning that there were fewer structural errors for feedback. Further support for this interpretation lies in the nature of the changes that *did* increase for Week 3. For example, the fact that there was a significant drop in the number of citations added (36.5% vs 14%), but an equally significant increase in the number of citations revised (4.5% vs 12.5%), suggests that feedback in Week 2 focused on missing citations, whereas by Week 3 students were including the necessary citations, and giving and receiving feedback on their format. 'Other changes made' (based on the open-ended comments) also increased from 50% in Week 2 to 56.5% in Week 3, but what is more interesting is that feedback in this area was often deeper and more language-focused by Week 3. Examples of Week 2 comments were 'You can put some transition signals in each paragraph' and 'It is better to write more supporting sentences instead of just supporting details', compared to Week 3 comments such as 'Maybe you should use "especially for".'

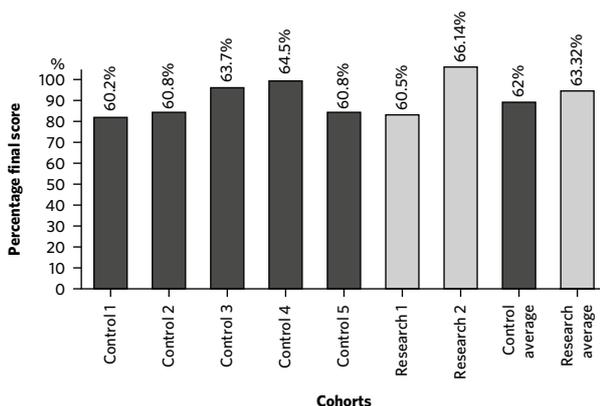
Figure 3: Comparison of changes made following peer feedback during formative assessment stages



Comparison of summative assessment results

Figure 4 compares average results for the final short essay, completed under exam conditions, for the two research classes and five 'control' classes which completed the unit earlier or concurrently in 2016.

Figure 4: Comparison of summative assessment results: UA6 short essay



Based on these figures, there does not seem to be a significant overall difference between the research and control cohorts (63.3% vs 62%). However, there are three considerations in terms of interpreting this data. First, the cohorts are very small (averaging 15 students), so it is difficult to find statistically significant results. Second, our experience is that cohorts tend to vary significantly in terms of overall experience and ability. Third, despite marking moderation and systems to ensure consistency in marking, the results may also be impacted by the fact that marking was not completed by one assessor, which may result in interferences. We are currently exploring ways of controlling for these factors, perhaps by comparing the marks given by individual assessors over a number of study periods with and without the peer feedback stage.

Student reflections

At the conclusion of the second cycle, students were asked to reflect on their experiences of using Aropä for peer feedback. Their responses were overwhelmingly positive, with most indicating that they had gained in confidence and found the process useful. The excerpts below are typical of the responses.

I learnt a lot of things from this experience. Firstly, by reading others' assignments, I can know what their ideas are and choose some of them to add to my assignment. Secondly, after giving comments to other essays, I can find some mistakes that we often make so that I will pay attention to mine when I write assignment next time.

At first I was confused in some questions. I felt a little hard to write a comment. After checking my notes, I feel more confident to write a comment. I tried to write down my own opinions and give advice. It became more and more easier after I finished one of the essays. I could feel a sense of achievement which inspired me to continue. When I was reading the second essay, I felt like I am a teacher. It's really exciting.

Teaching methodologies students

As previously mentioned, we also had the opportunity to workshop the feedback process with a group of teachers from China who were completing a teaching methodologies unit. As part of the workshop, the teachers used Aropä to jointly construct a survey regarding its potential utility for their individual teaching contexts, which they then completed. The consensus was that it could be very useful, particularly given that many of them teach very large classes in which they find it difficult to provide substantive or timely feedback themselves. Samples of their comments are shown below.

The reasons I'm going to incorporate this style of feedback into my future teaching area are as follows. Firstly, it's a very effective and applicable system. Everyone can use the system with the help of the internet and a computer. Secondly, this style of feedback is very functional. From

the system, students can get a clear idea about the writing structure. They can add their own comments in the comment box as well.

