Cambridge Assessment English

Research Notes

Findings of the Action Research in ELICOS Program 2018

Issue 74

ISSN: 1756-509X

Cambridge Assessment English

Research Notes

Issue 74/July 2019

Typeset in the United Kingdom by George Hammond Design

Research Notes: 74

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Editorial

Welcome to issue 74 of *Research Notes*. In this edition we review the work undertaken by teachers in the 2018 English Australia/Cambridge Assessment English Action Research in ELICOS (English Language Intensive Courses for Overseas Students) program, which provides intensive language courses for overseas students in Australia.

With the growth of internationalisation and availability of sophisticated technology, learners of English are no longer dependent on the classroom context to develop their language proficiency, yet learning which occurs outside the classroom is often overlooked. In her opening article, Professor Anne Burns details how this year's action research (AR) theme addresses this relatively underexplored area. Each of the projects reported by the teacher researchers in this issue was conducted to create opportunities for learning and using language in contexts outside the classroom.

The first project reported is by **Jessica Florent** and **David Leach**, who wanted to explore whether using English for meaningful purposes in authentic settings would enhance their students' learning. We see how, after taking part in a fundraising project, their students reported positive gains in confidence, communication skills, and intercultural engagement.

Next, **Luke Thompson** and **Hew Sutherland** wanted to situate their students' learning in the geographical environment where they were studying, in this case, Sydney. Their students worked in groups to produce tourist videos, and this collaboration seemed to produce a very positive effect on their pragmatic competence.

Dongmei Li wanted to reduce the potentially restrictive effects of her students being grouped in a monolingual class. To create authentic conditions for them to use English, she organised collaborative groupwork to create interaction between her students and the community. This allowed learners to set goals and prepare for real-life communication, and led to positive outcomes in their interactions with the community.

James Hallal and **Joseph Lewis** used cutting-edge technology to help their learners engage with less familiar topics and develop more confidence in discussing them. They used virtual reality (VR) headsets to immerse their students in new environments. Although not all students were comfortable with this experience, the researchers felt it has the potential to motivate and engage many learners.

Matthew Stott also turned to technology to facilitate project work outside the classroom. Interestingly, he found that the learners' need for technological support compromised the success of the online tool he hoped would motivate his students. This experience was useful in informing future experiments in integrating technology into the classroom.

Finally, **Meredith MacAulay** and **Tania Bencic** wanted to help their learners' transition to the discipline-specific requirements of their future areas of study. They created a pathway of tasks in which they could interact with students and staff to gather information about the traditions and expectations of their future courses. Thus the students used English as a tool to gain valuable insights 'on the ground', so to speak; a win-win situation.

All of these examples of classroom inquiry show the value of putting the learner at the centre of assessment research. They also provide an impetus for future AR studies to help teachers understand the complex interplay of factors which lead to better learning.

Connecting students to the outside world: Taking learning beyond the classroom

Anne Burns University of New South Wales

Introduction

Learning English in order to communicate beyond the confines of the classroom is an important goal for most international students who arrive to study in Australia and in other English-medium countries. During their time in these countries they are presented with optimal opportunities to use English in naturalistic settings and to expand their access to what has become an international *lingua franca*.

Richards (2015) argues that learning beyond the classroom (LBC) is one of the two important dimensions of successful learning. The amount of classroom time available to students for language input and use is limited and classroom content may not necessarily be finely tuned to their personal needs or aspirations. However, even though technology has massively expanded the possibilities for learning any time and anywhere, much research and practice in the field still focuses on the classroom as the main locus of learning:

> *Hence a major focus in language teaching in the last 100 years has been on the design of syllabuses, methods and materials, and on training teachers in how best to exploit the classroom as a source of meaningful input to learning as well as of opportunities for authentic communication and language use* (Richards 2015:6).

In the light of this predominant focus on the classroom, LBC has been described as 'a field of research ripe for the development of new research agendas' (Reinders and Benson 2017:561). These authors suggest three major areas for further research: the settings of LBC (environments, affordances and constraints, study abroad); how learners learn (the experiences of LBC, strategies in LBC, technology-enhanced learning); and how teachers provide support (teachers' beliefs about LBC, LBC 'in the classroom', preparing learners for LBC).

The articles in this issue of *Research Notes*, which all recount small-scale action research (AR) processes carried out by teachers in the Australian English Language Intensive Courses for Overseas Students (ELICOS) sector, all adopt the focus of encouraging students to learn beyond the classroom. In various ways they interrogate some of the areas outlined by Reinders and Benson – the settings with their affordances and constraints; learners' experiences of LBC, both with and without the use of technology; and how they as teachers and teacher researchers supported and prepared students to connect their learning to the world beyond the classroom. The section that follows outlines five dimensions of LBC (following Benson 2011, Chik 2014) and locates aspects of the research carried out by the teachers within these dimensions. Readers can then go on in this issue of *Research Notes* to read the full accounts by the teachers of the research they carried out.

Dimensions of connecting learning to the outside world

The concept of learning beyond the classroom is closely related to developing learner and learning autonomy and incorporates a range of potential learning opportunities. Benson (2011) proposes four possible learning dimensions: location, formality, pedagogy, and locus of control, while Chik (2014) adds a fifth, trajectory, to indicate learning management of learning over time.

Location is the actual or virtual place or space where learning takes place, which could range from affordances designed to lead student experiences beyond the classroom to independently initiated activities on the part of the student. Examples of the former might be after-school English clubs organised by the school (Goa 2009) while the latter might include media or social networking interactions (Jenks 2018). Two of the teachers in the Australian program, Jessica Florent and David Leach, working at a university language centre in Brisbane, were very conscious of the difficulties frequently faced by their students in using English 'in a meaningful' way outside the classroom. They wanted to offer them an 'out-of-class learning project' (Reinders and Benson 2017) that would involve them in authentic and engaging interactions. The program they set up encouraged students to volunteer to manage a fundraising event for the Cancer Council of Queensland. The event, known as The Biggest Morning Tea, is held Australia-wide and involves raising money for cancer research by hosting a morning tea. The students needed to negotiate with local businesses to request them to donate raffle prizes and to persuade staff and other students at their university to attend. Through this project, the students greatly expanded their confidence and communication skills with participants in their educational institution and in the wider community, as well as their ability to work through intercultural engagement with other participants.

Luke Thompson and Hew Sutherland wanted their students to learn more about Sydney, where they were studying, as well as make 'individualised connections with texts, locations and people in the local community'. They developed activities that could scaffold students' group collaboration in creating 'tourist videos' to highlight locations in Sydney that interested them. Involving other teachers at their centre in order to also gauge their reactions to this initiative and to include a greater number of students, they found that there was greatly increased collaboration among students, but that scaffolding such collaboration was important to its sustainability. Other teachers also found the project to be positive and overall the students involved made noticeable gains in their pragmatic competence in using English.

Formality refers to whether the learning takes place within an institutional program or is pursued only for personal interest. Chik (2018) points out that leisure activities can, however, also be turned into intentional learning, as illustrated in a quote from a learner in Richards (2015:7, italics in original):

> *A great deal of all the vocabulary I have collected ... I owe to English dubbed anime. I started watching these series in 2008 ... These dubbed shows have been an invaluable source of information and practice. The language used is as authentic and contemporary as it can be ... in fact I owe a lot of my strong listening skills to constantly watching these TV shows.* Jesu, Columbia

Dongmei Li worked in Melbourne with a class of students from a predominantly Chinese background and was concerned that this situation led to 'a monolingual classroom'. She developed a 5-week 'Conversation Project' which encouraged her students to participate in groupwork in order to plan

various interactions with the community. Students identified genuine interactions that they needed to carry out in order to achieve a personal purpose and worked together, with guidance from Dongmei, to prepare for these interactions. Students not only gained confidence in communicating outside the classroom but also in developing both their productive and receptive skills.

Pedagogy means the kind of instruction, activities, materials, resources and assessments used, and extends also to learning communities (Chik 2018). Learners may make use of many different pedagogical sources for learning, ranging from more traditional activities such as grammar or vocabulary learning to more recent adaptive technologies, and from special interest communities, such as gaming participants to family members or other international students. In their General English class in Melbourne, James Hallal and Joseph Lewis were concerned that their students were not bringing personal viewpoints and experiences into class discussion. Moreover, the syllabus they needed to follow was guided by a coursebook that included several topics with which the students did not seem familiar. They believed that linking some of these topics to a virtual reality (VR) experience that took students into situations outside the classroom could enhance their engagement and help them to produce richer discussions. As a result, they found that the students were able to use more personalised language, collaborate more effectively and engage more closely with texts, although some students found the use of VR technology physically uncomfortable. James and Joseph recommend the cautious use of this technology for beyond-classroom learning, because of its benefits to engagement and motivation.

In contrast, Matthew Stott, who was also interested in incorporating technology into learning, discovered that the use of the tool he selected in itself was not sufficient to encourage his students' group project work beyond the classroom. He describes how his attempts to use this online tool to support and record student out-of-class collaboration was largely unsuccessful because of the students' need for ongoing technological support. Even though Matthew had provided detailed orientation to the tool, the students did not respond well to it or use it to any great extent. Matthew reflected that although his research did not go the way he anticipated, he learned a great deal about his pedagogical approaches to integrating technology with LBC, and the areas to focus on in future to help students collaborate and to develop greater autonomy.

Locus of control is concerned with how learning is regulated, whether by others or by the learner him or herself, and who decides on the direction of learning. It may also mean gaining specialised or directed knowledge, rather than expanding knowledge in general. Locus of control can also include learning by seeking advice or support from more experienced others. Meredith MacAulay and Tania Bencic wondered how they could help their students, enrolled in English for General Academic Purposes (EGAP) courses, with their future disciplinary needs in language learning. They perceived that while students might gain EGAP language skills, these might not necessarily equip them for their specialised future courses. They set up opportunities for their students to steer their learning towards gaining knowledge of what to expect both academically and socially when they entered disciplinary programs. They positioned their students as researchers of their future disciplines and devised tasks to help them direct their own interactions with university staff and current and previous students of these disciplines. Their students found their own 'ethnographic' explorations extremely productive, as they felt much better prepared for their courses in terms of increased knowledge, motivation and confidence, skills development, and connections with their peers.

Trajectory is to do with the temporal dimension of learning – how a learner manages and steers their learning over time. Coffey and Street (2008, cited in Chik 2018) suggest that for many learners

learning another language is a lifelong pursuit, during which learning needs, strategies and interests will change according to personal goals and achievements. While none of the AR reported here has the kind of longitudinal dimension that can capture trajectories over time, in various ways some of the findings hint at the range of future learning opportunities students could exploit.

Conclusion

Nunan and Richards (Eds) (2015) highlight some key contributions for students that come from learning beyond the classroom. A major consideration is that LBC complements the inevitable limitations of classroom learning, which can never provide learners with a sufficiency of time, content, materials or resources that are required for sustained language learning. LBC offers students authentic language experiences and opportunities for real communication that must surely be the ultimate goal of language learning for most students. Consequently, LBC has wide-ranging benefits, which include the development of language and communication skills, an increase in confidence and motivation, a sense of personal growth and the opportunity for greatly enhanced intercultural awareness.

The research accounts in this issue provide a rich source of ideas for other teachers of ways to extend learning beyond the classroom and to connect students with the outside world. They illustrate in some detail, and from the point of view of teachers, how LBC can interact with and support classroom learning. They also suggest in what ways LBC entails new roles for teachers and learners, including setting clear goals, developing strategies to scaffold out-of-class learning, and providing follow-up and support in class. Among these different approaches, it is also very clear that teachers will need to continue learning how technological tools, which are now in any case a part of students' lives, can be integrated in creative ways.

I conclude by encouraging language teachers interested in exploring LBC to gain inspiration from these accounts and to do their own AR. In that way, this field of research, so 'ripe for development', can be expanded from teacher perspectives.

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Enhancing the student experience through project-based learning

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Introduction

As teachers, we have a strong desire to see our students fully engaged in language learning opportunities both inside and outside the classroom. However, students can have difficulty accessing opportunities to use English in meaningful ways in the latter. Our action research (AR) sought to enhance the student experience beyond the classroom by offering an 'out-of-class learning project' (Reinders and Benson 2017). We designed and facilitated an extra-curricular project in which a small group of students from the English Language Intensive Courses for Overseas Students (ELICOS) program volunteered to manage a fundraising event for the Cancer Council of Queensland.

The participants and context

Our AR was carried out at the Institute of Continuing and TESOL Education (ICTE UQ), the English language centre at The University of Queensland. Students at the institute study in 5-week blocks for 4 hours in the morning or afternoon. Outside class times, students have access to a range of free activities every weekday.

Ninety students were given the opportunity to join the project. The 20 students, from eight nationalities, who volunteered had been studying English at ICTE UQ for varying lengths of time: one student was new, 12 had been studying for 10 to 20 weeks and the remaining seven had been studying for 25 to 35 weeks. The English levels of the 20 participants ranged from B1+ to C1 on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR, Council of Europe 2001). The students were all studying in one of three courses: Business, Academic or General English. Our research was conducted over a 5-week period.

Research focus

Exposure to the language is an essential condition for acquiring a second language (Lightbown and Spada 2013). Inside the classroom, teachers usually aim to expose students to as much language as possible. However, after class, students have to make their own choices about how to pursue further learning opportunities. Students arriving in Australia believe they will be immersed in English language environments outside the classroom (Reinders and Benson 2017). However, access to these opportunities is not guaranteed and depends on a number of factors such as exposure to an English-speaking environment at home or at work, structured school activities, and willingness to

engage. It is therefore not surprising that a National ELT Accreditation Scheme (NEAS) report (NEAS 2015:12) on student satisfaction stated that while students were highly satisfied with classroom teaching, they were less satisfied with the support they received for their use of English beyond the classroom. International student perspectives of study abroad programs (International Consultants for Education and Fairs 2017) highlight four areas where their expectations were not met: making friends, practising outside class, participating in activities and the nationalities mix.

Project-based learning has the potential to maximise student collaboration when a clear, shared goal is provided along with sub-goals, reflection points, and personally relevant 'real world' applications (Dörnyei, Henry and Muir 2016). Extracurricular projects can enable students to access more opportunities in their language learning environment due to the support of a teacher and a dedicated project space where they meet, discuss and make key decisions in order to achieve their project goals.

Specifically, our research questions (RQs) about learning beyond the classroom were:

1. Why do students choose to engage in project-based learning?
2. What are the perceived benefits of engaging in project-based learning?
3. What are the students' perceptions of how project-based learning differs from other learning opportunities?

Our intervention

The ultimate outcome of the out-of-class project was for the 20 students to host a Biggest Morning Tea (BMT), an Australia-wide event in which organisations and individuals raise money for cancer research by hosting a morning tea with cakes and drinks. The task for our students was to organise an institute-wide BMT event for over 1,000 staff and students.

Over the 5-week period, we guided students through the process of developing their communication skills to negotiate with local businesses, liaise with university service providers, request donations and raffle prizes, and persuade university staff and students to participate. Students worked together in teams to plan and execute the event, and on the day, they set up the venue, provided catering, monitored and problem solved, greeted guests, made speeches, drew the raffle, cleaned up and counted the takings.

Our role as teachers involved establishing a positive group dynamic, a clear goal and a pathway to completion of the project. As the students were not required to have any fundraising or event management experience, a project framework was essential to ensure all deadlines would be met. The steps were mapped out in the form of eight task sheets. In order to establish a group identity and dynamic, students were assigned to different groups for each of the eight tasks to be able to develop relationships with all team members. The eight tasks are numbered in Table 1. An example of a task sheet can be found in Appendix 1.

Table 1: BMT timeline and tasks

	Monday	*Tuesday*	*Wednesday*	*Thursday*	*Friday*
Week 1			AM: Visit all classes PM: Project pitch	Consent forms Networking Exploring attitudes to charity (1) Baking cakes (2)	Cancer Council Queensland speaker Teams for Mini Afternoon Tea (3)
Week 2	Public holiday	Mini Afternoon Tea (3) – full mock event	Intercultural meeting styles (4)	Sponsorship practice and establish plan Asking businesses for sponsorship (5)	Choose area of responsibility (6) Team meetings – clarify tasks
Week 3	Advertising pitch (7) (script and coaching)	Raffle prize list Design raffle posters Raffle sales (8)	Practice pitch Advertising visits to all classes	Commence raffle sales	Whole team meeting – defining roles for the event
Week 4	Count cupcake pledges Confirm equipment Sponsorship posters	Raffle sales Full event walk through	Advertising to all classes Final cupcake pledge count	**Biggest Morning Tea**	Group photo Money and banking Announce the total Social media post
Week 5	Distributing raffle prizes	Thanking stakeholders and supporters	Group lunch Certificates		End-of-session BBQ

The process

On the first day of the 5-week block, we visited seven classes to invite them to an information session in which we detailed the time commitment, the purpose and the tasks involved. From the group of students who attended the information session, 20 students joined the BMT team.

The first stage of the project involved an induction to fundraising, catering and event management. In Task 1, students compared and contrasted their attitudes to charity to understand the differing attitudes they would face when advertising the event to multicultural classes. As a team we asked them to dedicate their participation to someone they knew who had experienced cancer. Task 2 was a catering challenge in which students baked a dozen cupcakes per group of three or four. The purpose was for them to understand the effort required to produce a dozen cupcakes before they asked staff, homestay families and teachers to bake for their event. Task 3 was a small-scale version of the BMT that gave them experience with fundraising, catering and event management. They worked in one of three teams (raffle, catering and marketing) and served their cupcakes to 40 guests (ICTE UQ staff).

Stage 2 started with Task 4 on intercultural meeting styles, in which they participated and observed meetings in monocultural groups to compare and contrast turn-taking to help them work effectively as a multicultural team. Task 5 required the students to ask an on-campus business for sponsorship in the form of an item that could be raffled to increase the amount of money raised. In many cases students had to return to the businesses to finalise the details and collect donations. In Task 6, they decided which of the three teams (raffle, catering and marketing) they would join and work with until the end of the project. Task 7 involved preparing, practising and presenting their pitch to advertise to all 55 classes in the school. Task 8 was selling raffle tickets to staff and students in break times.

Data collection

Throughout the project, students reflected on the eight project tasks using an online blogging platform. After the event, all 20 students participated in semi-structured videoed interviews, in which they answered 12 core questions (see Appendix 2). The data was analysed to identify emerging themes in the written blogs and interview transcripts. A post-project questionnaire was distributed to participants to confirm the validity of the emergent themes.

Findings

In relation to RQ1, the data we collected on the reasons why students chose to engage in project-based learning beyond the classroom showed that they primarily saw this fundraising project as a 'good learning experience', as one of them commented. Just over half of the students also had altruistic reasons for participating. Further reasons are outlined in Figure 1.

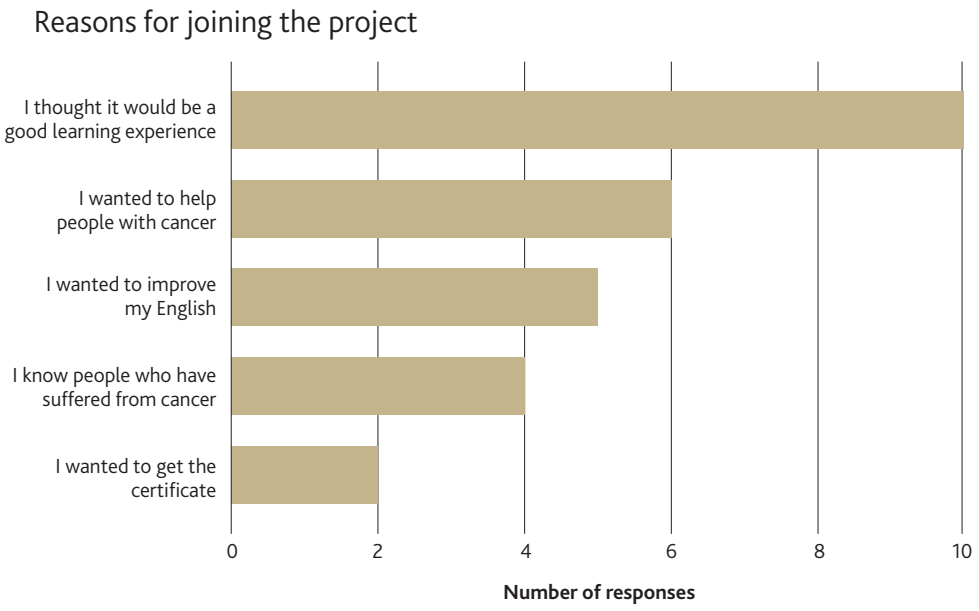

Figure 1: Reasons for joining the Biggest Morning Tea project

Regarding the participants' prior learning-beyond-the-classroom (LBC) habits, we found that the level of engagement varied greatly; just over a third of the participants had not accessed any LBC opportunities offered by the institute or university and had chosen to spend their free time on their own or with friends (see Figure 2).

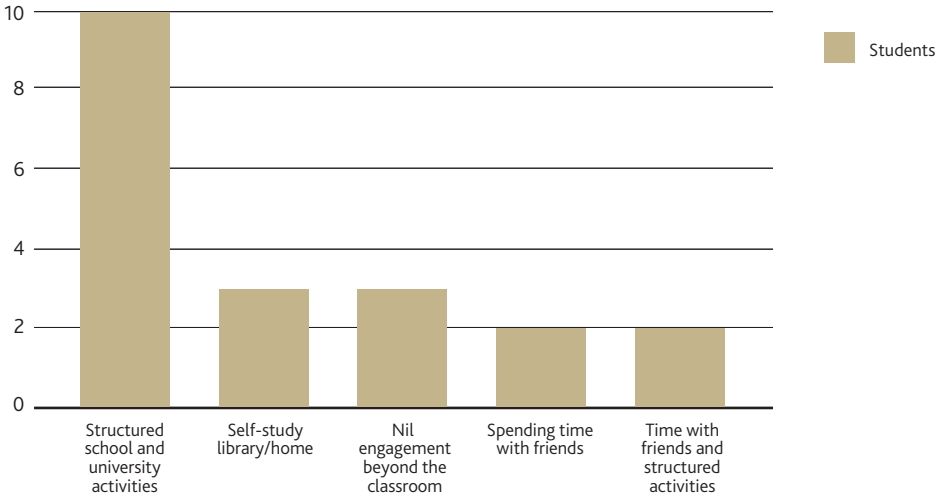

Figure 2: Learning beyond the classroom habits

RQ2 aimed to uncover what benefits the students perceived they had gained from participating in project-based learning. Detailed review of the blog data revealed that the tasks themselves were of benefit to them as they provided opportunities to learn new skills: entertaining guests, selling tickets, advertising presentations, and sourcing sponsorship. Data collected after each of the eight project tasks showed that the student experience of each task centred around a cycle of key stages: being anxious about the challenges involved, feeling supported, gaining confidence, and experiencing a sense of achievement as evidenced in this student's blog post (all posts are unedited to maintain authenticity):

> *'Before I go to visit the business last week for sponsorship, firstly I felt as great responsibility since it was my first time to approach people who should give a hand to an important purpose. I felt a bit fear and unsafe during the walking toward the sponsors, but as we were group, the confidence came out because I realized that I should count on my mates in case of any mistake. After the contact with the sponsors I had a sense of achievement.'*

In order to explore RQ3, we asked the students to identify the differences between learning in the classroom and learning on the project. Interview data collected about student perceptions of classroom-based learning pointed mostly to differences in the locus of control:

> *'Morning class the teacher teach us something and we try to follow them. Afternoon is just a big team, same target'.*
>
> *'In the project we are the one who's making something, who's making topics today.'*
>
> *'In the project you guys are teachers but you will tell us what to do then you let go'.*

The students' interview responses on their perceptions of project-based learning revolved around three main themes: being part of a team, sharing a goal, and feeling a sense of ownership.

