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CLESOL 2016 CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS

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EDITORIAL

This 25th volume of The TESOLANZ Journal is a special edition containing the proceedings of the 15th National Conference for Community Languages and ESOL, which was organised by TESOLANZ (Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages New Zealand) Inc. and CLANZ (Community Languages Association New Zealand). The conference was held at the University of Waikato from Thursday 14th to Sunday 17th July, 2016. The conference convenors were Jonathan Ryan and Mark Dawson-Smith of Waikato Institute of Technology.

Thanks are due to all those who attended and participated. CLESOL 2016 was, as always, a stimulating and enjoyable few days, when teachers from all sectors of the ESOL community in Aotearoa came together to learn, share ideas, and catch up with old friends and colleagues. The timetable consisted of thirteen parallel streams covering various aspects of our profession from aspects of learner identity and teacher education to the use computer-mediated technology. Papers were also presented from the fields of English for Academic Purposes, syllabus design, and testing and assessment, as well as the four core skills of speaking, listening, reading and writing.

The contents of this journal give a taste of the wide variety which characterised the offerings under the conference theme of *Learners in Context: Bridging the gaps; Äkongo Reo: Aronga Äputa*. The articles selected for publication reflect the spirit of CLESOL 2016 in that they focus on key elements for successful teaching and learning in both empirical studies and critical / reflective discussions.

The first paper by Julie Luxton, Tina Filipo and Sandy Morris begins by summarising the research agenda that has focused on Pasifika students' success, the goals that have been set to enhance the identity, language and culture of Pasifika school students, and the need to create effective school-home-community partnerships. The authors then discuss the journey taken one by semi-rural secondary school to establish a Pasifika home-school partnership involving teaching and non-teaching staff. It explores the effects of this initiative on Pasifika student engagement and achievement and, while still in its early stages, with continued commitment and collaboration among all concerned, there is room to hope that these aims will be sustained.

Sherrie Lee, in the second paper, sought to understand the under-researched issue of the informal academic learning practices of international EAL students. She conducted an ethnographic study applying the concept of brokering, defined as academic help-seeking interactions outside the formal curriculum. She interviewed ten international students regularly over the period of one academic semester about their interactions with various brokers. Her findings suggest that educators need to pay attention to how students seek peer support in academic learning thereby to develop effective ways of supporting their academic literacy.

In the third paper, Jinah Lee reports her narrative enquiry which followed the experiences of six Asian migrant women as language learners. She undertook individual interviews with the participants at various stages over a twelve-month period. The collected stories were analysed to identify and group categories into relevant themes to address the research questions focussing on the participants' perceptions of their identity. The findings suggest that there is a close link between a sense of belonging and a sense of self-value. The study raises important questions to education providers, ESL educators and policy makers.

The fourth paper, by Emily Saveedra, presented findings from a survey of university students in New Zealand, both domestic and international, about how they utilised their mobile devices for various purposes. It also explored their perceptions regarding how such mobile devices can help or hinder their

learning; the overwhelming majority (89%) stated that these devices were directly or indirectly facilitative. The paper suggests that students and teachers can together work towards the agreement about the appropriate integration of mobile devices to support teaching and learning within an academic context.

The action research project in an adult ESOL Literacy class reported by Debora Potgieter was intended to explore how teachers could design and use specific tasks to promote their learners' critical awareness of their own learning. The study was conducted in two stages. In the first phase, three teaching techniques and tasks were designed to suit students with a range of different skills. In the second phase the tasks were implemented and refined by the practitioners over a period of two terms. The findings suggest that the use of peer-learning and ongoing assessment activities may have a benign influence on raising learners' critical awareness.

Sarah Hardman's action research project involved the use of e-portfolios in her institution as part of the assessment system leading to the New Zealand Certificate in English Language. After explaining the nature and aims of e-portfolios, she explains how she developed an e-portfolio, and detailed criteria (appended) to assess students at Levels 3 and 4 of NZCEL. After two years of full implementation, the findings suggest that an e-portfolio seems to promote learning autonomy, develops their digital literacy and gives them experience in authentic communication.

The topic of assessment is also the focus of Sue Edward's paper about the Ministry of Education's recent guidelines for assessing school students, and particularly the validity of Overall Teacher Judgements based on the application of a range of assessment tools. The author presents findings from interviews with three primary school ESOL teachers regarding their experiences with using the new system. The findings of this small scale study identified some gaps between the Ministry guidelines and teachers' practices, and recommendations were made for bridging these gaps.

Vani Naik, Sian Hodges and Steve Kirk begin their paper on teacher observation by discussing how power relationships often create tensions between observer and observee. They then explain how they developed a new collaborative framework, CORE, intended to empower the observed teachers. They then conducted an action-research project to consider how those involved in the observation process view this model in comparison to traditional observation methods. The findings suggest that the benefits of CORE include reducing tension, increasing experimentation, and promoting lasting change in teaching practice.

In his paper, Ian Bruce considers the increasing demand for courses of English for Academic Purposes, and begins by tracing the origins, definitions and levels of EAP. He then discusses the five research streams that form the epistemological basis of EAP: systemic functional linguistics; genre theory; corpus linguistics; academic literacies; and critical EAP. This leads him to propose key areas of knowledge and expertise needed for EAP practitioners. His paper concludes with his current conceptualisation of EAP courses and how they can be supported in the New Zealand context.

Anthea Fester provides a critical review of the relationship between English language syllabus design models and ESL textbooks. After an historical overview of the way that syllabi developed over the course of the 20th century, she considers the impact these have had on the commercial production of a wide range of textbooks published since the 1960s. Her findings suggest that, with few exceptions, the textbook writers do not directly refer to specific syllabus designs, but prefer instead to draw upon different models, while still retaining a strong focus on progressive grammatical structuring.

Finally, Nigel Pearson considers the value of small group discussions (SGDs) in promoting second language learning. After a review of relevant literature, he reflects on his experiences when teaching

English in New Zealand and Hong Kong, and the similarities and differences in the ways that SGDs were applied in these contexts. He concludes that teachers need to seek ways to employ new technologies and strategies to facilitate the potential of SGDs to promote the language learning and 'soft' communicative skills of EAL students.

In conclusion, our thanks go to all those presenters who submitted their papers for consideration in this special edition of the journal. All the papers were subjected to double blind review, in that neither authors nor reviewers knew the identities of the respective parties. Part of the process involved in preparing a manuscript for publication requires responding to questions and advice from experienced peers. In this respect, we are extremely grateful to the many reviewers who, willingly giving their time and expertise, worked hard and long to read and report back on the manuscripts they were assigned, and to write detailed and constructive feedback to the authors.

UA ATOA LI'O LE MASINA:
THE COMPLETE CIRCLE OF THE MOON

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Abstract

The low achievement of many Pasifika students presents challenges for secondary schools in Aotearoa, New Zealand. This paper summarises some recent Pasifika-focused research in the context of systemic changes in a semi-rural secondary school aiming to raise the achievement of its senior Pasifika students. It discusses the impact of the establishment of a Pasifika aiga or family group, with an unrelenting focus on raising achievement, combined with strong pastoral support from teachers and community networks. The strengthening of Pasifika home-school partnerships through this aiga is considered, along with the role of a cross-curricular inquiry group involving teachers and non-teaching staff. The implementation of a Pacific Studies course exemplifying culturally and linguistically responsive pedagogical and assessment practices and the effects of this initiative on Pasifika student engagement and achievement are explored.

Introduction

The education system in Aotearoa New Zealand (NZ) rates highly internationally, but the "long tail of under-achievement" presents ongoing challenges in schools. Pacific Island or Pasifika[1] students make up a disproportionate part of this tail. The Education Review Office (ERO, 2012) identifies Pasifika students as those most at risk of not succeeding in NZ schools. Only one in five achieve the National Certificate of Education (NCEA) Level 2, which is considered a benchmark for secondary school success, and one in ten become disengaged from education, employment or training by the age of 17 (Ministry of Education (MOE), 2013). Since 2009 the NZ Government has called for a pro-active, urgent focus on raising Pasifika student achievement, urging schools to tailor programmes to meet the varying needs of different Pasifika groups, and recognise the cultural assets these students bring to their learning. In spite of this, a national evaluation of 302 schools, including 64 secondary schools, found no "system-wide changes evident in the way schools were responding to Pacific students" (ERO, 2012, p. 1).

This paper discusses some research-based evidence for a holistic approach to improving educational outcomes for Pasifika students. This approach encompasses the cultural package referred to by Tagaloa (1996, cited in Tuafuti, 2010, p. 3) as *ua atoa li'o o le masina* or the "complete circle of the moon", from which this paper takes its title. The implementation and positive impact of evidence-based changes in one semi-rural secondary school will then be described.

1 The term 'Pasifika' is a collective noun used throughout this paper to refer to people of Polynesian, Melanesian and Micronesian descent or heritage who have migrated to or been born in NZ. Pasifika include recent migrants or first, second and third generations of NZ-born Pasifika peoples of single or mixed heritages. These groups are distinct from indigenous Māori people.

Background: Pasifika peoples

Pasifika peoples are the fourth largest ethnic group in Aotearoa NZ, with 7.4% of the population (295,941 people) identifying with one or more Pacific ethnic group (Statistics NZ, 2013). 62.3% are NZ-born. The Pasifika population is young, with the highest proportion (35%) of children under 15 years old of any ethnic group. Most live in cities, with almost two-thirds (65.8%) living in Auckland and 12.2% in Wellington. However, the number of Pasifika peoples in other regions has grown in recent years because of employment opportunities, particularly in the agricultural and horticultural sectors. In the Bay of Plenty (BOP) region, for example, the number of Pasifika students in schools increased by 11.56% - from 1,177 to 1,313 - between 2011 and 2015. Pasifika peoples who live and work in rural regions do not have the support of the extensive family and cultural networks that operate in urban centres. This can lead to a sense of dislocation and it is incumbent upon these migrants to build Pasifika communities in their districts. Pasifika parents migrate to Aotearoa NZ with high hopes for a better life and increased prosperity. Education is seen as the key for achieving their "milk and honey" dreams (Siope, 2011, p. 11). However, as indicated by the ERO evaluation finding above, the aspirations of these "migrant dreamers" are not always fulfilled in terms of educational outcomes.

In 2010 the MOE instituted the first iteration of a cross-sector *Pasifika Education Plan* (PEP). This aims to achieve "optimum learning by promoting closer alignment and compatibility" between home, school, communities and services towards better outcomes for Pasifika (MOE, 2013, p. 4). The latest iteration of the PEP set some ambitious targets for 2017. These include:

- the number of all Pasifika school leavers leaving with NCEA level 1 literacy and numeracy qualifications to increase from 80% in 2010 to 95%;
- 85% of Pasifika 18 year-olds achieve NCEA Level 2 or equivalent qualifications;
- increase the number of Pasifika school leavers with University Entrance to achieve at least parity with non-Pasifika school leavers;
- 100% of schools demonstrate fully inclusive practices (MOE, 2013, p. 10).

As Table 1 below indicates, steady progress has been made towards the PEP NCEA targets nationally.

Table 1: Pasifika students' NCEA results (MOE, 2017)

	Pasifika school leavers with NCEA Level 1 and above			*Pasifika 18 year-olds with NCEA Level 2 or equivalent*		
	2013 %	2014 %	2015 %	2013 %	2014 %	2015 %
National	82.3	83.6	85.2	71.4	75	77.6
BOP region	84.7	80.2	83.7	67.2	69.1	81.6
WBOP district	81.3	73.3	94.1	45	46.2	82.4

The table shows that 85.2% of Pasifika school leavers achieved NCEA Level 1 or above in 2015. More specifically, the percentage of Pasifika school leavers who met NCEA Level 1 literacy and numeracy requirements increased from 84.1% to 87.9% between 2013 and 2015. In 2015 77.6% of Pasifika 18 year-olds attained NCEA Level 2 or equivalent. For Pasifika 18 year-olds in the BOP region, Level 2 achievement data show a significant improvement (almost 15%) from 67.2% to 81.6% between 2013 and 2015. Breaking these Level 2 statistics down

further for the rural Western Bay of Plenty (WBOP) district, there was an even more substantial shift from 46.2% to 82.4%. Whilst the number of NCEA candidates in the WBOP is small, this improvement is nonetheless noteworthy. The positive impact of changes implemented for Pasifika students in the school which is the subject of the second part of this paper is reflected in these data.

Pasifika education research

The importance of addressing Pasifika students' needs more holistically is well-documented. MOE identifies three evidence-based concepts fundamental to Pasifika student success. Each concept constitutes an arc of the circle of the moon and all should be incorporated into school charters. These concepts are:

- a focus on your Pasifika students and support for their academic success, with specific targets for their presence and achievement;
- goals for maintaining and enhancing the identity, language, and culture of Pasifika students at your school;
- a focus on engaging in productive partnerships with Pasifika families and communities (MOE, 2013, p. 9)

Some of the research underlying each of these concepts is summarised in the following section. The extent to which each is being implemented is also considered.

Focus on Pasifika student success

It is vital that schools analyse Pasifika student presence and academic progress and respond by setting priorities and targets to lift Pasifika achievement. MOE (2012) emphasises that this analysis needs to move beyond consideration of a notional Pacific cohort to look at individual Pasifika learners.

To illustrate effective practice, MOE (2013) summarised five "recipe for success" Pasifika case studies in urban schools. These all included goal-setting with individual Pasifika students to help them reach their potential and close monitoring of their progress towards these goals by teachers and mentors. The goals need to be specific, concrete, measurable and achievable. There needs to be "a shared understanding between teachers and students about what is meant by achievement, what progress means, and what constitutes quality work" (McDonald & Thornley, 2006, p. 29). Teacher expectations are important and a good work ethic needs to be expected and modelled (Hawk, Cowley, Hill & Sutherland, 2002). Additionally, Spiller (2013) emphasises that teachers must accept that they are responsible for the learning of the Pasifika students in their classrooms and employ good pedagogy. They must "actually like their Pasifika students and believe they have the ability to succeed", whilst also being honest about their current level of achievement (p. 64). Siope's (2011) classroom research supports this:

> Teachers who taught from their hearts…were the ones who made a significant difference. Often these teachers were secure in their own cultural identity and willing to encourage the same from their students. These teachers became the ones students felt engaged with and hungry to learn from. It was these "responsible, readily accessible, reasonable adults" whose collective wisdom recognised and then activated "our" potential for learning. These teachers enabled the migrant dreams of parents and families to come to fruition (p. 66).

However, these essential ingredients for Pasifika success are not sufficiently evidenced in secondary schools. ERO (2012) found that NCEA achievement data analyses for Pasifika

students in secondary schools were often not followed up by further investigation into what actually supported individual students to achieve or fail, or with appropriate plans or strategies to improve learning and teaching. Recent research by Wilson, Madja and McNaughton (2013) into high-stakes secondary English NCEA literacy achievement standards assessment found a disproportionate placement of Pasifika students in low streams with non-academic unit standards-based coursework, leading to inequitable opportunities to learn, thereby limiting academic and vocational pathways.

Pasifika languages, cultures and identities

The PEP (2013) states that Pasifika educational success is characterised by learners who are "secure and confident in their identities, languages and cultures navigating through all curriculum areas" (MOE, 2013, p. 3) and advocates "positively harnessing Pasifika diversity and multiple world views" (MOE, 2011, p. 3). Schools therefore need to explore achievement through a cultural lens that values Pasifika knowledge and provide opportunities for Pasifika students to participate in activities which build their sense of belonging, self-esteem and well-being. Challenging dominant discourses in NZ education, Tuafuti (2010) argues that Pasifika children who are "being labelled as under-achievers are *not* underachievers" but are being under-prepared by the education system, "through coercive and culturally inappropriate discourses" (p. 11).

Effective teaching and learning involves student instruction that has "known relationships to other cultural contexts in which students are socialised" (Alton-Lee, 2003, p. 37). MOE (2013) emphasises the need to tailor programmes for Pasifika students to address achievement disparities, and lack of cultural identification and of Pasifika resources and learning contexts is identified by Fletcher, Parkhill, Fa'afoi, Taleni and O'Regan (2009) as a barrier to Pasifika student success. Practitioner research also attests to the value of building on prior understandings and enabling the interaction of Pasifika knowledge with knowledge from other cultures. McNeight (1998, cited in MOE, 2008), for example, found that encouraging purposeful discussion with "a significant other" about the similarities and differences between classical Roman and contemporary Samoan culture significantly improved examination results for under-achieving Samoan students in her Year 13 Classical Studies class. Using *talanoa*[2] approaches to enhance the engagement and achievement of Year 13 Pasifika students studying history, Reymer (2012) found that listening to student experiences enabled her to develop her pedagogy:

> The conversations I have had with Pasifika students have led to the realisation that they experience history through unique cultural lenses, which allows them to understand the constructed and personal nature of historical knowledge (p. 58).
> If we are to ensure that our students' identities are "recognised and heard" then we need to learn about, acknowledge and validate the cultural understandings that students bring with them to the classroom (p. 70).

