

6 Head in the clouds – innovating classroom practice using online file sharing for collaboration and feedback

Laura Richards¹

Abstract

Navigating the shift towards blended learning in Higher Education (HE) provides opportunities for enhancing language teaching in the classroom. This paper will present a Technology-Enhanced Learning (TEL) -based project which aims to create a more collaborative and interactive classroom using open access file sharing services which focuses on developing collaborative writing practices and enhancing feedback loops. Using a Synchronous Computer-Mediated Communication (SCMC) approach to co-creating texts, students participated in a series of related in-class group writing tasks where feedback was recorded digitally. Both a survey and focus group were used to assess students' experience and use of the texts and feedback created. Results revealed a positive response to the use of SCMC for collaborative writing stemming from easier text manipulation and greater discussion of both textual and linguistic features, which is crucial to collaborative writing.

Keywords: technology-enhanced learning, feedback, collaborative writing, EAP.

1. University of Leeds, Leeds, United Kingdom; l.e.a.richards@leeds.ac.uk

How to cite this chapter: Richards, L. (2020). Head in the clouds – innovating classroom practice using online file sharing for collaboration and feedback. In A. Plutino, K. Borthwick & E. Corradini (Eds), *Innovative language teaching and learning at university: treasuring languages* (pp. 33-39). Research-publishing.net. <https://doi.org/10.14705/rpnet.2020.40.1063>

1. Introduction

As HE practitioners navigate the shift towards blended learning (Porter, Graham, Spring, & Welch, 2014) opportunities arise for enhancing language teaching in the classroom. At the same time, the increasing internationalisation of universities (Harvey, 2016) has prompted institutions to search for ways to support international students and fulfil their duty to create a hospitable academic environment (Ploner, 2018). With a strong indicator of success for international students being English proficiency (Trenkic & Warmingham, 2019), practitioners are constantly searching for new ways to support them which may include specialised software or digital services.

This paper will present a TEL-based project aimed at creating a more collaborative and interactive classroom using open access file sharing services. This project focused on developing collaborative writing practices and enhancing peer and teacher-learner feedback loops.

2. Method

2.1. Procedure

An action research methodology was used (Norton, 2009) to investigate the effect of activities based around the use of shared and editable files on Microsoft OneDrive (part of Office 365). Using a SCMC approach (Lin, Huang, & Liou, 2013) to co-creating texts, students participated in a series of related in-class group writing tasks that were conducted in shared online files. These activities included writing a report methodology (Figure 1), improving an abstract, and correcting an isolated sentence. Following this, the texts produced were anonymously displayed and analysed by the group, allowing both participants and tutor to analyse features of language produced by other groups, recording the feedback directly on to the shared document (Figure 2). Students were also invited to present and comment on individual pieces of writing shared in online documents (Figure 3).

Figure 1. Example of collaborative student writing shared online

Group 1:
 Firstly, the oven was preheated to 180°C. Then, a 20 cm square tin was greased and lined to prevent the mixture from sticking to the tin. The 125g butter or margarine was then melted with the 125g Shamrock demerara sugar and the 75g golden syrup. After that, 225g of Odlums porridge oats was stirred into the mixture. The mixture was then poured into the square tin and smoothed out. Next, the mixture was put into the oven and baked for 25 minutes. Finally, the tin was cooled for 5 minutes before being cut into pieces.

Group 2:
 First, we preheated an oven to 180°C. Next, we greased and lined an 20cm square tin. Then, we melted 125g of butter with 125g of Shamrock Demerara Sugar and 75g Golden Syrup. After that, we stirred the ingredients in 225g of Odlum's Porridge Oats. Further, we turned it into the prepared tin, smoothed top and pressed down well. Next step was baking it for 27 minutes. Finally, we cooled the flapjacks in tin for 5 minutes and cut them into pieces.

Group 3:
 Preheated the oven to 180°C/350°F/Gas 4. An 8"/20cm square was greased and lined on the tin. 125g/4oz sugar and 75g/3oz syrup were melted with 125g/4oz butter or margarine., then stirred with the oats. Turned the mixture into the prepared tin and smooth top and pressed down well. After baking it for 20-30 mins, it was cooled in tin for 5 mins and it could be served.