Participants reported a strong sense of support from their teammates and attributed their ability to achieve project goals to the support they received:

> *'If I do a mistake I have a friend that's going to support me … it made me feel safe … any mistake I have support.'*

The second theme that emerged was the sense of purpose brought about by sharing the goal of raising money for the Cancer Council and hosting an event for the whole institute. This group of students raised a remarkable $6,000 for cancer research and were very polite and professional hosts to over 1,000 guests on the day. A number of students reported thinking about the project regularly after the project session had finished for the day.

> *'We have same goal that's why we can get more deep relationship with others.'*

> *'I've never done those things those big thing focused on very much. I was thinking about it whole day.'*

> *'BMT discussed how to solve problems. I had to think about the problem. My brain is burned.'*

The final main theme was the sense of ownership and the feeling that what they were doing was authentic and had real-world applications for their future:

> *'We owned the process, it's ours, this is ours and we have to do this and in that spirit of ownership I was feeling in heaven and that was good, because we had a goal, and really it was amazing.'*

Other themes that emerged included the recognition of the fact that they had spoken to a greater number of people in a variety of new and authentic situations, which had led to students' self-reported increase in confidence and ability to use English. Students had no hesitation in saying they would recommend the project to other students.

Conclusion

Our AR intervention allowed us to boost the student experience for the 20 participants who volunteered to take part. However, logistically it is impossible to offer a project of this size to the whole body of over 1,000 students in the institute.

We have decided to call the limitations of our project the 'why-nots' of project-based learning. The why-nots list includes: staffing the project, obtaining management approval and finding a suitable project space. Other why-nots include the logistics of involving and co-ordinating all the departments involved, from administration and marketing to homestay families and teaching staff, in a whole-of-institute event. A Biggest Morning Tea relies on the school community to bake cupcakes, encourage students to bring a $5 donation, and rearrange schedules to be able to attend. Given the large amount of involvement from everyone it would not be possible to run such projects consecutively. This list of why-nots may prevent most language schools from ever attempting a large-scale out-of-class project of this type.

Despite these limitations, there are benefits for the participating students: the 'whys' of project-based learning. The whys list starts with belonging. Belonging to a team with a shared goal gives students a purpose and the support network they need to tackle the real tasks involved. The success they experience through completing these tasks gives them new-found confidence in their ability to do things in English. Spending 50 hours over a 5-week period with the same multicultural group fulfils all four of the unmet student expectations mentioned in the International Consultants for Education and Fairs (2017) report: making friends, practising outside class, participating in activities, and mixing with different nationalities. In addition, in this example of project-based learning the students hosted a very successful charity event that raised money for cancer research. Many of them said it was the most memorable experience they had had so far in their time in Australia.

Reflections

We believe that our research experience mirrored the students' project experience: the nervousness in facing a challenge (conducting AR), the support of a team (colleagues and the AR team), and an increase in confidence (research skills) and a sense of achievement. Our involvement in this AR program has given us new opportunities: we have started conversations on the student experience with colleagues inside and outside our institute, we have developed an understanding of research, and have been able to quantify some of the benefits of project-based learning. Perhaps most importantly? We also better understand ourselves as teachers and have been able to articulate our teaching principles.

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Appendix 1: Task sheet

Biggest Morning Tea Task 3

Mini Afternoon Tea

Time: Tuesday Week 2 at 2:00

Venue: In the "V"

Guests:

1. Admin Manager		9 Program Officer		17.Manager Admissions	
2. Student services		10. Academic Manager		18.Academic Manager	
3. Homestay		11. Academic Manager		19. Marketing	
4. Homestay		12. Academic Manager		20. Programme Admin	
5. St Leo's		13. Academic Manager		21. Director	
6. Activities		14. Academic Manager		22.Deputy Director	
7. ICTE Operations		15. Choir		23. Executive Assistant	
8. Program Officer		16. Drama Club		24. Senior Teacher	

You will be in one of **three teams**

Write the name of your team here: _____

Write the names of your team members here: _____

_____

_____

		
Sponsorship & Raffle	Food & Beverage	Marketing & Sales

Name: _____

Biggest Morning Tea Task 3

Teams	Tasks
 Sponsorship & Raffle	❑ Collect the raffle prize and raffle books ❑ Decide on a price for the tickets (discount for bulk purchases?) ❑ Decide on a target sales figure ❑ Work in groups of three to sell the tickets on the day ❑ Write down each person's name and mobile number
 Food & Beverage	❑ Find out what cakes you have for the afternoon tea ❑ Make labels for all cakes ❑ Use tablecloths to decorate the tables ❑ Display all cakes on stands and trays ❑ Fill the drinks container with cordial, water and ice & mix ❑ Prepare cups and serviettes
 Marketing & Sales	❑ Design an invitation & send to Jess/David ❑ Deliver invitations to all guests this week ❑ Give all guests a name badge ❑ Collect contact details (email) to send thank yous ❑ Network with all guests and introduce the team to the guests ❑ Take photos and videos ❑ Make a speech to thank everyone for their support

Name: _____

Appendix 2: Semi-structured interview questions

Interview questions

Interviewer: _____ Date: _____

Interviewee: _____ Recording device used:_____

Video file saved: _____ Room: _____

Thank you so much for agreeing to take part in this interview. Jessica and David are very interested to find about **your experience** as part of the project, The Biggest Morning Tea.

1. Where are you from? _____

2. How long have you been here at ICTE?_____

Learning beyond the classroom before the BMT

3. Before this project, how many hours a week did you typically spend learning English outside the classroom? ____

4. What main types of activities helped you learn outside the classroom?

☐ _____ ☐ _____ ☐ _____ ☐ _____

5. What knowledge or skills did you acquire (get) from those activities?

☐ _____

☐ _____

☐ _____

Learning beyond the classroom as part of the BMT

6. Can you tell me about why you volunteered to take part in The Biggest Morning Tea project?

7. Tell me about your role in the project? What types of activities did you do?

8. What were some of the challenges of being involved in the project?

9. What were the greatest benefits?

10. Did you acquire any knowledge and skills?

11. How did the project learning environment (room 439) compare to other places where you study English? (*How did you interact with the other students and the teachers?*)

12. Would you do it again?

Scaffolding peer collaboration in project-based learning

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Introduction

At Macquarie University English Language Centre, project-based assessments were recently introduced to address frequently presenting obstacles to student success, such as low levels of intrinsic motivation and engagement, poor access to learning opportunities beyond the classroom and difficulty functioning autonomously within an English-speaking environment. Project-based learning (PBL) has the potential to address these issues by providing opportunities for students to take ownership of their learning both within and outside the classroom.

While students were completing projects, we noticed that they often had difficulty understanding how to approach group work collaboratively. Some groups avoided collaboration by dividing their project into discrete tasks and completing them individually, minimising the meaningful communicative interaction which occurs when students make decisions together. As a result, these students often produced projects that lacked a unified focus.

Our research investigated how scaffolding can support a more collaborative approach to PBL, in which all students are involved in planning each aspect of their project by negotiating, discussing and accommodating each other's perspectives. We believed that increased and more consistent collaboration would not only lead to more successful projects, but also more sustained use of authentic and naturally occurring language.

Context

Our research was centred on scaffolding collaboration for a video project assessment that we designed. For this project, students worked in groups over a 5-week period to create a tourist video showcasing parts of Sydney that interested them. Achieving this outcome required students to make individualised connections with texts, locations and people in the local community. The video project called on students to collaborate on research, planning, filming and editing. Some class time was allocated to the research, planning and editing stages; however, students were expected to complete most of the project outside class. A 1-day class excursion was designated for filming. (See Appendix 1 for the video project task instructions.)

The video project is an assessed component of the Diploma Direct Entry (DDE) course at Macquarie University English Language Centre: a 10-week program with a focus on English for Academic Purpose (EAP) as well as language fundamentals, which enables successful students to progress directly to university programs. Students enter DDE with an IELTS score of 5.5 and upon successful completion graduate with the equivalent of an overall IELTS score of 6.0. Graduates then

matriculate into one of four Diploma streams available at Macquarie University International College (MUIC). After completing their 1-year diploma program, they can enter the second year of an undergraduate degree at the university.

Our research was conducted over two 5-week cycles. In each cycle there were four classes of 15–16 students. Each class was shared by two teachers who taught on separate days. A total of 124 students participated in our action research (AR). This group comprised 90 Chinese, 12 Vietnamese, eight Korean, six Thai, four Japanese, two Indonesian and two Emirian students. The ages of the students ranged from 17 to 25.

Fourteen teachers (including ourselves as teachers and researchers) implemented our research intervention over the course of the two research cycles. Of these 14 teachers, three had experience with the video project prior to our research intervention. We chose to include other teachers in the AR so that we could combine their perceptions of the effectiveness of our research intervention with our own. In the first cycle, we co-taught the same class, with one of us teaching Monday to Wednesday and the other teaching Thursday and Friday. In the second cycle, we co-taught separate classes with different teachers.

Research focus

PBL has been promoted as a practical means of encouraging language learning, as learners' use of language is determined by genuine communicative needs. It requires students to develop their ability to use the target language by interacting and communicating over an extended period to achieve a shared outcome (Fried-Booth 2002). Shared outcomes can be achieved through co-operation, which involves the division of tasks amongst participants, and collaboration, which requires the mutual engagement of participants in co-ordinated and synchronous activity (Roschelle and Teasley 1995).

Collaboration promotes more naturally occurring opportunities for language learning than co-operation. Opportunities to interact in the target language arise more often and are self-directed because collaboration requires group members to negotiate, discuss and accommodate each other's perspectives to reach shared outcomes (Kozar 2010). These opportunities stem from the genuine communicative needs that emerge from endeavours to understand different perspectives and gain new insights during collaborative discussion (Desiatova 2008, Dillenbourg 1999). Working collaboratively requires students to use authentic language to debate the merit of ideas and build new understandings in the process.

Although collaboration leads to higher levels of interaction and authentic target language use (Stoller 2006), we noticed that it was the preference of many of our students to opt for an exclusively co-operative approach to PBL. This preference may have been due to cultural factors related to individual responsibility and accountability. Even when our students were inclined to initiate a collaborative approach to the video project, it was rarely sustained. This observation is consistent with research which indicates that when collaborative learning does emerge, it is inherently fragile and difficult to maintain (Volet, Summers and Thurman 2009).

During collaboration, students need to confront and process conflicts between individual and group needs (Nunan (Ed) 1992). Such conflicts need to be handled appropriately, both socially and linguistically. According to Bardovi-Harlig and Dörnyei (1998), ESL students believe that sociopragmatic difficulties interfere with interpersonal communication more so than any other type of learner mistake. The consequences of such difficulties are often interpreted on a social or personal level rather than as a result of the language learning process (Bardovi-Harlig and Mahan-Taylor 2003). When students are involved in collaborative interactions which require them to elicit, clarify, challenge, negotiate, compromise and defend ideas, sociopragmatic difficulties not only affect communication, but also the general mood of collaboration (Dillenbourg 1999). In these situations, sociopragmatic failures that interrupt the collaborative process can have ramifications on its sustainability.

Within the scope of the video project, the interaction and communication necessary for collaborative learning is ideally sustained over five weeks, and a large proportion of this interaction and communication is expected to extend outside the classroom. To support and guide the collaborative process for the duration of the project, both inside and outside the classroom, we believe it is necessary to scaffold key stages of the collaborative process.

Scaffolding of PBL can be provided in the form of tools or resources that outline the objectives of key stages and promote peer interactions. The two main mechanisms of scaffolding PBL, structuring and problematising (Reiser 2002), have the potential to promote collaboration. Structuring, or staging, provides procedural help which guides peers to limit the scope of a complex task as they develop a shared understanding of its possibilities. This shared understanding, or intersubjectivity (Rogoff 1990), is attained when group members collaboratively define their approach to the project and share an understanding of their agreed goal. Problematising compels students to confront the complexities of PBL. Resources that problematise PBL encourage collaboration by referring students to the range of potential approaches to the task and actively encouraging the exchange of multiple (possibly conflicting) perspectives or solutions.

Based on our appreciation of the complexity and benefits of collaboration, we decided to investigate the following research question: How can scaffolding for project-based learning promote collaboration?

Research intervention

Cycle 1

The first step in developing our scaffolding resources was to understand what aspects of the project students believed they might have trouble collaborating on. We asked students to document their perceived needs and difficulties related to the video project and what type of support they believed they needed. This needs assessment consisted of two parts. First, students completed a checklist to indicate the activities they planned to carry out to complete their video and if they believed they required assistance to do so. Second, students completed narrative frames to detail what type of support they believed was necessary to achieve their aims. In the context of needs assessment, the narrative frames method of Barkhuizen (2011) provided students with a series of incomplete sentences which, when completed and combined, produced a coherent account of their identified

needs. Our use of narrative frames was motivated by the potential insights it might provide on learners' perspectives and a desire to avoid time-consuming methods such as journals and diaries.

There were three separate needs assessments conducted for different aspects of the video in Weeks 1, 2 and 4 of our research (see Appendix 2 for a sample completed needs assessment):

1. Doing research for your video:
   - researching the location through texts
   - physically exploring the location
2. Planning a successful video:
   - creating a video plan and writing your script
   - interacting with people
3. Editing a successful video:
   - identifying problems
   - exploring possibilities of editing software

Several trends emerged from the initial needs assessments. Firstly, students were preoccupied with establishing what constituted a 'model' tourist video. This made us aware that they were having difficulty understanding the flexibility of the tourist video genre. Secondly, students believed it was their teachers' role to direct them to appropriate research sources and to dictate what was suitable content for a tourist video. This response made it clear to us that students did not understand that the purpose of research was for groups to generate their own personalised content rather than to simply re-present material from published sources. Also, as students were predominantly concerned about their 'own' section of the video, we realised that they did not understand that to create a cohesive video it was necessary for them to integrate their research findings and to co-construct content.

We believed that by creating scaffolding resources to address these issues, we could help students sustain collaboration that extended from inside to outside the classroom over a 5-week period. Understanding students' concerns informed our decisions as to what scaffolding resources needed to be developed and at which stage in the project process they should be implemented. Below is a list of the resources we developed.

Genre analysis

This resource is designed to assist students in forming a better understanding of the main features of the genre. In their project groups, students collaboratively analyse three examples of tourist videos that differ in style and content. This analysis helps students to develop an understanding, not only of the communicative purpose and language features of the genre, but also of the way that visual and linguistic components interact in each video. It also implicitly demonstrates the flexibility and range of approaches possible within the genre. Using narrative frames, groups then make preliminary decisions about the social purpose of their video. The process of collaboratively deciding how the social purpose can be realised through specific aspects (i.e. the register) of their own video is the first step in reducing students' inclination to divide and delegate the project. (See Appendix 3 for one section of the genre analysis resource.)

Evaluating videos

When using this resource, students collectively analyse short sections of student videos from previous deliveries to identify assessable aspects of the videos and what distinguishes their quality. Students then apply each category of the assessment rubric to the same videos to reinforce their understanding of how aspects such as content, video production, delivery and language are assessed. We felt that it was important to use short sections of student examples to show that the outcomes were achievable through a range of approaches to the genre. (See Appendix 4 for the evaluating videos resource.)

Research planner

This resource provides groups with a structural framework for the collaborative research process. It prompts groups to discuss and negotiate what locations or activities they want to include in their tourist video. Students then independently research different aspects of one of these locations or activities. After collating their research on the research planner resource, groups make decisions about what specific content will be included in the final video. This process is then repeated for the other locations or activities that were initially selected. This systematically staged approach to the research process is designed to discourage groups from delegating the research of entire segments of the video to one individual. It also takes into account that engagement in collaborative learning moves across a continuum from individual regulation to co-regulation as a group (Volet et al 2009). Stoller (2006) also asserts that engaging students in project planning which requires collaboration as well as some degree of autonomy can stimulate creativity. (See Appendix 5 for a completed student sample of the research planner.)

Audio-visual planner

This resource is a structural framework which groups use to collaboratively plan how content from the research stage will be incorporated into scenes and transitions. It also requires groups to consider how this content will be represented linguistically and visually. Collaborative decisions related to visual details such as camera angles, gestures, locations and actions are recorded in one section while corresponding audio details such as music, voiceovers and dialogue are recorded in a column alongside. The open-endedness and flexibility of the audio-visual planner affords students the opportunity to make creative decisions that personalise the content and style of their video. The audio-visual planner was chosen instead of a storyboard as it requires more language use, is less time-consuming, and is more conducive to collaboration. (See Appendix 6 for a copy of this resource completed by a group.)

Completing the audio-visual planner is a complex task for students who are not familiar with planning a multimodal text. To reduce anxiety and guide students, before planning their own video, students watch a tourist video while examining a corresponding audio-visual planner that has already been populated.

Conducting interviews

To promote interactions with the local community, students are encouraged to include interviews with the general public in their tourist videos. In these interviews, students might ask the general public about their impressions, opinions and/or knowledge of activities and/or locations chosen for the video.

To prepare students for such interactions, we developed a resource in which students analyse both successful and unsuccessful attempts to conduct street interviews, to develop an understanding of the discourse strategies and functional language appropriate to this context.

Instructional videos for editing software

To assist students with the editing process, we created a series of short instructional videos in graded English. These videos consist of screen recordings of the editing software in use, accompanied by detailed audio instructions. The editing process is divided into 13 discrete steps, which allows students to navigate the instructions according to their own immediate needs.

Data collection

Cycle 1

In research Cycle 1 we took a mixed methods approach to data collection. In Weeks 3 and 5 of the cycle both quantitative and qualitative data was collected using questionnaires that consisted of open-ended, multiple-choice and closed-ended items. These questionnaires gauged students' perceptions of their collaborative process, the role of the scaffolding resources in their collaboration, and their perceptions of the effectiveness of the scaffolding resources to facilitate collaboration. After Week 5, further qualitative data was collected from open-ended surveys with students who indicated in Weeks 3 and 5 that their collaboration had been unsuccessful. We also conducted open-ended interviews with the co-ordinator of the DDE course and DDE teachers who had used our AR intervention in the classroom.

Findings

Cycle 1

Quantitative data

The students surveyed in Cycle 1 indicated that the scaffolding resources helped them understand how to work collaboratively at different stages of the video project and facilitated communication amongst their group members. Of the 60 students who completed the questionnaire, 97% reported that the resources helped them to understand how to research their video collaboratively (Figure 1) and 92% indicated that the resources helped them understand how to plan their video collaboratively (Figure 2). Ninety percent of questionnaire respondents indicated that the scaffolding resources had facilitated communication between group members during the research stage (Figure 3), while 97% believed that the scaffolding resources had facilitated communication between group members during the planning stage (Figure 4).

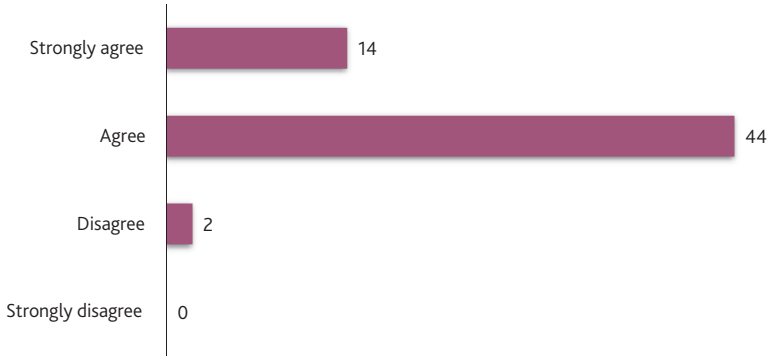

Figure 1: The scaffolding helped me understand how to research the video together

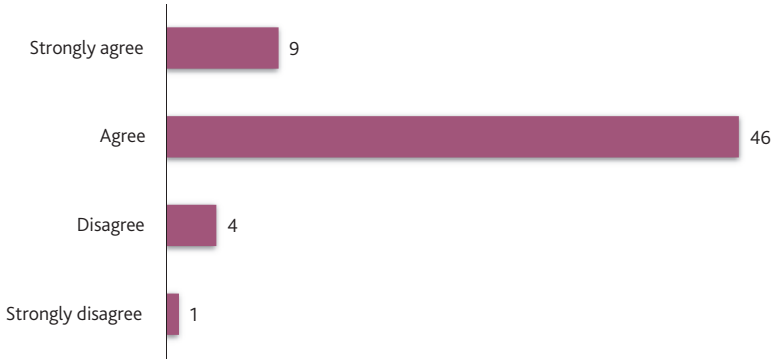

Figure 2: The scaffolding helped me to understand how to plan our video together

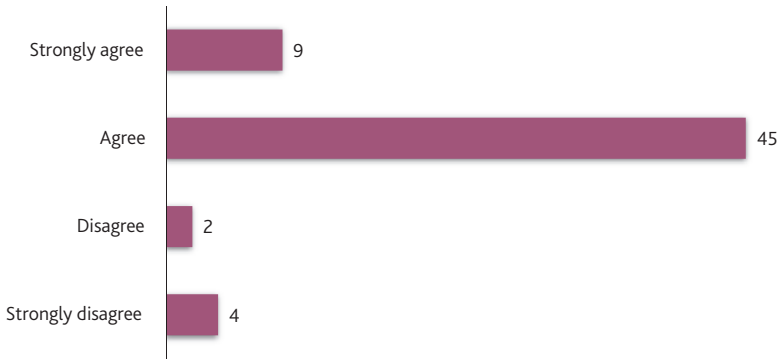

Figure 3: The scaffolding made it easy to communicate with my group about our research

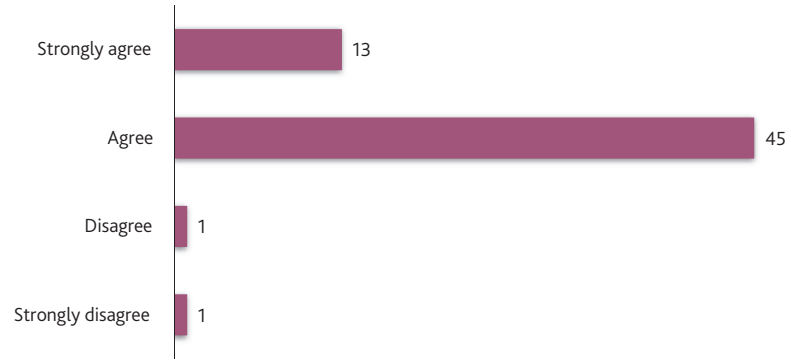

Figure 4: The scaffolding made it easy to communicate with my group about our plan

A comparison of student grades from the video project showed that there was an increase of 7% in the average group work score of students between the pre-intervention delivery and Cycle 1 of our AR (Figure 5).