Focus group conversations with Pasifika students and their teachers led Spiller (2012) to express concerns about teachers' tacit and expressed perceptions and beliefs about Pasifika ways of learning. She emphasises the need to "really listen" to students "when their actions are

[2] Talanoa is an informal conversation in which the participants relate their experiences "without a rigid framework", thereby providing more authentic information (Reymer, 2012, p.60)

telling teachers how they learn. When Pasifika students' voices are heard and acted upon, Pasifika learning has a better chance" (p. 65).

Valuing, recognising and using Pasifika languages is an important part of this cross-cultural interaction and connectedness. In the recent past, a subtractive view of 'English-only language zones' has been in evidence in many secondary schools. However, it is an additive view of Pasifika bilingualism that is required, enabling learners to draw on their home languages to support English language development and enhance achievement. Tuafuti (2010), amongst others, advocates an additive Pasifika bilingualism approach, which affirms a sense of identity and instils confidence because students know that "their voices will be heard and respected" (p. 6). Tongan and Samoan parents interviewed by Fletcher et al. (2009) consider confidence in home languages important for their children to access cultural and social skills from their communities to help them function in the world. As one of these parents explained:

> I think the language is a gift of the tongue. It is part of the belonging, the heritage and all of that. It's giving something back to our children to be proud of whether they can speak it fluently or not. It is part of their belonging to that place (p. 29).

It is also noteworthy that Latu (2005) found that secondary Pasifika students who used their home languages in English-medium mathematics classrooms outperformed those who did not.

In spite of this research, ERO found little evidence of schools responding to the diversity, identity, languages and cultures of Pacific students. They noted a mismatch between references to Pasifika students in school curricula and classroom planning and practice, which "frequently missed opportunities to reflect the culture, knowledge and understanding of these learners" (ERO, 2012, p. 2). This failure to connect with the wider lives of Pasifika students can limit their opportunities to respond, engage with and understand what they have to learn.

Productive Pasifika partnerships

Effective schools are those which develop partnerships with Pasifika parents and communities and aim to have learners and their families take "a proactive approach to knowing about and tracking the learners' progress" (ERO, 2012, p. 15). A literature review by Gorinski and Fraser (2006) concluded that positive relationships with Pasifika parents and communities are "a pre-requisite for learning" (p. 1). Although there is surprisingly little research into home-school partnership initiatives in New Zealand secondary schools, interviews with Samoan parents (Cahill, 2006) and Micronesian parents (Ratcliffe, 2010) indicate that schools need to respect, understand and be responsive to Pasifika cultural perspectives, be more pro-active in reaching across the cultural divide, and adapt teaching styles for Pasifika learners. Similarly, Baleinakorodawa (2009) found that prevention of truancy requires an understanding of Pasifika cultures, empathy with the situation of Pasifika students, and dedicated programmes to meet their academic needs and foster a positive learning environment.

Encouraging the participation and contributions of parents is also a key aspect of the "collaborative empowerment model" (Cummins, 2000) and the "New Vision Partnership" advocated by McAllister Swap (cited in Tuafuti, 2010, p. 6). The latter recommends a "re-visioning of the school environment and a need to discover new policies and practices, structures, roles, relationships and attitudes" (p. 6). It acknowledges the challenges of this task, which requires many resources and the collaboration of parents, community representatives and teachers. Tuafuti (2010) sees the integration of these models and the Samoan pedagogical

empowerment strategy of *soalaupule* (power-sharing) as crucial to improving educational outcomes for Pasifika students.

Unfortunately, Pasifika home-school partnerships in secondary schools are too often insufficiently focused on Pasifika student progress and achievement. ERO (2012) reported that most secondary schools did not have specific initiatives in place for engaging Pacific communities and leaders, and engaged less with Pacific parents and community members than primary schools.

The present study: One school's journey

The following section describes how one school put into practice each of the three evidence-based concepts elaborated above to address the identified needs of its Pasifika students. It is written from the perspective of the author, who was a Professional Learning and Development (PLD) facilitator working in the school, and incorporates reflective comments by the two teachers and co-authors who spearheaded these changes, as well as Pasifika student voice. This account relates to a semi-rural, co-educational, state secondary school in the WBOP, with approximately 840 students, 5% of whom identify as Pasifika. These students are predominantly Tongan, with some Samoan, and include NZ-born students and recent arrivals. Given that most Pasifika educational research to date has been undertaken in urban centres, the journey undertaken by this school will provide valuable information for leaders and teachers in similar rural settings.

Focus on Pasifika student success: "It's about bridging the gap"

For many years the English language and pastoral needs of Pasifika students at the school were met by the dedicated and competent teacher in charge (TIC) of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL). She had developed good relationships with students and their families through concerts and home-school partnership meetings. However, although supported by the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) in these endeavours, the TIC ESOL was essentially working in isolation.

In 2013 the Head of Faculty (HOF) English became concerned at the low achievement of Year 9 and 10 Pasifika students in response to text writing examinations. Mastering this text type is important because it is tagged for NCEA Level 1 and University Entrance literacy and is externally assessed. The HOF therefore initiated an evidenced-based faculty PLD inquiry into ways of improving the vocabulary and writing skills of Year 9 and 10 Pasifika students. To help inform this inquiry, the HOF and PLD facilitator undertook *talanoa* conversations with Pasifika students about what was working well for their learning in English classrooms and what was not. The students' comments were candid and helpful and soon extended beyond subject English to their wishes for their schooling. All expressed a desire to learn more about their Pasifika cultures and languages at school. For example:

> We could like learn our language more... Like how they have French classes, we could do Samoan...Cos it's like kinda fading cos I don't go to Auckland as much and only speak it to family friends. We could have some like islander teachers, too. I'm beginning to forget about my language…I'm afraid that I might lose my tradition. I would like, how we have French, there could be like an island like class when all the islands get together learn our traditions.

Analysing the evidence, seeking a better understanding of and "really listening" to these Pasifika students, as advocated by Reymer (2012) and Spiller (2012), would later have a strong

and ongoing impact on Pasifika provision in the school.

The wishes of one of these Pasifika students were fulfilled with the appointment of a new HOF English, a NZ-born Tokelauan, in 2014. This teacher liaised closely with the TIC ESOL and continued the faculty's Pasifika-focused inquiry with some success. However, it soon became clear that this one-faculty approach was insufficient. When signing students into courses for 2015, the HOF noted:

> It just broke my heart that our Pasifika students didn't fully understand what they were doing…the structures that were in place…trying to figure out what course to go into…What was their direction? And they wandered from table to table and the doors were all shut. In the end, they just gave up…That was the point I thought we need something where we can have a focus on academics for these kids so they can understand the pathways available to them…I felt I had a responsibility and I just couldn't in my conscience see that go on…

This heart-felt observation was the catalyst. The HOF English and TIC ESOL put forward a proposal to the SLT, asking for a senior Pasifika mentoring group to be set up in 2015 with a focus on student achievement. The SLT agreed. The students named the group *aiga*, because "it captured who [they] were – family". The *aiga* meets with the HOF English and TIC ESOL at the beginning of the school day. They composed a *lotu* (prayer) based on the school's values and one of the *aiga* students opens their time together with this *lotu* every day. The HOF English reported that "there is absolute silence when they say it, with that respect and that focus on what we are about". In this way, although the *aiga* is about the academic success of each individual student, traditional Pasifika values are acknowledged. The *aiga* thus exemplifies the re-visioning and discovery of new structures and roles advocated by Tuafuti (2010).

The HOF reflected that *aiga* students often spoke of the mismatch between the worlds in which they live at home and school:

> It's about bridging the gap… I talk to the kids about this and I say you have your island way and here at school is a predominantly pālagi way and it is my job as your teacher…to try to join the dots between the Pasifika way and the pālagi way and have you understand...this is the world that you are in, understand it, know it, figure out what you need to be able to do to operate within it. You need to know the system, who you are working with and how you need to act…These are the expectations...

The *aiga* has become the core of this school's vision for Pasifika. This group nurtures the Tongan and Samoan identities of students, creating a sense of belonging and continually checking on their well-being. At the same time *aiga* teachers maintain an unrelenting, non-negotiable focus on individual Pasifika student achievement, combining "hard love and soft love… good cop and bad cop". Presence is closely monitored and it is made clear to students that good attendance is vital for NCEA success. The PEP goal of at least 85% achievement at Level 2 is made explicit to students and staff members. This approach further exemplifies the MOE (2013) "recipe for success" ingredients of goal-setting, monitoring progress and high expectations. It also reinforces the importance of "responsible, readily accessible, reasonable adults" who can recognise and activate Pasifika student potential (Siope, 2011, p. 66).

In her short-term role as an acting Deputy Principal (DP) during 2015, the HOF English

was able to provide release time for the TIC ESOL to do more academic mentoring. Having a strong, committed and pro-active Pasifika advocate in the SLT was vital. As the TIC ESOL noted:

> It makes a huge difference having someone else in the school who gets it and… is in that senior management role. I think that's the crux really. You need someone in senior management to wave the flag… a really staunch believer, someone to push and support you because you can't do it on your own… And things take time. To get to the point we have gotten to, it's not going to happen in a year, especially to build up those relationships…

The *aiga* also aims to build closer relationships with Pasifika students and their families. Traditional parent interviews were replaced with three-way conferencing, inviting Pasifika parents to come at a time which suited their demanding work schedules. Reports are not given to students, but kept for the conferencing, as a conduit for conversations with parents and students about their attendance, achievement, and the co-construction of individual goals. These conversations provide a valuable opportunity for listening to the voices, concerns and aspirations of *aiga* parents. In this way, the school fosters strong Pasifika partnerships focused on student achievement.

In 2015 a Pasifika-English Language Learner PLD inquiry group was also established focusing on culturally responsive pedagogical practices. Co-facilitated by the TIC ESOL and PLD facilitator, this group included teachers from a range of learning areas, as well as the school's guidance counsellor, attendance officer and the librarian. Each participant undertook an individual inquiry about understanding and enhancing support for Pasifika students in their respective roles. In one of the sessions, an *aiga* student who had been helping the guidance counsellor in her inquiry explained local family connections and migrant backgrounds and stories to the teachers. This opportunity was empowering to the student and invaluable for her teacher-listeners. The understandings emerging from PLD participant inquiries helped improve their practice in relation to ERO's evidence-based concepts of acknowledging Pasifika identity and culture and focusing on their academic success.

Pasifika languages, cultures and identity: "It builds on strengths and knowledge"

To further acknowledge identity, language and culture, the TIC ESOL initiated a Pacific Studies course for eight hours each week. This course explored themes, such as the dawn police raids on Tongan and Samoan 'over-stayers' in NZ in the 1970s and the sinking of MV Princess Ashika in Tonga in 2009, which were relevant and engaging for Pasifika students. It incorporated graded NCEA Pacific Studies and English Language unit standards, which enabled students to investigate aspects of Pacific society. Students were encouraged to interview their parents and grandparents as part of their investigation and to use their home languages in class to support their learning. One unit standard, in which students described the making of *ngatu* or tapa cloth, was presented in *Lea Faka Tonga*. Some class work and assessments were woven around the experience of the local Pasifika festival, in which the school had participated for the first time. Preparations for this also involved parents and members of the Pasifika community. The TIC ESOL later reflected on the Pacific Studies course:

> It builds on strengths and knowledge and makes it interesting for the students… acknowledging and celebrating their culture …and it's just lovely to walk in there and feel it. They talk about it all the time, their family coming in and being proud of them…and… parents come in and say they heard about what they are learning

> in class, so the kids are going home and having conversations with their parents about what's going on in class and what they are learning… You see…the light turn on in their eyes and they feel they belong and they want to be there…I can see the difference in them.

This course was successful because it acknowledged Pasifika learners' "unique and institutionalised ways of knowing and relating to the world" and constituted the "tailor-made contextualised learning" advocated by Wendt-Samu (2010) and other researchers.

Productive Pasifika partnerships: "So we put this arm out…"

As acting DP, the HOF English had more time to make connections with the Pacific Island community beyond the school. Contact was made with regional MOE Pasifika advisors, vocational pathway, tertiary and employment representatives, and the local Pacific Island Community Trust. The Trust later ran a programme called 'Roots and Wings' with *aiga* students to help them understand their Pasifika identities and develop positive attributes for educational success. They also supported the school with a *Pō Talanoa*, which was well attended by Pasifika parents, students and staff. Students were reminded of the motivation of Pasifika families who moved to New Zealand to give them a good education and a better life, and parents were encouraged to tell their stories to their children. Young Pasifika people shared their pathway stories, as did the school principal and the HOF English. One Trust member described this as "supportive talk in action" by the SLT, which was also evidenced by their interactions with students and parents.

Along with MOE representatives, the HOF also initiated a cross-sector teacher group focused on improving outcomes for Pasifika students in the BOP region. In this way productive collaborative partnerships were established and are ongoing. The HOF commented on the importance and value of "having others on board":

> We have a group of Pasifika, a Pasifika heart… So we put this arm out….and now it is in the community and it is widening it out. Everyone felt they were doing it by themselves, but now at last we are coming together and feel like a collective and we feel supported with systems, people we can wrap around us, and procedures in place.

These initiatives illustrate the PEP (2013) call for activities ensuring that schools work closely with Pasifika parents, communities and partner organisations.

Discussion

All of these changes exemplify MOE's evidence-based concepts for Pasifika success in practice. Together they have led to substantial improvement in Pasifika student engagement and achievement in the school. Between 2012 and 2015, NCEA Level 1 achievement shifted from 40% to 85.7% and Level 2 from 25% to 100%. Interim NCEA 2016 results for Pasifika indicate 83% achievement at Level 1 and 100% at Level 2. Four Pasifika students gained NCEA with Merit endorsements.

In 2016 *aiga* students were given the opportunity to prepare for and sit *Lea Faka Tonga* and *Gagana Samoa* achievement standards, as they had requested three years earlier. Video-conferencing classes were taught by teachers based in Auckland. Initial results were very positive, with nearly all *Lea Faka Tonga* candidates achieving the standards and some gaining Merit and Excellence grades. *Aiga* parents were pleased that their children had this opportunity

to nurture and develop their home language skills.

Informal conversations indicate strongly that the *aiga* is working well for students. Some said that the *aiga* has "brought islanders together" so that they "have a bond" and others commented that *aiga* had engendered respect – "people look up to me" and "the young kids want to be like me". One student said that *aiga* had improved Pasifika student learning because they are more "comfortable" asking questions of *aiga* teachers, whereas they feel "shy" or "scared" to ask in other classrooms and "hide around the corner". Students said that *aiga* teachers explain things in a way which they can understand. They also retrospectively appreciated close monitoring of their attendance – "the teacher tracked us down".

However, issues around academic pathways and opportunities to learn remain. A breakdown of 2015 NCEA Pasifika achievement data showed that an average of 64% of the credits gained by *aiga* students came from unit standards, with half of the students gaining between 71% and 87% of their credits from these standards. This means that many Pasifika students are blocked from university studies because, with the exception of two English for Academic Purposes unit standards, only achievement standards are approved for University Entrance. Encouraging and supporting Pasifika students to take subjects offering achievement standards is the next big challenge. Another challenge is to develop Pasifika understandings and pedagogical skills for more classroom teachers in the school.

Conclusion

This school has indeed been proactive in responding to the Government's call for an urgent focus on enhancing provision for Pasifika students – the complete cultural package. However, the educational journey has just begun. In a presentation to the Board of Trustees the HOF English emphasised the importance of a strong vision for the future, embracing change and taking risks in terms of policy, practice, structure and roles. She emphasised the need to be strategic - with staffing, time, money and targeted staff PLD – and to build the capacity of staff to make positive change sustainable.

Progress made on this Pasifika journey must be able to survive the ebb and flow of changing tides. Both the TIC ESOL and the HOF English have recently moved to new teaching positions. However, a young Tongan teacher with strong community connections has been appointed. The *aiga*, Pacific Studies course and the opportunity to learn Pasifika languages remain in place. These systemic and curricular changes will facilitate sustainability in the school. With continued commitment and collaboration between Pasifika students, families, communities, senior leaders and teachers, the circle of the moon will be complete – *ua atoa li'o o le masina.*

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UNDERSTANDING INFORMAL LEARNING AMONG INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS THROUGH THEIR BROKERING PRACTICES

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Abstract

While informal learning is recognised as an important part of academic learning, the significance of learning outside the prescribed curriculum has been largely overlooked in the literature on international students. The purpose of this study is to better understand the informal academic learning practices of international EAL students through the concept of brokering. In this study, brokering practices are defined as academic help-seeking social interactions outside the formal curriculum. Examples of brokering interactions include translating academic-related information or making explicit the requirements of an academic task.