First, it is a good way for students to re-evaluate the things they have learned. They must be very sure about what they are saying when giving feedback. Secondly, it is a good way for teachers to save some labour and time. Leaving some structure work to students themselves can give the teacher more time and effort to focus on grammar. Also, it is good feedback for teachers to know how students understand the task.

Conclusion and reflections

Although the final assessment results did not show a significant change, we can conclude that online peer feedback, if scaffolded well, benefits students in developing academic essay writing skills in our context. We found that students reviewed their own writing, and the peer feedback fed forward into the writing process, thus substantially RQ1. Regarding RQ2, the data show that students had a solid grasp of the final essay structure by Week 3 – a substantial improvement on our previous observations. Additionally, the fact that students submitted revised essays rather than their first drafts is an indication that there was greater learner autonomy. Comments made by students indicate that engagement with the process and motivation for peer feedback improved. For our third RQ, our evidence is mostly observational. We, as teachers in the classroom, certainly felt there was more opportunity during teacher feedback sessions to focus on language use where the suggested structure had been used in students' essays. This was particularly the case for teacher feedback in Week 3.

We believe that the skills our students developed through the process are not just applicable to UA6. Our hope is that this process will lead students to practise similar techniques in the following UTAS Access unit, and when studying for their degrees. Boud and Falchikov (2006) and Keppell et al (2006) note that self-editing and review are essential skills at university with Boud, Cohen and Sampson (1999) further stating that peer reviewing tasks are increasingly being integrated into university degrees. Carless (2014) believes that the reason is the student-oriented nature of the tasks, which allows for informal formative assessment to take place. Therefore, if peer review tasks are permanently integrated and become common practice within the UTAS Access course, they will not only be assisting in the development of language skills but also the development of study skills essential for their future studies.

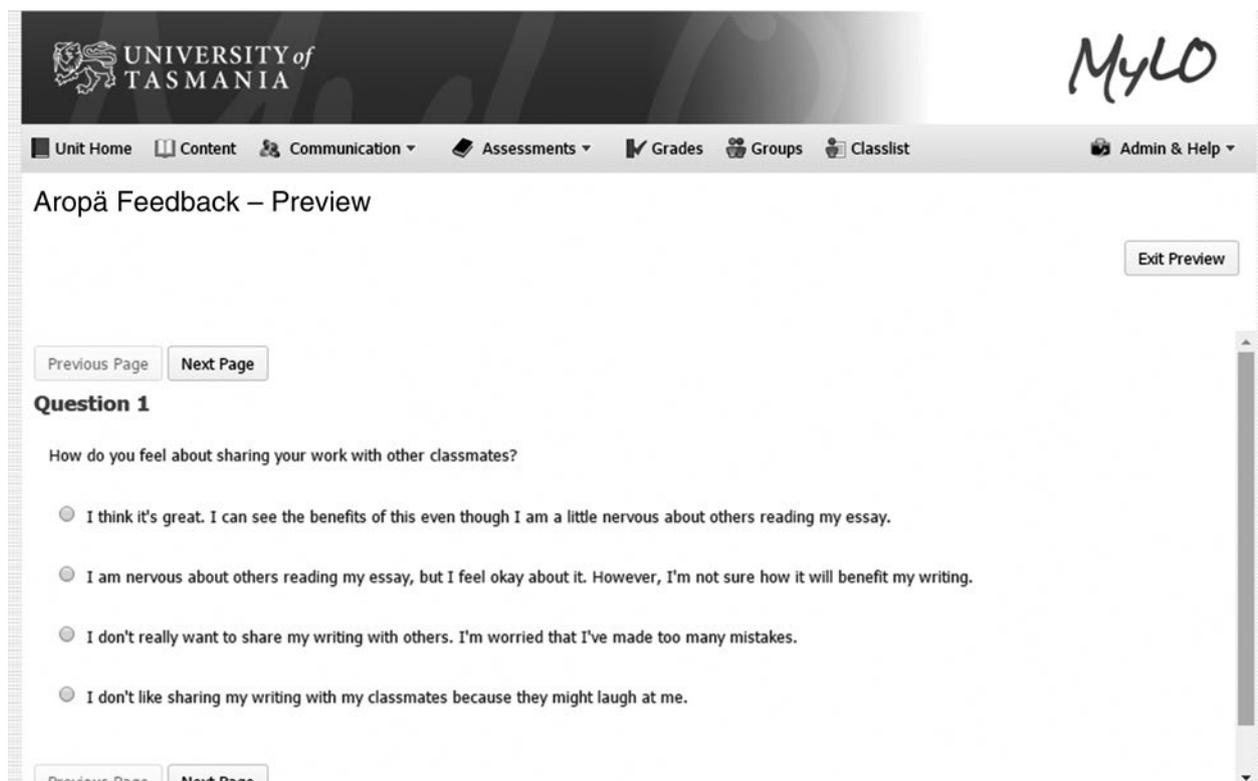
As teachers, we found this AR project to be very rewarding, particularly as it enabled us to gain a clearer understanding of the editing and drafting process from the students' point of view. We also appreciated the way it encouraged the students involved to take on and meet new challenges. Additionally, our teaching practice has