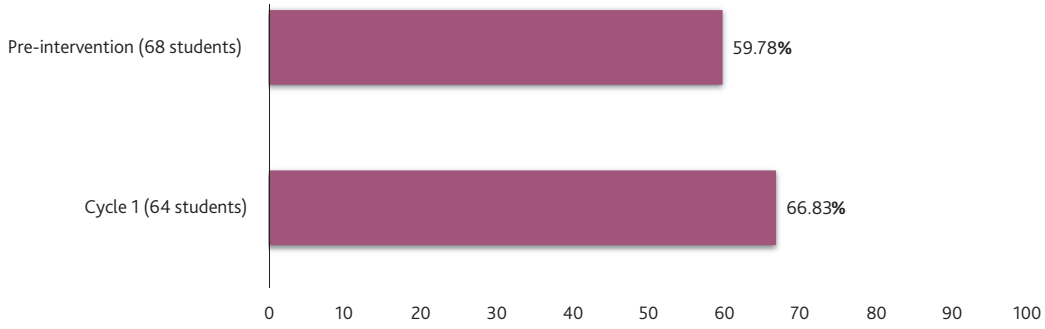

Figure 5: Comparison of average group work scores between pre-intervention and Cycle 1

Findings from qualitative research

Teachers noted a substantial increase in the amount of collaboration and commented on the authenticity of that collaboration. The responses are unedited to maintain authenticity.

> *'Because the research and planning contribution of each student was visible to the whole group throughout the project, it was easier for them to question and elicit from each other and debate their ideas when necessary.'*

Students reported that the scaffolding resources facilitated sustained collaboration by making the planning process clearer and affording them more opportunities to express their opinions on how to best achieve their group's objectives.

> *'Everyone has a form together that is convenience to discuss and save the form. Any information can be find quickly and clear. It is very easy for us in the early part when there are some contents we don't know. We can quickly decide with discussion.'*

> *'Some problems are solved by summarise ideas of all member and analyse them. If member not change his ideas, we tried to make them by give the strength and weakness of the idea so the member understand why an idea is the best.'*

After completion of the video project, we also asked students and teachers to reflect more generally on the collaborative process.

Students said that the collaborative process increased their confidence in their ability to collaborate effectively and express opinions in English. Students also recognised that the collaborative planning process and their interactions with the community had motivated improvements in their use of English, particularly in their speaking ability. Furthermore, they started using the video technology independently to self-assess pronunciation and prosody prior to other speaking assessments.

> *'I improve a lot in speaking skill, teamwork skill, more confident in speaking English, and planning in English.'*

In addition, teachers reported that increased authentic interactions allowed them to observe student behaviour that had not been seen in the classroom before and gain a better insight into their students' personalities.

> *'I think some of the quieter students, it gave them an opportunity to express themselves, and possibly see them in a different light, definitely, and also to see the relationship between the students … so definitely you could see more their real relationships, what they are like with each other.'*

Students indicated that their collaborative research and planning occurred in cafes, restaurants, the university library, each other's houses and on social networking sites. Groups often visited shooting locations of their own volition before the allocated time and as a result of their collaboration were, in some cases, able to finish their project up to a week before the submission date. Previous to our intervention, this behaviour had not been observed and is possibly attributable to the accountability that comes with the responsibility of meeting shared objectives staged throughout the project.

However, despite these positive findings, there were still some groups who struggled with the process of collaboration. Interestingly, students in these groups did not attribute these difficulties to linguistic ability but rather to either their own or their group members' use of discourse strategies. Students found collaboration difficult because of inappropriate turn-taking, avoidance of requests for confirmation and reformulation, and a tendency to opt for direct negation, disagreement or rejection rather than using mitigation devices to ease interactions.

> *'One of the big problems was not to listen carefully concentrate until the other team members had finished speaking.'*

> *'When group members do not understand the communication, they try to pretend they understood the communication, and say "yes" even before other group members finish.'*

They also indicated that these types of experiences negatively affected their interactions with each other and the project.

> *'I knew my friends shouldn't be communicating in this way when we go to university and this made me sad. I tried to understand them more because we are all friends and I adore them, but I believe that real life won't be like DDE. I wish there were more feedback for communication: proper manners or effective attitude.'*

Research intervention

Cycle 2

In response to feedback from students who had difficulty with collaborative interactions in Cycle 1, we introduced an additional scaffolding resource in the second cycle of our research. This resource was designed to help students develop discourse strategies useful for negotiation and compromise during collaborative discussion. This resource draws on pedagogical practices for developing pragmatic competence informed by research into the discourse strategies of English as Lingua Franca speakers (Murray 2012). The application of this resource is outlined below.

Language for negotiation and compromise

First, students analyse situations in which communication breakdowns have occurred during collaboration and draw on their existing knowledge to collectively suggest discourse strategies and appropriate language that could help to resolve the issue. Students then match discourse strategies they have discussed with functional language commonly used during negotiation and compromise (see Appendix 7 for a copy of this resource). Finally, students use this language in communicative activities that require them to negotiate in order to reach decisions through compromise. The aim of these activities is to raise students' awareness of discourse strategies that can be used for effective interaction during collaboration (see Appendix 8 for a copy of this resource).

Findings

Cycle 2

In Cycle 2 we conducted online surveys to assess the impact of our resource on the collaborative process. We did this by asking students to reflect on the language they produced when certain complications emerged during collaboration. Live recordings of student interactions whilst collaborating would have been ideal for this purpose; however, this was beyond the scope of our research at the time.

Survey results showed that when disagreements did occur, 79% of students attempted to resolve them by asking other group members to clarify their ideas and provide support for their proposals, 81% by eliciting ideas from other group members before reaching a joint decision, and 80% by using both strategies.

> *'When we have problem, we make decision to take everyone's opinion and compare which is better. This is inconvenience, but best way for differences.'*

Seventy-six percent of students reported that when a group member was not contributing to a discussion, other group members encouraged them to speak by making them feel that their ideas were valued.

> *'[I asked], "How about your idea?" Encourage him to say more, don't care other opinions, just be confident yourself.'*

Conversely, in situations in which one member dominated a group discussion, 80% of students reported that they were willing to intervene and 67% indicated that their intervention was intended to provide opportunities for other group members to contribute.

> *'[I said] sorry, because we are group, everyone has to control their speaking time and make some time for rest of group.'*

If interrupted mid-speech, 50% of students reported that they attempted to prevent the discussion from being diverted.

> *'[I said,] Please don't interrupt other member or me, wait until we finish talking and say your thoughts.'*

Fifty-eight percent of students reported that if a group member was agreeing without understanding, they checked comprehension.

> *'[I asked] Are you really sure? If you don't understand, we can explain you.'*

After the completion of Cycle 2, we also asked students and teachers to reflect generally on the interactional aspect of the collaborative process.

Both students and teachers reported that awareness of discourse strategies useful for negotiation and compromise had positively affected the atmosphere of collaboration.

> *'We can understand why to make sure everyone can say their opinion. If a member has problem, all member listen, and explain clearly. We share our opinion and check if all member understand the idea, and always try to make an enjoy feeling so we can work effectively, not have tense feeling.'*

> *'[After teaching with the language for negotiation resource], I noticed students started asking each other to explain the reasons for their ideas, there was more comparison and discussion of ideas, and it became less competitive. Students were not simply agreeing or disagreeing with suggestions, which is what normally happens, but they were having more consequential exchanges and were building on each other's ideas and opinions.'*

A comparison of student grades from the video project showed that there was an increase of around 5% in the average group work score for individual students between Cycle 1 and Cycle 2, and over 12% in the average group work score for individual students between pre-intervention delivery of the project and Cycle 2 of our action research (Figure 6).

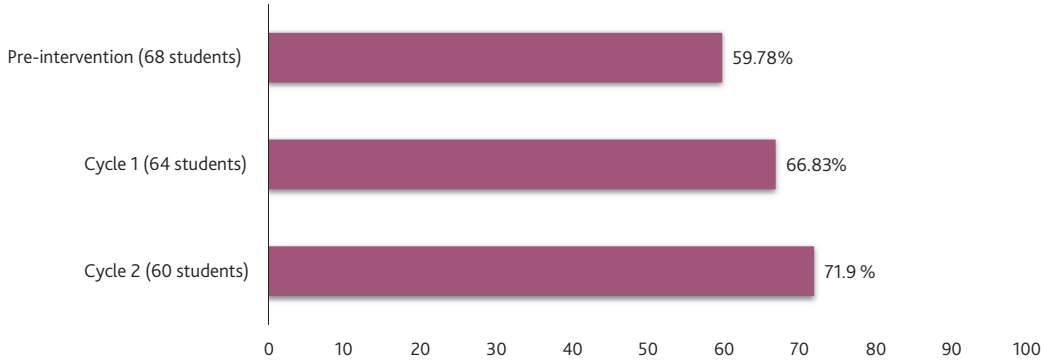

Figure 6: Comparison of average group work scores between pre-intervention, Cycle 1 and Cycle 2

Discussion

The scaffolding resources we introduced in Cycle 1 led to a noticeable increase in the level of collaboration compared to previous deliveries of the course. By observing collaboration formatively and summatively, we were able to ascertain that the scaffolding resources had also increased the likelihood of collaboration being sustained. These findings point to the importance of supporting and guiding the collaborative planning process, as opposed to simply directing students to a list of tasks they should complete collaboratively.

Increased collaboration led some students to consider the nature of their interactions, specifically the use of discourse strategies, and to recognise that the development of pragmatic competence would improve the effectiveness of interactions during collaboration. These findings resulted in the creation of the language for negotiation resource in Cycle 2.

Raising students' awareness of discourse strategies appropriate for negotiation and compromise resulted in those strategies being used quite frequently during collaboration. When necessary, students were able to ask for clarification and elicit further support from group members with a high degree of confidence. Although students did attempt to resolve issues when individuals dominated discussions or interrupted inappropriately, they had some difficulty doing so tactfully. Altogether, the increased use of such discourse strategies created a more productive collaborative environment.

One of the goals of language teaching is to familiarise learners with the range of pragmatic strategies and conventions of the target language (Bardovi-Harlig and Mahan-Taylor 2003). Our AR has identified that the scaffolding of collaborative PBL can promote interactions in which students adapt their use of pragmatic strategies according to genuine communicative needs. Our research also highlights that a sustained approach to the development of pragmatic competence can help learners to manage the effect of their participation in collaboration.

Conclusion

Our intervention has raised awareness within our workplace of the importance of scaffolding collaboration. Other teachers who implemented our intervention on the DDE course have shown an appreciation of the principles underpinning it and have developed further resources designed to facilitate sustained and meaningful collaboration. In addition, following the success of our video project and scaffolding intervention, curriculum designers at our school have made a concerted effort to focus on the collaborative aspects of PBL. Resources that scaffold collaboration by promoting collective research and planning, as well as supporting the development of pragmatic competence, have been included in new projects on several General English courses.

Our scaffolding engaged a wide range of students in the collaborative process, including many who had struggled with the open-endedness of PBL during previous assessed projects. However, a very small minority of students still avoided face-to-face group work and deferred responsibility to other group members. In the future we would like to provide students with an online platform where they can contribute to, and reflect on, their group's research and planning. This approach has the potential to remove the anxiety that some language learners may associate with face-to-face collaborative interactions.

As a university pathway provider, we are responsible for adequately preparing students for the English language demands of their future studies. This involves assisting them to reach their required English proficiency level and familiarising them with the language demands of interactions that facilitate learning in the Australian tertiary environment. The ability to work as part of a team has been identified by both Australian and international employers as an important attribute for international graduates (Australian Education International 2010). With the support of scaffolding

which sustained their collaboration, students formed a greater understanding of the value and complexity of this soft skill, and as a result, were more likely to be willing participants in activities and projects that contribute to its development.

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Appendix 1: Video project task instructions

DDE	T9 Project Task Instructions

Due date for videos: Week 10

Video viewing: Week 10

Weighting: 5%

Task: tourist video about Sydney

Over the next 5 weeks of DDE, you will work in groups to create a video which showcases an interesting part of Sydney.

The project is designed to develop your group work skills, which you will need to use regularly at university as almost all subjects have a group work assignment.

Each week, your group will complete specific tasks leading to the screening of your project to the class in Week 10. The project is designed to develop a range of skills including:

- group work
- communication
- delivery
- planning
- research
- creativity

Video length: 4–5 minutes

Groups: 3 students per group (or 4 if needed)

Video editing software: *Shotcut*

Your teacher will help you with the tasks each week and explain what you need to do. A general breakdown of tasks per week is included on the other side of this page.

Plagiarism penalty: If you use language that is not your own, marks will be deducted.

Weekly schedule of tasks

Week 6:

- Watch some example tourist guide videos.
- Analyse videos, the language used and typical content.
- Form groups and brainstorm preliminary ideas about where in Sydney the class can go.
- Choose a destination for the class excursion.
- Consider visiting the location on the weekend to prepare for the assessment.

Week 7:

- Use a storyboard to create a plan for the filming and video.
- Write the dialogue for each scene in the video and submit to your teacher.

Week 8:

- Act on feedback to correct dialogue for video and create cue cards.
- Go on excursion and film the video.
- Save video footage to group USB.

Week 9:

- Learn how to use Shotcut video editing software to edit videos.
- Edit videos.
- Consider revisiting the location to improve the quality of your video and correct any technical issues.

Week 10:

- Bring video to class on a USB on Wednesday.
- Watch videos with class.

Note that the filming location should be within a ten-minute walk from the class meeting point. The filming is expected to be done during the excursion. If you decide to continue filming in your own time (e.g. at the weekend), it is your choice and responsibility.

Appendix 2: Sample completed needs assessment

Doing Research for your Video – Week 6

Creating a successful video includes talking to people, doing research, exploring the location and editing. Below are a number of activities you can do in the research stage of creating your video. You do not need to do all of the activities and you may add your own activities.

- Tick the activities you want to do in the left column.
- If you need help to do this activity, tick the right column also.

		Do you plan to do this?	Do you need help to do this?
Research	• Research the excursion location	✔	✘
	• Research film sites in excursion location	✔	✘
	• Research tourist attractions in excursion location	✔	✘
	• Find personal points of interest	✔	✔
	• Find out opening hours of locations	✔	✘
	• Research transport to the location	✔	✘
	• Find out about permission to film at locations	✔	✔
	• Research specific information about the area	✔	✔
	• Find examples of tourist videos	✔	✘
	•		
	•		
Exploring the location	• Travel to the location before filming:	✔	✘
	– consider camera angles	✔	
	– take photos for your storyboard	✔	✘
	– ask in person for permission to film in the future	✔	✔
	– assess background noise	✔	✔
	•	✔	✔
	•	✔	✔

Things I need to do/Do I need help?

For my project I would like to communicate better with my group members so everyone can be on the same page about what we need to now and when.

I will do this by reminding ~~my~~ group what's important for now and try to use time efficiently.

I need help from my teacher to do this. (Yes) / no

I need my teacher to help me to nat be to stressed so we can finish this project successfully.

My teacher can help me to do this by understanding (?) that for some groups, communication can be a big problem that makes this team project a lot more difficult.

Things I need to do/Do I need help?

For my project I would like to help every group members participate in the project and contribute evenly.

I will do this by communicating & making sure every one is on the same page, and not ~~specific~~ only students stand out.

I need help from my teacher to do this ~~Yes~~ / no

I need my teacher to help me to (sorry :c hard to think about it yet)

My teacher can help me to do this by listening to every single student... ? (as always !!)

Appendix 3: Section of genre analysis resource

Video 1

	✓
Purpose	
to inform	
to entertain	
to share an experience	
Tone	
serious	
entertaining	
educational	
Target Audience	
Age	
children	
teenagers	
young adults (18-25 years old)	
adults	
elderly people	
Background	
tourists with little knowledge of the location	
tourists with some knowledge of the location	
people who have lived in Australia for a short time	
locals	
Visual Style	
composed	
dynamic	
interactive	
Language	
formal	
informal	
conversational	
journalistic	
playful	
expressing opinion/emotion	
Speaking Mode	
voice over	
direct to camera	
dialogue between actors	

Tourist Video 1

Appendix 4: Evaluating videos resource

Evaluating Videos

Content

Watch video 1 which is an example of a student video. Circle aspects of the tourist location that are included:

transport	food	art and culture	local people
famous buildings	activities	shopping	nature

Now watch video 2 which contains short clips from several student videos. Circle aspects of the locations that are included.

transport	food	art and culture	local people
famous building	activities	shopping	nature

Video Production

Watch video 3 and choose words and/or phrases from the box below to describe the music.

Music: _____

Watch video 4 and choose words and/or phrases from the box below to describe the photography.

Photography: _____

Watch video 5 and choose words and/or phrases to describe the scene transitions.

Scene transitions: _____

Watch video 6 and choose words and/or phrases to describe the video effects.

Video effects: _____

distracting	disjointed	low quality	dynamic	logical	natural
appropriate	well-ordered	high quality	boring	Illogical	awkward

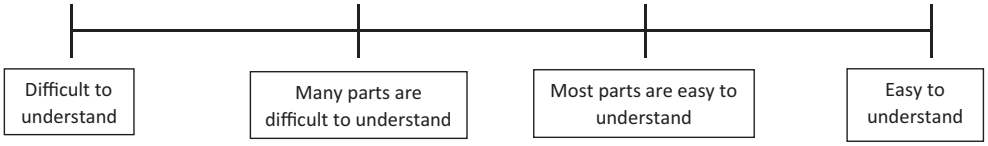
Delivery

Watch video 7 and comment on the following elements of the students' delivery.

	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Comments
Eye contact	☐	☐	_____
Pronunciation	☐	☐	_____
Fluency/Natural output	☐	☐	_____
Reading from notes	☐	☐	_____
Interaction with the environment	☐	☐	_____

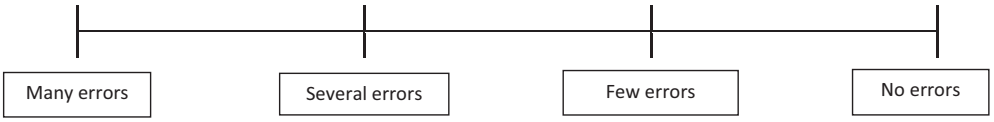
Pronunciation

Watch video 8 and rate the pronunciation.



Grammar

Watch video 9 and rate the grammar accuracy.



Groupwork

Watch video 10 and answer the following two questions.

1. Is the style of the video consistent throughout the whole video?
   - Yes ☐
   - No ☐
2. Do the group members appear on camera together?
   - Yes ☐
   - No ☐

Appendix 5: Sample of completed student research planner

Location/activity 1: Circular Quay Ferry to Watson Bay

Features of the location/activity that you would like to showcase:
Group members meet at Circular Quay
- wharf 6.
- private ferry. Captain took cruise
- concession one-way $5.

What to eat there?
Hungry Jacks
gelatissimo

views of Sydney Harbour Bridge and Sydney Opera House
Nielsens Park. Famous high rock for jumping into water.
popular place

Filming indoors/outdoors/both? outdoors
Opening hours:
Permission to film required?
Problems with noise: Many people at Circular Quay. Sound of ferry

Location/activity 2: Watson Bay

Features of the location/activity that you would like to showcase:
Lighthouse (Monica) — voiceover
- Hornby Lighthouse
- Near Watson's bay
- Whale watching
- can catch ferry there
- ticket price?
- walk there via South Head heritage trail
- iconic white and red striped
- built 1858
- designed by Alexander Dawson

cover section at lighthouse
- funny talk with Daniel & and Albert
  write script next week
- maybe about girlfriends?

Information about fish sign? Daniel + Albert
- can explain how to fish
- And what the sign means
- Albert can talk about Watson Bay Beach - Lady Bay Beach
- spectacular views
- see Middle head

Filming indoors/outdoors/both? outdoors
Opening hours:
Permission to film required?
Problems with noise: Luke says maybe the wind is loud

Location/activity 3: Royal Botanical Gardens

Features of the location/activity that you would like to showcase:
Travel around botanical gardens in Choo Choo Express children's train.
25 minutes long every 30 minutes
Tickets from the Queen Elizabeth II gate beside Sydney Opera House. Tour starts here. Concession (student) $5
Stops - number 3 Restaurant and cafe.
Botanic Garden cafe art exhibition will be held 27 June-1 August
- number 4 Mrs Macquarie's Point. great view of Sydney Harbour bridge. Chair?

Many people take their photo there. Maybe it is popular place.
- we can use time lapse iPhone camera to make train look fun + cute

Filming indoors/outdoors/both? both
Opening hours: 10am last tour 4:30pm
Permission to film required?
Problems with noise: many people at Mrs Macquaries Chair?