This paper is based on an ethnographic study involving ten international EAL students at a New Zealand university. Students were interviewed regularly over the period of one academic semester. Based on initial findings, the article details the characteristics of peer and non-peer brokers. Brokers were chosen because they had prior experience or recognised expertise in particular academic areas. At times, they were also chosen because they could communicate in the students' native language. It is hoped that understanding the different types of brokers will allow institutions to develop more effective strategies in supporting international students' academic needs.

Introduction and background

Enrolments of international students in New Zealand and other countries such as Australia, Canada, US and UK are no doubt a source of significant financial benefits. In New Zealand, the total contribution of international education for the year 2015/2016 was more than $4 billion, with the university sector representing almost a third of that figure (Education New Zealand, 2016b). A large majority of international students originate from 'non-Western' countries and have English as an additional language (EAL). According to the literature (e.g., Andrade, 2006; Smith & Khawaja, 2011), students' English language proficiency levels and adjustment to a different pedagogical environment contribute to their academic success..

Much of the discussion about international students' academic learning is in the context of classroom interactions such as asking questions and participating in group discussions (Campbell & Li, 2008; Johnson, 2008; Lee, Farruggia, & Brown, 2013). However, academic learning is not contained within classrooms and formal structures (Barnett, 2007; Barron, 2006). Several studies have recognised that out-of-classroom interactions are significant contributions to students' academic learning whether these interactions are face-to-face (Goodwin, Kennedy, & Vetere, 2010; Hommes et al., 2012; Krause, 2007) or mediated through social networking sites (Madge, Meek, Wellens, & Hooley, 2009; Vivian, Barnes, Geer, & Wood, 2014). The importance of informal academic learning, nonetheless, has tended to be overlooked in the literature on international students.

This article reports on doctoral research that uses the concept of brokering to examine the informal academic learning practices of international EAL students at a New Zealand university. Based on a sociological concept, brokering takes place where interactions between individuals or groups are constrained by differences in language and culture (Stovel, Golub, & Milgrom, 2011). The broker is an intermediary who assists in the transfer or exchange of valued resources such as knowledge and opportunities between these separated communities. In this research, brokering practices among international EAL students are understood as academic help-seeking social interactions outside the formal curriculum within the host academic environment. Several studies (e.g., Che, 2013; Li, Clarke, & Remedios, 2010; Montgomery & McDowell, 2009; Seloni, 2012; Zappa-Hollman & Duff, 2015) have alluded to brokering practices among international students, even if the term is not explicitly used. Nonetheless, brokering practices remain largely unexamined in terms of the dynamics of the interactions and the characteristics of brokering relationships.

In researching brokering practices, an important consideration was that engaging in brokering interactions as informal learning was likely to be taken-for-granted as part of everyday life and therefore not always visible to the learners themselves (Eraut, 2004). Another consideration was that given the routine use of digital media for personal communication among young adults (Helles, 2012; Madell & Muncer, 2007; Thompson, 2013), brokering may occur through digital means (e.g. mobile text messages), in addition to taking place during face-to-face communication. Furthermore, these help-seeking interactions were likely to feature more prominently in students' initial period of study where they faced the greatest adjustment challenges (Hechanova-Alampay, Beehr, Christiansen, & Van Horn, 2002; Ward, Okura, Kennedy, & Kojima, 1998).

In order to investigate students' particular social practices, an ethnographic methodology was used as ethnography emphasises gaining the insiders' perspective of what happens in their natural settings (O'Reilly, 2012). More specifically, *focused* ethnography was chosen as it adapts conventional ethnographic methods to address the challenges of investigating everyday social interactions that occur within a specific timeframe and context, as well as in multiple sites (Higginbottom, Pillay, & Boadu, 2013; Knoblauch, 2005).

In this research, the goal was to understand the nature of brokering interactions of ten international EAL students during their initial academic semester of study. Nine of them were of Chinese ethnicity and whose language and culture were familiar to the researcher, thus facilitating an emic understanding of the research topic. Rather than conducting unstructured interviews common in traditional ethnography, regular semi-structured interviews were conducted during the semester with the primary purposes of identifying and understanding academic help-seeking interactions participants had with others, and exploring opportunities to gain access to these brokering interactions. Observations of brokering interactions were not always feasible because of their irregular or unpredictable occurrences, as well as concerns with privacy issues. Nonetheless, three of the ten participants provided data on brokering interactions. Obtaining interactional data from these key informants capitalised on technological affordances more so than depending on taking field notes of social activity. Two participants provided visual records of mobile text message exchanges with their brokers, while brokering interactions between one participant and her broker were observed in addition to being audio recorded.

Based on initial data analysis, the article provides an overview of different types of brokers that the participants engaged with. Students approached peers as well as non-peers (e.g.,

learning support staff) as brokers. The main reason for choosing a particular broker was the person's prior experience or expertise in a particular academic domain or skill. In certain cases, a shared language allowed the broker to translate or interpret information for the student. The article concludes with some implications for enhancing support for international EAL students.

International students and academic learning

The economic value of international students enrolled in higher education has increased in the past decade. The number of foreign tertiary students enrolled worldwide has more than doubled, with an average annual growth rate of almost 7% (OECD, 2014). Most international students studying abroad come from Asia. In New Zealand, the two main source countries in 2015 were China and India (Education New Zealand, 2016a). International students make up about 15% of the total tertiary student population in New Zealand (Ministry of Education, 2016) and university tuition fee revenue from international students in 2015 was more than NZ$370m (Education New Zealand, 2016a).

Academic support is a common theme in the literature on international EAL students. Numerous studies have identified various challenges EAL students face in academic learning, particularly in the classroom context, such as inadequate English proficiency and differing educational expectations (Johnson, 2008; Lee et al., 2013), and being isolated from the host community (Sawir, Marginson, Deumert, Nyland, & Ramia, 2008; Ward & Masgoret, 2004). However, little is understood about how international EAL students engage in academic learning outside the formal structures of learning.

Informal learning is "any activity involving the pursuit of understanding, knowledge, or skill that occurs without the presence of externally imposed curricular criteria" (Livingstone, 2006, p. 206). However, the literature on informal learning among students is often related to peer tutoring, cooperative learning, and peer assessment *within* the classroom (Boud, Cohen, & Sampson, 2001; Topping, 2005), overlooking informal learning that occurs *outside* formal structures of instruction (Barron, 2006; Hommes et al., 2012). While informal learning may arise as part of one's daily activities or routines (Marsick & Volpe, 1999), it may also be a response to the inadequacies of formal learning where learners face barriers such as low self-confidence, poor previous educational experiences and inappropriate content in and delivery of formal instruction (McGivney, 1999).

For international EAL students, the barriers in formal instruction are highlighted in the literature on students' academic challenges. However, predominant themes of poor English and passive communication tend to present a deficit view of EAL learners (Kumaravadivelu, 2003; Ryan & Louie, 2007). Exploring informal learning as a space where learners overcome language and cultural gaps can thus potentially re-position EAL learners as agents of their academic learning, exploring how they "mak[e] proactive choices" (Marginson, 2013).

Brokering as informal learning

The concept of brokering offers an alternative lens through which to view EAL students' informal learning. As a sociological concept, brokering refers to the transfer of resources such as services, information and knowledge, from one entity to another over gaps in organisational or social structure (Gould & Fernandez, 1989; Stovel et al., 2011). In terms of social structure, gaps may arise from the differences in language and culture between these entities. It is the broker who has connections to these separated entities that allow the transfer of resources between them. Extending the brokering concept to EAL students' informal learning, one can

then conceive of learning as seeking academic resources, not directly from classroom instruction, but through someone who also has access to those resources.

Brokering as a learning concept has been used in the literature on immigrant communities, particularly in terms of language and literacy learning. The phenomenon of *language brokering*, defined as "interpreting and translating performed by bilinguals … without special training" (Tse, 1996, p. 48) has been researched in family (Eksner & Orellana, 2012; Martinez, McClure, & Eddy, 2008; Morales, Yakushko, & Castro, 2012) and classroom contexts (Coyoca & Lee, 2009; J. S. Lee, Hill-Bonnet, & Raley, 2011). With families, it is the children of newly arrived immigrants who are brokers for their parents, translating and interpreting a range of texts such as school notices, bank letters and application forms. In the classroom context, bilingual students broker for their classmates who are in the process of learning a second language.

A related concept, *literacy brokering*, further illustrates the brokering phenomenon with a focus on understanding the underlying meaning and implication so unfamiliar texts and practices (Perry, 2009). Perry's (2009) research on literacy brokering among Sudanese refugee families in the United States documented how family members helped one another understand and interpret a range of written genres such as unsolicited mail, texts from school, as well as webpages and online forms.

Thus the literature on language brokering and literacy brokering provides a starting point for understanding how brokering may take place among EAL international students. International EAL students may seek help in translation or interpretation of academic information and texts, as well as with understanding the expectations of assignments and underlying meaning of other academic demands.

Brokering in higher education

Brokering, while not termed as such, has been alluded to in the higher education literature that explores academic-related social interactions among students. Several studies demonstrate how students seek help from peers to meet various academic demands such as completing assignments (Li, Clarke, & Remedios, 2010; Montgomery & McDowell, 2009; Wakimoto, 2007; Zappa-Hollman & Duff, 2015), with some studies specifically on how students seek help with academic writing (Che, 2013; Nam & Beckett, 2011; Séror, 2011). Students may also seek advice on interacting with instructors and peers from the host academic community (Li & Collins, 2014; Seloni, 2012). The literature further suggests that students seek brokers who are already part of their existing social relationships. These brokers may be native-English speaking peers with whom students have shared experiences, or who come from a similar cultural background (Che, 2013; Montgomery & McDowell, 2009; Seloni, 2012; Zappa-Hollman & Duff, 2015). Nonetheless, little is understood about the motivations behind brokering interactions.

Considering the gaps in the literature on informal learning among international EAL students, the purpose of this research was to investigate the nature of brokering practices among such students at a university in New Zealand. The article reports on data that relate to the following research questions:

- What aspects of academic learning are being brokered?
- Who are the students' brokers?
- Why are these brokers chosen?

The present study

I recruited ten students from two faculties (related to social sciences) at the university, all of whom signed the consent forms to participate in the research, and had the chance to ask questions about the research (see Appendix for a summary of the participants). These students were international students for whom whose English was an additional language, and in most cases, a foreign language in their home country. They were enrolled for the first time in a New Zealand university, pursuing either undergraduate or postgraduate qualifications. The initial period of study is where adjustment challenges are the greatest (Hechanova-Alampay et al., 2002; Ward et al., 1998). As such, the target timeframe of the research was students' initial academic semester (15 weeks long), a period with potentially a lot of brokering activity.

In order to examine a specific type of informal learning (i.e. brokering practices) within the limited time period of one academic semester of 15 weeks, I used the methodology of focused ethnography. As much of the literature on brokering in higher education tended to rely on self-reported data such as interview responses, an ethnographic methodology was chosen to enable a close and sustained observation of human behaviour (O'Reilly, 2012). However, while conventional ethnography stresses the importance of long-term immersion and participant observation, focused ethnography responds to the short-term or temporary nature of specific social or cultural phenomena by using a flexible approach in data collection (Higginbottom et al., 2013; Knoblauch, 2005).

As a form of informal learning, brokering practices were likely to be "implicit, unintended, opportunistic and unstructured" (Eraut, 2004, p. 250), thus making conventional ethnographic observation challenging. Furthermore, students themselves may not be conscious of their brokering interactions if such informal learning is taken for granted. Thus, the data collection strategy was to first conduct regular semi-structured interviews individually with participants in order to focus their attention on help-seeking interactions related to their academic-related activities. These interviews were conducted once every two or three weeks, and each interview lasted approximately 40 minutes. Subsequently, in the course of the regular interviews, I explored opportunities to observe brokering interactions between participants and their brokers.

As the objective of the research was to investigate the nature of brokering practices among international students, as a researcher, I was conscious of not being a participant myself in the very phenomenon under investigation. Furthermore, the literature on brokering in higher education suggests that brokering interactions were likely to take place in personal or private spaces (e.g. Nam & Beckett, 2011; Séror, 2011; Li & Collins, 2014; Zappa-Hollman & Duff, 2015). Thus, instead of engaging in participant observation, being a detached observer was more appropriate in this context where active participation was not possible or desirable (Higginbottom et al., 2013; Knoblauch, 2005).

Three of the ten participants, Kim, Linda and Jane, granted me permission to access their brokering interactions in the following ways: i) obtaining copies of draft assignments annotated by brokers; ii) observing and audio recording face-to-face interactions; and iii) obtaining screenshots (i.e. images of what is displayed on the screen of a device) of mobile phone messages exchanged between participants and their brokers. In the latter two cases, permission to use the interactions as data was also sought from the participants' brokers. In addition, Linda and Jane were selected to continue as participants in the following academic semester as their

willingness to allow access to observations and other records of brokering interactions was thought to lead to additional data on their brokering practices.

The following sections reports on initial findings on the types of brokers sought by the participants. Although there was a variety of evidence of brokering interactions, i.e. interview recounts, observations, images of text exchanges and annotated writing, this article looks primarily at interview data.

Initial findings

Peer v. non-peer brokers

Students approached peer as well as non-peer brokers. Peers can be defined as "status equals or matched companions, [involving] people from similar social groupings who are not professional teachers" (Topping, 2005, p. 631). In addition, "[t]hey may have considerable experience and expertise or they may have relatively little … Most importantly, they do not have power over each other by virtue of their position or responsibilities" (Boud et al., 2001, p. 4). In this research, peers can refer to those who are students, just as the participants are, or those who participants identify with as belonging to a similar social grouping, such as the same age group. In contrast, non-peers refer to those who have a higher position or status; in this research, they are firstly, non-students, and secondly, have a position of power over, or responsibility towards the participants such as being a host parent (as part of a homestay arrangement) or a staff member at the university.

Non-peer brokers

Non-peer brokers predominantly provided help with academic writing and language use. These non-peer brokers were mostly learning support staff who were not part of the formal instruction team (i.e., the participants' subject lecturers and tutors). These staff members were either appointed by the faculty for assisting the faculty's students, or part of the larger learning support team for the university. Their role can be broadly described as assisting students with their assignments; such assistance includes understanding the assignment question, providing comments on the organization of the writing and pointing out grammatical errors.

Learning support staff were often called on by participants to help with the organisation of their writing, using appropriate vocabulary and correcting grammatical errors:

> I think the content is ok, but about the expression, especially expression in academic English is a little hard. Because I don't know very long words. I just write sentences is more like in oral English, it's not academic. That's one point. And another is I can't express or make a very clear statement. The thoughts are all in my head but I can't make it very organised or clear to express. So I need a lot of proofreading to make sure that everything is organised, it makes sense, it's meaningful. (Linda, Interview, 5 April 2016)

> The last time I went to see a tutor, she didn't understand my writing. She asked me a few questions about what I was writing about. And I explained it. That tutor looking at my grammar was very detailed. She helped me re-write my sentence. (Jane, Interview, 5 May 2016)

> [INTERVIEWER (referring to draft assignment): From what I can see, it was primarily correcting grammar mistakes and filling in missing words to make it more coherent.] And changing the word use, because sometimes I'm still

> not familiar with the meaning. At least the words that are correctly used, or correct to express my ideas. (Kim, Interview, 31 May 2016)

Thus these non-peer brokers could be seen as literacy brokers who made explicit the mechanics of academic writing by re-organising participants' writing, changing word use and correcting grammatical errors.

Peer brokers

Non-peer brokers were involved mostly in literacy brokering interactions; peer-brokers, by contrast, were involved in a range of interactions such as sharing academic resources, providing advice on how to interpret and complete assignments, as well as translating and interpreting information.

Students often sought help from their peers such as classmates or those in their social networks. Examples of peers from social network include former classmates who attended the same preparatory programmes at the university and friends of friends. In the case of nine of the ten participants who were Chinese nationals or of Chinese ethnicity, their peer brokers were often students from the same country (co-nationals) or with whom they shared a common language. The choice of co-nationals as brokers appear to concur with the findings found in the literature (Che, 2013; Li & Collins, 2014; Zappa-Hollman & Duff, 2015).