evolved to include a greater emphasis on the planning and drafting stages when teaching writing to ensure that the draft submitted to the teacher is a better representation of the student's ability. In turn, this feeds forward into increasing the student's confidence in their own capabilities.

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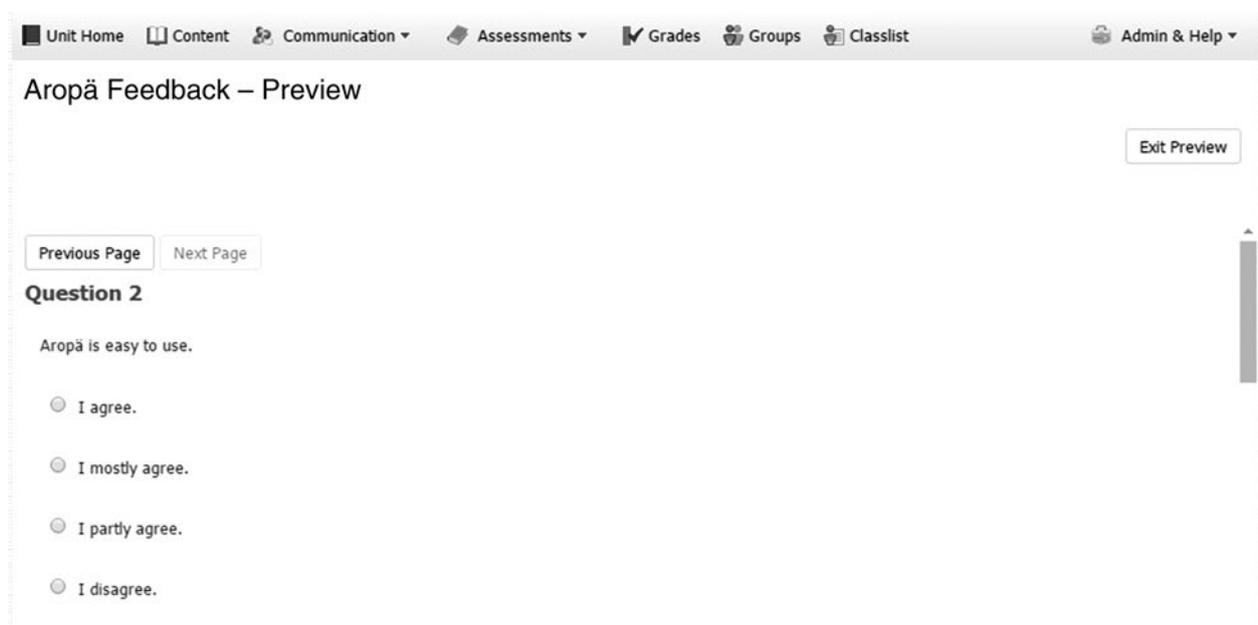
Appendix: Student online survey



The screenshot shows the MyLO interface for a survey preview. At the top left is the University of Tasmania logo. The navigation bar includes links for Unit Home, Content, Communication, Assessments, Grades, Groups, Classlist, and Admin & Help. The page title is 'Aropä Feedback – Preview'. There is an 'Exit Preview' button in the top right. Below the title are 'Previous Page' and 'Next Page' buttons. The main content is 'Question 1' with the text 'How do you feel about sharing your work with other classmates?'. It contains four radio button options:

- I think it's great. I can see the benefits of this even though I am a little nervous about others reading my essay.
- I am nervous about others reading my essay, but I feel okay about it. However, I'm not sure how it will benefit my writing.
- I don't really want to share my writing with others. I'm worried that I've made too many mistakes.
- I don't like sharing my writing with my classmates because they might laugh at me.