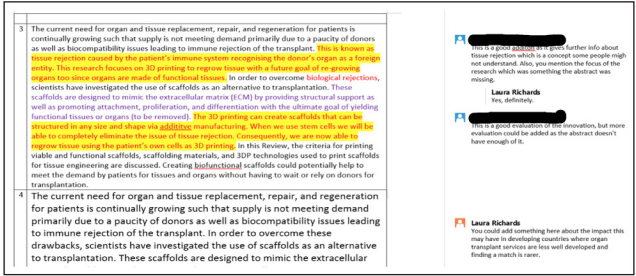
Figure 2. Example of annotated student writing

Group 1:
 Firstly, the oven was preheated to 180°C. Then, a 20 cm square tin was greased and lined to prevent the mixture from sticking to the tin. The 125g butter or margarine was then melted with the 125g Shamrock demerara sugar and the 75g golden syrup. After that, 225g of Odlums porridge oats was stirred into the mixture. The mixture was then poured into the square tin and smoothed out. Next, the mixture was put into the oven and baked for 25 minutes. Finally, the tin was cooled for 5 minutes before being cut into pieces.

Group 2:
 First, we preheated an oven to 180°C. Next, we greased and lined an 20cm square tin. Then, we melted 125g of butter with 125g of Shamrock Demerara Sugar and 75g Golden Syrup. After that, we stirred the ingredients in 225g of Odlum's Porridge Oats. Further, we turned it into the prepared tin, smoothed top and pressed down well. Next step was baking it for 27 minutes. Finally, we cooled the flapjacks in tin for 5 minutes and cut them into pieces.

Group 3:
 Preheated the oven to 180°C/350°F/Gas 4. An 8"/20cm square was greased and lined on the tin. 125g/4oz sugar and 75g/3oz syrup were melted with 125g/4oz butter or margarine., then stirred with the oats. Turned the mixture into the prepared tin and smooth top and pressed down well. After baking it for 20-30 mins, it was cooled in tin for 5 mins and it could be served.

Figure 3. Student and tutor comments on individual student writing



2.2. Participants

The participants were a mixed-gender class of 16 pre-undergraduate foundation year students all going into Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) subjects and aged between 16 and 23 who had already studied at the university for a semester. They attended 8 hours of study skills classes per week and all regarded themselves as competent digital users.

2.3. Data collection

Quantitative data collected in an online survey (of 11 respondents) (see [Supplementary materials, Appendix 1](#)) was initially used to inform questions used to collect qualitative data in a semi-structured student focus group (of 3 respondents) which were recorded and transcribed ([Supplementary materials, Appendix 2](#)). Comparison was drawn with similar traditional group writing activities to determine whether or not students felt the process was enhanced through SCMC and how comfortable they felt writing in this way. A thematic analysis ([Norton, 2009](#)) was then conducted to analyse the data.

3. Results and discussion

Preliminary results revealed a positive response to the use of SCMC for collaborative writing, stemming from easier text manipulation and greater

discussion of both the textual and linguistic features which are crucial to collaborative writing (Storch, 2019). Viewing and analysing multiple texts in real-time (Fagan, 2015) allowed participants to notice – and then later review – features of language and genre in a way previously impossible. Data from the survey suggested a largely positive response to the use of SCMC in the classroom. All students found Microsoft OneDrive easy to access and 9 of 11 said it was easy to share files.

All students said they used the feedback created in class to help them understand assignments and 73% said they looked at the specific feedback they received in class. Just over half of students said they looked at feedback given to other students. Feedback from the focus group supported these findings and provided clarification and insight into the results. Students commented that it was much easier to review work through OneDrive and believed they would not have done some if they had relied on paper. They also commented on the speed and volume of feedback that was created during classes and how this helped them to understand their assignments much better as a result of having annotated writing tasks to refer to. One student also commented that being able to see other student’s mistakes gave him confidence and perspective in reflecting on his own work.

4. Conclusions and limitations

In line with previous studies, perceived benefit of blended learning was high (López-Pérez, López-Pérez, & Rodríguez-Ariza, 2011). Despite the preliminary nature of these findings, use of SCMC in this form appears to be welcomed by learners and most certainly provided opportunities for interaction with each other and interaction with the texts created in a way that students found beneficial. For the practitioner, the capacity to give more dynamic and responsive feedback captured and stored in real-time provided versatility and utility in classroom interaction. Future research may not only seek to determine the impact of this feedback and collaborative writing method on more quantitative outcomes such as assessment performance, but also investigate approaches to increasing student

engagement and utility. As suggested in the focus group, learner training may increase uptake and utilisation. However, this is not only an issue for learners but also a barrier to practitioner adoption. If this form of classroom interaction is to be deployed beyond isolated individuals, the conceptual, practical, and epistemological barriers must be overcome; as must the stability of institutional internet connections.

5. Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the students and tutors of the International Foundation Year at the University of Leeds for their feedback and support. I would also like to thank Joy Robbins for acting as my mentor for this project.

6. Supplementary materials

<https://research-publishing.box.com/s/fvew84qtk2fbqv1yi16ptxdepga4kczs>

References

- Fagan, D. S. (2015). Managing language errors in real-time: a microanalysis of teacher practices. *System*, 55, 74-85. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2015.09.004>
- Harvey, L. (2016). 'I am Italian in the world': a mobile student's story of language learning and ideological becoming. *Language and Intercultural Communication*, 16(3), 363-383. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14708477.2016.1168049>
- Lin, W., Huang, H., & Liou, H. (2013). The effects of text-based SCMC on SLA: a meta-analysis. *Language Learning & Technology*, 17(2), 123-142.
- López-Pérez, M., López-Pérez, M., & Rodríguez-Ariza, L. (2011). Blended learning in higher education: students' perceptions and their relation to outcomes. *Computers & Education*, 56(3), 818-826. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.compedu.2010.10.023>
- Norton, L. (2009). *Action research in teaching and learning*. Routledge.

- Ploner, J. (2018). International students' transitions to UK higher education – revisiting the concept and practice of academic hospitality. *Journal of Research in International Education*, 17(2), 164-178. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1475240918786690>
- Porter, W., Graham, C., Spring, K., & Welch, K. (2014). Blended learning in higher education: institutional adoption and implementation. *Computers & Education*, 75, 185-195. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.compedu.2014.02.011>
- Storch, N. (2019). Research timeline: collaborative writing. *Language Teaching*, 52(1), 40-59.
- Trenkic, D., & Warmingham, M. (2019). Language and literacy skills of home and international university students: how different are they, and does it matter? *Bilingualism: Language and Cognition*, 22(2), 349-365. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s136672891700075x>



Published by Research-publishing.net, a not-for-profit association
Contact: info@research-publishing.net

© 2020 by Editors (collective work)
© 2020 by Authors (individual work)

Innovative language teaching and learning at university: treasuring languages
Edited by Alessia Plutino, Kate Borthwick, Erika Corradini

Publication date: 2020/04/20

Rights: the whole volume is published under the Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives International (CC BY-NC-ND) licence; **individual articles may have a different licence.** Under the CC BY-NC-ND licence, the volume is freely available online (<https://doi.org/10.14705/rpnet.2020.40.9782490057603>) for anybody to read, download, copy, and redistribute provided that the author(s), editorial team, and publisher are properly cited. Commercial use and derivative works are, however, not permitted.

Disclaimer: Research-publishing.net does not take any responsibility for the content of the pages written by the authors of this book. The authors have recognised that the work described was not published before, or that it was not under consideration for publication elsewhere. While the information in this book is believed to be true and accurate on the date of its going to press, neither the editorial team nor the publisher can accept any legal responsibility for any errors or omissions. The publisher makes no warranty, expressed or implied, with respect to the material contained herein. While Research-publishing.net is committed to publishing works of integrity, the words are the authors' alone.

Trademark notice: product or corporate names may be trademarks or registered trademarks, and are used only for identification and explanation without intent to infringe.

Copyrighted material: every effort has been made by the editorial team to trace copyright holders and to obtain their permission for the use of copyrighted material in this book. In the event of errors or omissions, please notify the publisher of any corrections that will need to be incorporated in future editions of this book.

Typeset by Research-publishing.net
Cover layout by © 2020 Raphaël Savina (raphael@savina.net)

ISBN13: 978-2-490057-60-3 (Ebook, PDF, colour)
ISBN13: 978-2-490057-61-0 (Ebook, EPUB, colour)
ISBN13: 978-2-490057-59-7 (Paperback - Print on demand, black and white)
Print on demand technology is a high-quality, innovative and ecological printing method; with which the book is never 'out of stock' or 'out of print'.

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data.
A cataloguing record for this book is available from the British Library.

Legal deposit, France: Bibliothèque Nationale de France - Dépôt légal: avril 2020.