Co-national peer brokering is illustrated in the following examples where brokering occurred in the classrooms but outside the purview of formal instruction. During lectures and tutorials, some students helped each other with obtaining information related to academic tasks. In some of these situations, the information was only available during the lesson; for example, an instructor's verbal explanation, or information on presentation slides that was not available elsewhere. Because it was difficult to take down notes when the lecturer spoke too fast or when there was too much information, students then felt that it was necessary to record that information for responding to assignments or preparing for tests:

> During tutorial, we will use our camera to take photos of the answer on the screen. ... There could be some lessons that I did not take photos of. And some he did not take photos of. So when we meet, we are sharing with each other the answers we have. (Henry, Interview, April 2016)

> The tutor was taking about important points about the test. And I used my phone to record. But I couldn't take the photo of the PPT, so I asked her if she could help me take a photo of it. … [INTERVIEWER: So you recorded, and she took photos?] Yes … perhaps what we're doing is not right. … She shared with me what she took photos of. (Annie, Interview, 11 April 2016)

In another situation, students were helping each other complete an in-class task:

> (During tutorials, there are) four of us sitting together and referring to each other's answers. [INTERVIEWER: Do other students do the same thing, the local students?] I don't know, but they also sit together and discuss, but I don't know if they will look at each other's answers. … For the locals, there's not much obstacle, they can freely respond. … We usually ask, hey, where can we find the answer to this question (laughs), which is which page and

> which part. We don't usually talk and exchange opinions. Most of the time we're looking for the answer. (Jane, Interview, 22 September 2016)

Here, the help students received was not related to their *understanding* of academic material, but rather, *acquiring* adequate material in order to complete academic tasks. In such instances, there is, what can be termed, *resource brokering*, where resource refers to materials "that can be drawn on by a person … in order to function effectively" (Resource, 2017). In these examples of resource brokering, students were co-brokering by exchanging with each other information that was valuable to them for a common academic task. Participants themselves further suggested that acquiring task-specific resources was not part of regular classroom behaviour. For example, Annie was hesitant about whether what she was doing was appropriate, implying that her actions were not common among the rest of the students. Jane's remarks about having a (language) 'obstacle' and not talking or exchanging opinions as the domestic students were doing seem to suggest that she and her Chinese classmates were not engaged in typical tutorial behaviour.

Peer brokers may be chosen on the basis of co-nationality, however, perhaps a more important criterion was whether the person had relevant knowledge or prior experience, as suggested in several studies (Nam & Beckett, 2011; Séror, 2011; Zappa-Hollman & Duff, 2015). In the case of this research, participants were not always keen on approaching fellow Chinese classmates for assistance, especially when their needs went beyond resource brokering. Even though they could communicate with each other in their native language, their classmates' similar lack of knowledge and experience did not help to resolve problems related to understanding of English academic content:

> … I try to talk to them in Chinese. … I ask them some question about this but they don't have a really clear organisation of this. And so sometimes we discuss the questions, it is useful but just discuss. We don't have confidence in our own answers. (Henry, Interview, 16 March 2016)
> There are many [Chinese], but I only know a few. And among them, I won't ask some of them because I don't know if they know what's going on or not. They also look lost and confused (laughs). (Jane, Interview, 11 April 2016)

Sarah, for example, was faced with the challenge of writing about a wide-ranging topic with a 100 word limit.

> "I've got some homework … and we have to give examples, but no more than 100 words. I don't know how to answer that. And also the teacher suggested to us to answer from these three aspects which is, language, policy, and culture. But I thought it was very big topic, and I don't know how to answer it in 100 words … it's only 100 words and I have to give examples. How do I give examples in 100 words? … The tutor … didn't really give a clear answer. Then I asked Kevin after the tutorial. He said, maybe you can choose the aspect of language. (Sarah, Interview, 9 May 2016)

Without a clear response from the tutor, Sarah approached Kevin, a co-national who was older than the majority of the students. They studied three subjects in common and were in the same project group for one of the subjects. Kevin had a higher level of English proficiency than other Chinese students and was recognised as being a wiser and more experienced person by his classmates:

> I can trust him. He doesn't make too many mistakes. If he does, He will say, sorry, I'm wrong. Other people will make excuses, like saying it was too many years ago. Kevin is not like that, he will say, I am wrong. He is really responsible. (Sarah, Interview, 4 April 2016)

In another example, Kim approached an Indian international student about a written assignment. Although Kim was more comfortable communicating in Chinese, she nonetheless had several things in common with her non-Chinese classmate – that they were both international students and embarking on a similar course with common subjects:

> "I met an Indian girl and this is also her first year of postgrad we are somehow in the situation and we have the same feelings as well. We would catch up with each other about what is going on, especially how we can do the assignments."(Kim, Interview, 15 March 2016)

While sharing the same circumstances may have facilitated their brokering interaction, it was the broker's near-native level of English proficiency that led Kim to refer to a well-written sample for her own assignment:

> "… the Indian girl, she is really good at English because for her she studied her degree in India all in English. So for her, somehow English for her is her first language. And she is willing to share on how she organises her assignment. Because lecturers only say, oh just follow the APA format, include this and this. But for me I'm not sure how to organise the whole project, and make it easier for the lecturer to read my project. Yesterday she shared on one report she submitted, how she organised everything, and how much effort she had put in. That makes me have a very basic and general plan for how I can do it in my assignment."(Kim, Interview, 5 April 2016)

In the above two examples, it can be seen that sharing a common nationality or language with brokers was not as important as the brokers having the ability to successfully manage academic tasks.

In the final example of peer brokers, it was a combination of common language and greater expertise that allowed them to be useful brokers for participants. These brokers were those who had taken the same or similar subjects as before, sometimes referred to as *seniors*. Sarah, for example, approached a Chinese student, an acquaintance from her language preparatory programme, because he had previously taken the subject and did very well in it:

> When I arrived there, he was already there for half a year. And he's very helpful. He arrived earlier, and he lives with some local people, so his speaking skills is better than me. And I ask him for help for translation (laughs). … He's really good at studying. He got A last year in Economics, and he just had a test for Accounting, and he received 100. … So I asked my senior who is also Chinese. I asked him for suggestions on how to answer the short answer [questions]. … Yes, I can ask my tutor but I thought my English is not good enough. So I asked my senior who took this paper last year…. He taught me some skill to answer the short answers. He said, you don't need to write a lot. You just need to draw some pictures for supply

> curve, demand curve. He told me, you just need to mark the changes and briefly explain it, that will be okay. (Sarah, Interview, 9 May 2016)

Similarly, Henry found that he benefitted from having a senior student, whom he knew through a classmate, explain to him how to prepare for a test:

> I was totally confused about this because the tutor talks so fast. I tried to ask another Chinese guy in our group for help, but he cannot follow what the tutor said as well. … The senior gave me the examples from her material, which is in the test when she studied this paper. I guess the reason why this approach is more effective and efficient is she taught [me] in Chinese and English both. This way reduces the time that I translate the information from English to Chinese. (Henry, Email, 6 April 2016)

> When I revise for the test, I may ask senior. … Before the test, I will probably ask about special features of the test, or ask about the sample questions that I don't understand. (Henry, Interview, 4 May 2016)

These seniors were not merely resource brokers (e.g. transferring or sharing materials), but they were also *language brokers*, i.e., translating and explaining English terms in the students' native language, as well as *literacy brokers*, i.e., making explicit the ways to fulfil the requirements for academic tasks.

Conclusion

The initial findings on the different types of brokers demonstrate the different strengths of peer and non-peer brokers. Non-peer brokers, in this case the learning support staff, were equipped with knowledge and skills to address the specific areas of students' academic writing. Peer brokers, on the other hand, have the advantage of immediacy – being timely with assistance or advice, having common academic goals, and/or sharing a common language.

While it is common for universities to have learning support staff to address students' academic needs, it is less common for universities to facilitate peer support for international EAL students. The findings suggest that academically competent *seniors*, particularly those from the same or similar backgrounds as first year students, could play an important role as peer brokers. Thus one recommendation is for universities to facilitate peer support where relatively more knowledgeable and more experienced students can potentially act as academic mentors or advisors for incoming students. Ideally, these students would have similar backgrounds as the incoming students, whether in terms of shared culture, or shared background as international students. Another approach for this recommendation is to increase informal social interactions between cohorts of students, thereby providing new students opportunities to meet with suitable academic brokers.

Peer brokers are important social connections that enhance international EAL students' academic learning. It is hoped that future research will consider students' informal academic learning practices as an integral part of their overall overseas educational experiences.

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Appendix:
Summary of participants' background

Name	Gender	Age	Home country	Level of study	English entry qualification
Kim	F	Early 20s	Taiwan	Postgraduate diploma, first year, first semester (Completed Bachelor in Taiwan)	English language programme in NZ
Linda	F	Early 20s	China	Postgraduate diploma, first year, first semester (Completed Bachelor in China)	IELTS in home country
Josh	M	Early 20s	Malaysia (Chinese ethnicity)	Honours year, first semester (Completed Bachelor in Malaysia)	English medium university in home country
Jane	F	Early 20s	China	Undergraduate, first year, first semester	IELTS in home country
Sarah	F	Early 20s	China	Undergraduate, first year, first semester	English language programme in NZ
Henry	M	Early 20s	China	Undergraduate, first year, first semester	University preparatory programme in NZ
Annie	F	Early 30s	China	Undergraduate, first year, first semester	English language programme in NZ
Kevin	M	Early 40s	China	Undergraduate, first year, first semester	IELTS in home country
Cindy	F	Early 20s	Japan	Undergraduate, first semester of an exchange programme	TOEFL in home country
Simon	M	Early 20s	China	Undergraduate, first year, second semester	English language programme in home country

BEING A LANGUAGE LEARNER — IS THAT ALL THERE IS?

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Abstract

Asian migrants are inevitably categorised as language learners. At times, it is the migrant's own definition and can be used as a support. At others, it is an imposition in two senses: it can be imposed by others and by institutions; and also acts as a hindrance to resettlement in the new country. Language learning raises issues of a sense of belonging and a sense of self-value. A narrative inquiry study of six Asian migrant women follows their experience as language learners over a twelve-month period, focusing on the different concepts above, as the women negotiate their identities, to finally divesting the label language learner. The findings suggest that there is a close link between a sense of belonging and a sense of self-value which influences the participants' identity trajectories—towards valuable members of the mainstream society. The discussion poses two questions to education providers, ESL educators and policy makers: What does the image of language learner migrant do to the perception that others have of newcomers? How long is a newcomer a migrant?

Introduction and background

Aotearoa New Zealand (Aotearoa NZ) has become a multicultural country, attracting many people from diverse cultures and languages. Among those, there is an increase in the number of migrants who identify with at least one Asian ethnicity (Statistics New Zealand, 2015a, 2015b). Many Asian migrants are likely to have become language learners once they make the decision to move to Aotearoa NZ. Asian migrants are expected to learn English, and they themselves expect that language learning can lead to successful integration in the new home (Barkhuizen & de Klerk, 2006; Hamberger, 2009; Pio, 2005; Statistics New Zealand, 2015a). However, to adult migrants, learning and gaining confidence in communicating in English is often described as a challenge which is extremely difficult to overcome. Thus, in this paper, I investigate how Asian migrant women experience their language learner identity in order to gain a sense of belonging in their new home. I also look at how the process influences the way they themselves view their sense of self.

This paper 1) reports on part of the findings from the original study which investigated Asian migrant women's identity negotiation processes as language learners, and 2) reinterprets the findings to consider questions that arise from extending the implications of the study.

Framework: The construct of identity

Identities are constructed, maintained, and de-stabilised in interaction with others indicating that they are socially constructed (Kinginger, 2004; Norton, 1995; 2000). Social identity changes when people move geographically or socially: for example, an Asian woman becomes recognised as a migrant and an English language learner when she migrates to a country in which English is the lingua franca. Furthermore, there can be changes to the way people view themselves and the ways they are viewed by others. The concept of identity is

used by many researchers (Barkhuizen & de Klerk, 2006; Kinginger, 2004; Kim, 2011; Norton, 2000) to better understand migrants' experiences.

Identity as a language learner influences how Asian migrants feel about their belonging in the mainstream society. A study of migrant ESL students accessing four-year college education (Varghese & Kanno, 2010) revealed that most participants were well aware of their non-native speaker status. It also showed that language learner identity is a structurally imposed challenge for the participants. The institutional constraints that apply only to ESL students gave the students a sense of unfairness compared to non-ESL students and the stigma of "remedial student" status (Varghese & Kanno, 2010, p. 319). Troyna and Siraj-Blatchford (1993) similarly argue that there is a prevailing assumption that people tend to link lack of English language skills with learning difficulties. Such common assumptions of language learners serve to highlight the points examined here.

Firstly, the language learner identity can be socially assigned without belonging in a group of people or organisation. Some Asian migrants may not actively engage in learning English let alone take language learning classes, yet they are seen socially as language learners. A case in point is Martina, a migrant woman, (Norton, 2000), relying on her children when she needed to communicate with the landlord and the bank teller. Martina was a language learner.

To gain access to the mainstream society, Asian migrants are expected to have legitimate language skills. Two studies illustrate the point. In a study of one migrant's language learning experiences in re-settlement in Canada, Han (2012) revealed that fluency in the dominant language is critical for migrants to enter a new society, and that language is "primarily an issue of access and legitimacy" (p. 147) for Chinese migrants in Canada. Colic-Peisker's (2002) study of Croatians in Western Australia established a close link between the participants' sense of belonging and their English language use. The findings show how language learner identity should be broadly defined: early settlers with a lack of language proficiency struggle to belong in mainstream society due to language barriers, and later settlers with high language proficiency still express a lack of sense of belonging in the Australian community because of their accents. Hence Asian migrants become classified as language learners even though they may not participate in formal learning classes.

Secondly, the unsettling language learner identity of an Asian migrant adult is related to a sense of access to mainstream society. Many scholars (Bauman, 1999; Delanty, 2003; Mercer, 1990) link identity with a sense of belonging. They argue that identity becomes an issue for individuals when they experience the feeling of not belonging. In his second language identity study, Block (2007) links identity questions to a lack of sense of belonging for many language learners. Similarly, as noted earlier, Han (2012) concludes that the "immigrants' language problem is primarily an issue of access and legitimacy, both of which are not under immigrants' control" (p. 147). She further points out the embedded power issues which lead to many difficulties in identity negotiation. Power issues, presented in the interactions between Yang, a participant in Han's (2012) study, and the lease company representatives, have also been identified in studies of language learners, such as Troyna and Siraj-Blatchford (1993) and Varghese and Kanno (2010).

To migrants, learning English is linked to the hope of gaining a sense of belonging, defined by one account as "the experience of fitting in or being congruent with other people, groups, or environments through shared or complementary characteristics" (Hagerty, Williams, Coyne, & Early, 1996, p. 236). Others go further than "fitting in". Anant (1966) suggests a link between

sense of belonging and self and a sense of value, claiming that a sense of belonging is developed when a person feels valuable and indispensable in a social system. More recently, Jones and Krzyzanowski (2008) hold that the sense of belonging is developed through rejecting negative information that may distort or undermine positive self-image.

Sense of self amplifies the concept of belonging. In an examination of 40 articles relating to belonging, Mahar, Cobigo, and Stuart (2013) refer to belonging as "a subjective feeling of value and respect derived from a reciprocal relationship to an external referent that is built on a foundation of shared experiences, beliefs or personal characteristics" (p. 1031). In that context, a limited language learner identity is likely to influence the sense of self of Asian migrants learning English. Research on Japanese women in the USA (Kawakami, 2009) indicates that many Japanese stay-at-home women in the USA had imagined identities as professionals, yet they were reluctant even to apply for a job because they felt that their English was not sufficient for the application process. The participants viewed themselves as "just another Asian immigrant" (Kawakami, 2009, p. 22) because they were language learners. (For similar cases, see Colic-Peisker, 2002; Li, 2011; Pailliotet, 1997; Pio, 2005.) For migrants, being a language learner constructs a limited identity, which needs to be overcome to gain a sense of belonging in the mainstream society.

This paper holds that social identity is closely connected to a sense of belonging and sense of self. The case here is that the identity of Asian migrants learning English is related to their hopes of belonging in the mainstream society and of counterbalancing the lack of perceived self-value. Within this frame, I investigate 1) the ways language learner identities of Asian migrant women in Aotearoa NZ influence their sense of belonging in the mainstream society, 2) the ways their sense of self-value plays in the participants' identity negotiation, and 3) the ways they negotiate their identities.

The present study

Participants

Six Asian migrant women participated in the research: two participants (Holly and Emily) are from China, two (Mia and Jessica) from South Korea, one (Simi) from India, and one (Lucy) from Japan. All names are pseudonyms. Core identities that the participants identified with included Early Childhood Education (ECE) teachers (Simi and Mia), tertiary students (Jessica and Mia), ethnic community volunteers (Mia, Simi, Lucy, and Holly), and a Sunday school teacher (Emily). The participants also saw themselves both as mothers and migrants, thereby influencing their identity trajectories. In this paper, I use only a few selected stories of the participants.

Narrative inquiry

Narrative inquiry was used to collect stories from the six Asian migrant women. The approach has some features that helped to capture the complexity of the participants' experience in Aotearoa NZ. In the first place, narrative inquiry helped me to understand the participants holistically. Relevant studies (Moen, 2006; Phinney, 2000; Riessman, 2008; Webster & Mertova, 2007) note that narratives can capture the complexity of social phenomena. Narratives include what and how social structures influence people's daily lives, how they react to different influences and what the outcomes are.