Location/activity 4: Hurricanes Grill, Darling Harbour

Features of the location/activity that you would like to showcase:
Our favourite Hurricanes foods:
- Pork ribs
- Wagyu beef
- Prawns with moura (with rice)
- garlic mushrooms

it is in the Harbourside Shopping Centre
Monday midday-3pm 5-10pm
Tuesday midday-3pm 5-10pm

Vocabulary for tasting the food:
succulent juicy
finger-licking delicious
seared medium
roasted medium-rare
Harmone-free charcoal-grilled
sizzling
spicy
roasted
tender
smoked

Filming indoors/outdoors/both? indoor
Opening hours: Wednesday Thursday Friday 10:30 Saturday midday-10:30 Sunday midday-10:30
Permission to film required? we already get the permission to interview the Hurricanes manager. Must interview at 3pm or late night, after 8pm
Problems with noise:

Appendix 6: Sample of completed audio-visual planner

Location	Visual	Audio
St Mary's Cathedral	1) close-up of Monika on the crossroad near QVB who is ready to go to the church 2) Monika introduces the views simplely along the way to the church 3) Monika comes across Aurora in the park and they plan to go to the church together. (Camera follows Monika from the back and notices Aurora sitting on the bench in front of church) 4) long shot of the church 5) camera around the inside of the church	1) voiceover (Hi, I'm Monika ....) with BGM 1 2) 3) they talk about the church and the voiceover play when they enter the church (voiceover is above the history and details of the design. building) BGM
Transition: Take train (10 mins) Take ferry in Circular Quay (30 mins)	(THE THIRD ANGLE) Screen record 1) Mo makes a video call to Albert and decides to meet A at CQ	(record the screen)
Watson's Bay	1) camera around angle includes CQ sign. Opera House and Bridge on the ferry 2) Camera angle about teammates chatting happily and the waves and seagull 3) camera angle about the wharf in Watson's Bay and yacht 4) Angle about the group walk to cannon and D introduces the history	1) voiceover about this area by Albert with BGM2 2) Aurora ① praises the beautiful views ② dreams of her life in the future
Watson's Bay	5) light tower → introduction by Daniel 6) sunset → a view of four persons' back (shadow) four cans of beer → celebration	voiceover → history of light tower → Monika BGM 3 sunset → Albert
Ferry → back (30 min)		
CQ (Vivid show)	(1) the camera angle aroud CQ includes Opera House whraf and bridge, tall buildings (on ferry) (2) Albert and Daniel stand at CQ Rock Daniel introduces the history of Vivid to Albert	voice over → Daniel BGM 4

Appendix 7: Discourse strategy resource

DDE T5 PROJECT

Language for negotiation

Over the next 10 weeks, you will be required to work in groups to complete assessed projects. In order to do this successfully, you will need to learn how to negotiate, come to an agreement, and at times compromise. These are skills that will be useful for your future studies and in the workplace.

Key terms

negotiation	formal discussion between people who are trying to reach an agreement
agenda	a plan of things to be done, or problems to be addressed
compromising	an agreement made between two people or groups in which each side gives up some of the things they want so that both sides are happy at the end
strategy	a plan that is intended to achieve a particular purpose
clarify	to make something clearer or easier to understand

Useful strategies for group discussions

1. Below are some situations that could come up when you are doing group work at university.
What strategy could you use for each situation?

Situation	Strategy: what could members of the group do?	What could you say?
No one speaks.	Encourage someone to speak by asking them a question.	So, X, what is your opinion?
One person dominates.		
Someone doesn't say anything or doesn't appear to participate.		
Someone makes a statement, but gives no support.		
Someone gives a long complicated answer.		
The discussion has only focused on one aspect of the issue/topic.		
The discussion goes off topic.		

1

DDE T5 PROJECT

2. Match the strategies below with the expressions on the next page.

Strategies	
listening and asking others for their ideas	beginning the negotiation and setting the agenda
concluding	supporting ideas and opinions
clarifying ideas and decisions	reaching a joint decision
seeking advice from others	disagreeing with ideas/opinions and giving reasons for disagreement
compromising	making suggestions and presenting ideas
agreeing with ideas and opinion	

2

Appendix 7: Discourse strategy resource – continued

DDE T5 PROJECT

Strategies	Expressions
	Let's start by having a look at the task instructions. Before we begin, let's have a look at the main points on the task instructions.
	What is your opinion about…? Do you have any suggestions for…? How do you feel about…? What do you think we should do? How do you think we should…?
	I think the best way is to… I recommend that we… I'd like to suggest a solution. I think we should…
	The most important reason for this is… One of the key reasons for this is… I think this is a good idea because… Firstly… Secondly… Last but not least…
	That sounds great to me. I agree with that suggestion. I think that's a great idea. I think that idea is acceptable.
	I'm not sure about that. I understand what you're saying, but… Unfortunately, my opinion/idea is different to yours. I'm afraid I can't agree with you because…
	I'm ready to agree if you can… If I agree, would you be willing to…? I would be willing to… if you…
	So, let's decide which is the best decision for this situation. Well, we both seem to agree that…
	Let me make sure I understood your idea. I'm not sure I understood your opinion. Could you please tell me again. I just want to make sure I understand you correctly.
	Let's do a quick search on the internet to see what we can find. Why don't we ask the teacher? Let's ask someone else for their advice.
	Let's look at what we decided to do. Shall we try to sum up to the main points of our discussion? Let's sum this up really quickly to make sure we all understand.

3

Appendix 8: Sample communication activity

Your teacher has given the class two options for your class excursion: the beach or the cinema. You and your partner have different opinions about where the class should go for the excursion.

You will need to explain why the class should go to the location you have been assigned, using reasons and support. You will also have to explain why the other location is not a suitable choice for the class.

Use language for negotiation to give your opinion, support your ideas, agree or disagree with your partner, and reach a decision or compromise.

In favour of the beach	
Pros of the beach	Cons of the cinema
● BBQ ● outdoor activities ● a new experience ● Australian culture ● Australian animals	● price ● no subtitles ● expensive food and drinks ● not everyone enjoys the same type of movie ● not a unique Australian experience
Notes	

Your teacher has given the class two options for your class excursion: the beach or the cinema. You and your partner have different opinions about where the class should go for the excursion.

You will need to explain why the class should go to the location you have been assigned, using reasons and support. You will also have to explain why the other location is not a suitable choice for the class.

Use language for negotiation to give your opinion, support your ideas, agree or disagree with your partner, and reach a decision or compromise.

In favour of the cinema	
Pros of the cinema	Cons of the beach
• convenient location • snacks • variety of movies • safety • comfortable	• distance • weather dependent • unsafe • sharks & jellyfish • sunburn • sand
Notes	

Groupwork to enhance learning beyond the classroom

Dongmei Li Monash University English Language Centre, Melbourne

Introduction

Over the last few years, students enrolled in English pathway programs in Australia have frequently come from mainland China, which often results in a monolingual classroom. This situation has constrained the development of cross-cultural communication and language learning. Research has found that Chinese international students have felt reluctant to work and interact with local students (Li, Remedios and Clarke 2010), as well as to engage with the multicultural Australian community (King and Gardiner 2015, Yu and Wright 2016). The lack of linguistic and cultural diversity in the student cohort has been a challenge to effective language learning and community engagement.

To encourage my students to engage with the local community outside of the classroom, I introduced the project on groupwork reported in this article and supported them to work with peers to complete the tasks. Groupwork has been found to benefit international students working in cross-cultural contexts, as it leads to improved communication and acceptance of diversity (Cabrera et al 2002), and enhanced communication skills, task achievement and language learning, even in a homogeneous group setting with all members being Chinese (Li, Remedios and Clarke 2014). Therefore, I believed groupwork might benefit students.

The context and students

Monash English Bridging (MEB) for university at the Monash University English Language Centre (MUELC) is designed for international students who have received a conditional offer to enter Monash University in Australia. Students can transfer to a full offer upon successful completion of the course's three integrated learning outcomes: English language proficiency, academic skills, and Australian socio-cultural awareness.

This was the eleventh MEB program I had taught at MUELC. In this class, I had 17 students who entered this course with an overall IELTS score of 5.5. They aimed to achieve a score equivalent to 6.5 overall at the end of the 20-week course. Table 1 lists details of the participants.

Table 1: Participants*

Pseudonym	*Gender*	*Entry test type*	*Destination faculty*	*Level*	*Nationality*
Andy	M	IELTS	INFO TECH	Undergraduate	Chinese
David	M	IELTS	SCIENCE	Postgraduate	Chinese
Gaby	F	IELTS	INFO TECH	Postgraduate	Chinese
Jerry	M	VCE-Y12	INFO TECH	Undergraduate	Chinese
Jack	M	IELTS	INFO TECH	Postgraduate	Chinese
Katie	F	IELTS	SCIENCE	Postgraduate	Chinese
Kyle	M	VCE-Y12	INFO TECH	Undergraduate	Chinese
Larry	M	IELTS	INFO TECH	Postgraduate	Chinese
Oliver	M	VCE-Y12	INFO TECH	Undergraduate	Chinese
Ruby	F	IELTS	INFO TECH	Postgraduate	Saudi Arabian
Sally	F	IELTS	INFO TECH	Postgraduate	Chinese
Sunny	F	IELTS	SCIENCE	Undergraduate	Chinese
Terry	M	VCE-Y12	INFO TECH	Undergraduate	Chinese
Tom	M	IELTS	SCIENCE	Undergraduate	Chinese
Victor	M	IELTS	INFO TECH	Undergraduate	Chinese
Yoyo	F	VCE-Y12	SCIENCE	Undergraduate	Chinese
Zack	M	IELTS	INFO TECH	Postgraduate	Chinese

*VCE = Victorian Certificate of Education

Table 1 highlights the following features of the participants in this class:

a. *Similar destination faculties*

   All students shared some similar academic backgrounds in the science discipline.

b. *Almost monolingual*

   Of the 17 students, 16 were from mainland China and one was from Saudi Arabia.

c. *Different course levels*

   Nine students out of 17 intended enrolling in undergraduate programs and the other eight in postgraduate courses. This meant that while the nine students had completed a 4-year university study, the other eight had just left high school. My observation in the first five weeks before the project started was that the older students tended to be more autonomous, especially when asked to complete out-of-class homework.

d. *Diversity in length of time in Australia*

   Five students had been living in Australia for over two years, completing their Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE), a certificate that students in the State of Victoria receive on satisfactory completion of their secondary education. Another student had previously studied on a General English course at Monash College. All the other students had recently arrived in Australia, mostly a few days before the course had started. I suspected that the VCE graduates might find this project less beneficial, and as will be elaborated in more detail later in this report, this proved to be the case.

Research questions

The main research question (RQ) I wanted to ask was:

In what ways can engaging with the local community enhance learning in an English pathway course?

To support the key RQ, the project elicited data on the three following more specific questions:

- To what extent can this project help students achieve the course outcomes?
- What do students value in this context?
- What can be done to improve the project for the next cycle?

The action research

According to Burns (2005), typically action research (AR) is conducted in a four-stage cycle: planning, action, observation, and reflection. The current AR evolved based on the four stages.

1. Planning – 'prospective to action, forward looking and critically informed in terms of:
   i) the recognition of real constraints; and
   ii) the potential for more effective action' (Burns 2005:59).

   As mentioned earlier, I realised that, although they were in Australia, my students were studying and living in a 'bubble' of the Chinese language, which constrained their learning of the English language and local socio-cultural knowledge.

   I had also observed that students seemed to value the three learning outcomes differently. They tended to place much more attention on language proficiency than academic skills and Australian socio-cultural awareness. Students seemed to isolate the three learning outcomes and failed to realise that learning from the MEB course also provided them with skills to communicate not just within the academic context but also out in the social community. Therefore, I had been thinking about a learning activity that could encourage them to break out of the bubble and engage with the local community, to apply learning to real life and thus achieve the course outcomes holistically.

2. Action – 'deliberate and controlled, but critically informed in that it recognises practice as ideas-in-action mediated by the material, social, and political "struggle" towards improvement' (Burns 2005:59).

   The Conversation Project which I put in place was a 5-week program that involved students conducting conversations which had genuine purposes in the local community. Each week every group of students identified a topic and conducted a conversation in a shop, a train station or an information centre. Each group was encouraged to conduct five conversations.

   Before introducing the task, I conducted a learner needs survey using Google Forms (see a version taken from Word in Appendix 1. More details of the survey will be presented in the 'Findings' section. To set students up for the task, I demonstrated a conversation in a shop by playing a video clip in class, followed by a group discussion of cultural and linguistically

appropriate conversations. Then I introduced the project explaining my rationale, linking the purpose of the project to the course outcomes.

To prepare the students for the conversations, I provided a task list (Appendix 2) for groups to choose from and stressed that groups could also choose a task that was not in the list.

After introducing the project, I asked students to form a group and then decide on the first task. There were seven pairs and one group of three. In this article, I will refer to them all as groups. On the second day, students came back with their partners and task.

Once the groups were established, I explained to students the three-step cycle of conducting the conversations: preparation, conversation, and reflection, as shown in Figure 1. I also provided each group with a copy of more detailed instruction (see Appendix 3).

As indicated in Figure 1, for each conversation I gave groups time in class to prepare.

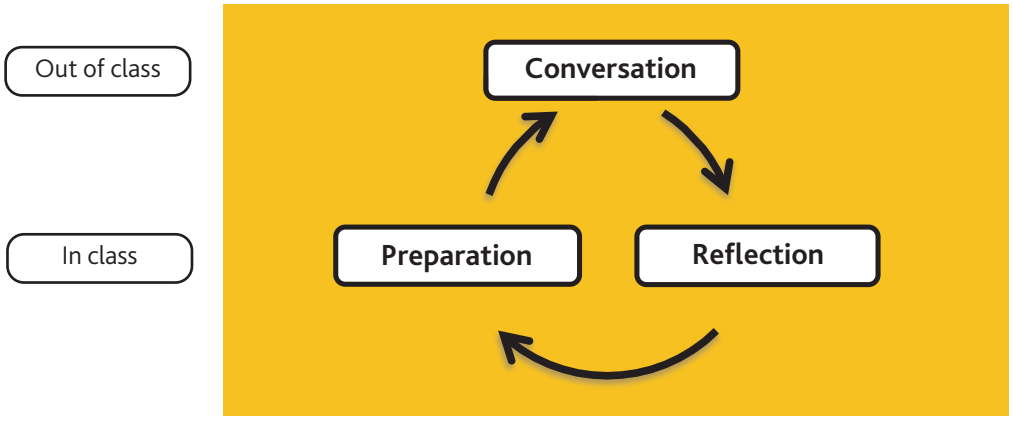


Figure 1: The conversation cycle

The preparation normally included deciding on the task, writing down the questions and predicting relevant vocabulary to be used. I allowed 10 minutes so that I could answer any questions. I encouraged students to write down the questions they were to ask at a business outlet out of class and discuss the questions with me.

After the preparation, groups then conducted the conversation out of class during the next few days, which included a weekend. On Monday, I asked each student to share their experience with other groups and write down their reflection on the independent learning plan (ILP)[1] on Moodle[2]. To facilitate students' better understanding, I created a template and sample reflection for students' reference (see Section 4 in Appendix 3).

3. Observation – 'responsive, but also forward-looking in that it documents the critically informed action, its effects, and its context of situation, using "open-eyed" and "open-minded" observation plans, categories and measurements' (Burns 2005:59).

1. ILP was part of the curriculum in the MEB course. Students were required to record their independent learning of the four macro skills (speaking, writing, reading and listening) on a weekly basis on Moodle. Teachers have access to each student's ILP online and can conduct individual consultations with students each week to keep track of students' progress.
2. Moodle is a learning management system that Monash College uses blended with in-class teaching. Students engage with Moodle for various learning activities including accessing course materials, submitting assignments and maintaining individual independent learning plans.

After reading students' reflections on their ILPs, I spoke with each group, acknowledged their progress and provided support where questions were identified, so that they could improve for the next conversation.

During the project a few adjustments were made to the plan to improve the effectiveness of the exercise. The first change was made after the first weekend. The original plan was for students to record the conversation. However, most groups reported that the people they approached outside the classroom rejected their request to record the conversation. Students appeared highly discouraged. Therefore, I advised them to reflect on the conversation and record the reflection instead of the conversation.

Another change I made was to emphasise the importance of preparation from Week 2.
After reading students' first reflections, I realised there was an apparent difference in motivation between groups who had prepared more thoroughly from those who had not. I extended the preparation time in class and provided more specific facilitation for individual groups in terms of questions and language use, especially in writing down the questions. Figure 2 is an example of the questions that one group wrote to prepare for a conversation in a bank branch.

In relation to the questions, I also discussed issues of courtesy and accuracy with the students, which proved to be effective according to their reflections.

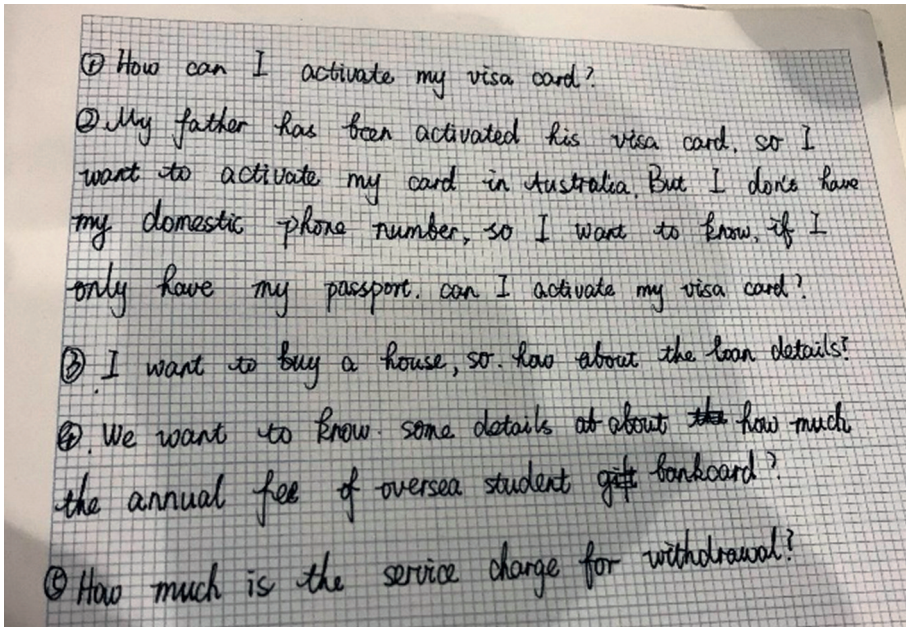


Figure 2: Draft of questions to ask at the bank

4. Reflection – 'evaluative and descriptive, in that it makes sense of the processes, problems, issues and constraints of action and develops perspectives and comprehension of the issues and circumstances in which it arises' (Burns 2005:59).

   My reflection took place throughout the whole project and has also informed my writing of this report. I now believe that reflection will continue for as long as I teach. In the next two sections I will report on what I found and what I have learned from the project.

Data collection

To achieve data triangulation, a diversity of data types was collected, as listed in Table 2.

Table 2: Data types

Timeline	*Data*	*Completed*
Pre-program	*Learner needs survey	18 responses
In-program	Recordings of conversation preparation	32 audio recordings
	Recordings of conversation reflections	29 audio recordings
	Recordings of conversations	1 conversation
	*Weekly written summary of reflection	18 online pages
Post-program	*Post-task group interviews	7 group interviews
	*End-of-course survey	14 responses

Findings are presented from the asterisked data types in Table 2. The other sets of information were used to confirm or clarify the data presented. For a Word version of the post-task group interview protocol and the end-of-course survey questions please see Appendix 4 and Appendix 5, respectively.

Findings

1. Learner needs survey

The questionnaire provided useful information for the project. Students reported urgent needs to improve English language skills and socio-cultural awareness. I have selected two questions from the questionnaire as examples, as shown in Figures 3 and 4.

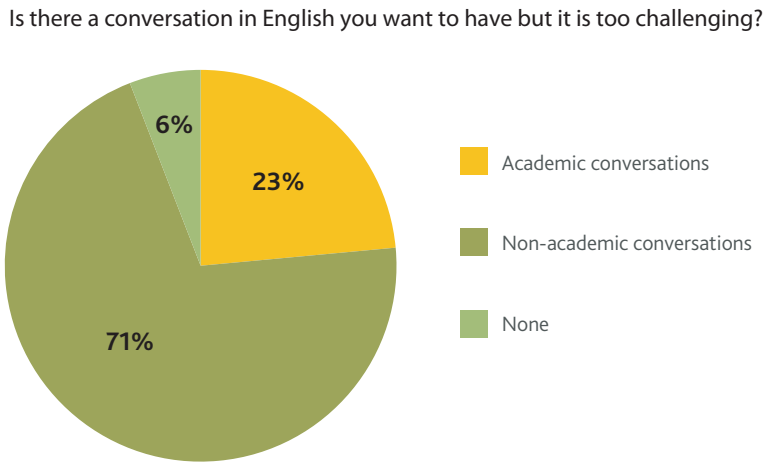


Figure 3: Challenging conversations

As indicated in Figure 3, most of the conversation needs were non-academic, as indicated by 12 out of the 17 responses (71%). They were mostly related to living in Melbourne, hobbies, job seeking and engaging with the local community. Below are selected examples of responses from the questionnaire. The responses are unedited to maintain authenticity.

1. Living in Melbourne

   'Yes. I want to change my student plan of my sim card in Optus.' (Andy)

   'Yes. Go to bank and ask something about my card. That is too difficult for me.' (Terry)

2. Hobbies

   'I want to ask some questions that how to use fitness equipment from foreign in the gym, but I don't know how to talk with them.' (Gaby)

   'Yes. The topic is about comic. I am a comic fan and really want to talk about it with other persons who have the same hobby like me, but it is really difficult for me to say some words in English.' (Sunny)

3. Job seeking

   'Yes, it is. I want to find a part time job, it is really challenging for me to talk with the messenger.' (Katie)

4. Engaging with the local community

   'Yes, I want to know some local culture with local people.' (Zack)

   'To communicate with others. Describe something you want to buy in store. Talk with local people on the bus or tram'. (Jack)

The responses verified the purpose of the project. They suggested the project was appropriate in meeting students' needs at that particular stage of their study and life in Australia.

The next question enquired about students' specific challenges with the use of the English language (see Figure 4).

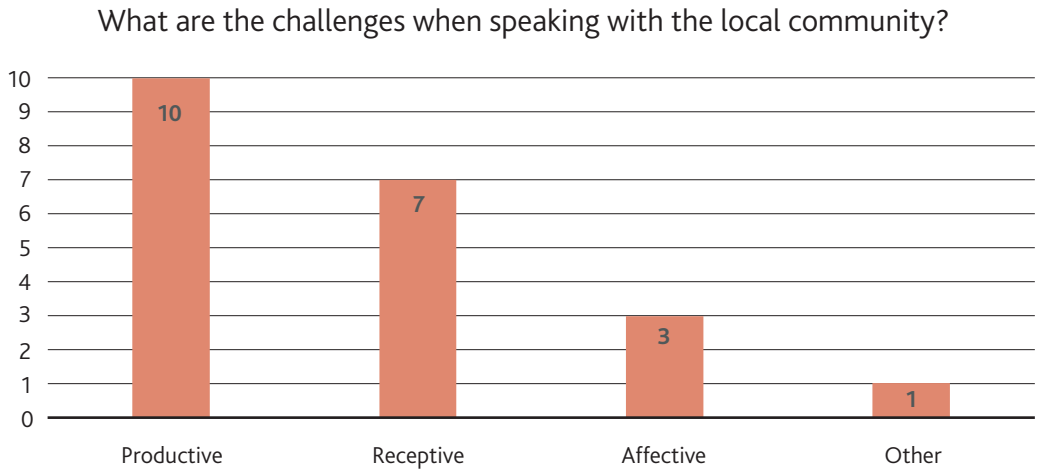


Figure 4: Speaking challenges

The majority of the students were concerned about both productive/speaking skills (vocabulary, pronunciation, fluency, grammar) and receptive/listening skills (vocabulary, accents, speaking speed of other person) in English. Three responses related to affective or cultural challenges, for example, not knowing what to talk about with local people.