At the bottom of the question are 'Previous Page' and 'Next Page' buttons.



The screenshot shows the MyLO interface for a survey preview. At the top left is the University of Tasmania logo. The navigation bar includes links for Unit Home, Content, Communication, Assessments, Grades, Groups, Classlist, and Admin & Help. The page title is 'Aropä Feedback – Preview'. There is an 'Exit Preview' button in the top right. Below the title are 'Previous Page' and 'Next Page' buttons. The main content is 'Question 2' with the text 'Aropä is easy to use.'. It contains four radio button options:

- I agree.
- I mostly agree.
- I partly agree.
- I disagree.

At the bottom of the question are 'Previous Page' and 'Next Page' buttons.

Unit Home Content Communication Assessments Grades Groups Classlist Admin & Help

Aropä Feedback – Preview

Exit Preview

Question 3

The feedback I got from my classmate(s) in Aropä was

- really useful. The feedback made me aware of some parts that needed work.
- useful. I could use it to revise my essay.
- okay. There were not many comments, so it did not really help with revising my essay.
- not useful. It did not help me to revise my short essay in any way.

Unit Home Content Communication Assessments Grades Groups Classlist Admin & Help

Aropä Feedback – Preview

Exit Preview

Question 4

I revised my essay before submitting it to MyLO.

- True
- False

Question 5

Do you have any other comments to add about peer revision, Aropä or revising the essay?

Improving grammatical accuracy and range through award-based assessment

MELISSA REED KAPLAN INTERNATIONAL ENGLISH, SYDNEY

Introduction

Writing classes can be a source of frustration for students and teachers. In my own classes, I observed that the negative feelings some students had about writing stemmed from a perceived lack of improvement. I was utilising self-correction, peer correction and teacher feedback to remedy the situation in class, but even though the students improved gradually, there were issues with repetitive errors. This led me to believe that the students were not attaining the skills in class they needed to fully correct their mistakes. Although grammar points were dealt with as a class according to the units in the syllabus, each student had their own areas of weakness. I wondered if time both inside and outside of the classroom could be allocated to better deal with these areas. I concluded that each student needed an individual study plan that addressed their own grammar needs, and they also needed the skills and understanding to create their own plans in the future. My main focus was on increasing my students' grammatical accuracy and range, which I perceived to be the major problem in my class's written work.

Context and participants

This research was conducted at Kaplan International English, Sydney, a private English language college, which is part of a large international group. The college has 300–400 students, most of whom study in the General English program, with Academic English, Examination Preparation and pathway courses to university also being offered.

The participants in this research were students in two low intermediate (CEFR A2 level) General English classes. I conducted the research in consecutive 5-week cycles, which corresponded to the length of time for each class. Both cycles began with 16 students involved in each, but institutional demands and student movement meant that 11 students completed Cycle 1 and seven students completed Cycle 2. Of those students, three completed both Cycle 1 and Cycle 2 (10 weeks). The students ranged in age from 18 to 40 years, and had a variety of learning goals, from improving their English for work to studying in Australia. The nationalities represented in the study were Albanian, Brazilian, Colombian, French, Japanese, Korean, Slovak and Venezuelan.

One challenge of conducting research at the college, as in many other English Language Intensive Courses for Overseas Students (ELICOS) colleges in Australia, is that the student population in General English is not stable.

Students arrive and leave every week and can move to the next level at any time when sufficient progress has been shown. Despite an expectation that students would be able to complete the 5-week cycle for the project, several students in both classes improved so significantly they moved to the next level in the middle of a cycle, so could not be included in the final results.

Research focus

The idea of individualisation in learning has been connected with autonomy, as both of these approaches are student-centred (Benson 2013). However, as Benson explains, in individualisation, the teacher considers the learner's preferences when making a study plan or lesson, but in true autonomy, the learner makes all the decisions about their own studies. During the project, I aimed to give my students the tools they needed to improve their grammar and writing with the aim of becoming fully independent, so that individualisation would lead to autonomy. I also included the students' preferences in lesson plans and homework completion in order to increase motivation in the class. According to Ushioda (2008), student choice is a key part of motivation for learning.