Narratives are not only about representing the complexity of reality that people live in but also what is important to the participants. Hence, in the second place, narrative inquiry helped

to discern critical points out of the complexity that are important to the most current situation of the participants. People tell stories which are relevant and important in a particular context, which Labov (1997) refers to as reportability. Their stories are relevant to the present experience. Scholars (e.g., Bell, 2002; Moen, 2006; Sandelowski, 1991) note that telling stories includes not only past events but also the present and future.

Thirdly, narrative inquiry helped me to understand the identity negotiation process, through dyadic ways of communication. Narrative inquiry is a collaborative inquiry process (Gergen, 2001, 2009; Gergen & Gergen, 2014; Talmy, 2010a): the participants tell their stories and the researcher/interviewer responds to the stories. Recent literature in applied linguistics points out the collaborative aspect of qualitative interviews (Mann, 2011; Richards, 2010; Talmy, 2010b). The collaborative and dyadic process is helpful to understand the process of identity negotiation, which helped in designing the research methods as follows.

Methods

Iterative in-depth interviews were used to gather stories from the participants who were residing in Aotearoa NZ. The interviews consisted of three stages: one initial interview, six individual in-depth interviews, and one reflective interview. The initial interview and the in-depth interviews were focused on the stories of the participants. The interviews were conducted roughly once a month. The participants shared recent or salient experiences that related to their sense of belonging as language learners. The reflective interview was conducted at the end of each participant's participation in the research and focused on sharing the researcher's interpretation of the participant's shared stories, which were confirmed, changed or augmented by the participant. The collected stories were analysed thematically. Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis process and Bernard and Ryan's (2003) techniques to identify themes were helpful to analyse the data. Significant quotes and expressions were identified, grouped and sorted into categories under headings relevant to the research questions, enabling close analysis of data for the original study. The current paper draws on a restricted selection of themes that addresses the theoretically drawn questions for this paper as listed at the end of the framework which I constructed.

Findings

Language learner identities and sense of belonging

The participants reported that language learner identities were of limited use in trying to gain access to mainstream society, which become apparent largely in two ways. First, the participants found that they needed to provide evidence of their English proficiency when they hoped to enter a certain community such as a degree programme. Such cases were explicitly seen in the stories of Jessica and Mia. Mia was once a registered ECE teacher, but the regulations changed, and she needed to provide a specified English language proficiency result to regain her registration. Mia reported that she was a confident ECE teacher with many years of experience both in South Korea and Aotearoa NZ. However, she was denied status as a registered teacher due to English language proficiency. Similarly, Jessica wanted to enrol in an ECE degree programme after completing a post-graduate TESOL diploma at the same institute. However, she could not enrol unless she provided the required English language proficiency result.

The second limiting feature of language learner identity related to the participants' sense of belonging in daily social interactions. The first day at Simi's practicum at an Early Childhood Education (ECE) centre illustrates this clearly:

> I arrived there, saw my associate teacher in the kitchen to do morning tea. So I thought I would help her. "Are you preparing the morning tea? Is there anything I can help you with? Do you want me to cut the fruit or anything like that?" . . . She said it is not *fruits*; it is *fruit*. She was pretty rude, the way she said it. So I didn't understand. It was my first day, and I was nervous. I said I did say *fruit*. Anyway, I kept quiet because I didn't want to upset her, I didn't argue with her. I quietly did what I was told. . . . Then, she wrote in the reflection; I had used the word plural *fruit*. She had an Indian teacher who worked for her before, and she used to say *fruits* all the time, and she wrote on the board and then, and she said Indians used English in a very archaic manner and everything. So I was quite put off. . . . She had her concern about teachers coming from overseas with no English background, and they were trying to come here and work like that, pretty nasty stuff. . . . (Interview 2)

As seen in the excerpt above, the associate teacher seemed to deny Simi and more broadly, migrant teachers, as suitable ECE instructors, since they did not have "proper" English language skills. To the associate teacher, it seems that language skills were fundamental to gaining access to the ECE teacher identity, and she appears to have assumed that all migrant teachers from a particular background cause great concern.

Another example is from Mia's interpretation of many negative experiences at work. Mia often claimed that her lack of sense of belonging at work was due to her lack of English proficiency. She expressed it as such:

> I feel that I belong here, but there is a bit of frustration that I feel. It does not have the same feeling as I feel in Korea. I feel that I am two percent short, probably more than two percent. So, not completed. . . . Yes, that is right. It is the language. (Interview 2)

She perceived that she was a confident ECE teacher with experience and skills. However, she did not feel that she belonged to the group of teachers at work, even though she felt that she was a competent ECE teacher when she was with children. She explained the difference by the fact that she was a language learner.

Viewing herself as a language learner influenced how Mia interpreted a negative experience with other Koreans as well. Mia was principal at a Korean language school, where a group of teachers and parents accused her of incompetency as head of school. She highlighted that the people who were challenging her were those with competent English language skills and professional jobs. Overall, it seems that language learner identity not only limits the access to a certain identity but also negatively influences daily social interactions for Asian migrant women learning English.

Sense of self-value

Statements about the sense of self appeared when the participants narrated their stories. A strong sense of self-value emerged in many of Simi's stories while reporting an insistent sense of belonging as an ECE teacher. After an initial struggle (as described in Section 4.1), Simi became established as a registered ECE teacher, and worked at an ECE centre for many years as a reliable and trustworthy employee. Among many incidents, the highlight seemed to be the story that Simi was one of few employees with whom the manager shared a confidential matter.

Perhaps paradoxically, sense of self was also apparent in participants' stories of lacking a sense of belonging. As briefly described in Section 4.1, Jessica successfully finished a Level 7

tertiary course. However, when she applied unsuccessfully for an ECE programme, she was referred to a Level 4 course (Foundation Studies). She did not feel that she belonged there:

> I have been using APA referencing over a year [at the TESOL course] . . . I have done it for a year, and I know what to do. That's why my essay I finished it . . . she [a tutor] used my essay for an example to my classmates . . . I don't mind studying easier things, but it is a waste of money and time. And like this class, treating me like that, I hate this. (Interview, 3)

Jessica knew the course material, and her work became a standard for other students. While she was a model student, she did not feel that she belonged in the course.

Meanwhile, lack of sense of self-value appeared in stories in which belonging was challenged. Emily told how she had to rely on her peers because she could not comprehend the Sunday school teacher training class in English. She was also silenced by her own children when she did the school run: her children did not want her to speak either Chinese or English, due to the oddness of Chinese language and the different English accent that Emily had. Similarly, Holly illustrated her frustration when she had to buy an intercity bus ticket at the beginning of her settlement in Aotearoa NZ. She had to rely on her friends. She felt she was belittled, losing a sense of self-value as a grown-up and independent person.

Conversely, as described above, a strong sense of self-value could present even while reporting a lack of sense of belonging as a language learner. Mia's comments about her ECE teacher identity are a case in point. She spoke about the difficulty at work due to the lack of English competency. However, she often added comments like "I could not speak, but I was creative and . . . I was the only one who could play the piano . . . and I am the senior there." (Mia, Interview 1). Mia validated to the researcher her identity as an ECE teacher by providing evidence to increase her self-value, to reinforce a sense of belonging at work.

Enhancing belonging and self-value

Mia became an unregistered ECE teacher due to the lack of the English language requirement. She reported that she was frustrated that her salary scale differed significantly from registered employees, even though she was a qualified teacher with many years of experience. She was an ECE teacher, yet she felt that she was less valued compared to other teachers at the same institute, a situation which seemed to affect her sense of belonging, as seen in the section above. She changed from f working ull-time to part-time to take an English language course. Mia became an active language learner.

Similarly, when Holly experienced a lack of sense of belonging, she shifted her identity from a tertiary student to a language learner. In the mainstream course, a business course at a tertiary institute, Holly realised that she could not follow the class. She reported that she could not even understand simple instructions in English. She asked for the transfer and reported that she was a lot happier. She could relate to her classmates and could follow the lesson: her sense of belonging increased

> When I came, I realised that my English was so bad. In the class [Business course] I could not understand well. Even I did not understand what they asked me to do. Totally I got lost. I said I had to change to the English class. . . . I felt better. There were lots of Chinese, so I could ask [in Chinese when she did not follow any instruction]. I was happier in [the] general English class. (Interview 1)

As described in the section above, Holly gained a sense of belonging in the language course rather than the business course. She mentioned that she was indeed a language learner and her identity trajectory of being a Chinese interpreter indicates that the changes increased her sense of belonging and her sense of self-value. After many years, she reported that she often voluntarily helped people in the Chinese community. Her availability, mobility and, most of all, her English skills were the reasons why people asked for help, she reported. Being a good English language user increased her sense of self-value as someone who could contribute to her ethnic community and more widely, to the mainstream society. She became a valuable member of the society, which increased her sense of self and increased the sense of belonging.

The participants hoped to belong in the mainstream society, and the negotiation is on-going. In Jessica's case, she wanted to enter a degree programme hoping for a career. As previously mentioned, she failed to enter an ECE programme and took a Level 4 course due to the social benefit her family relied on. After six months, she entered an applied linguistics degree programme at a different tertiary institute. Her journey to becoming a valuable member of society in a new home continues.

Discussion, implications and conclusion

From the findings, I discuss two main points with corresponding implications: 1) what is the relationship between a sense of belonging and a sense of self-value? 2) Where does the language learning process take a newcomer? Next, I reinterpret the discussion and address critical points to ponder as education providers, ESL educators, and policy makers. Then, I conclude the paper with my view on the use of migrants' stories.

Holly's and Mia's cases in the findings sections indicate the complexity of sense of belonging and sense of self-value, which is in line with relevant literature (Mahar, Cobigo, and Stuart, 2013; Kawakami, 2009). The complexity is closely connected to migrants' identity trajectories as seen in Pio's (2005) study on Indian women migrants in New Zealand and Norton's (2000) study on women migrants in Canada. The participants in this study as well sought a sense of belonging, as seen in Holly's change of courses, which had the effect she wanted. A similar interpretation can be drawn from Mia's and Jessica's language learning stories. Mia hoped to gain a sense of belonging as an ECE teacher and Jessica as a tertiary student. The increased sense of belonging in language courses grew out of their lack of sense of self-value. Their sense of self was negatively influenced by the fact that they were language learners, and they often used their language learner identity to account for any negative experience.

The identity trajectories of the participants built a base for becoming valuable members of Aotearoa NZ society. Holly, for instance, learned the language and became an interpreter. In this way, she gained a sense of self-value and belonging, as she moved into an existence that went beyond language learning. Such a development implies that language learning is not just limited to linguistic skills but can helpfully orient to diverse identity possibilities, a frame that EAL education and policies can promote and enhance.

Considerations such as these have some timely reminders for ESOL courses. They suggest that EAL educators, programme facilitators, and institutes should be mindful that Asian migrants have aspirations and identities that go beyond language learning; that their current state of being in a language course may be strongly conflicted and perhaps contradictory; that migrants see language learning as stepping stones in a trajectory to other activities and lives.

The discussion above suggests that the perceptions and stereotypes of mainstream society further isolate migrants from successful belonging in Aotearoa NZ society. Simi's story from the practicum illustrates the point. The associate teacher assumed from previous experience that Indian migrants lacked legitimate language skills, which stopped her from listening to what Simi was saying: Simi had intended to help the associate teacher. The story reminds us to look critically at ourselves—at how we view migrants and adult language learners, especially to note that focusing narrowly on linguistic skills may keep us from identifying qualities and skills that EAL Asian migrants possess. This very reasonable realisation has useful support in relevant literature on EAL. Reports from González, Moll, & Amanti (2013); Kelly, Daiwo, & Malasa (2011); and Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez (1992) argue against focusing only on target language skills. Instead, they call for shifting to a wider approach that can address social, cultural and linguistic resources of EAL students. Here, the teacher becomes a knowledge seeker rather than a knowledge bearer, with the understanding that the learners have diverse knowledge which can offer a useful resource for learning the target language. Recognition of the fact that EAL learners themselves have resources can help to redesign the ways lessons are designed and managed.

The participants in the study had lived in Aotearoa NZ for a considerable number of years at the time of interviews. For example, Holly and Mia settled in Aotearoa NZ in 1996 and 1997 respectively. After more than a decade, Mia still identified herself as a language learner and a migrant. Such identities raise a question about when Mia will be just an ECE teacher rather than a hyphened identity - an ECE teacher who is a language learner and migrant. Mia reported that she lacked a sense of belonging as an ECE teacher. She was "two percent short" which is in line with other studies that suggest that access to mainstream society requires legitimate language skills (Colic-Peisker, 2002; Han, 2012). Even though Mia was a language learner and migrant, she considered herself a relatively successful migrant who had obtained the same career as the one back home, just as Simi also mentioned. In this regard, Holly's case is similar because she was a successful migrant who helped other new settlers from China. The fact that they still considered themselves migrants seems unsettling. It may be due to differing perceptions: first that they do not feel the belongingness they hoped for; and second that society still views them differently, namely as Asian and as migrants. Looking at the issue broadly, many of us were once migrants, moving from one city to another and one country to another. Many young Aotearoan New Zealanders have been migrants for shorter or longer periods while engaged in activities like teaching English in Asian countries. Such overseas experiences should prompt us to be reflective and reflexive when viewing certain groups of people as migrants.

In a study of three stories of English language learners, Early and Norton (2012) argue that sharing stories of each other would increase not only their personal value but also the ability to learn from each other, leading to increased learning opportunities and greater possible identity options. Learning from sharing stories is also identified in Lee et al. (2014). It does not mean that the story sharing should focus on an either-or view of the identity construction of EAL Asian migrant, for example as either a hero or victim, which is far from the reality of people's daily lives (see Hunter, 2015, for an analysis of the need to rethink the dichotomy). For policy makers and education providers, such outcomes provide insights into what kinds of policies and programmes are more likely to increase the construction of desirable identities for EAL Asian migrants, and also how those policies and programmes should be delivered.

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ARE STUDENTS REALLY ON-TASK WHEN USING MOBILE DEVICES?

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Abstract

Recent data show that internet connections and mobile device usage is increasing in Aotearoa, New Zealand. Mobile devices are becoming increasingly ubiquitous, which has prompted questions regarding the use of these devices in academic settings (Madrazo, 2011). Whilst some teachers see the constant connectivity as an intrusion or believe that mobile devices distract students from achieving learning objectives, other educators have embraced the exploration of the affordances offered by these constantly connected devices. The focus of this paper is to present findings from a qualitative investigation into how students enrolled in a university preparation course at a New Zealand university utilise their mobile devices for academic purposes. It outlines what mobile devices are being used for, and what tasks students indicate a perceived need to use mobile devices for. It also investigates student perceptions regarding how mobile devices can help or hinder their learning. In addition, students have identified situations when mobile devices distract them from learning within a face-to-face academic tertiary context. Finally, this paper will discuss some of the pedagogical factors that might influence the use of mobile devices within an academic context.

Introduction and background

Students in the tertiary education sector appear to constantly using their mobile devices (Johnson, Adams Becker, Estrada, & Freeman, 2015). However, what it is students are accessing has not been fully understood or explored. This paper looks at self-reported use of mobile devices within an academic context. It aims to discuss whether or not students are using their devices to complete academic tasks.

Students who participated in this study are enrolled in a Foundation Bridging Certificate at a tertiary institution in New Zealand where all classes are conducted in a face-to-face, English-medium environment. Course materials are available through an online Learning Management System (LMS). Many students access the course materials using a mobile device during class time. For the context of this study, mobile devices refer to any portable device that allows the user to connect to the internet: these include laptops, tablet computers and smartphones. The site of this inquiry offers the opportunity for all students enrolled to connect to free, high-speed, wi-fi whilst on campus. This ensures that, while on campus at least, students have the ability to be constantly connected via mobile devices. However, what students are accessing is unclear. This study aims to investigate what activities students are engaging in and the extent to which students are on-task. On-task refers to students being engaged in the appropriate academic task at the appropriate time. Preliminary findings of what students are accessing and their perceptions of the impact of mobile devices on their studies are the focus of this paper.

This paper will provide details of the first phase of a phenomenological study into students who are currently enrolled in pre-degree academic preparation courses at a New Zealand tertiary institute. It summarises how students are using their mobile devices and investigates their experiences and perceptions of the value of these mobile devices to support teaching and learning. This paper outlines a review of current literature on the use of mobile devices in

similar contexts and details the research project conducted, with attention to pertinent findings and results obtained from the research. Conclusions and pedagogical implications for the acceptable use of mobile devices in similar tertiary academic contexts will also be discussed.