2. End-of-course survey and post-task interviews

Findings from the end-of-course survey and the post-task interviews were positive. Students identified progress in three aspects: academic (productive and receptive language skills), affective (confidence in interacting with the local community), and collaborative (working in groups) (see Figure 5). Out of 14 responses, the distribution of the categories was rather even (5, 5 and 4 for academic, affective and collaborative, respectively).

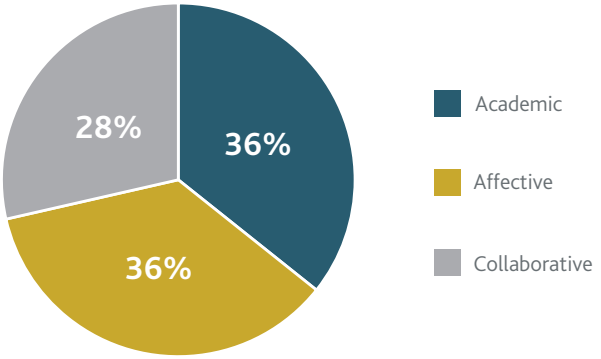


Figure 5: The most useful thing learned from the project

In addition, students reported learning from the project in the following five aspects (Figure 6).

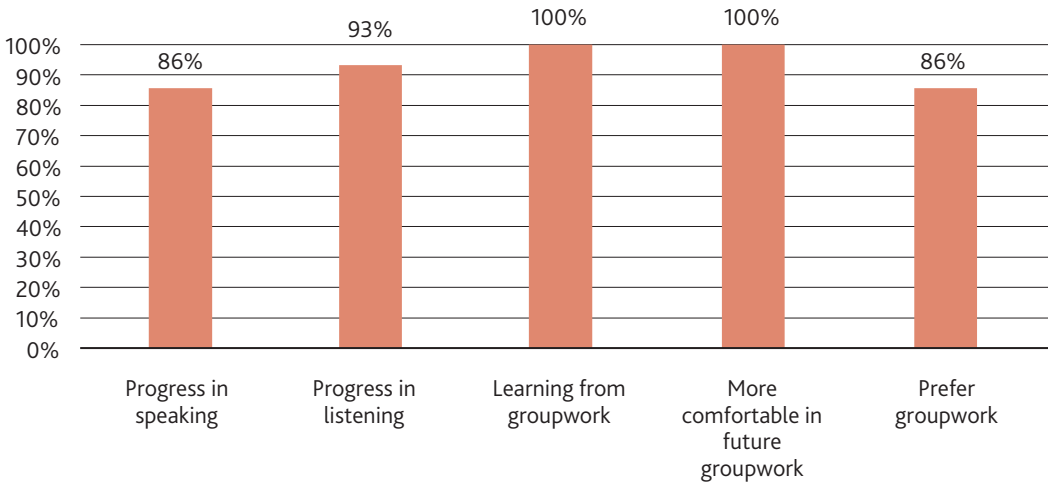


Figure 6: Selected questions of end-of-course survey and post-task interviews

As shown in Figure 6, all students reported increased understanding of the essential elements of groupwork. Students specifically mentioned time management and co-ordination with other group members (see also 3c in the next section), as well as increased confidence in working in a group. Most students (86%) preferred working in a group to working on their own to complete this task. They further explained in the post-task interviews that they felt the task was easier when working in a group, with support from peers, and sharing the workload of asking questions.

In terms of language learning, most students reported progress in both productive/speaking skills (86%) and receptive/listening skills (93%). This finding again showed that the project met their needs at this stage of the course.

3. Student reflections

Students' written reflections were consistent with the end-of-course survey and post-task interviews. Most students wrote about academic, affective and collaborative progress.

a) Academic (language)

Student reflections showed progress in both productive and receptive skills. Students reflected often on how much better they understood the external person and could make themselves understood (comments are unedited to maintain authenticity).

> *'I feel better than the last conversation. The conversation went well because her answer I can understood most of them.'* (John, Week 2)

> *'I did a good job during this conversation, I could understand all the word he said, and give reply clearly.'* (Oliver, Week 3)

Fluency was another factor that students valued. Sunny's reflection was a good example:

> *'I still felt nervous during the conversation and stopped many times.'* (Sunny, Week 3)

> *'Tom and I assigned questions in advance and did really good job during the conversation. I did not even stop once and felt more confident than before. I hope I can do well again next time.'* (Sunny, Week 4)

b) Affective

Most students reflected on improved confidence when interacting with the local community. In the reflections, students used the word 'confident' and 'nervous' frequently to indicate their affective changes. Below are some examples.

> *'Actually, by time, I feel more confident speaking to people who are outside the domain of the university.'* (Ruby, Week 3)

> *'I did not even stop once and felt more confident than before.'* (Sunny, Week 4)

> *'We think that we did better than before, because we are not nervous and express more clearly. The staff could understand us and give us the perfect solution.'* (Katie, Week 4)

> *'I think I had changed a lot. I am not nervous any more before girls.'* (Andy, Week 4)

c) Collaborative

One emerging finding from this project was the awareness of groupwork skills. Though no student mentioned the need to improve groupwork skills in the pre-task learner needs survey, in the end-of-course survey, all students responded positively to questions regarding groupwork (see Figure 6). The positive responses were confirmed in the post-task interviews and the student reflections. For example:

> *'Improve my time management to fit in group work.'* (Oliver, Week 4)

> *'Teamwork skill, such as leading.'* (Yoyo, Week 4)

Conclusions and reflections

The outcomes from the recordings and interviews were positive overall. There was an apparent increase in the students' awareness of the importance of groupwork. In addition, that students preferred groupwork to individual work confirms the previous research findings on the benefit of groupwork mentioned in the introduction. Students reported improvement in productive and receptive skills in English. They also found they were more confident about interacting with the local community beyond the classroom.

In addition, either the length of time in Australia or age (or prior university learning experience) seemed to have an impact on the level of motivation. The students who completed all five conversations were those who were fresh in the country, and who also happened to be postgraduate students. They also found the project more beneficial than students who had been in Australia for a longer period of time. Students who had been in Australia for two years, who were all undergraduate students, did not complete the tasks. It appears that this project may be more effective for new arrivals in a new country. This experience of research has given me a different insight into research itself. I really enjoyed the fast feedback from research to practice, both as a researcher and practitioner.

I found talking about the project with colleagues proved to be extremely beneficial. My colleagues generously offered their time and brains to listen to my progress and struggles. At every single stage of the project, I received invaluable ideas and advice from my fellow teachers.

It was a privilege to be part of the AR group and it was an extremely rewarding experience to be introduced to AR, which will be a way of learning that I will carry on into my future career.

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Appendix 1: Learner needs survey

Is there a conversation in English you want to have but it is now too challenging? What is it?

What are your expectations about interacting with the local people/your life in Australia (you can tick more than one box)?

- ☐ To speak with them comfortably
- ☐ To find a job here
- ☐ To achieve high scores at university
- ☐ To learn about the culture
- ☐ Other

How often do you speak with English speaking people here?

- ☐ Multiple times a day
- ☐ Once a day
- ☐ 2–3 times a week
- ☐ Once a week
- ☐ Less than once a week

How useful is it to engage with the local Australian people and culture for your study in Australia?

- ☐ Very useful
- ☐ Useful
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Not useful
- ☐ Very unuseful

How do you normally start a conversation with people in the community?

- ☐ Greeting (e.g. Hello)
- ☐ Asking a question (e.g. the train timetable)
- ☐ I do not normally start a conversation with strangers

What are the challenges when speaking with the local community?

What support would you like from the teacher to be more able to engage with the local community?

- ☐ I would like to know what questions I can ask
- ☐ I would like to learn some non-verbal strategies like eye contact
- ☐ I would like to speak more clearly and naturally
- ☐ Other:

Appendix 2: Introductory task list

1. Ask about prices at a shop in a shopping centre, with a non-Chinese speaking staff member
2. Buy a ticket/ask for ticket prices at Metro
3. Ask for a weekend idea at the Info Centre in Melbourne city
4. Enquire about half tix (discounted tickets) at the Town Hall
5. Ask about the class timetables at the City Bath or a gym
6. Ask info about joining a club on campus
7. Sign up at a local library
8. Find out about gold class (prices, services, sessions)
9. Get a reward card at a supermarket (e.g. Coles, Woolworths)
10. Discuss having a haircut (or styling) with a non-Chinese speaking hairdresser
11. Have a meeting with someone on campus (e.g. English Connect, Monash Connect, Student Engagement, Admin …)
12. Ask for directions
13. Ask for a staff member

Appendix 3: Conversation instruction sheet

Before the conversation

Step 0. Preparation (Record on phone)

1) Work together with your partner(s), decide the task. You can choose from the task list or any actual task you need to complete this week, e.g. Jeremy and Kenneth's task: to get a Coles Flybuy card. I would recommend you discuss the real tasks you may have during the weekend with your partner, like buying new shoes, etc. Then the conversation would be more meaningful.
2) Decide where to go.
3) Write down a list of questions to ask the person.
4) Upload the recording of the conversation.

During the conversation

Step 1. The conversation

1) Have the conversation without asking to record it. Since you don't need to record the conversation, you don't need to tell the external person that you are doing a project.
2) Be friendly and courteous.

After the conversation

Step 2. Reflection (Record on phone)

1) Straight after the conversation reflect with your partner on the following questions (about 5 minutes). Record the reflection.
2) Focus your reflection on these questions:
   a. What was the goal of this conversation? Have we achieved our goal?
   b. What questions did we/I/you ask well? Why? (Alternatively you can ask each other: in what way did the conversation go well?)
   c. What questions didn't we/I/you ask well? Why? (Alternatively you can ask each other: in what way didn't the conversation go well?)
   d. How can we do better in the next conversation?
3) You can use your first language in the reflection if it is easier.

Step 3. Upload the reflection on Google Drive under your names.

Appendix 3: Conversation instruction sheet – continued

Step 4. Summarise your reflection in English in about 150 words on ILP Speaking in two paragraphs including the following information. An example has been provided for your reference.

Task:

Date and time:

Location:

My reflection:

Example:

Task: Buying perfume at Myer

Date and time: Saturday 17 March 3 p.m.

Location: Myer shopping centre

My reflection:

(para 1, the description: who, when, where, what)

My partner and I were trying to ask a staff member to introduce some good perfumes for me. She showed us a couple of brands and products for me to smell. She also explained the stories of the brands. The conversation went on for about 6 minutes. The staff member spoke quite fast and I only understood a small part of what she said.

(para 2, the reflection: how did I feel then? How do I think the conversation went? Did it go well? What did not go well? How can I do better in the next conversation?)

I was quite nervous during the conversation because I could not understand most of what she said. I did not want to keep asking 'pardon'.

The conversation went well because she understood all my questions and gave me the answer. For example, when I asked to smell some of the products she was happy to let me smell.

However, after talking to my partner, I would like change one area. I should have said thank you very much to the staff for her time and her help. In the next conversation I will remember to do that.

Appendix 4: Post-task group interview protocol

Starter

1. Can you tell me how you feel about the whole experience?

Language/academic skills

2. Is there any change in your speaking skills after the project? If yes, in what ways?
3. Has your listening improved (if no response, prompt for examples such as listening to accents, rapid speech)?
4. How did you choose the topics?
5. Do you think the project would help with your course and university study?

Groupwork

6. Was there any benefit working with peers?
7. Compared to working in groups, would you rather complete this task on your own?
8. Would you feel comfortable working with different students in the future?
9. Has the project helped you develop groupwork strategies? If yes, in what ways?
10. Would you do anything differently next time when you work in a group? Could your group improve in any way?

Socio-cultural

11. Has your understanding of the local community improved over the five conversations? Do you think you have a better understanding of the local culture?
12. What Australian social customs surprised or shocked you?
13. Did you notice any difference in politeness between your culture and the external people?
14. Have you become more confident in talking with people outside the classroom?
15. Do you think you have a better understanding of the appropriate interaction or cultural differences? In what way?

Overview

16. Overall, do you notice any change in you after the project?
17. Compared to other out-of-class homework, how do you like this? (Prompt writing, listening, ILP etc.)
18. Would you recommend this project to other students in a future course?
19. Any advice to make the project better?
20. Any other final comments?

Appendix 5: End-of-course survey

1. How many conversations did your group complete?
2. For how long had you been in Australia when the conversations started in Week 5 (for example, 7 weeks, or 3 years and 2 months)?
3. Were our weekly consultations about the conversation project helpful? If yes, in what way? If no, why?
4. Would you prefer to complete the conversation tasks with another student or on your own?
5. If you used Chinese for your reflection, did that help with your project? If yes, in what way? If no, why?
6. Has this project brought any change to your learning? If yes, what is the biggest change?
7. Do you think you have made progress in speaking? If yes, in what areas?
8. Do you think you have made progress in listening? If yes, in what areas?
9. Did you learn anything from working in a group for this project? If yes, what did you learn?
10. How was your experience working in a group to complete this project? (5-point Likert scale from 'very bad' to 'very good')
11. What was the biggest challenge in organizing with your groupmates(s) to conduct the conversations?
12. Name one thing you liked about this project.
13. Name one thing that would make this project better.
14. What would you do differently next time you work in a group?
15. In what ways could this project help your course and university study?
16. Would you feel more comfortable working with different students in the future? (5-point Likert scale from 'much less comfortable' to 'much more comfortable')
17. What was the most useful thing you have learned from this project?
18. What Australian social customs surprised or shocked you?
19. To what degree would you recommend this project to other students in a future course? (5-point Likert scale from 'not at all' to 'very strongly')

Thank you very much! All the best in completing this course!

Virtual reality: Encouraging more personalised responses in discussions

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Context and focus

Kangan Institute's English Language Intensive Courses for Overseas Students (ELICOS) offer four General English levels and cater to students from a variety of backgrounds and age groups. Our action research (AR) focused on the upper intermediate level, which gives students an IELTS equivalent of approximately 5.5 upon completion. ELICOS students are either studying English only, or preparing to enter a Certificate or Diploma course following completion of upper intermediate.

The main focus of the research first came to light due to a noticeable issue occurring in discussion tasks and summative assessments. Many students were often unable to participate or contribute fluently in discussions, particularly if they were personally unfamiliar with the topic. As Reyes and Vallone (2007:59) note, authentic assessment should create equity between learners with 'activities that foreground the linguistic and cultural backgrounds of students'. In our case a deficit existed between many of our students in terms of life experience, age, exposure to the globalised landscape and socio-cultural experiences of independence. While some of these students were easily able to converse and relate to a variety of topics, often students had not had a great deal of exposure to the topics that were referred to in the curriculum. This phenomenon had been observed for some time, with research arguing that students can lack the ability to connect through appropriate and meaningful dialogue with others (Yates and Wahid 2013:1,038).

This issue creates a unique problem for ELICOS providers in general. General English programs strive to deliver well-rounded courses that cover global themes, whilst simultaneously considering the broad range of cultural and social experiences in the classroom. In terms of speaking assessments and discussions, this problem leads teachers to change topics and questions to best cater for their group of students. However, providing flexibility to students offers a short-term solution in many cases, and presented a challenge in ensuring the fairness and consistency of assessment tasks between groups of students and periods of time.

Research questions

The issue discussed above led us to consider a variety of approaches. One of the possibilities involved using technology as a way of bridging the experience gap between students. We decided to experiment by introducing virtual reality (VR) into the classroom. VR is the use of 360° video content, which is viewed through a headset and tracks with the user's head movement.

In the initial stages of the proposal, exact research questions were not apparent. We believed, however, that VR might perhaps help students connect to a topic more easily. This was because we experimented with the video and technology ourselves and found the experience more immersive than traditional video. We also hoped that they might be able to produce more interesting, complex content and ideas, though there was no observable way of defining content as such. Later, we decided that the most accurate measurement tool would be the performance indicators available in our discussion rubric (Appendix 1), which we could use to compare changes in the students' ability to express themselves over a number of research cycles.

Two key research questions (RQs) gradually came into focus:

1. Does interaction with a VR text assist in the production of more personalised ideas and content?
2. How do students respond to the use of VR texts?

RQ1 attempted to address the key issue of students being unable to relate personally to an abstract concept, or a concept with which they have had no personal connection or experience. For example, if students were asked to discuss crime, students who experienced crime, or have family and friends who experienced it, were much more likely to engage with the topic. Through the use of VR, the aim was to provide a virtual space in which students would all have had the same experience, and one that most closely related to the subject matter.

RQ2 was deliberately broader and aimed to capture some of the first-hand user experiences that students had while using the technology. These responses may have involved physical experiences and sensations, emotional responses, cultural and social reactions, and most notably the intellectual stimulation that we hoped would be facilitated through the VR text.

Intervention procedure

Our research consisted of two cycles within the upper intermediate class, with five students participating in both cycles. We chose this level as we believed it would make the instruction and feedback process much more efficient to manage and student responses would be more detailed. The first cycle had 12 students and the second had 15 students. They originated from China, Indonesia, South Korea, Japan, Colombia and Thailand. The students' ages ranged between 18 and 30, with an English proficiency level between Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR, Council of Europe 2001) Levels B1 and B2. After conducting a pre-intervention survey, we collated data on their initial experiences and opinions with technology and preparation for discussion assessments. Every participant stated that they felt comfortable using new technology in class, with most of them stating that they found mobile phones, video and iPads useful or very useful. This was an important finding, particularly as we would be undertaking the project with technology that we felt hadn't been used much in the classroom.

In terms of our own experience with VR in the classroom, neither of us had had much experience sourcing content or using the technology in this way before the project. However, we both considered ourselves capable of learning to use new technology, so discovering how to use the VR goggles was not a major obstacle in the process. Joseph was a regular teacher in the upper

intermediate class and undertook the first cycle with the students. This ensured that they were comfortable not only in the discussion itself, but also the focus group. The second cycle was run by James, who had not taught this particular class before the intervention. We conducted the lessons approximately 10 weeks apart, so therefore most of the cohort had changed in the second cycle. However, we were able to have some students in both groups – providing a basis for comparison.

The students engaged in lessons with and without VR, with the former followed by a discussion that prompted a response to the experience they had viewed. For the purpose of the research, VR headsets were purchased and students made use of their personal phones to display the content. Initial research into media sources involved applications that displayed images with sound and made use of Google's Street View. We settled on using the mobile YouTube application as our primary platform, as using the search function to filter 360° VR-supported videos was rather intuitive and this also meant that content creation was not required.

As the curriculum was based on the first edition of the coursebook (Clare and Wilson 2011), VR content was selected to match the corresponding unit themes. In the first cycle, we used Unit 8.1, 'It's a Tough Call', which contextualises language around making difficult decisions in stressful situations. In a non-VR discussion, students would typically need to recall a difficult situation they had experienced and establish a discussion around this theme. However, for the VR alternative, a video entitled 'Decisions: A 360° virtual reality drunk driving experience, presented by Johnnie Walker' was used for students to discuss. This text showed a young woman experiencing the consequences of drink-driving from a variety of perspectives. We provided conventional pre-teaching, followed by participation in the VR experience in small groups (Appendix 2). The students were then given questions, which would be the basis for their ensuing discussion, before watching the video a second time. Questions involved asking students to say how they felt, give their opinions on what the people in the video could have done differently, and provide personalised answers.

Data collection

Data collection involved four principal sources covering both quantitative and qualitative data. The quantitative sources were the student discussion assessment results, which compared the VR and non-VR results, and a survey which was primarily used to capture students' existing perspectives and attitudes to VR in an educational context. The qualitative sources were made up of a focus group interview, which came after the student discussion assessment, and a textual analysis of the language used by students during the VR-based discussion. The organisation of data sources was designed to facilitate a thorough analysis of the use of VR in the classroom through a triangulated range of data sets.

Findings

With the variety of data sources at our disposal, we were able to make a number of findings in order to answer our two RQs. With the two sets of scores, we were also able to determine whether any

patterns could be made between the groups. To gain further insight, we used the discourse analysis to measure the quality of the students' responses. We were able to use the assessment scores and discourse analysis to see the use of personalised language and effectiveness and level of collaboration between students. The focus group interview gave us varied responses from students, and we were ultimately able to identify some common thematic responses. The students expressed their enjoyment of VR, but some of them felt uncomfortable using the goggles.

1. Students utilised more personalised language

Many students were able to produce more personalised language throughout their discussion. This finding was demonstrated through both discourse analysis and by comparing individual students' *content* scores.

In the discourse analysis of one discussion, we counted the number of 'I felt/feel …' statements (15) and personal stories (2) (see Appendix 3). When recounting a personal story, one student said: 'That's exactly the same as my cousin lost all the movement in his arm.' Additional evidence showed students' *content* scores in comparison with a non-VR discussion, which saw a median increase of 10% (see Appendix 4). As predicted, younger students with less life experience saw the greatest benefit. One example is Student A (21 years old), whose *content* score rose from 3 to 4.5 and *overall* score increased from 48% to 74%. In contrast, the inverse can be seen in Student B (27 years old) whose *content* and *overall* score showed no change (see Figure 1). Student B's result reflects his ability to produce language fluently in both discussions, whilst accuracy issues remained static.