Another concept which was important in the idea of helping students to become more self-sufficient was Vygotsky's concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) (1978). By considering the current level of the student and the skills that are still forming, or which the student may be ready to practise with support, the teacher can help the student develop in their own way. Formative assessment is a way to identify current and emerging areas of development and therefore learning goals (Carless, Joughin and Liu 2006, Wright, Litinas, Palaktoglou and Tsiannikas 2015). Ongoing weekly assessment in grammar and writing was therefore an important part of the identification of student strengths and weaknesses in this project.

One concern about individualisation is the feasibility of making learning plans for each student. I hoped that using technological tools would help make the task of marking, tracking progress and feedback easier and that by building in autonomy, as the teacher, I would not be solely responsible for the plans.

The research questions I developed for the project were:

1. How might formative assessment results lead to learning plans that better meet individual student needs?

2. Will individualised grammar-focused learning plans lead to greater progress in writing accuracy and range?
3. How can technological tools help teachers and students to track progress and create learning plans?

Intervention

As mentioned the research took place over two cycles which built on each other.

Cycle 1

I began by asking students to complete online writing assignments each week, so that I could provide formative assessment to identify grammatical areas that students needed to develop. The students completed the online writing assignments using Kaplan's learning management system (LMS) called K+Tools. I assessed the writing, giving a grade and feedback. The feedback included a personalised study plan I suggested for the student based on errors made in the writing, or areas identified as the next step the student could take to improve. The study plan recommended exercises on the LMS in a part of K+Tools called K+Extra, where students could receive stars according to their grades. Students had to demonstrate their understanding of each identified grammar point by receiving a star in the online assessment.

I worked with the students in the Study Centre twice a week. During one of the lessons, they completed a set writing preparation exercise and then a writing assignment. The writing preparation included a model of the text for the assignment with activities to complete which drew attention to grammatical features. In the follow-up Study Centre lesson a few days later, students read the feedback on their writing and begin working on grammar activities which I had suggested in their study plan. Beginning the plan in class time allowed for students to receive support and clarification where needed. They then completed the work at home on their own devices or in the Study Centre after class.

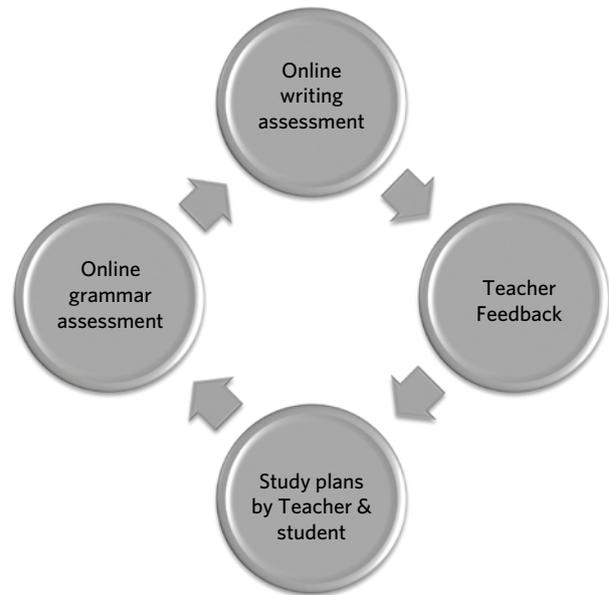
The study plans that I created early on in the project included very detailed recommendations of which activities to complete in K+Tools and occasionally other sites. During the five weeks of the cycle, I scaled back the mention of specific activities for students to complete in my feedback, so students were required to navigate the system themselves to find activities in K+Tools that they needed.

Cycle 2

In the second cycle, the new group of students took a few weeks to learn how to navigate the system confidently. During this time, as in the last weeks of Cycle 1, I gave students general feedback on grammatical areas which required work, but students found the activities themselves. Students were gradually guided towards constructing their own detailed study plans from feedback and their own areas of interest or need. They incorporated these plans into a more comprehensive study schedule which they

mapped out in their diaries. During this cycle, I no longer gave homework to the class as a whole, as students were working on their own study plans. During lessons in the Study Centre, I was able to talk with individual students and monitor their progress. The weekly teaching cycle we followed can be seen in Figure 1.