Mobile devices are increasingly more available and technology-enhanced learning initiatives have moved from eLearning to mLearning (G. D. Murphy, 2011) and from Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) to Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL) (Jarvis & Achilleos, 2013). Many of the studies have looked at what can be introduced by way of technology enhancement into the classroom but few have asked what students are using their devices for outside of these action research or intervention based scenarios. The researcher noticed that in the classroom of an urban, tertiary institution that enabled wi-fi based internet connectivity, the majority of students were often transfixed by their screens. As a classroom practitioner, the researcher was interested in ascertaining what it is that students are doing, without prompting or input, with their mobile devices. All students who took part in the study claimed to bring at least one mobile device to class daily, with many students declaring to own multiple mobile devices. In order to better understand student's experiences and perceptions of the value of these devices, the following questions were posed:

- What are students using their mobile devices for?
- What tasks are students reporting they "need" their mobile devices for?
- In what situations do students perceive a mobile device to be a distraction?
- According to students, how can mobile devices help or hinder learning?

Literature review

Research into how students are using mobile devices is a relatively new area of investigation. Kennedy et al. (2009), and studies conducted by the Australian Government's Collaborative Research Networks (A. Murphy, Farley, & Koronios, 2013; A. Murphy, Farley, Lane, Hafeez-Baig, & Carter, 2013) have investigated the use of mobile devices to access and facilitate both formal and informal learning opportunities in Australian Universities. Similar investigations have been undertaken in Vietnamese universities (A. Murphy, Midgley, & Farley, 2014), American universities (Gikas & Grant, 2013), and Australian secondary schools (Keane, Lang, & Pilgrim, 2012). Investigations into the use of mobile devices in the context of tertiary classrooms in Aotearoa New Zealand, is relatively underrepresented. Gedera (2014) has looked specifically at eLearning and the use of Learning Management Systems within a tertiary institute in Aotearoa New Zealand, but did not explore specifically the use of mobile devices. Educators involved in the use of mobile devices have identified that it does matter which device students are using (Kukulsha-Hulme, 2009) and subsequently how the device can affect the learning approach and level of integration of technology in teaching and learning opportunities. This paper aims to contribute to a greater understanding of what students are using their mobile devices by discussing self-reported experiences of this usage.

As mobile devices are becoming increasingly ubiquitous in our everyday lives, there has also been a rise in the use of mobile devices within an educational context. The increase in mobile devices can be seen to have facilitated the increase in a more flexible approach to teaching and learning. Learning is no longer confined to the four walls of a classroom or lecture theatre but can now expand into the online, virtual environment where knowledge can be gathered, tested and new knowledge created through the use of connected devices (Churchill, Fox, & King, 2012; Hockly, 2013; Perkins & Saltsman, 2010; Traxler, 2009). Blended learning opportunities, when traditional face-to-face learning can be supplemented with online, digital resources, are becoming more frequently available (Contact North, 2015; Owston, York, &

Murtha, 2013). With the mobility afforded by virtue of the size of mobile devices, students are able to access blended learning activities more readily within the context of their academic study. Some researchers have expressed concern raised by teachers, that students can be more easily distracted when constantly connected (Bennett, Maton, & Carrington, 2011; Geist, 2011; Perkins & Saltsman, 2010). However, little research has been done into what students are accessing when they are on their mobile devices. This study intends to work towards addressing this issue and looking at ways in which the mobile device may distract them from learning.

Evidence suggests that learners, across a variety of contexts, are using mobile devices to support aspects of their learning (Godwin-Jones, 2011; Jarvis & Achilleos, 2013). Access to the internet and continued connectivity is a reality for many New Zealand households. Data produced by Statistics New Zealand (2012) indicates that 80% of New Zealand households have internet connections. This is an increase of 15% from 2006 on the number of homes where connectivity is available. Alongside the increase in connectivity, mobile device usage in New Zealand is also increasing with "three out of four New Zealanders owning a smartphone and half with a tablet" (Wynn, 2014, para. 3). This number is expected to continue to increase with the research organisation Frost and Sullivan (2013, para.1) predicting "[B]y 2018, New Zealand will have 90% smartphone and 78% tablet ownership levels". This would indicate that in New Zealand, internet access is becoming more readily available and mobile device usage is becoming more pervasive. This study aims to provide additional evidence as to the type of activities and tasks that students are using mobile devices to complete.

The present study

The data discussed in this paper were collected via online surveys distributed to students enrolled in a university preparation course at a tertiary institute. Students were encouraged to complete the surveys out-of-class time to minimise any possible referent power differential that may have affected bias in the data collection if the teacher or researcher were to be present. To eliminate any potential bias towards any student there was no option for participants to provide their names or identifying information, thus rendering all responses anonymous. Surveys included the collection of demographic information, closed questions, and open-ended questions regarding the usage of mobile devices within an academic context. The latter allowed a wider range of responses. The responses that are discussed in this paper have been drawn from surveys administered that aimed to collect perceptual and attitudinal responses and were self-reported.

The participant pool comprised of 75 males and 67 females (2 participants chose not to identify a gender). Half of the students surveyed were under 20 years of age with two of every five students being recent school leavers (aged 17-18 years old at the time of sampling). The context within which this study is situated is important. Although all instruction at the institution is in an English-medium environment, students come from a variety of backgrounds: 45% of participants were enrolled as domestic students whereas 55% were international students. Many of these students come from cross-culture families and ethnically identify with their 'home country' ethnicity. Across the student sample, the largest ethnic representation was Asian (48%), followed by New Zealand European (20%), then Arab (12%), Pasifika (9%), Maori (5%), and an additional 7% of "other" ethnicity, which included South African, Australian, Irish and New Caledonian. The cohort of students was also linguistically diverse. Only 19% of the students surveyed considered themselves monolingual in English. Slightly under half (49%) identified themselves as bilingual, with one in four claiming to be tri-lingual. An additional 6% claimed to speak more than three languages. This would indicate that the

majority of the students involved in this study are operating in an English as a Second Language (ESL) academic context.

It was deemed important to ascertain what students are using their mobile devices for as opposed to what they could be used for, which is a topic for additional study and is outside the scope of this paper. Participants were asked to indicate the frequency with which they used their mobile devices to complete different activities. The survey investigated twelve different activities that mobile devices could be used for. Participants were asked to choose the frequency that ***best*** suited their use of mobile devices. They could choose from the following options: hourly, every 3-4 hours, daily, every 2-3 days, weekly, every 2 weeks, monthly, every 2-3 months, never used. Students could only choose one frequency, therefore, it is possible that exact usage varies from that reported but it was decided that these times gave a more accurate picture than using terms such as regularly or often because students may misinterpret the frequency. Responses to the closed-end questions were tallied to identify the number of responses for each time option.

Where students were asked open-ended questions that investigated perceptions and attitudes towards the role of mobile devices in academic contexts, iterative analysis was applied (Boeije, 2010). In accordance with iterative analysis practices, responses were read and re-read multiple times during the coding process. *NVivo* software was used to group codes into categories using an inductive approach resulting in identifiable themes.

Results and Discussion

The following section will look at the results of four of the questions from the surveys. The findings have been divided into the four content areas.

Use

Among the 63 students who chose to participate in this section of the study, all except one student reported bringing a phone to class (4% did not identify the type of phone but the remaining 96% reported having access to a smartphone in class). The activity that participants are overwhelmingly using their devices for the most is for communicative purposes (see Figure 1 for frequency of communicative use of mobile devices): 96.8% of those surveyed indicated that they used their mobile devices to send SMS and text messages on an hourly, 3-4 hourly or daily bases; 92.1% indicated that they were accessing emails and equally 92.1% indicated they were accessing social networks via their mobile device at least once a day if not more regularly. As it would be considered inappropriate to use a phone during class times, the survey did not question using mobile devices to make phone calls.

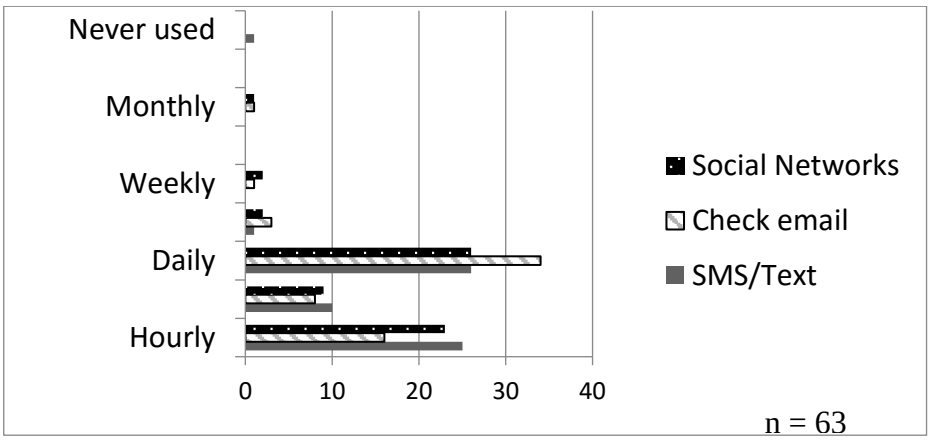

Figure 1: Communicative uses of mobile devices

Following communication, entertainment was also high on the list of uses for mobile devices. In particular, the survey enquired into the use of mobile devices to listen to music, play games, read books, download apps and surf the internet. The two activities that are significantly higher, in this category, are surfing the net and listening to music: 90.5% of participants indicated that they regularly (daily or more frequently) used their mobile device to listen to music, and 85.7% said that they used their mobile device to surf the internet. In this study, participants were not asked to differentiate between personal, social or academic use of the internet but this might be an area of interest in subsequent studies. Likewise, when asked about downloading apps, students were not asked to identify the nature of the apps they were downloading: 30% of students downloaded apps on a daily basis with an additional 27% downloading apps on a weekly or more frequent basis.

When asked about playing games, 11% of students claim to have never used mobile devices to play games; conversely, 38% reported playing games on their mobile device at least daily. These statistics may have potential classroom implications in the area of gamification (Johnson, Adams Becker, Estrada, & Freeman, 2014; Johnson et al., 2015) and two students reported playing games hourly, which would seem to indicate the high likelihood that these students are regularly off-task. This may have subsequent implications for classroom management. Of interest to academic usage of mobile devices, 33% of students indicated they had never used mobile devices to read books. Reasons surrounding this could also be an area of further investigation give the growing trend for eBook usage (Bai & Smith, 2010) and the potential to access academic texts electronically.

According to leading mobile devices providers such as Samsung and Apple, the activity that is marketed as a ubiquitous key feature of a mobile device is to take and distribute photos. In the survey, students were asked to differentiate between the frequency that they took photos and the frequency that they sent or posted photos: 79.3% of students reported taking photos every 2-3 days or more frequently; slightly more than one in every two students claimed to be taking photos at least every day. However, of the almost 80% of students taking photos, only 71% reported posting or sending them during the same time frame. This would indicate that many photos taken are not distributed. Within the academic context, this may include photos of whiteboards or classroom presentations.

The final activities investigated were booking appointments and buying products. Comparatively very few respondents reported regularly using their mobile devices for these activities: 55% book appointments more regularly than once a month and 57% buy products in the same time period. This could be a reflection of the frequency with which we do these activities, however, these results are interesting given, according to Thomas and Jose (2015), the rise in e-commerce.

Necessity / Need(s)

To identify tasks deemed to necessitate the use of mobile devices, 105 students were invited to respond to the prompt “what tasks do you feel you could not do if you weren’t able to use your mobile device?” Through an inductive coding process the following categories were identified: academic, social, and functional. The largest category identified was the use of mobile devices to complete academic tasks. Students identified a range of academic tasks that they believed could not be completed without the use of mobile devices. These included conducting research, accessing materials to complete class work, submitting assignments, accurately referencing and citing materials adhering to academic conventions. It is possible

that the prominence of academic tasks may be attributable to the context within which the research project was conducted. The category of social uses included needing a mobile device when communicating with peers and teachers and generally being able to connect with others. The functional convenience, accessibility and use of mobile devices as a tool were briefly mentioned. Sixteen students stipulated that mobile devices were not necessary, with one student stating, "I don't believe not having mobile devices should effect [*sic*] any part of studying even though it makes things a lot more [*sic*] easier."

What tasks students use their mobile device for, but could probably complete without the aid of the mobile device, was also investigated: 90 responses were received and the same approach to coding was implemented with the same categories being identified. Students claimed that they could complete academic tasks such as writing tasks (including writing essays), note-taking, research, assignments, and class work without the use of mobile devices. Students commented on the ability to be able to complete tasks without mobile devices; however, the convenience of mobile devices made certain tasks easier to complete, as illustrated by comments such as, "I think some writing tasks, since writing on a laptop is very convenient to edit and revise. But I can do it without using a mobile device."

Of interest were the categories that appeared in response to both "What task do you need your mobile device for?" and "What task can you do without your mobile device?" Of importance within an academic context is the use of mobile devices to complete research and access materials. Some students commented on needing mobile devices to complete these tasks while others commented that these tasks could be completed without mobile devices. Also, within an ESL context the appearance of vocabulary on both lists is of interest.

In the open-ended responses to the prompts regarding the necessity of mobile devices, academic applications of mobile devices were overwhelmingly mentioned more frequently than the social or functional aspects of the devices. This would indicate that the majority of students self-reported being engaged in academic tasks on their mobile devices. This may indicate that they are regularly on-task (engaged with academic tasks) within the context of their studies. What we are not able to ascertain, through this dataset, is the extent to which students are on-task at the appropriate time. Students may recognize the affordances of mobile devices to support their learning but may not always be engaged in the appropriate on-task use within the classroom context.

Distractions

Students were asked about student perceptions of situations in which mobile devices may distract them from learning. Approximately half of the received responses (n=53) indicated that mobile devices were not a distraction. An additional five students reported not using mobile devices in class so did not find them to be a distraction. The remaining responses indicated receiving texts and emails were the main source of distraction with 21 students indicating this was a cause that distracted them during class. A number of students (n=23) mentioned notifications, social media, or Facebook in particular, as being a distraction. Another five students referred directly to the in-house Learning Management System as a distraction to their learning.

Usefulness: help or hindrance

When students were asked whether mobile devices can help or hinder their learning experiences (see Figure 2), the overwhelming self-reported responses were in favour of mobile

devices assisting learning with 89% of students either directly or indirectly stating that mobile devices helped their learning.

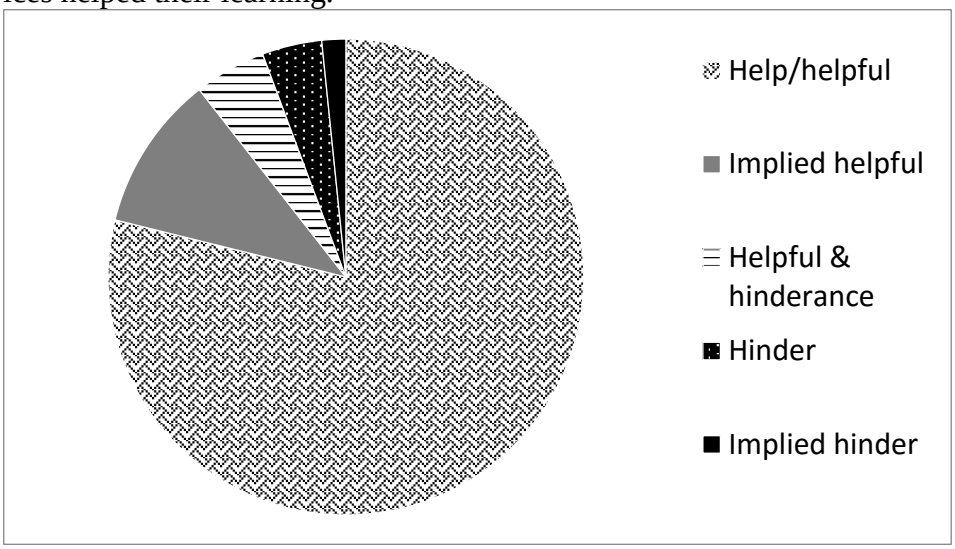

Figure 2: Perceived usefulness of mobile devices

Some comments that indicated mobile devices were perceived to be beneficial included:

- Yes it definitely does. Not only can it be a lot quicker to get tasks done but it also saves the weight of carrying around more things such as big folders.
- Overall, I think they are favourable for me. The main reason is that it is the fast and convenient way to get course and other information relevant to study. Next, I can reserve assignments easily and check them in any time.

Responses to the question "In your opinion, do you think mobile devices help or hinder your learning?" can be seen in Figure 3. Responses indicate that mobile devices are most helpful when accessing information and references. Access to material was attributed as the second most helpful function. Seventeen of the 83 responses indicated the efficiency of being able to complete tasks using mobile devices as a factor that positively impacted on their learning.