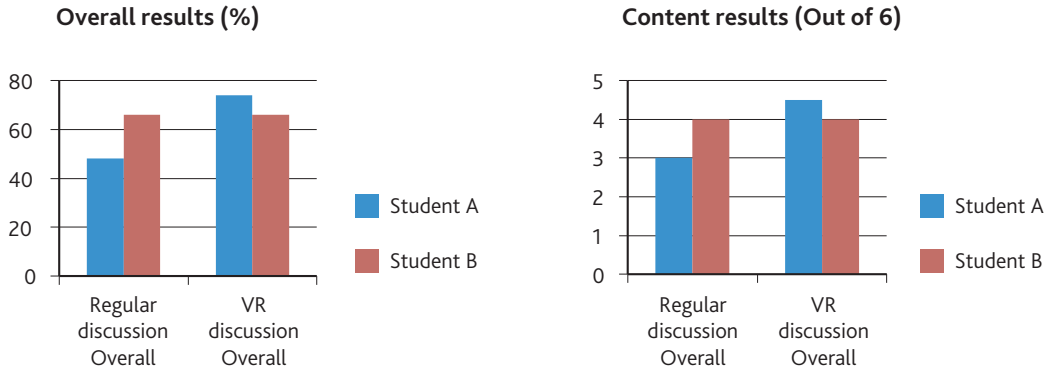

Figure 1: Sample score contrast

2. VR facilitated authentic collaborative learning

Once again, both the discourse analysis and student scores indicated that students found it easier to conduct an authentic discussion as a team after using VR. When students were engaged in an assessed discussion, they often found it difficult to 'act authentically'. This could result in a lack of natural turn-taking and active listening as well as long monologues. The difference noted in the discourse analysis was demonstrated by several key elements: interruptions, agreement/disagreement, clarification, questions and affirmations. All of these elements were seen frequently in the discussion, which we believed indicated a natural reaction to the experience. One example of this language use was seen in an excerpt in the first round of discussions (see Appendix 5).
In addition, there was also a 13% median assessment results increase (non-VR >VR) in the *teamwork and participation* performance indicator.

3. Students found the texts to be more engaging

Overall, students found that VR texts were engaging and allowed them to connect more deeply with the topic. Throughout the research, students responded positively to the 'real-life' experience. An 8% median increase was seen in the *engaging and responding* performance indicator. Improvements are also evident in the discourse analysis, which created a more authentic discussion, and the focus groups, which allowed the students to provide feedback about their experience. Some comments included (comments are unedited to maintain authenticity):

> *'It helped me feel how it could happen.'*
>
> *'It's more exciting, more interesting. I can feel close. Looks like I am there.'*
>
> *'I watch the video and have true feeling.'*
>
> *'I think it's very easy to pick up the topic. You just watch it – much easier than reading article[s] or reading some information.'*

This finding is further supported in a study by educator Ida Mae Craddock (2018:8), who found that using engaging content can lead to increased student attention. Furthermore, her research showed that the use of an engaging visual aid such as a VR text can efficiently allow English language learners to grasp concepts without comprehending all the vocabulary in the text. As our goal was to create stronger connections to content, it is likely that the use of engaging visual resources in our AR assisted in this process.

4. Some students found the experience of VR to be uncomfortable

Throughout the process, we had to direct students and give careful instructions on how to use the headsets effectively. At times, students would remove headsets prematurely or be at very different stages of the video. Some students who felt motion sickness were instead encouraged to use their phones without the headsets, although it seemed that this did not create a particularly immersive experience for them. Overall, most students happily participated with only a few having technical issues; some made it clear that VR was not suitable for them due to a past poor experience. It would seem that students need to be made fully aware of how they may feel after using VR, considering that motion sickness can impact their involvement in the discussion. Recent developments in VR have been attempting to tackle the issue of motion sickness with the development of a scale (Kim, Park, Choi and Choe 2018:72). Ideally, it would be possible for teachers to use a motion sickness scale to be better informed for video selection.

Due to the negative side effects that were occasionally encountered by students, we also concluded that using VR in an assessment may not be the best way to exploit its capabilities in the class. Therefore, whilst assessments provided a clear tool to measure its effectiveness and to ensure fairness in students' assessments, VR could be better utilised in lessons leading up to discussions as opposed to forming the basis of an assessment. In particular, VR could be used to further connect students to topics that may appear distant to them due to differences in life experience and culture. A practical example could be the use of VR to engage students by immersing them in an experience of a community affected by climate change or extreme poverty. This would usually be difficult to personalise for some students, and VR may be used to bridge the gap in empathy and understanding of these topics.

5. Post-research findings

Following the successful AR referred to in this report, we purchased additional VR goggles to allow for simultaneous whole-class experiences. We subsequently engaged a whole class of 18 students at pre-intermediate level (A1–A2) in the VR experience. There were some difficulties encountered in this lesson, particularly around teaching students how to activate the VR feature in the YouTube application. This caused the students to experience the video in a scattered way, somewhat affecting the overall experience. From this, we believe that setting aside time to cover the use of the goggles and the YouTube application may be necessary to make VR usage more streamlined at lower levels.

Reflections and conclusions

From our research, we concluded that VR functions effectively as a way for students to increase engagement with texts. Indeed, we predicted that VR could be an effective medium for contextualising language at all levels, and is an effective means of eliciting prior knowledge. Furthermore, as the technology develops, teachers and students will find it possible to create videos. This in turn may allow students to engage both as creators as well as consumers of VR content.

As predicted from the outset, students who were generally younger and had less exposure to social and cultural experiences found the greatest benefit from the VR content. In addition, most students found VR engaging, regardless of age, experience or cultural background. In contrast, the discomfort some students felt is something that will need to be mitigated in the future. Teachers will need to proactively ensure those students are not disadvantaged in their learning experiences. One way to address discomfort is to provide a variety of headset options, including hand-held goggles as opposed to fastened goggles to enable better control of their experience.

At an institutional level, VR will continue to be used as more and more texts are sourced and mapped effectively to our curriculum. Due to the success of the research, our department has purchased a full class set of VR goggles, and teachers will be encouraged and trained to use them in class to enhance the learner experience. Some areas we aim to further examine are using VR to provide a basis for fluency speaking practice in tandem with coursebook material. Morrison (2016) conducted research using VR and concluded that it could be used to increase motivation and engagement generally amongst learners. As mentioned in our findings, we definitely found that VR had a positive effect on engaging students, particularly as their mobile phone usage was restricted. As Morrison has alluded to, conducting practice exercises using VR could potentially be an outcome of the technology's increasing use.

Considering other future possibilities, entrepreneurs such as Cardwell (2018) have attempted to produce dedicated VR applications that include interactivity with a VR text and provide instant feedback to students on their abilities. This technology could enable learners to take the experience outside of the classroom to provide an additional layer of scaffolding. As the research of VR in English language learning is still in its infancy, we believe that further exploration by others in different contexts would be beneficial to understanding its effectiveness in the classroom. AR of this kind might encourage developers and publishers to move their focus to creating applications with English language learners in mind.

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Appendix 1: Discussion rubric

Please note that this topic is simply an example and will not necessarily be appropriate for all cohorts.

KANGAN INSTITUTE

GE5 Upper Intermediate: Discussions Week 8 VR

Family Name _____ **Student I.D.** _____

First name _____ **Teacher/s** _____

Class _____ **Date** _____

Information for student:

Time Limit: 3 students: 7 min / 4 students: 10 min / 5 students: 13min

Topic: Decisions (drink driving)

Task:

1. How does the video make you feel?
2. Is drink driving a serious problem in your country? Why/why not? Does your country have a legal limit?
3. What should the young woman have done differently?
4. Have you ever been in a car with a drunk driver? If not, how do you think that would feel?
5. Do you know of anyone that has been affected by drink driving? If not, how do you think the survivors of this crash might feel?

Discussion Rubric

	6	5	4	3	2	1	0
Team work and participation - Maintained appropriate eye contact and body language; not slouching, open posture, facing speaker, etc. - Participated without prompting - Not speaking for too long without stopping							
Content - Remaining on topic - Original ideas are explored - Ideas are clear and easy to follow							
Engaging and responding - Responding in a way which encourages discussion - Asking relevant questions - Interjecting where necessary (if required) - Clarifying ideas and opinions							
Fluency and pronunciation - Speech is smooth and flowing - Appropriate repetition and filler words - Appropriate pauses or hesitations - Word / sentence stress and intonation - Clarity and understanding of individual words; e.g. phonemes (/z/, /k/)							
Vocabulary and grammar - Appropriate word choice - Attempted vocabulary from unit - Range of vocabulary (including synonyms) used - Accuracy of question forms - Verb forms are correct (past, present, future) - Syntax is relevant and at level							
Total = **X 4 =** **/ 100**							

Teacher's comments:

You must score 60% or higher to pass this assessment.

Ver. VR Apr 2018

Page **1** of **1**

Appendix 2: VR lesson plan

VR Lesson plan/procedure [Approx. 1 hour]

Aim: To use a virtual reality text that students can respond to in the form of a discussion.

Topic: Difficult decisions – drink driving/car accidents

Prior knowledge:

Grammar- Students will have been familiarised with second and third conditional, which will be appropriate for discussing the text.
Vocabulary-

responsibility (n)	an obligation or duty for which a person is held accountable
judgement (n)	the act of judging or assessing a person or situation or event
guilt (n)	a feeling you did something wrong
waste of life (n - n)	unnecessary, short, untimely death
decision-making ability (adj - n)	the capacity to use good judgement to come to a decision
tragedy (n)	an event resulting in great loss and misfortune
impaired (adj)	weakened or damaged
legal limit (adj - n)	the amount of alcohol one can legally have in their blood while driving

Process:

Pre-teaching: [approx. 25 minutes/whole class]

Vocabulary teaching/practice: [3–5 minutes/whole class] ss will be given cards with the new vocabulary and place them into word form categories

[10 –15 minutes/whole class] Quizlet.live matching activity

[https://quizlet.com/283328900/vr-discussion-lesson-drink-driving-flash-cards/?new]

Prediction: [3–5 minutes/whole class] Ss are given 5 minutes to discuss what they think the video might be about

Assessment: [approx. 15 minutes per group]

[4:41 min/discussion groups] Ss watch the video once

[2–3 minutes/discussion groups] Ss are given the assessed discussion questions to consider before watching the video again. Students also have a short opportunity to summarise the video as a group.

Appendix 2: VR lesson plan – continued

Assessed discussion questions:

1. How does the video make you feel?

2. Is drink driving a serious problem in your country? Why/why not? Does your country have a legal limit?

3. What should the young woman have done differently?

4. Have you ever been in a car with a drunk driver? If not, how do you think that would feel?

5. Do you know of anyone that has been affected by drink driving? If not, how do you think the survivors of this crash might feel?

[4:41 min/discussion groups] Ss watch the text a second time.

[7 minutes/discussion groups] Ss undertake discussion assessment.

Follow up:

Focus group discussion.

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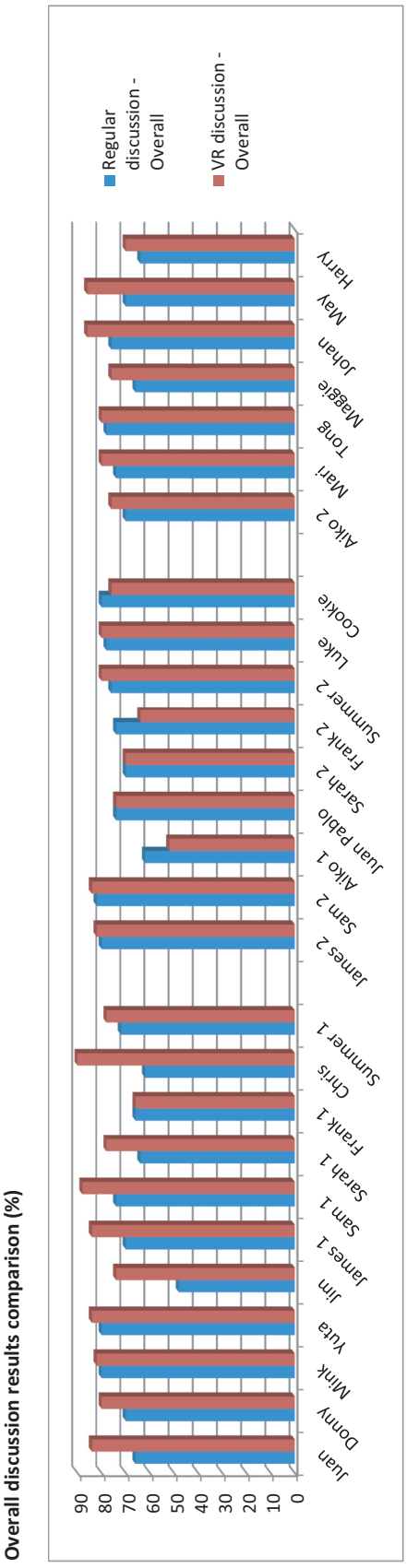
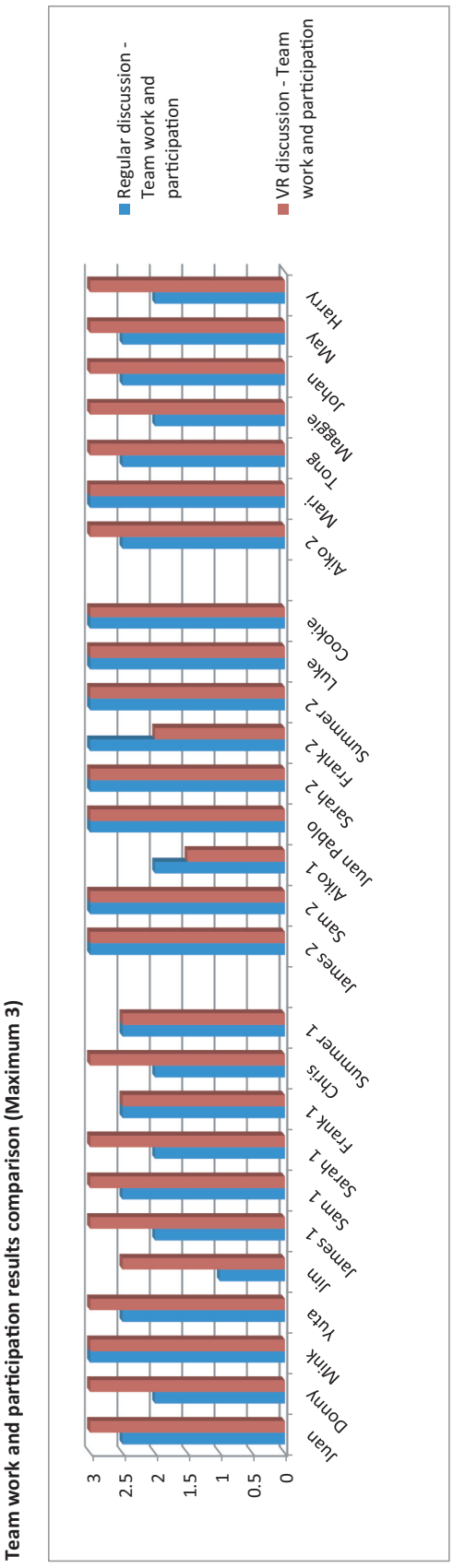
Appendix 3: Discussion 1 discourse analysis

Interruptions	7
Clarifications	5
Agreement/disagreement	13
Questions	3
Affirmations	11
Personal stories	2
'I feel/felt' statements	15

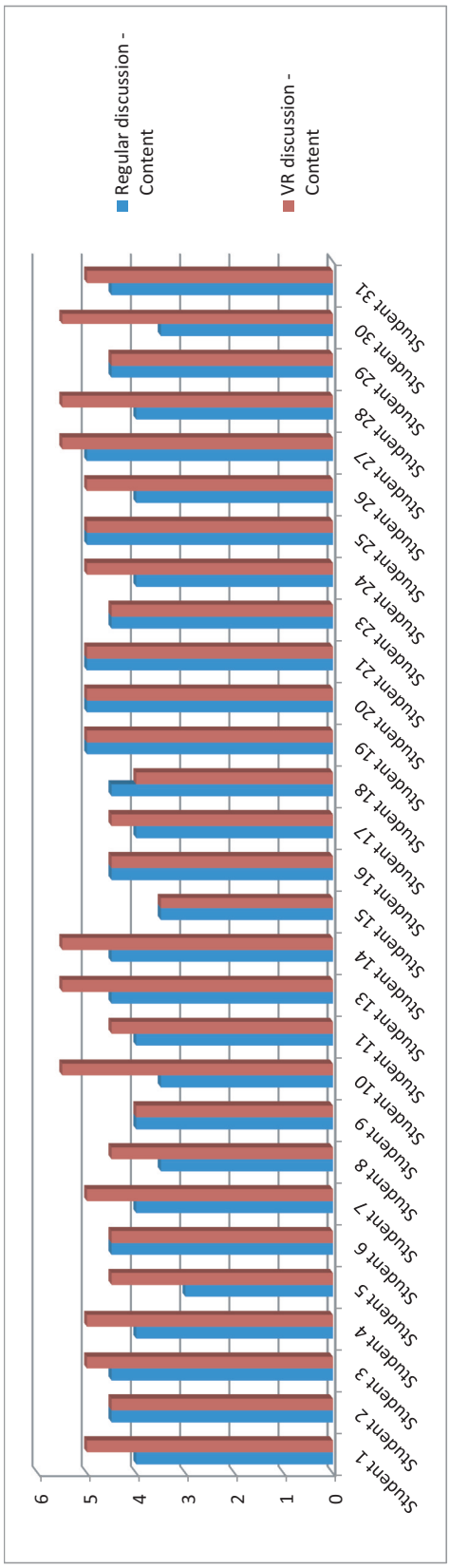
Appendix 4: Student discussion assessment scores



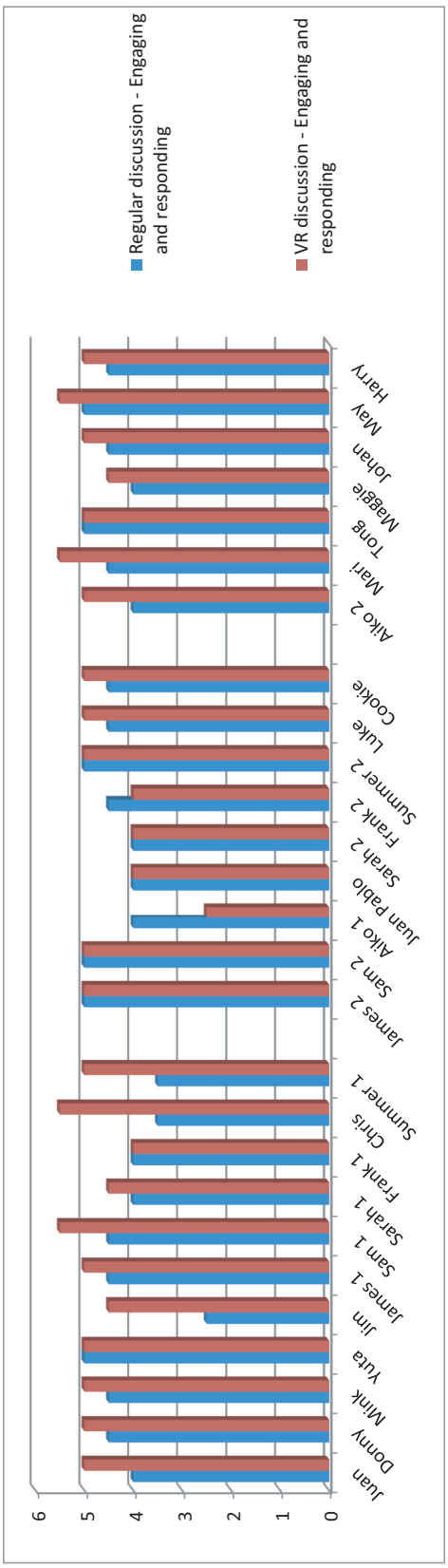


Appendix 4: Student discussion assessment scores – continued

Content results comparison (Maximum 6)

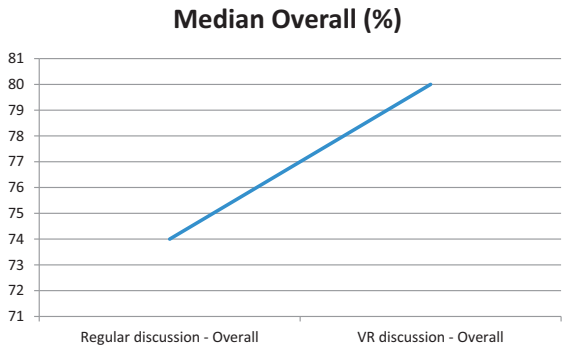


Engaging and responding results comparison (Maximum 6)

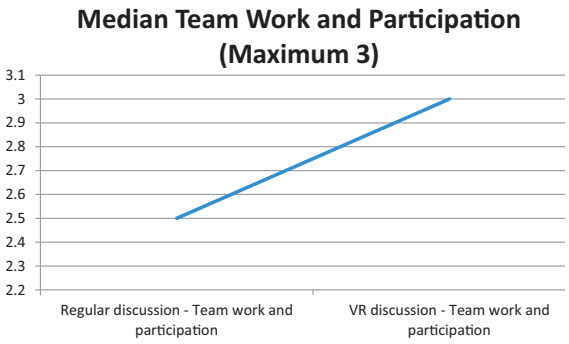


Appendix 4: Student discussion assessment scores – continued

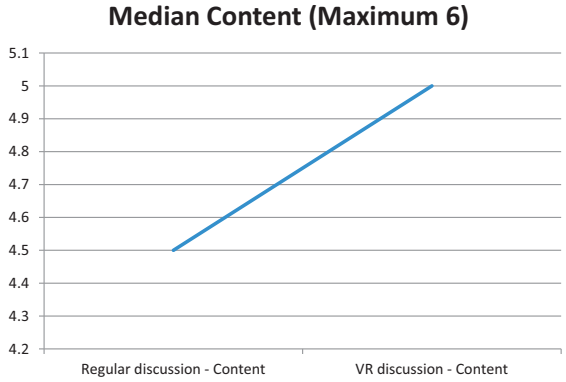
The charts below show the median score of various criteria across all participants.



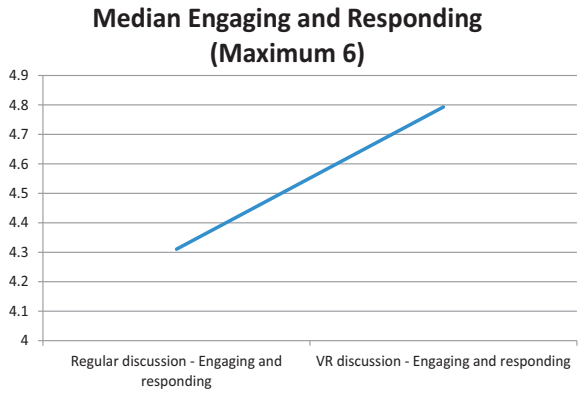
Median scores for overall discussion results



Median scores for engaging and responding results comparison



Median scores for content results comparison



Median scores for content results comparison

Appendix 5: Excerpt from transcript showing interruptions, clarifications and questions

Student C I think so. And I think in my country, in Korea, not usually, but some people drink too much and then try to drive by themselves. Then they make accidents and it's a big trouble it's a really serious trouble.