Figure 1: The weekly teaching cycle



Data collection

K+Tools facilitated the tracking of student activities and progress. Formative assessments for writing and grammar were all available in K+Tools and students could regularly review their progress in their online gradebook. During Study Centre lessons, I was able to review the gradebooks with students and talk about their next steps.

Student progress was also measured before starting the project and at the end of a 5-week cycle, in the form of a summative assessment. These were part of the college's normal level testing procedure and were written by hand under test conditions. The assessments served as an overall gauge of student improvement. I evaluated them using the Low Intermediate Kaplan International English Global Curriculum (Kaplan 2014; see excerpt in Appendix 1), which includes lists of grammar points students at this level are expected to master in the Kaplan Syllabus. The only change I made was in the first point, which refers to linkers. In order to assess sentence structure, I changed this point to three areas: coordinating conjunctions, subordinating conjunctions and other linkers. With this adjustment, there were 49 possible grammatical structures in the list. Students received one point for every one written correctly. If a structure was written several times, the student received a point if most of the examples were written and used accurately. Because each structure was given only one point no

matter how many times it was employed, range could also be assessed. A student, for example, who wrote a very accurate text using only present simple and coordinating conjunctions could not score very highly even though they made few mistakes. The scores from the beginning of the course and five weeks later were compared to judge improvement.

Student opinions were collected during an online survey at the end of each cycle (see Appendix 2) and three students from each group were interviewed about the project. In addition, one student from Cycle 1 and two students from Cycle 2 were interviewed at least nine weeks after completing the project to find out if they had continued to use the methods. I also kept a reflective log to note my observations, successes and difficulties during the cycles.

Analysis

The data taken from students' pre- and post-treatment assessments have shown some promising results. As seen in Table 1, grammatical accuracy and range improved 62% for Cycle 1 and 31% in Cycle 2 (an average of 48%). Students who stayed for both Cycles 1 and 2 (10 weeks), had average gains of 115%. These results were compared against 10 students from several other low intermediate classes, studying the same curriculum. The average improvement over five weeks for the other students was 5%. Excerpts of writing from a sample student who was involved in the project for 10 weeks can be found in Appendix 3. This student's grammatical accuracy and range improved a remarkable 143% over 10 weeks.

It is clear from this data that the individualised programs helped students to address weak areas in their grammar. There is, however, a discrepancy between Cycle 1 and Cycle 2. This discrepancy can perhaps be accounted for by the lack of stability in the second cycle group; only seven students out of an initial sixteen remained in my class at the end of the five weeks. These changes made it difficult to build up the students' skills over the time period as I had in Cycle 1. Another factor to consider is that the students who had made the greatest progress in the second cycle moved to the next level during the project, meaning that their results had to be excluded even though their progress to the next level could have been related to the project.

Table 1: Writing improvement table

Group	Commenc- ing mark (ave)	Final mark (ave)	Move- ment	Move- ment %
Cycle 1 group	8.1	13.1	5.0	62%
Cycle 2 group	10.6	13.9	3.3	31%
Cycle 1 + 2 (10 wk)	6.7	14.3	7.7	115%
Other students	12.1	12.7	0.6	5%

The biggest difference between my student groups and those being taught in other classes was the range. In their assessments, the students in the other classes displayed an improvement in accuracy and mastery of new grammar points (those taught in the syllabus), but often did not use grammar they had previously acquired. Their writing showed a subtractive range: as new grammar structures were included, structures the student had previously mastered were absent. The students in my groups showed more additive range: they improved on areas of difficulty and added new grammar points, both those in the syllabus and those they had shown an interest in or readiness for. It seemed that the variety of activities used in the homework plans allowed for more opportunities for revision and retention of grammatical structures than those afforded in the other classes.

Survey results from the two cycles showed that students felt the methods had been beneficial to them. The overwhelming majority of students felt that their writing and grammar had improved during the five weeks (91% writing, 97% grammar). An average of 85% of students had used K+Tools outside of class time for personal study (beyond their study plan) and they had had positive experiences using the system. All of the comments (100%) were favourable, with the two most common themes being related to student preference and usefulness. Typical examples of comments are: 'I like this skill because I learn more English', 'It's really useful. We have to use it.'