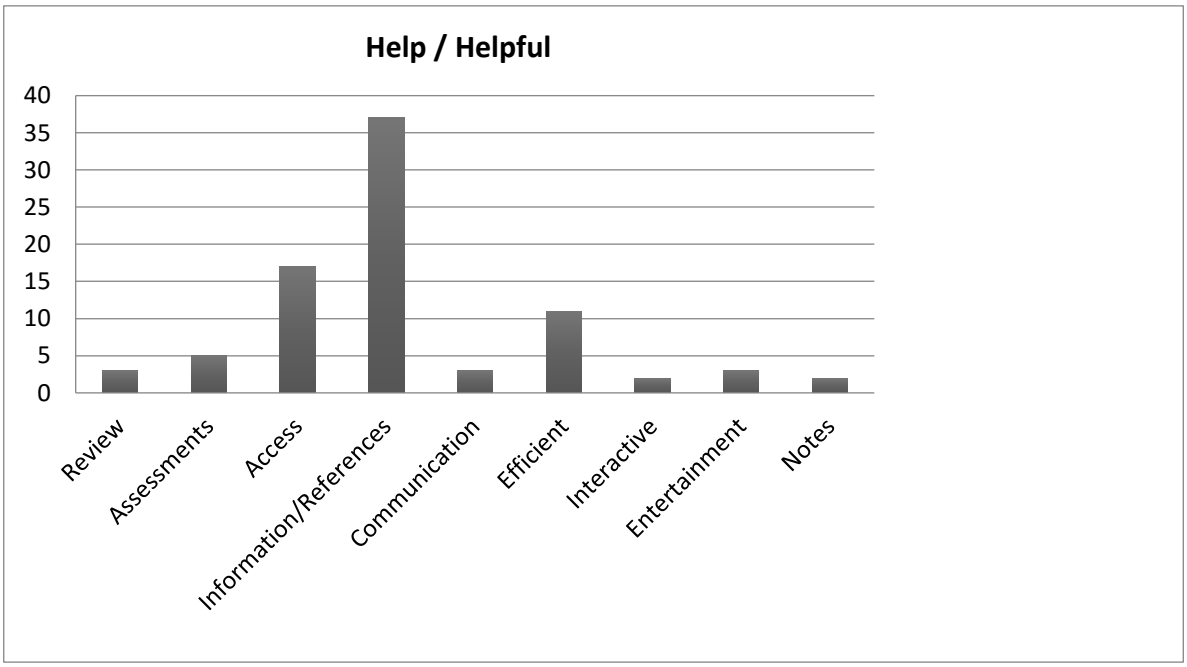

Figure 3: Beneficial uses of mobile devices

What is interesting in the context of an ESL classroom is the majority of comments indicate that students self-report to be on-task. Comments regarding how mobile devices can help to support language learning included:

- I can use the dictionary anytime
- Me as a second language student it helps me a lot as I always refer to Google translator
- Help. when i don't know the word's meaning i can check the meaning from the phone
- I can learn the language conveniently
- some grammars and vocabularies are difficult for me, I need to check in the internet.

These comments appear to suggest that students are using their mobile devices to gain immediate access to language support and reference materials. However, some students appear to have reflected on a need to physically process language through quotes such as "I seem to remember more when I'm writing rather than typing".

Implications

Students are actively referring to their mobile devices and may not necessarily being distracted from remaining on-task. This may, therefore, offer an opportunity for teachers to promote discussions around behaviours and, where necessary, establish boundaries for acceptable use within the classroom context. When students appear disengaged, there may be a possibility of turning that around by introducing or integrating a mobile technology that facilitates the acheivement of learning objectives. Students are already using their mobile devices to access classroom materials, language support and research resources. Therefore, through careful consideration of ways in which a classroom practitioner can potentially substitute, augment, modify or redefine learning tasks (Puentedura, 2011) we may find students and teachers together can work towards appropriate integration of mobile devices to support teaching and learning objectives.

As a result of implementing this project, there are still some areas that could be probed further. It would be beneficial, for example, to understand the extent to which academic, social, and functional use of the internet and downloaded applications overlap. An understanding of what students are doing with their mobile devices is particularly important if we are to understand whether or not students are on-task when required in class. The analysis of the self-reported responses shows that the primary uses of mobile devices were SMS & texts (96.8%), sending emails and accessing social networks (92.1% equally), listening to music (90.5%), surfing the internet (85.7%), followed by taking and sending photos at 58% and 50% respectively. Hockly (2011) identified a need to teach students how to be responsible in their use of mobile devices in class. It appears in this study that when using their mobile devices, most students perceive that they are engaged in learning tasks. Therefore, it is perhaps incumbent on teachers to actively encourage and incorporate appropriately meaningful learning strategies, including the use of mobile devices, alongside more traditional teaching and learning practices.

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RAISING CRITICAL AWARENESS OF LEARNING AMONG ADULT ESOL LITERACY LEARNERS

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Abstract

An action research project carried out in an adult ESOL Literacy class attempted to answer the question: 'In what ways and to what extent is it possible for a teacher in the ESOL Literacy programme to adapt teaching techniques or task design to help learners develop or increase critical awareness of their own learning?'. The research project was carried out in two stages. Firstly, three teaching techniques were selected and tasks designed that would suit learners with a range of different skills in the class. Secondly, the tasks were implemented and refined during the process of data collection over a period of two terms. Three types of tasks were used during the data collection period: dictation, the use of Cuisenaire rods, and the use of computer-based tasks. Instruments used for data collection included learner logs, teacher observations and reflections and informal discussions with other teachers in the programme.

Introduction and background

The ESOL Literacy programme that was the subject of this study is a community education programme focused on teaching English and literacy skills to adult learners from refugee backgrounds. The main objective of the programme is to enable learners to develop the language, literacy and learning skills necessary to facilitate settlement (Blakely, Castles, Field, Ibrahim, & Walkerdine, 2009). Learners ideally leave the programme to find a job or enter into further study at a formal education provider.

The learners have less than nine years of school experience in their own countries – many of them have had no formal education. Classes are offered not in dedicated classrooms but in community centres that are easily accessible to the learners. The teaching team consists of a trained teacher, a Bilingual Assistant (BLA) and one or more volunteer tutors. Classes are multi-level, multi-cultural and sometimes include babies and young children accompanying their parents.

At the time when this study was conducted, the teaching context being researched included up to 23 learners from 11 different countries speaking 12 different languages. Only two of the language groups received part-time language support from a trained bilingual language assistant (BLA). All other classroom interaction had to be negotiated using support from more capable peers. The learners ranged in age from their early twenties to late sixties. Some came to New Zealand on the refugee quota, while others were included in the family reunification programme. Learners usually came directly from a refugee camp or an informal settlement in a transition country. Some of the learners had been in the country for a number of years before starting in the programme and some had been very recent arrivals. Their varying stages of acculturation had an impact on attendance and learning needs.

A number of learners were dealing with symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder which made it difficult for them to attend class regularly or to concentrate for long periods at a time. The enduring effects of the trauma experienced by the former refugees also made it difficult for them to develop relationships of trust and rebuild self-esteem – qualities that are needed for successful language learning (Hrubes, 2000; Isserlis, 2000). This aspect contributed to the

decision to initiate an action research project where the teacher was also the researcher. The learners knew and accepted the teacher, trusted her and felt that they were engaged in the project from start to finish. Action research is not research carried out from an external perspective by an objective stranger, but a project carried out by partners in a learning situation to the benefit of all participants (Altrichter, Kemmis, McTaggart, & Zuber-Skerrit, 2002).

The desire to take back control over their lives is one of the main motivating factors for learners from a refugee background (Benseman, 2012). Learner autonomy is a complicated construct perhaps best described in Oxford's study (2003). She describes five perspectives of autonomy: a technical, psychological, two socio-cultural and a political-critical perspective. This model, as well as the relation between learner autonomy and the development of learning strategies, are discussed in more detail in a wider study (Potgieter, 2015). That study focused on raising critical awareness of learning among the learners and explored what changes the teacher could make in teaching techniques and task design to encourage learners to increase their self-awareness in this regard.

The present paper

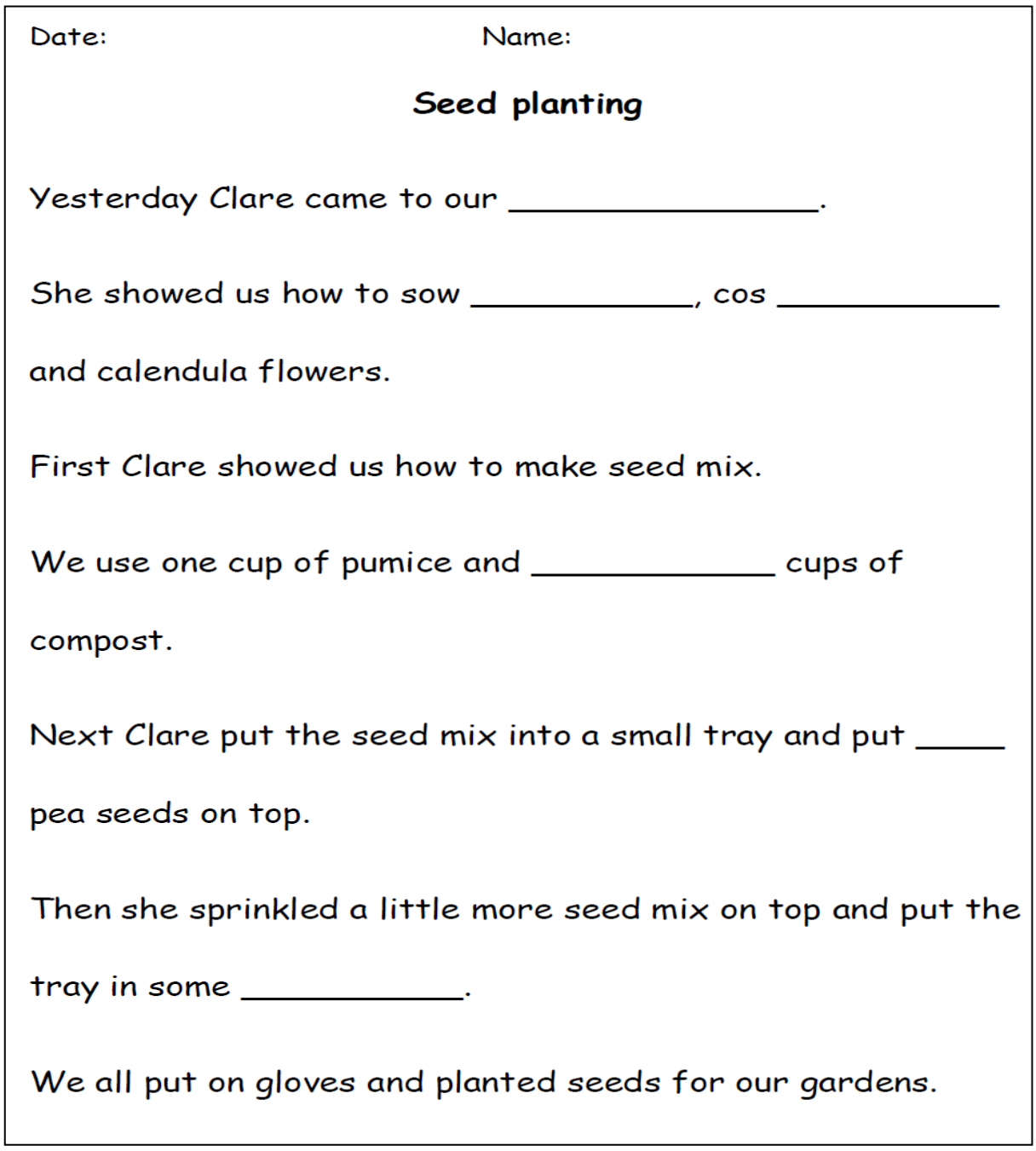
This article will discuss the three focus techniques and tasks of the original research project: dictation as a learning tool; the use of Cuisenaire rods; and computer-based tasks.

Dictation as a learning tool

At the time of this study, orthographic dictation formed part of the summative assessment in the middle (P2) and higher (P3) level groups in the ESOL Literacy programme in order to measure learners' progress in developing writing as well as listening skills. Skills descriptors for this task included the correct use of capital letters and full stops or other basic punctuation, knowing that a full stop is followed by a capital letter, writing on the line and spacing words conventionally, as well as decoding the sounds and spelling the words. Some experienced teachers in the same programme used dictation as a regular class activity and reported that learners preferred this as an activity that engaged their interest and that they felt was useful for learning (Blake, 2011). This is supported by research findings that list the benefits of using dictation in the classroom (Davis & Rinvolucri, 1988) and describe dictation as a technique that copes with large, mixed-level groups. Alkire (2002) also identified orthographic text dictation as the type of dictation with the broadest learning possibilities. He described a process whereby learners transcribe a unified passage, reinforcing the sound/spelling correlations of English as well as uncovering comprehension and grammatical weaknesses in learners which the teacher could then analyse and use in planning future lessons.

A variety of teaching techniques and different dictation tasks were trialled, refined and trialled again. For the middle and higher level groups (P2 and P3), the procedure that worked best was a linked-skills procedure that culminated in a cloze-type worksheet where learners had to complete sentences in a printed text while listening to the text being read out to them. The procedure ran over more than one session. It usually started with a shared language experience session – a demonstration of some kind, or a video that the whole class watched at the same time. Afterwards the whole class worked together to create a written text describing the event. In follow-up sessions speaking, reading and writing skills were linked in the opening sequence of the task, talking about the experience and reading the shared text. During the next sequence listening, writing and reading were linked and learners had to listen to the tutor reading the text and fill in the gaps on their worksheets. Worksheets (See Figure 1) were prepared for each learner individually, according to the level of support they needed. Some

learners had to fill in a few gaps where basic sight words were missing and the higher level learners were required to write whole sentences.



Date: Name:

Seed planting

Yesterday Clare came to our _____.

She showed us how to sow _____, cos _____ and calendula flowers.

First Clare showed us how to make seed mix.

We use one cup of pumice and _____ cups of compost.

Next Clare put the seed mix into a small tray and put _____ pea seeds on top.

Then she sprinkled a little more seed mix on top and put the tray in some _____.

We all put on gloves and planted seeds for our gardens.

Figure 1: Example of a cloze dictation worksheet for a learner in the P2 group (middle level)

Afterwards learners were asked to work in pairs to check their answers and write down words that they needed to learn how to spell. This part of the task encouraged them to develop awareness of some of their own learning needs. In these two groups a few comprehension questions at the end of the worksheet also provided a prompt for reflecting on learning at the end of the week.

For the learners in the lowest level group (P1) a different procedure had to be used. Learners in this group were still learning the letters of the alphabet – identifying letters and forming the letters. The findings of Sawyer and Silver (1961) supported the use of phonemic

item dictation as a tool to increase learners' ability to identify the sounds of a language and its contrasts, supporting them in not imposing the sound system of their first language on the target language.

For the P1 group, a technique was designed where phonemic item dictation supported learning and led up to orthographic item dictation at the end of the week. During the first two sessions hands-on activities like picture cards and letter blocks were used to revise the alphabet. After a discussion and demonstration of letter-sound relationships, the learners completed an alphabet maze worksheet where they had to link the letters in order from A to Z. This was followed by a handwriting task where they had to trace the letters of the alphabet. The session concluded with a phonemic item dictation where the tutor said the letter and the learners had to indicate the correct letter on a worksheet.

The first orthographic item dictation task was carried out after two days of phonemic item dictations. This was a short list of five simple words from the shared language experience the day before. The tutor read the word aloud, gave the learners time to attempt at least the first letter, and usually ended up spelling each word while the learners were writing down the letters as they heard them.

Dictation: Changes in teaching practice

The focus on dictation in this study confirmed that dictation as a learning device is suitable for mixed level groups, but the technique and type of dictation selected need to be adjusted to accommodate the different skill levels in the ESOL Literacy class. The use of cloze-type worksheets with different gaps as a concluding task in a procedure spanning several sessions, and based on a known text generated by the learners themselves, worked well in the middle and higher level groups. The lowest level group had different learning needs and needed a different type of support. The main finding in this group was that the anxiety caused by a lack of writing skills made the traditional dictation task too difficult. Phonemic and orthographic item dictation tasks may encourage the development of alphabet and decoding skills provided that the writing of words on a line is not the main objective of the task. Methods based on alternative assessment procedures for ESL learners (Tannenbaum, 1996) that use pictures and flashcards and require learners to indicate physically the letters or sounds they hear seemed to be more suitable for this group.

As a result of this study, the teaching practice in the class being studied has changed significantly. In order to support the lowest level learners and to encourage learners in the higher levels from a pre-literate background nobody is allowed to write down their own names for learners to copy when interviewed for a survey or a quiz (a favourite class activity). Instead, the name is spelled out for the other learner to write down. In the higher levels tutors are also encouraged to make less use of the whiteboard when helping learners to write words. They now spell or sound everything first and only use the whiteboard after the group has finished writing, for the learners to check their own work.