Student E What about you?

Student F The problem is also the same with Korea.

Student C What should the young woman have done differently?

Student F Don't drink.

Student E The girl with two guys in the car?

Student D No the drunk girl.

A blended learning approach to scaffolding collaboration in the English for Academic Purposes (EAP) classroom

Matthew Stott Curtin English, Curtin University, Western Australia

Initial motivations for conducting the action research

While group projects are a key feature of many university courses, class sizes and crowded syllabuses can make it difficult for teachers to monitor, support and assess effective group work during lessons. Looking for a way to observe learners working together outside of the classroom rather than within the classroom, I turned to Trello, a cloud-based project management tool which not only allows users to set deadlines, delegate tasks, exchange comments and share files but also, importantly, timestamps and records this activity. I wanted to see if an online tool such as Trello could make it easier for me to (a) assess individual contributions to a group project more transparently, and (b) provide students with a scaffold for collaborating with each other outside of class time (defined as before 8 a.m. and after 2 p.m.).

Theoretical background

In considering how to approach my action research (AR) project, I realised that in order to observe students collaborating, I needed a working definition of 'collaboration' – something more robust than merely 'students working together'. Drawing on collaborative learning theory (Laal 2013, Lin 2015), five key elements of collaboration can be identified – see Table 1.

Table 1: Key elements of collaboration

Positive interdependence	Each group member must believe (i) that the task can only be successfully completed through the combined efforts of all members, and (ii) that the final product will be so much the better due to the combined efforts of the group.
Promotive interaction	This can take a variety of forms: explaining, encouraging, problem-solving, giving feedback, and gathering and sharing knowledge.
Individual accountability	Each group member must have a feeling of personal ownership of their role in helping the group achieve its goals.
Development of social skills	These include conflict resolution, decision-making, leadership, building trust and communication.
Group self-evaluating	After an initial goal-setting stage, this involves cycles of assessment and reflection in order to identify what changes are needed to help the group work more effectively.

Assuming that an instance of students working together can be described as 'collaborative' to the extent that the group work satisfies the above conditions, I decided to incorporate them into the design of my questionnaires.

Context and participants

Curtin English offers a 17-week intensive English Language Bridging (ELB) program, as elsewhere? divided into a 7-week and a 10-week block (Blocks 1 and 2, respectively). Students aim to exit the course with the equivalent of a 7.0 or 6.5 IELTS score, depending on what their mainstream university course requires.

My AR was carried out over two cycles. The first involved a Block 1 ELB class across two-and-a-half weeks of the course (April–May). There were 18 students in this class, on pathways to a range of disciplines (some requiring higher exit scores than others), and hailing from China, Iran, India, Vietnam, Malaysia, Indonesia and Korea. The second cycle involved a Block 2 class of 16 students across seven weeks of the course (May–July). These students, most of whom were on a pathway to health science courses and therefore had higher exit requirements, came from China, Malaysia, Indonesia, Korea, Japan, Thailand, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, India and Russia. It should be noted that three students from the first cycle also participated in the second cycle.

Research questions (RQs)

My AR project sought to answer the following research questions (RQs):

1. How can the use of an online tool contribute to group project work?
2. What are the students' perceptions of the effectiveness of the online tool for collaboration on a group project?

The research process

Cycle 1

Since the Block 1 syllabus does not include any formal group assessments, I assigned students to groups to prepare a poster presentation based on one of the possible topics they might be called on to discuss (such as sustainable fashion, the relationship between science and commerce, and alternative sources of energy) in a speaking assessment held in the final week of the block. I then gave a brief demonstration of how group members could collaborate via Trello while not in the classroom or in each other's company. Students were then instructed to install the Trello app on their phones, register, set up a group 'board' and invite me as a member (in order for me to collate and analyse their board activities). Students were also provided with links to instructional videos on the Trello website. It should be emphasised here that the poster presentation task was not assessed, nor was the use of Trello compulsory.

Cycle 2

The second cycle involved a formal speaking assessment in the form of a group presentation. As with the poster presentation, the introduction of Trello was integrated with the run-down of the assessment requirements – except in this cycle I devoted more time in the launch lesson to

demonstrating the tool and its functions, nominating students to perform simple tasks such as creating to-do lists, creating cards, commenting and setting deadlines. A second difference was externally imposed: though I had always intended to use Trello, the curriculum designers had decided to incorporate the tool more formally into the assessment; students were informed that their use of Trello would be taken as evidence of how well they had participated as group members.

Data collection

To answer RQ1, I employed Trello's activity log, which records and timestamps all activities associated with a Trello board. I used this log to measure raw usage of the online tool (for each day of the cycle, counting the number of times each student performed an activity on Trello), and usage of the tool outside of class (counting the number of times a student engaged with Trello after 2 p.m., the time that classes finish for the day). I also employed coding to focus on activities that represented two kinds of group interaction: 'chatter' (the exchange of comments) and 'resource sharing' (the uploading of attachments including pdfs and ppts).

To address RQ2, I conducted two online questionnaires using Google Forms, at the beginning and at the end of the cycle (these are included in Appendix 1). I also interviewed each student by email a few days before the end of the cycle (see Appendix 2 for the email interview form).

The first questionnaire began by asking students about their prior experience of online collaboration, including whether they had worked on a group project previously, whether this had involved the use of an online tool, and if so, which tool they had used. These questions were followed by a series of Likert-style questions on their attitudes towards online collaboration, themed according to the five aforementioned elements of collaborative learning (see Table 1). Some of these questions were accompanied by free-text open questions for students to explain their responses.

The second questionnaire contained mostly the same questions as the first for the purpose of comparison, but this time students were also asked to reflect on the outcome of their group project, and to give information about other modes of communication (including face-to-face) that they had used when working in their groups.

The email interview form was designed to give me an insight, while the group project was still running, into participants' experience of working with their fellow group members and the role played by the online tool. It asked open questions on the themes of positive interdependence, promotive interaction, individual accountability and social skills (namely leadership, trust and decision-making); it also sought to discover whether Trello was helpful in each of these areas.

Findings

In relation to RQ1, the data for the first cycle shows that there was highly disparate usage of Trello across the five groups. Three of the five groups had low levels of engagement, together accounting for only 19% of all Trello activity. The remaining two groups used Trello far more frequently,

accounting for 34% and 47% of total activity respectively. The highest levels of engagement for all groups were on the day of the launch, when students were given some time in class to set up their own accounts and create their own groups on Trello. Regarding the use of Trello outside of class time, I found a similarly stark disparity between the two more active and the three less active groups. For the more active groups, almost 75% of their Trello activities occurred out of class, whereas the opposite was true for the less active groups, with just over 75% of their Trello activities occurring during class. Some of the responses to the email interviews suggest that students in the less active groups lacked confidence in their ability to use Trello (all comments from students are unedited to maintain authenticity):

> *'We are not familiar with using the app.'*
>
> *'I don't think our group has used Trello properly.'*
>
> *'Sometimes we are not really familiar with [Trello's] functions.'*

Finally, across all groups, only a quarter of Trello activities involved interaction: 10% 'chatter' and 15% 'resource sharing'. Again, the two most active groups were also the most interactive, at least on Trello, suggesting that students who were more willing to use the tool in any capacity were perhaps also more open to use it for collaboration. As one member of the most active group remarked, '[after viewing the Trello instructional video,] group members understood how to use Trello to share ideas'.

In the second cycle I found the usage of Trello to be more evenly spread among the four participating groups, ranging from 19% to 34% of all activity. Again, the highest levels of engagement were on the first day of the cycle, but remained consistently high across the six weeks of the cycle, aside from lulls in the second and fifth weeks. Moreover, compared with the participants in Cycle 1, all four groups in this cycle made greater use of Trello outside of class. For the two more active groups of the four, almost 80% of their Trello usage occurred outside of class time, whereas this was true for just over half of all Trello activity by the two less active groups. Cycle 2 participants also used Trello more interactively than subjects in the first cycle: more than a third of all Trello activity across all groups in this cycle involved 'chatter' or 'resource sharing', and for the group with the highest usage of Trello, more than 50% of this involved interaction. The results of the second cycle indicate a greater overall level of confidence among students in the use of Trello as a tool for collaboration. Unlike in Cycle 1, respondents to the email interviews in Cycle 2 did not say that they found Trello difficult to use; rather, they commented on what they found the tool more useful (planning and division of labour) and less useful for (communication).

Data collected (from the questionnaire distributed at the beginning of the cycle) in relation to RQ2 shows that while clear majorities in both cycles had completed group projects previously, only a third of Cycle 1 participants had done so using an online tool, compared with over 60% of Cycle 2 students. As mentioned above, respondents were also asked questions based on five dimensions of collaborative learning. Responses to the end-of-cycle questionnaire relating to positive interdependence show that a majority of students in both cycles (55% in Cycle 1; 58% in Cycle 2) agreed that using an online tool to work collaboratively on a project produces better outcomes than working individually. Regarding indicators of promotive interaction, a majority of students in Cycle 1 agreed that using an online tool helped them explain (56%), encourage (56%), challenge (67%), give feedback (61%), and gather and share knowledge (67%), but students were lukewarm to negative on its usefulness for problem-solving (44%) or helping (50%). Most Cycle 2 students

(64%) agreed only that an online tool was useful for gathering and sharing knowledge. On the development of social skills, most students in Cycle 1 agreed that using the tool helped them to develop skills such as leadership (72%), building trust (67%), making decisions (83%), communication (72%) and resolving conflict (67%). They had initially (that is, in the pre-cycle questionnaire) doubted that their leadership skills would improve. Most Cycle 2 students only reported improvements in their decision-making skills (57%).

The fourth and fifth aspects of collaboration explored in the questionnaires were individual accountability and group self-reflection. Here, most students in both cycles (78% in both Cycle 1 and Cycle 2) agreed that Trello helped them take personal responsibility for doing their fair share, citing the tool's capacity to enable them to allocate tasks and set deadlines. A majority in both cycles also agreed that the tool made it easier for the group to set goals (78% in Cycle 1 and 71% in Cycle 2), track progress (61% in Cycle 1 and 71% in Cycle 2) and reflect on what could have been done differently (72% in Cycle 1 and 57% in Cycle 2).

An additional section was included in the second questionnaire asking students about their experience of Trello in comparison to other modes of communication. Only around a third of students in both cycles (33% in Cycle 1 and 28% in Cycle 2) listed Trello among the most useful collaboration tools. The most popular by far was 'face-to-face' (78% in Cycle 1 and 100% in Cycle 2), with the messenger applications WeChat (55.6% in Cycle 1) and WhatsApp (71% in Cycle 2) also favoured by a majority of students. Students were asked to report how much time they had spent collaborating using different modes of communication in the last seven days of the cycle. Eighty-nine percent of Cycle 1 respondents spent four or more hours within that period on face-to-face collaboration, while only 11% spent four or more hours doing group work via Trello. A greater percentage of Cycle 2 respondents, 28%, spent four or more hours of the 7-day period collaborating via Trello, but 86% of respondents spent four hours or more of the week working together in person.

Students were also asked to evaluate my role in facilitating their use of Trello. In Cycle 1, only half of the respondents found the level of guidance I had provided helpful; others expressed a need for further training and assistance, particularly in the middle of the project. By contrast, 60% of Cycle 2 students were satisfied with the amount of teacher assistance, though some wanted me to take a more active role in the Trello board and give feedback.

Finally, students were asked to sum up their overall feelings about the effectiveness of using an online tool to work on a group task. Students in both cycles indicated a belief that while Trello might be useful for planning, it is less useful as a communication tool or for dealing with problems in depth (face-to-face interaction was preferred here). Significantly, a majority of Cycle 2 students indicated that they would not have used Trello at all, had it not been a compulsory part of the assessment.

Discussion

Regarding RQ1, students in Cycle 2 showed higher levels of engagement with Trello than their Cycle 1 counterparts, and made greater use of its interactive functions (commenting and resource-sharing). While students in the second cycle received a more extensive introduction to the tool and thus a greater appreciation of how it could be used to plan a project, making the use of Trello a

mandatory element of the group assessment in the second cycle was most probably the key motivator. As one Cycle 2 participant remarked in the email interview:

> *'We didn't discuss anything in Trello. We created our own group in WhatsApp and communicated there, then just posted something in Trello as it was compulsory.'*

A third factor may have been greater group cohesion as a result of the fact that most of the participants in the second cycle were on pathways to similar courses; this shared identity may have inspired a more positive and experimental approach to the online tool.

In relation to RQ2, students generally agreed about the benefits of using an online tool for collaboration on a project, yet favoured face-to-face collaboration significantly over collaboration via Trello. One way to account for this contradiction might be to suggest that when singing the praises of online collaboration, participants may simply have been considering the virtues of collaboration itself, ignoring the online aspect altogether. The strong preference for face-to-face collaboration, or collaboration via familiar applications such as WhatsApp and WeChat, is likely due to the educational context; students studying together for 20 hours a week, and who have ample opportunities outside of class time to meet on campus, may see a tool like Trello as an artificial and inconvenient means of communication. Indeed, this very observation was made by a respondent in Cycle 1:

> *'I think it's good for part-time or online students, [but] because we are full-time students and we met each other every single day, it was easy for us to talk face-to-face.'*

Reflections

I set out to learn what contribution an online tool might make to group project work, but what I discovered was the extent to which Trello was *not* used and did *not* capture the various means by which groups actually collaborated. One implication of this finding for the assessment of group work in an intensive EAP context is that asking students to provide a portfolio of evidence of collaboration – WhatsApp screenshots, recordings of meetings, and so on – might paint a more accurate picture than something like a Trello board alone. A second implication is that where a project management application is to be used to scaffold group project work beyond the classroom, the emphasis should be on planning, resource sharing and the marking of milestones, rather than communication. Finally, the difficulties my students had with Trello suggest that when introducing new technology into the classroom, a thorough orientation phase is not sufficient: ongoing support with the technology (which I failed to provide) is vital.

References

Laal, M (2013) Collaborative learning: elements, *Procedia – Social and Behavioural Sciences* 83, 814–818.

Lin, L (2015) *Investigating Chinese HE EFL Classrooms: Using Collaborative Learning to Enhance Learning*, Berlin: Springer.

Appendix 1: Questionnaires (adapted from Google Forms)

Survey of attitudes towards online collaboration (beginning of cycle)

I'm interested in your attitudes towards the effectiveness of collaborating with others on a project or task using an online tool. Please take a few minutes to answer these questions.

Attitudes towards group work and experience of online collaboration

1. Have you ever worked with others on a group project or task before (in school or in the workplace)?
   Yes *No*

2. What do you think is needed for a group to work together on a project effectively?

3. What qualities (skills, personality) do you think individual students need to be effective group members?

4. Which do you prefer?
   Individual assignments *Group assignments*

5. When working on a group task, which do you prefer?
   Working together *Splitting up the work*

6. What do you think are the main benefits of group work?

7. Have you ever worked with others on a group project or task using an online tool?
   Yes *No*

8. If you answered 'Yes', what online tool did you use?

Attitudes towards the effectiveness of collaborating online (positive interdependence)

1. Working on a task in a group using an online tool will help me achieve my learning goals.
   Strongly disagree *1* *2* *3* *4* *5* *Strongly agree*

2. Working on a task in a group using an online tool will help the group produce a better end result than if we work individually.
   Strongly disagree *1* *2* *3* *4* *5* *Strongly agree*

3. Working on a task in a group using an online tool will help develop positive relationships among the group members.
   Strongly disagree *1* *2* *3* *4* *5* *Strongly agree*

4. I will enjoy using an online tool to work on a group task.
   Strongly disagree *1* *2* *3* *4* *5* *Strongly agree*

Attitudes towards the effectiveness of collaborating online (promotive interaction)

1. Working on a group task using an online tool, rather than face-to-face only, will make it easier for me to interact with others in the following ways:

	Strongly disagree	*Disagree*	*Not sure*	*Agree*	*Strongly agree*
Problem-solving					
Helping					
Explaining					
Encouraging					
Challenging					
Giving feedback					
Gathering and sharing knowledge					

2. Please explain your answer/give examples.

Attitudes towards the effectiveness of collaborating online (development of social skills)

1. Working on a group task using an online tool will help me develop the following social skills:

	Strongly disagree	*Disagree*	*Not sure*	*Agree*	*Strongly agree*
Leadership					
Building trust					
Making decisions					
Communication					
Resolving conflict					

2. Please explain your answer.

3. What other social skills do you think you might develop by working with others online?

Attitudes towards the effectiveness of collaborating online (individual accountability)

Using an online tool to work on a group task will help me take personal responsibility for doing my fair share of the group work.

Strongly disagree *1* *2* *3* *4* *5* *Strongly agree*

Attitudes towards the effectiveness of collaborating online (group self-evaluating)

1. Using an online tool to work on a group task will make it easy for the group to set goals.

Strongly disagree *1* *2* *3* *4* *5* *Strongly agree*

2. Using an online tool to work on a group task will make it easy for the group to check its progress and make necessary changes.

Strongly disagree *1* *2* *3* *4* *5* *Strongly agree*

3. Using an online tool to work on a group task will make it easy for the group, once the task is completed, to consider what could have been done better.

Strongly disagree *1* *2* *3* *4* *5* *Strongly agree*

Final thoughts

Please briefly sum up your overall feelings or expectations about the effectiveness of using an online tool to work on a group task.

Thank you for participating!

Survey of attitudes towards online collaboration (end of cycle)

Now that you have worked in a group on a group presentation using Trello, I'm interested in your attitudes towards the effectiveness of collaborating with others on a project or task using an online tool.

Please take a few minutes to answer these questions. Your feedback will be very helpful in the design of my next research cycle and future group presentation assignments.

Satisfaction with the end result

1. How satisfied were you with your group's final presentation on Monday Week 10?

Very satisfied *Somewhat satisfied* *Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied* *Somewhat dissatisfied* *Very dissatisfied*

2. Please explain your answer.

Attitudes towards the effectiveness of collaborating online (positive interdependence)

1. Working on a task in a group using an online tool helped me achieve my learning goals.

Strongly disagree *1* *2* *3* *4* *5* *Strongly agree*

2. Please explain your answer/give examples.

3. Working on a task in a group using an online tool helped the group produce a better end result than if we had worked individually.

Strongly disagree *1* *2* *3* *4* *5* *Strongly agree*

4. Please explain your answer/give examples.

5. Working on a task in a group using an online tool helped develop positive relationships among the group members.

Strongly disagree *1* *2* *3* *4* *5* *Strongly agree*

6. Please explain your answer/give examples.

7. I enjoyed using an online tool to work on a group task.

Strongly disagree *1* *2* *3* *4* *5* *Strongly agree*

8. Please explain your answer/give examples.

Attitudes towards the effectiveness of collaborating online (promotive interaction)

1. Working on a group task using an online tool, rather than face-to-face only, made it easier for me to interact with others in the following ways:

	Strongly disagree	*Disagree*	*Not sure*	*Agree*	*Strongly agree*
Problem-solving					
Helping					
Explaining					
Encouraging					
Challenging					
Giving feedback					
Gathering and sharing knowledge					

2. Please explain your answer/give examples.

Attitudes towards the effectiveness of collaborating online (development of social skills)

1 . Working on a group task using an online tool helped me develop the following social skills:

	Strongly disagree	*Disagree*	*Not sure*	*Agree*	*Strongly agree*
Leadership					
Building trust					
Making decisions					
Communication					
Resolving conflict					

2. Please explain your answer/give examples.

3. What other social skills do you think you developed by working with others online?

Attitudes towards the effectiveness of collaborating online (individual accountability)

1. Using an online tool to work on a group task helped me take personal responsibility for doing my fair share of the group work.

Strongly disagree *1* *2* *3* *4* *5* *Strongly agree*

2. Please explain your answer/give examples.

Attitudes towards the effectiveness of collaborating online (group self-evaluating)

1. Using an online tool to work on a group task made it easy for the group to set goals.

   Strongly disagree *1* *2* *3* *4* *5* *Strongly agree*

2. Please explain your answer/give examples.

3. Using an online tool to work on a group task made it easy for the group to check its progress and make necessary changes.

   Strongly disagree *1* *2* *3* *4* *5* *Strongly agree*

4. Please explain your answer/give examples.

5. Using an online tool to work on a group task made it easy for the group, once the task was completed, to consider what could have been done better.

   Strongly disagree *1* *2* *3* *4* *5* *Strongly agree*

6. Please explain your answer/give examples.

Overall feelings about using an online tool for collaborations

Please briefly sum up your overall feelings about the effectiveness (or usefulness) of using an online tool to work on a group task.

Use of Trello

1. In the 7 days leading up to the presentation on Monday (Tuesday Week 9–Monday Week 10), please estimate how much time you spent working with your group on the group presentation using the following modes of communication:

	Less than 1 hour	*1–3 hours*	*4–6 hours*	*7–9 hours*	*More than 9 hours*
Did not use this tool					
Face to face					
Trello					
WhatsApp					
Curtin student email					
Other					

2. Please explain your answer.

3. Which of the following modes of communication did you find the most useful for working with your group on the poster presentation? (More than one answer is possible.)

   Face to face
   Trello
   WhatsApp
   Curtin student email
   Other …

4. Please explain your answer.

5. How helpful were the teacher's instructions on how to use Trello?

Extremely helpful
Very helpful
Moderately helpful
Slightly helpful
Not at all helpful

6. Please explain your answer.

7. What could the teacher have done, or what information did you need, to make it easier for you to use Trello?

8. How likely are you to use Trello in future group assessments in your mainstream course?

Not at all likely *1* *2* *3* *4* *5* *Very likely*

9. Please explain your answer.

10. Please indicate your position on the following statement: 'If Trello had been OPTIONAL for the group presentation, I would NOT have used it.'

Strongly disagree *1* *2* *3* *4* *5* *Strongly agree*

11. Please explain your answer.

Your group's topic

Finally, please indicate which topic your group presented on:

Smartphones and education
Smartphones and health
Smartphone addiction
Social media, relationships and character

Thank you for participating!

Appendix 2: Email interview form

I'm interested in hearing about your experience of **using Trello** to work on your **poster presentation** with your fellow **group** members. Please take some time to write answers to the following questions.

(The length of your answers is up to you, but please give details or explanations where possible. Write your answers beneath each question.)

Positive interdependence

1. Do you feel that you understand clearly what your group is trying to achieve? (Please explain your answer.)

   Yes/No, because . . .

   - Is Trello helping you to understand your group's goals? (Why/why not?)