Autonomy became a more important goal in the second cycle, and even though there was a lot of student movement through the class, every student was able to create their own specific study plan from my feedback by the end of the course. Students in this cycle were also asked if they felt confident using the system to create their own study plans with no help and 81% said that they were. These results could also be seen in the post-intervention interviews more than nine weeks after the program had finished. All three students were still creating their own study plans from writing feedback of their own volition and using the LMS for self-study at least once a week.

An increase in motivation could also be observed in the students in my class during the project. I received no negative comments about writing online, even when it was done at the end of a long week. This was a completely different response from the lack of enthusiasm students had shown about writing at the beginning of the project. Students also enjoyed comparing how many stars they had achieved in their online gradebooks. The friendly competition seemed to be an incentive for some students. In another interesting result, homework completion increased by an average of 20% once I offered the option of online homework, even though responses were not checked in class.

Findings

The data collected, while only a small sample, does indicate some findings related to the research questions.

Formative assessment

Formative assessment was a useful starting point for me to determine student problems and assess whether a student has mastered a particular concept. When attempting to work within the students' ZPD, it is crucial to first find out the current level of the student. Ongoing writing assessment allowed me and the students to see progress over time. K+Tools also gave students immediate feedback on grammar activities and to work on extra activities if they were having difficulty receiving a star. Formative assessment was vital in creating study plans which were compatible with the needs of individual students rather than a 'one size fits all' approach.

Writing improvement

The learning plans clearly improved the students' writing, in both accuracy and range. In comparison with other students not involved in the project, the students in my group showed considerable gains, particularly in range. Students also felt that their writing had improved, according to the surveys delivered at the end of each cycle.

Technological tools

K+Tools made it easy for students and the teacher to monitor progress. The instant feedback on grammar assessments was an important part of student buy-in to the system. Students could also, with practice, feel confident navigating the system and work on challenging or remedial work of their own choosing. The more positive students felt about the program, the more likely they were to use the system in their own time.

Autonomy

By building gradual autonomy into the project, students could continue to progress in their learning and use the methods when they moved onto different classes. By giving students more choices about how to study, homework and motivation for classwork increased. The continuation of the use of individual study plans based on writing feedback months after the project was finished demonstrates that the aim of achieving autonomy was successful.

Further directions

I had intended to complete two further cycles in my classroom. However, I became the Director of Studies of the school, which is a non-teaching role and so I decided to extend the project to teachers at the college. I conducted a professional development session showing the teachers how to manage writing assessments online and detailing the methods in the project. Teachers were encouraged to try the online tools and were then given a survey six weeks after the professional development session to determine what had happened.

There was an encouraging increase in the use of K+Tools after the professional development session. Prior to the session, none of the teachers had used the writing assessments, but six weeks later, this number had

increased to 75%. All of the teachers had used the online grammar activities in the previous six weeks. In addition, every teacher said they felt confident using the LMS. Half of the teachers who had attended the professional development session had changed the way that they taught writing and grammar, mostly by increasing online writing.

However, most teachers reported that they continued to give their whole class the same grammar activities to complete as homework, and they preferred to use individual correction (self or peer) to increase grammatical accuracy. A quarter had tried linking writing feedback and assessment with individual scaffolded grammar plans but had not done this consistently across a 5-week cycle.

The fact that teachers are using the online tools and feel more confident navigating them is a promising step. Further professional development sessions both within the college and nationally through a webinar are planned to help teachers to become more confident using technological tools.

Conclusion and reflections

From my own perspective, being a part of the action research project has changed the way that I look at my students and teaching. I now see how important it is to include students in choices about their learning as the motivation levels soared in my class when I did this and students became more engaged. The formative assessment was also key to having evidence which drove the decisions I made in my class. I realised that the learning process needs to be co-created with the students and re-evaluated constantly in order to be effective. The same concept can also be applied to teachers: each teacher needs to be autonomous in his or her classroom and will use the technological tools in an individual way. Importantly, both students and teachers at my centre are gaining confidence using K+Tools as part of learning and teaching. I hope that the teachers and I can keep working together to engage our students and respond to each individual student's learning needs.

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Appendix 1: Excerpt from Low Intermediate Kaplan International English Global Curriculum

Tag	Descriptor	Category
G202	Linkers: Sequential - Past time	Discourse Markers
G211	Imperatives (affirmative / negative)	Simple Verb Forms
G212	Question forms	Questions
G213	Wh- questions in the past	Questions
G214	Question tags	Questions
G215	Simple present	Present
G216	Present continuous	Present
G217	Simple past	Past
G218	Past continuous	Past
G219	Used to	Past
G223	Future time: Going to	Future
G224	Future time: Present simple	Future

Appendix 2: End of Week 5 survey

1. How much has your writing improved over the last 5 weeks?

- a lot
 a little
 it hasn't improved

2. How much has your grammar improved over the last 5 weeks?

- a lot
 a little
 it hasn't improved

3. Did the writing feedback from your teacher help you to improve your grammar and writing?

- yes
 no
 don't know

4. Did you use K+Extra outside of class?

- yes
 no

5. What kind of homework do you prefer?

- Homework from the book
- K+Extra/ K+Tools homework

6. Do you feel confident using K+Tools and K+Extra by yourself to create your own study plans?

- yes
- no
- don't know

7. What do you think about K+Tools and K+Extra?

8. What is the best way to improve your writing and grammar?

9. What would you like to change about our classes in writing and grammar?

Appendix 3: Excerpts and analysis of a student's writing before the project, after five weeks and after ten weeks

Before the project

Write your answer below. *Dear Vicky!*

I would like meat, fks!

I want potato, tomato and corn.

I don't know if I have come.

I will be in the house at 7pm.

After 10 weeks

Hello Claudio! How are you? I hope very well.

I am so happy about your decision because learning English is very important for your career.

After five weeks

Sweet games!

First I would you like to Tell thank you. I have a car was very good for me. This help for my perfect holiday.

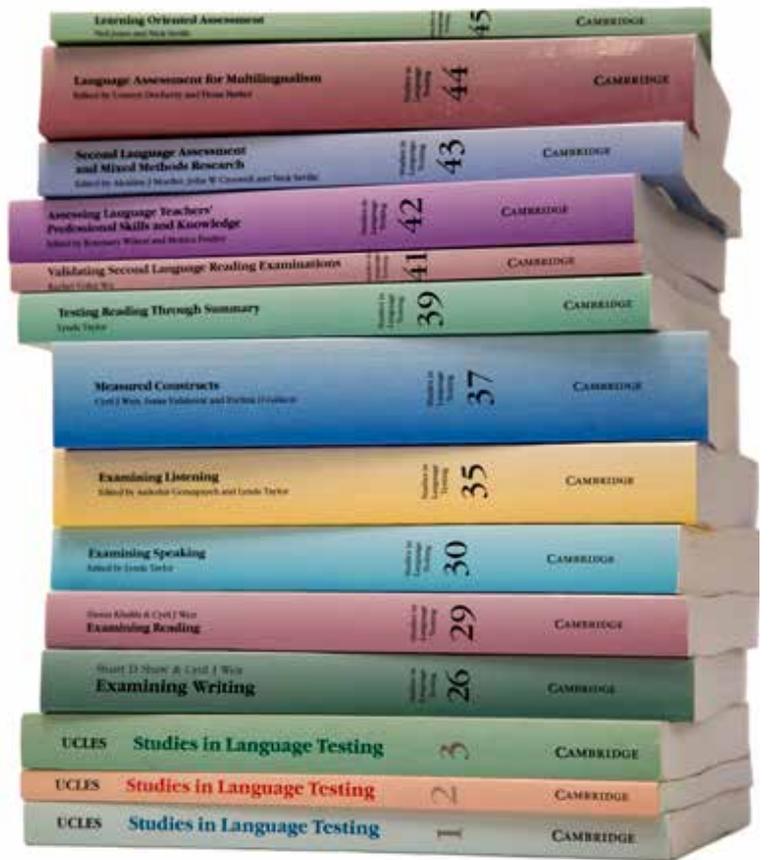
Table 2: Analysis of summative assessments for student 3*

Student	Pre-project	5-week mark	10-week mark	Improvement
Student 3	7	10	17	143%

* Data indicates the number of grammatical points that student can produce correctly

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