2. 'The poster presentation project needs the participation of all group members in order to be successful.' Do you agree or disagree with this? (Explain.)
   - Has Trello made it easy to see this? (Why/why not?)

3. Do you feel that you are developing a closer relationship with your group members? (Explain.)
   - Is Trello helping with this? (Why/why not?)

4. Is each person working on a different part of the project? What part(s) are you working on?
   - Has Trello made it easy to see and decide which member is doing which part of the project? (Why/why not?)

Promotive interaction

1. Do you feel free to share your ideas about the poster presentation project with the group? (Explain.)
   - Has Trello made it easy for you to share your ideas with the group? (Why/why not?)

2. Do you think you are expressing your ideas clearly to other members of the group? (Explain.)
   - Has Trello made it easy for you to express your ideas clearly? (Why/why not?)

Individual accountability

1. Do you trust other members of your group to complete their share of the project on time? (Explain.)
   - To what extent has Trello helped the group to ensure each person is doing their agreed share of the work? (Why/why not?)

2. Do you think everyone in your group clearly understands what is expected of you? (Explain.)
   - Has Trello made it easy to see this? (Why/why not?)

Appendix 2: Email interview form – continued

Social skills

1. Have you taken a leadership role in this project, or any part of it? (Explain.)
   - Has Trello helped you to do this? (Why/why not?)
2. Do you feel that you are able to trust the other members of the group, and that they can trust you? (Explain.)
   - Has Trello helped with this? (Why/why not?)
3. What have been some of the more difficult decisions the group has faced? (Explain.)
   - Has Trello helped you to make these decisions? (Why/why not?)
4. Have there been any communication problems in the group while working together on the project? (Explain.)
   - Has Trello helped you to resolve these communication problems? (Why/why not?)
5. How has the group dealt with situations when members have disagreed or have had differences of opinion? (Explain.)
   - Has Trello helped you to resolve these conflicts? (Why/why not?)

Thank you so much for your participation. I'm looking forward to seeing your poster!

Making connections: Student investigations of their future disciplines within a direct entry EAP course

Meredith MacAulay UNSW Global, Sydney
Tania Bencic UNSW Global, Sydney

Introduction

Direct entry EAP programs (DEPs), an alternative to English proficiency exams, not only aim to improve students' linguistic skills but also to prepare them for their future study contexts. While some DEPs are discipline-specific, many in Australia can be classified as English for General Academic Purposes courses (EGAP), approaching academic literacy from a multidisciplinary perspective. In such courses, students are taught language, skills and knowledge which are assumed to be transferable across different disciplinary contexts and courses, and this is true of the University English Entry Course (UEEC), the high-stakes course we teach at UNSW Global, Sydney.

One of the challenges of teaching the UEEC course is addressing the individual content needs of students within a class comprised of individuals with diverse future majors. Our action research (AR) focused on the issue of how students can make connections with their future faculties within our EGAP course.

Context and participants

Our research was conducted at UNSW Global with an intake for the UEEC. Students enrolled in this course have conditional offers from the University of New South Wales (UNSW) and, on successful completion of the course, they commence undergraduate or postgraduate study in a variety of disciplines. Students may complete 20, 15 or 10 weeks of the UEEC course depending on their English proficiency scores at the time of entry, but it is the 10-week UEEC course (UEEC 10) which is recognised for direct entry to degree courses at UNSW.

As an EGAP course, the UEEC curriculum focuses on generic skills that may be applied across the various future faculties of our students. These include academic reading and listening strategies, research skills, academic writing, and oral communication skills such as discussion and presentation. Best practice in DEP courses recommends that students are engaged with the language and learning activities of their proposed degree programs (English Australia 2017) and the UEEC course does this at a broad level, with multidisciplinary themes and authentic material from various faculties at UNSW. In the high-stakes UEEC 10 course, students also have one major assessment in which they explore their future fields of study: a research-based presentation and annotated bibliography.

A total of 36 participants took part in our research, drawn from two classes that we taught twice a week for 15 weeks. Students were pursuing a variety of majors including Business, Engineering, Law, Art and Design and Science, primarily at the postgraduate level. Students came from China (31), Taiwan (2), Vietnam (2) and Saudi Arabia (1). The approximate level of English proficiency at the beginning of the research was B2 on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR, Council of Europe 2001).

Research focus

Research carried out on EGAP graduates indicates that they transferred some skills and strategies to their university courses including presentation skills, discussion strategies, writing structures and knowledge of academic conventions such as referencing and paraphrasing (Dooey 2010, MacAulay 2016). However, Hyland (2002) questions whether EGAP courses adequately prepare students for the specific conventions and demands of their discourse communities. Some graduates of EGAP courses may not perceive the opportunity to transfer the generic skills they had learned, failing to see their relevance or similarity to field-specific tasks (Counsell 2011, Ong 2014). EGAP graduates, including ones from our institute, have also reported lacking the content language to participate fully in discussions, particularly at the beginning of their tertiary courses (Dooey 2010).

In our experience of teaching the UEEC course, we have also noticed that many UEEC students lack basic knowledge of the content, issues, language and expectations of their intended majors at UNSW. As a result, they struggle to choose topics and issues to research for their field-related seminar presentations in UEEC 10. In addition, some students do not perceive the relationship between the UEEC course and their future disciplines, viewing it as a 'gate' rather than part of their academic pathway. This may lead to lack of motivation.

With these issues in mind, we aimed to explore ways for students to make greater and earlier connections with their future disciplines in the UEEC course. We also hoped to help students to recognise the relevance between their current course and future degree program. Our research questions (RQs) were as follows:

1. How can UEEC students make greater connections with their future university disciplines?
2. What effects will these connections have on students?

Research design

In order to answer our RQs, we positioned the students as researchers of their future disciplines, drawing on the approach of ethnography. Ethnography encourages researchers to 'immerse themselves' into the activities of the group which they wish to understand, without preformed ideas or theories (Starfield 2010). This design gave students the autonomy to make their own decisions about the information they need or want to access about their majors, developing their research and critical thinking skills in the process. Drawing on research on learning transfer, we also incorporated bridging strategies into our design, encouraging our students to anticipate applications of knowledge into their future courses (James 2006, MacAulay 2016).

In response to a series of tasks which we developed, students investigated their future fields of studies at UNSW, using authentic course information and resources, and interacting with students and staff. They were asked to formulate questions, record and reflect on their findings, and discuss them with their classmates. Students then presented their synthesised findings and evaluated how they might use this information as they continued their studies. Reflection was an important component of the research design and students were asked to write in learning journals.
We continued the research for two cycles.

Cycle 1

Cycle 1 was conducted during UEEC 15, a 5-week course with formative assessment only. The intervention took place during the discussion and presentation components of the course and consisted of nine 2-hour lessons, which we created, based on the same aims as the original course. In this cycle, participants from our two classes were mixed and grouped according to their faculty specialisations, working collaboratively on activities (see Table 1).

Table 1: Faculty groups - Cycle 1

Group A	*Students*	*Group B*	*Students*
Media and Law	3	Electrical Engineering and Biochemistry	3
Commerce	4	Business and Commerce	4
Environmental Engineering and Architecture	4	Professional Accounting	3
Commerce	3	Civil Engineering, Materials Technology, Project Management	3
Art & Design (Graphic and Experience)	4	Information Technology	5

We assigned five investigations to participants which they completed outside of class, individually or in groups. Tasks related to each investigation were explained and scaffolded in the discussion class, and the findings of the investigations formed the basis of that week's discussion (see Appendix 1 for a sample worksheet). Table 2 shows the various investigations students carried out during Cycle 1.

Table 2: Overview of student investigations – Cycle 1

	Task	*Source*
Investigation 1 (Week 1)	Overview of faculty and course requirements and career pathways	UNSW faculty website
Investigation 2 (Week 2)	Identification and analysis of course tasks and assessments	A course outline
Investigation 3 (Weeks 2–4)	Interview to identify future course demands, course challenges, strategies and links to UEEC	Former UEEC student
Investigation 4 (Week 4)	Identification and analysis of a field-related issue	Media articles + UNSW website/links
Investigation 5 (Weeks 2–4)	Photo capture of a 'student space'	UNSW campus

In the presentation lessons, students learned strategies to present the information they had acquired through the investigations, with special attention to group collaboration and presentation. However, we also introduced the concept of a poster presentation which had not been done before at UNSW Global.

We chose this mode as it is an authentic and concise way for students to present the findings from their investigations. Students were introduced to the purpose of posters in an academic context and given tips on how to produce and present a poster. Authentic examples from Australian universities were analysed including the UNSW Business and Engineering faculties, which highlighted the relevance of this task.

The group presentations were given in class in the final week of the cycle. The poster session was held as an event for other UEEC students and staff, with participants taking turns explaining and answering questions about their group's posters.

Cycle 2

Cycle 2 took place over 10 weeks in the assessed part of the course, UEEC 10. Twenty-two students continued with the research. Because of the high stakes involved, we could not change any of the content of the course. For this reason, the research in this cycle focused primarily on the existing seminar presentation assessment as it linked to students' field of study. We also asked participants to complete at least two investigations independently from a list, shown in Table 3.

Table 3: List of investigation choices – Cycle 2

A. UEEC Graduate Talks
B. UNSW Faculty Orientations
C. Making Connections Videos
D. Lecture Attendance at UNSW
E. Focus on Career Pathways and Job Qualifications
F. Create Your Own Investigation

This list of investigations was intended to build on students' knowledge from Cycle 1 and give them more scope to personalise their own research about their field. As in Cycle 1, we were interested in what connections students were making with their future faculties, and how this impacted them. However, we also aimed to determine whether Cycle 1 had prepared UEEC students for this part of the course, specifically for the research for their presentations. Students were asked to reflect on their research and investigations in their online journals fortnightly.

Data collection

Data collection consisted of several approaches to achieve triangulation. Before and after each AR cycle, students completed an online survey using SurveyMonkey about their level of knowledge and confidence in their future study fields as well as feedback on the investigations. This gave us quantitative data.

Qualitative data was obtained through entries in an online reflective learning journal (see Appendix 2), already a requirement of students in UEEC 15, but not in UEEC 10. Focus groups comprised of representatives from different faculties were held following each cycle (see Appendix 3). The posters and presentations were analysed at the end of the first cycle to note the awareness of field-specific information and vocabulary (see Appendix 4 for an example poster). We also kept our own journals.

After each cycle, analysis was undertaken on the qualitative data, using inductive coding as recommended by Burns (2010) to identify themes. We also compared the pre- and post-intervention surveys to measure if levels of confidence and knowledge had changed.

Findings

In looking at the impacts of the Cycle 1 project, four main themes emerged: increased knowledge, motivation and confidence, skills development, and connections with peers. All comments from students are unedited to maintain authenticity.

Through the investigations, students reported acquiring new knowledge about their course structure, required tasks and assignments, and potential career pathways, and valued this knowledge. One student noted that: 'I know how the skills I learn from UEEC will be applied in UNSW courses. This would push me study harder to prepare well for the UNSW courses.'

Analysing the posters, presentations and journals revealed new knowledge of field-specific issues and the use of related vocabulary. The interviews of the former UEEC students (Investigation 3) were highlighted as particularly relevant. Participants said that this experience had given them first-hand insight and advice on skills and attributes to help them succeed at university. According to one student, 'this investigation helped me to get real knowledge from real experience'.

Linked to new knowledge and insight, particularly from the alumni interviews, students cited being motivated to improve their skills and to make changes in their study habits in order to succeed in the UEEC course and at university. Newly gained confidence and a feeling of accomplishment and

pride were both expressed, particularly after the presentations. One student noted: 'I think my poster speech is very successful, because I tried my best to explain our major and campus to students and teachers. Many students heard my explanation and got more understanding of the design major, which made me very proud.'

The findings of the survey corresponded to those of the journals and focus groups. When comparing the pre- and post-Cycle 1 responses, students reported higher perceptions of knowledge of their future courses, related language and field-related issues, as well as higher levels of confidence when presenting and discussing their majors. The increase was more than double for many of these statements (Table 4).

Table 4: Survey responses

Survey question	*Pre Cycle 1 Strongly Agree/ Agree*	*Post Cycle 1* Strongly Agree/ Agree
'I know the types of courses that I have to study for my degree at UNSW.'	70.5%	100%
'I feel confident using academic language related to my major.'	32%	86%
'I am familiar with some current issues and topics in my field.'	64.7%	76%
'I am confident giving presentations about my field.'	38%	90%
'I am confident leading discussions about topics and issues from my field.'	38%	83%
'I am confident using English with students I do not know.'	45%	86%

Skills development was mentioned in both the qualitative and quantitative data. In both the focus groups and journals, students said that they had improved strategies for collaboration. Several noted that group work was a challenge but would be a 'key to success' at university. Figure 1 shows that over 50% of students reported improving four skills: critical thinking, research, presentation and discussion.

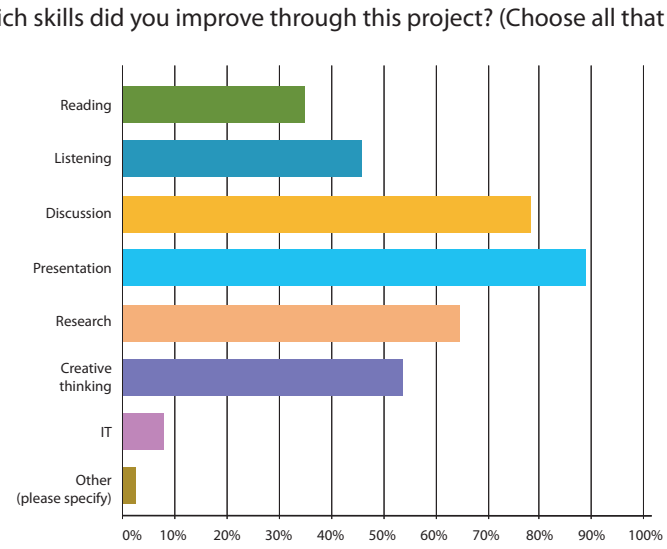


Figure 1: Skills learned during the course (Survey post Cycle 1)

Finally, participants cited valuing the connections they had made with their peers. They found it enjoyable and useful to work in faculty groups and learn from each other. They also enjoyed meeting students of their future faculties during the poster presentation 'gallery event', viewing these students as a 'network' or possible future support group. One student noted: 'I'm very happy to learn my professional courses with other students later. I like my major and I find that my future classmates are very friendly.' The survey following Cycle 1 revealed that 100% of the participants 'strongly agreed' or 'agreed' that they found the project useful in learning about their future fields of study.

The results of Cycle 2 were generally consistent with those of Cycle 1. With only a few exceptions, participants found the investigations they completed to be valuable, helping them to build on knowledge of their disciplines and motivating them. For example, many noted that information gained from the UEEC graduate talks had motivated them to target particular skills, including reading, critical thinking, time management and oral communication. Others gained content knowledge, such as the IT student determined to learn more about the Python programming language after attending a UNSW lecture. Both the career pathways and faculty orientation sessions were deemed useful to inform future course selection.

According to the post-Cycle 2 survey, the most popular investigations were the graduate talks and faculty orientations. This is perhaps because these were the easiest to access. However, as in Cycle 1, the reflections revealed that students particularly valued contact with peers from their future discourse communities.

A very satisfying finding from Cycle 2 was that students had transferred skills and knowledge from the UEEC 15 discussion and presentation lessons to the UEEC 10 seminar presentation research project. Because of the UEEC 15 project, they felt fairly confident to do more in-depth research with academic databases, and several had chosen their topics based on issues explored in their investigations. The experience of doing presentations had also given them confidence. One student stated: 'I appreciate my UEEC 15 presentation, the skills and the ability to find resources which helped me finish my PPT and presentation [in UEEC 10]. As a consequence, the semester presentation had a wonderful result.'

Though the reflective learning journals served as a means of data collection, students also viewed them as an important learning tool. Asked whether it was useful to write in the reflective learning journals, 100% of the participants responded 'yes'. One student wrote: 'This give me a chance to record my ideas and reflection which enhance memories for me.' Research has shown that metacognition not only consolidates learning but also promotes learning transfer (Lightner, Benander and Kramer 2008), which is one of the main goals of an EAP course. This suggests that more emphasis on reflection in the UEEC 10 course would be beneficial for students.

Despite the positive results from this cycle, it is notable that of the 22 students who had signed up for Cycle 2, only 15 completed the final survey and not all participants wrote each week in their journals. This is reportedly due to the pressure from the high stakes of the UEEC 10 course. Thus, as suggested by students, some of these investigations, such as live lectures representing different faculties, could be integrated into the course.

Conclusions and reflections

The findings suggested that our AR was successful in helping UEEC students to make connections with their future disciplines and had a number of beneficial impacts on students.

In response to RQ1, we found that students can connect to their fields in a number of ways, and positioning students as researchers was a meaningful way for students to do this. According to the results, the investigations in Cycle 1 were well chosen and varied, and gave the students a good overall introduction to their disciplines and requirements at UNSW. Moreover, these tasks were achievable. With scaffolding and guidance, we found that students at the UEEC 15 level could manage this research and were very engaged in the process. Though Cycle 2 investigations were found to be useful, time constraints and stress reduced students' participation.

We also found that students were very motivated by connecting with their peers, both those in the UEEC course and those at UNSW. They also expressed interest in speaking to faculty members. Perhaps even more structured orientation activities involving these groups could be integrated into the UEEC course so that all students have access (see English Australia 2017:10).

In response to RQ2, helping students to make greater and earlier connections had a number of beneficial effects including increased knowledge of their disciplines, skills development, peer connections and motivation. According to Woodrow (2013:129), 'perceived relevance is a motivating force' in the case of pre-sessional EAP students, and this seemed true in our AR as well. The project and related activities offered students opportunities to engage in typical university learning activities such as information finding and analysis, discussion and presentation. One of the key benefits derived from doing so is that students were able to identify the relevance of the knowledge or skill, and as a result, they became more motivated to develop these skills during the rest of the UEEC course and to anticipate their usefulness for university study. As teachers, being aware of opportunities to use bridging strategies in class can also help students to perceive this relevance.

Overall, undertaking this AR was a positive experience. As we had both taught the UEEC course numerous times, it was enjoyable and rewarding to experiment with a new design and material that we created for our students. The research process we underwent ourselves to design and scaffold the tasks made us more aware of our students' needs and learning goals, and also made us more empathetic to the challenges they face as international students. We were also made aware of the potential that our students have as learners, and their willingness and interest in exploring their future fields of study. Finally, the AR was valuable in informing the curriculum of our program. Due to the positive results, we were both invited to redevelop the discussion and presentation components of the UEEC 15 course to match the teaching content and delivery from our research project. Up to the time of writing this article, this redeveloped course has been run twice.

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Appendix 1: Example of worksheet used in the discussion course – Cycle 1

Investigation 2: 'What assessments and tasks will I need to do?'

Instructions: Use your course outline to answer the questions. Discuss them with your group. Compare your outlines.

I. Overview

1. What's the name of the course?
2. Who teaches your course?
3. When does the course meet?
4. What is the aim of the course?
5. Do you have: lectures/tutorials/labs?
6. What materials you need for the course? Where can you access these materials?
7. What should you do if you have a question?
8. Will MOODLE be used in this course? How?

II. Tasks and Assessment

- What types of activities or tasks will you do in class? E.g. analyse case studies
- What can you do to prepare for lectures or tutorials?
- How are you assessed in this course?
- How much is each assessment worth? E.g. 10%
- Are assignments done individually or in a group?
- Are you required to assess your classmates?

III. Reflection

1. What did you find surprising about this course outline?
2. Which tasks or assignments are similar to what you have done in UEEC?
3. Which skills can you apply from UEEC?
4. What would be easy for you? What would be challenging? Why?
5. Do you have any questions about this course outline?

Appendix 2: Reflective learning journal prompt Week 3 – Cycle 1

Investigation 3: 'Tasks, assignments, challenges and strategies' – student interview

- What did you find most interesting/surprising from talking to a former UEEC student?
- What was the main advice given to you by the student?
- In light of the information given to you by the student, do you plan to do anything differently in UEEC/outside of class? What?
- Were there any challenges in communicating with the student?
- How useful was this investigation in learning about your field of study?

Appendix 3: Focus group questions – Cycle 2

1. Which investigation did you find most useful and why?
2. Which investigation did you want to do but couldn't and why?
3. Is there anything you wanted to know about that is related to your field of study but couldn't find out?
4. Which specific skills e.g. presentation, discussion, research, do you feel you have improved the most due to your participation in these investigations?
5. Have you enjoyed participating in the investigations and why?
6. Were the investigations useful for making greater connections with your future field of study?
7. Do you think it is a good idea to implement the discussion, presentation and poster presentation segments of the project into our future UEEC 15 course? Why?

Appendix 4: Example of a group poster

UNSW Business School

Master of Commerce (Extension)

Karen, Marsha, Vicky

UNSW institute of language school

Overview of the course

1. The reasons for our choice:

- Knowledge and solution in business field
- Wide range of specialisations: 14
- Double specialisation
- Professional recognition

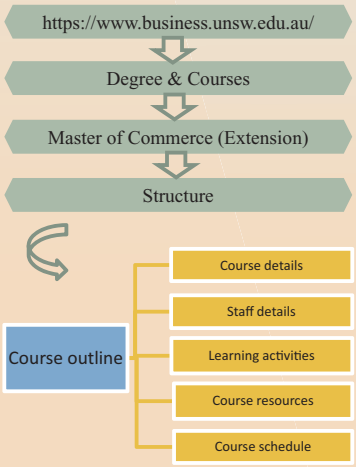
2. Job and career prospects

- Management accountant
- Management and organisation analyst
- Risk analyst

UNSW Business School, College Rd, Kensington NSW

Methodology

1. UNSW Business faculty website



2. UNSW student interview

What do you think is the **most important aspect** of UEEC class?

Well, I think **reading** and **writing** are most useful.

What are the **differences** between UEEC and the Commerce courses ?

Actually, although the writing structure is useful, the assignments are much longer -1500 words or more. We also have to do a lot of research and use referencing.

Issues in Commerce

- The causes and cost of financial distress
- The relationship interest rates, foreign currency and exchange rates
- Issues of inflation
- Investment and portfolio selection
- Analysis of business data

Recommendations

1. Search the information from websites before starting
2. Pay more attention to reading and writing practice in UEEC
3. Communicate and exchange ideas with your group members
4. Time management
5. Prepare lessons adequately before classes

Overall recommendations part 2, 4, 5 also have been recommended from the interviewee.

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1. *Interviewee: Edward L Leong, a former student in UEEC*
2. *https://www.business.unsw.edu.au/degrees-courses/postgraduate/masters/commerce-extension#Structure*

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