Cuisenaire rods

The second technique selected for this study was the use of Cuisenaire rods. Originally these rods formed part of the Silent Way approach (Gattegno, 1963) and they were chosen for this study with the aim of stripping verbal instruction in the P1 group down to the minimum.

In the Silent Way as originally intended teacher input is limited to single words or short phrases only and the teacher is silent for most of the session. One of the constraints of the ESOL Literacy classroom in a community education programme is the fact that large groups

of learners with a wide range of skills share a relatively small space. Learners with low listening skills find it extremely difficult to distinguish sounds produced by the teacher during instruction from the background of equally incomprehensible sounds generated in other parts of the classroom.

During the Cuisenaire rod sessions, the tutor concentrated on teaching numbers, colours and shapes. At the time, the class topic was houses and housing in New Zealand. The P1 group in particular was learning the names of the different rooms in a house. The first session was focused on four basic shapes and recycling vocabulary for colours and numbers. Adjectives 'long' and 'short' and two prepositions of place 'above' and 'below' were also included. The aim was to let this learning progress naturally into building a 'plan' of a house.

The first session with the Cuisenaire rods focused on the target language only and learners and tutor worked together in one group. During the second session the tutor used the first 30 minutes for a group activity and then split the learners into pairs to support each other, with minimal verbal input from the tutor. This became the norm for the sessions to follow as learners became more accustomed to the method. At first, the tutor allowed the learners to choose their own partners, but after one or two sessions she started to control the pairings when possible to ensure that learners with different first languages worked together. Irregular attendance of learners in this group was a major constraint during this study. It influenced changes to lesson plans and groupings as the tutor had to adapt her teaching to who and how many learners attended any given session. Sometimes learners had to work together in small groups of three and sometimes the tutor had to play the role of a learner during particular activities. She also started to introduce new resources to recycle or review vocabulary and to provide extension activities for learners who were progressing at a faster pace than others.

After the initial session focusing on the target language, learners started adding their own words to the list, introducing a new shape and adding vocabulary for furniture into the rooms they were constructing with the rods. This opened the opportunity for more adjectives and more prepositions of place. All this learning happened naturally and at a pace directed by the learners themselves. A typical Cuisenaire rod activity is illustrated in Figure 2, where one learner is asking the other two learners to repeat the names of the rooms and the furniture in the rooms. These learners all speak different first languages.

Figure 2: Learners engaged in 'building' houses using Cuisenaire rods

Cuisenaire rods: Changes in teaching practice

The learners in the P1group were at the very beginning of their journey towards achieving literacy. The first session – when learners were focusing on learning four new words only – ended with the learners copying the new words into their workbooks. As usual in this group with differing writing skills this part of the lesson took a long time and the anxiety levels of some learners seemed to increase considerably. It seemed as though the difficulty of writing the new words was undoing the progress made with learning the words: this seemed to confirm Barcroft's findings (2006) that copying target words may negatively influence productive L2 vocabulary learning. This observation led to a change in lesson plans for Cuisenaire rods, so that new learning was always introduced focusing on listening and speaking skills first, followed by reading and lastly by writing the new words. This progression over multiple sessions is illustrated in Figure 3.

When new vocabulary is introduced, there is minimum input from the teacher. In the second stage the learning is extended by adding information about the item, and then, in the third stage, the word is related to everyday life. The written word is introduced in the fourth stage only, when learners practise to read the word. They only start learning to write the word after they can say, hear and read the word with confidence.

The progression illustrated below resulted in the Cuisenaire rods being used mainly for improving listening and speaking skills, helping learners to acquire the natural melody of English. In some ways this study seemed to confirm the findings noted by Iturain (2010) who regards the rods as one resource, to be used in conjunction with other resources, to introduce new language. In the classroom being studied the rods also provided a bridge between prior learning and new material and provided opportunities for peer learning with reduced input from the tutor.

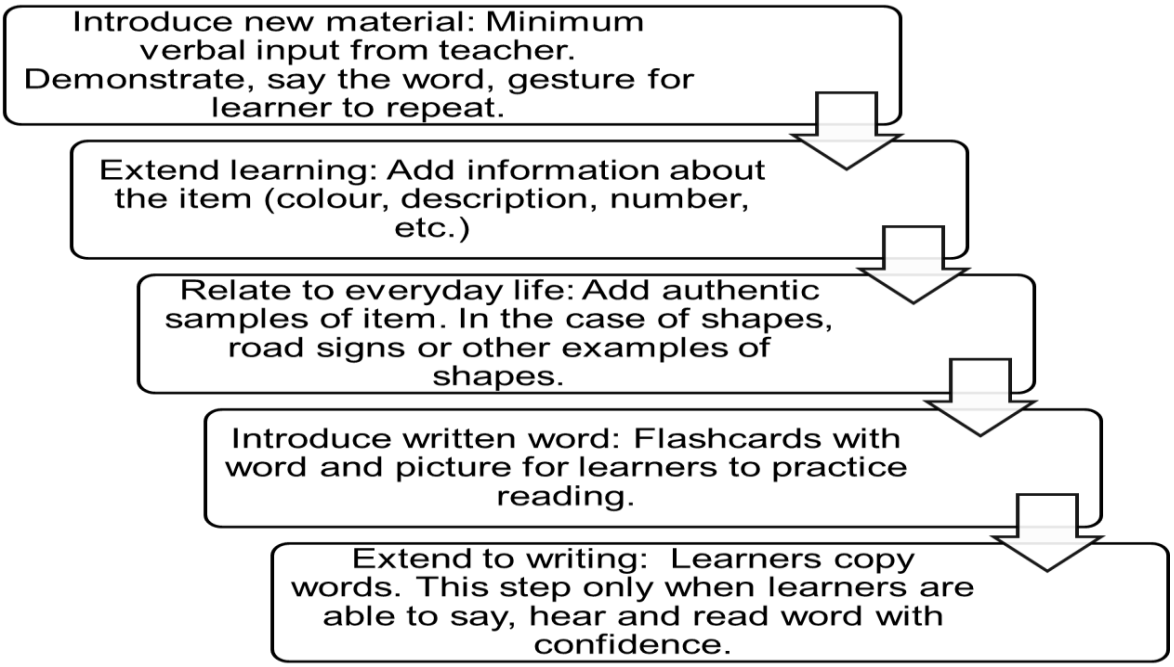


Figure 3: The new progression for using Cuisenaire rods to introduce new vocabulary

Computer-based tasks

The third type of technique included in this study was the use of computer-based tasks. Computer-assisted language learning is well established in higher level ESL classrooms and has been well researched (e.g. Murray & McPherson, 2006; Sullivan & Lindgren, 2002; White, 2008; Willing & Girard, 1990). At the time this study was conducted the teaching context made the introduction of computer technology very difficult. The teacher had to bring in everything she wanted to use by car, set up the classroom before the start of the session and take everything away at the end of the session. Her use of technology was therefore limited to using a laptop and data projector set up for introducing material or extending learning in some cases.

During the data collection period it quickly became clear that the laptop could not be used for individual tasks. Learners were not used to the technology and needed ongoing supervision and support to complete simple tasks on the computer. Activities like this required strict time management and resulted in the loss of spontaneity in the group. Connecting the laptop to the data projector provided the opportunity for small group or whole group tasks, or for providing a shared experience that could be used as a platform for other tasks. However, the set up was time consuming and cumbersome. The progression that made the best use of the technology in the class as it was at the time of the study is illustrated in Figure 4. This formed the basis for lesson plans including computer technology in the introductory session on the first day of the week. Class started with a conversation circle where background knowledge of the topic was elicited and learners practised some target language chunks if appropriate. Step 2 was a whole group shared activity watching a video clip or power point presentation on the topic and included a discussion or question and answer activity. During step 3 learners worked in their profile groups (P1, P2 and P3) on activities appropriate to their level and the skills they were practising.

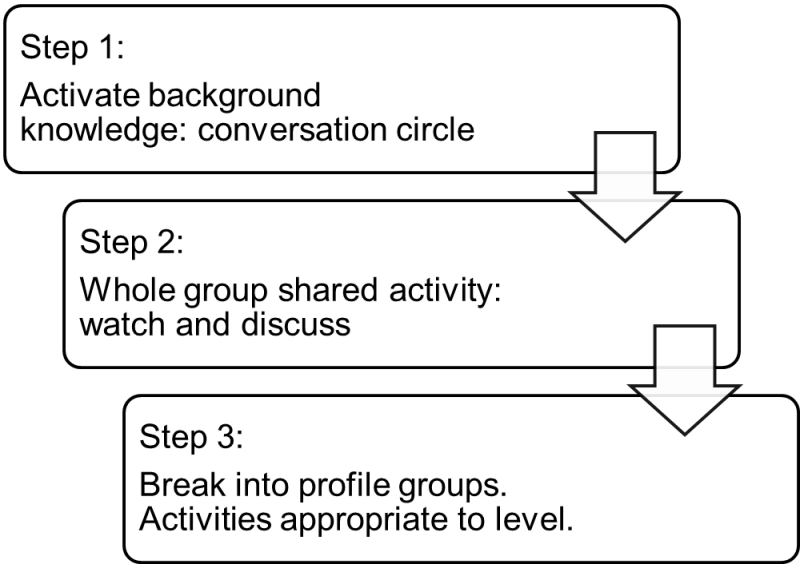


Figure 4: Progression for lessons using laptop and data projector for whole group activities

This progression allowed learners to share their own experience of a daily living situation and practise language that may be part of that situation, before reinforcing the topic with visual material and then carrying on to reading or writing tasks on the same topic or using the text from the video, as appropriate to their level.

Computer-based tasks: Changes in teaching practice

At the time of the study the constraints of the teaching environment meant that using computers for individual tasks was not effective. Small group or whole group tasks were more efficient and delivered better results in comparison to the amount of time and effort spent in preparing the lesson and setting up the equipment. Overall, the findings relating to the use of computer technology in the whole group were encouraging. ESOL Literacy classes around the country differ greatly in composition and facilities available. A comparable study in another teaching context may deliver different findings. Recent changes to the course requirements have also necessitated a renewed focus on teaching basic computer skills, especially the use of tablets to complete online listening assessments. This has put a range of internet resources and apps at the disposal of the teacher and is an aspect that deserves further study.

Conclusion

The current study was limited by the small sample size and short data collection period. The lack of L1 interviews contributed to make the findings inconclusive. However, it would seem that the use of peer learning and ongoing self-assessment activities may have an influence on raising learners' critical awareness of learning at this level. Other studies in similar teaching environments would be needed to confirm these findings, however. Further study could also include a focus on the use of computer technology in the adult ESOL literacy classroom, particularly the use of commercially available apps and online games or activities that would help learners develop independent study routines.

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AN E-PORTFOLIO FOR EAL ASSESSMENT

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Abstract

In the last few years, we have been experiencing what seem to be contradictory pressures: a move to digital teaching and e-learning, modern learning spaces and an app for everything but, simultaneously, the introduction of a national certificate or common standard for English language learners' achievement which takes a fairly traditional view of what should be produced, taught and assessed. Electronic forms of assessment have become common in education generally at all levels from primary through to tertiary. In 2013-14 it was apparent to our language teaching team that we needed to go beyond assessing our digital-generation students in one-off events mostly involving a pencil and paper. We decided to use e-portfolios as part of the assessment system for our revamped courses leading to the NZCEL (New Zealand Certificate in English Language) at levels, 4 and 5. We then had the problem of how to develop an assessment which measured achievement in English language learning, without being e-learning specialists. How this has been achieved is discussed in this article, which includes some practical suggestions and resources for others to use.

Introduction and background

Our EAL programme for adult migrants and international students is one of the largest in New Zealand, teaching students from CEFR level B1 to C1. The majority of our students are in an Academic English preparation programme, with goals of further tertiary study in a range of fields. We adopted the NZCEL qualification programme from its introduction in 2014, which meant a flurry of activity to write new assessments and courses in 2013-14. At roughly the same time, our institution, Unitec, was engaged in a transformation of teaching and learning which included the adoption of *Ahimura*, its "living curriculum" (see http://www.unitec.ac.nz/ahimura/pages/living_curriculum.php). *Ahimura* includes eleven characteristics which should be embedded in each programme. In our department, we felt that many of the ideas which informed the living curriculum were already informing our work. Two of these eleven characteristics were that it "develops literacies for lifelong learning," and "includes embedded assessment - assessment is authentic and both informs and contributes to the learning process. Learners benefit from timely feedback." (op cit.) Unitec was not only transforming teaching and learning but also, like many other educational institutions, development was happening in the physical environment where 'modern learning environments' (MLEs) were being constructed. The first of these was opened in 2014, with our students and teachers amongst the early users. The opportunities which these spaces afforded for socially constructed, student- centred learning were not particularly compatible with course assessment in an exam situation.

When we considered the assessment requirements of the NZCEL, they did not seem to particularly reflect or include this approach. Although it could be argued that some of the assessment tasks might be both authentic and part of the learning process, the need for national standards makes this unrealistic. All of our NZCEL assessments were developed as examination-style events. The NZCEL assessment follows a standardised model which typically means that all parts of a standard must be achieved and there is less flexibility to reflect the achievement of a very diverse student population than we were used to. Our classes might include learners as young as 18 or 19 alongside adults in their 30s and 40s, with a wide range of previous educational attainment and life experience gained in many cultural contexts

and backgrounds. One student's starting point for learning might be to have an undergraduate degree, IELTS level 5 for academic reading and 4.5 for speaking and to have arrived in New Zealand , the first English-speaking country they have ever visited, a few days before the course begins. Another student might have lived in New Zealand for seven or eight years, speaking English in the community and at work, but having had access to only a basic level of secondary schooling in their home country. The first student will have a good level of academic literacy, the "vital underpinnings or cultural knowledge required for success in an academic community" (Hyland & Hamp-Lyons, 2002), while the second student will probably lack this type of literacy. However, the second student will be much more familiar with the New Zealand cultural and linguistic context. The type of progress that these two people have to make in order to pass the same assessments is quite different. We wanted the diversity amongst our students to be recognised in a positive way.

We were also moving from a programme with seven or eight language proficiency levels to one with four levels. We wanted to be able to give our students credit and recognition for a wider range of achievement than the pass/fail of the NZCEL, and at the same time to give them embedded opportunities for assessment and feedback during the course.

We had used portfolio assessment in our courses at Unitec for some years. For example, Academic Writing students wrote a series of drafts of their texts and submitted them for assessment purposes, which was "an effective teaching, learning and assessment tool." (Romova & Andrew 2015, p. 15) This was a paper-based portfolio system. Other courses had been developed which used blogging platforms (Blogger and Wordpress), where students collected and published their work digitally. We decided to include an e-portfolio assessment in our new NZCEL courses at levels 3 and 4. (Level 5 have subsequently added one.) Our e-learning committee then went through a process of evaluating and choosing a digital platform to use for this assessment. A number of different formats were considered. In the end, we chose Google Sites. Our main reasons for doing so was that it seemed easier to use and was portable, in the sense that students would be able to access their work after they had left us. I was given the task of developing the assessment, a process which would also involve up-skilling teachers to use it.

Developing the e-Portfolio

I developed the e-portfolio assessment using our approved course outcomes for level-appropriate reading, writing, listening, and speaking in English as well as other outcomes such as autonomous language learning, use of ICT and reflection.

There are multiple definitions of what an e-portfolio actually is. A common understanding is that this is an online 'showcase', or type of virtual curriculum vitae, which a person assembles for employment or promotion purposes, and that the audience for students' portfolios is primarily future employers or, in the case of younger students, parents. In fact, there are many potential dimensions of an e-portfolio (Cotterill, 2007). The purpose of a portfolio can be self-development and therefore of intrinsic value or of external value. Some dimensions that I chose are that the portfolio be structured rather than unstructured, both formative and summative, contain representative samples of work rather than all work (although this distinction has become blurred by time) and be learner-owned. This portfolio was intended to be about the students' language learning, which they might be undertaking for a number of reasons beyond our course goals of further study and so the audience was not future employers. However, those students who went on to further study would often have to create professional portfolios when they did so, and the experience of using an e-portfolio

would therefore be valuable to them. According to the New Zealand Ministry of Education (n.d.), an e-portfolio is "an electronic format for students to: record their work, goals, and achievements; reflect on their learning' and share their learning and receive feedback and feed-forward." Our e-portfolio was broadly designed to achieve these goals, with reflection and feedback being primary amongst this.

Given the emphasis on the use of digital technology in learning at Unitec and elsewhere, I was mindful of the need to foster our students' digital literacy and to carefully support and scaffold their learning of digital literacy skills. Clearly, they would need enough time and support to be able to develop these skills (Danaher, 2014). There was some concern about whether our students' ability to use digital technology was going to mean that too much time would be spent teaching them how to use their portfolios. However, I believed that it was really important that the students should become 'digital citizens'. Digital literacy is "recognised as an important component of digital citizenship", according to the government-supported agency, Virtual Learning Network (http://www.vln.school.nz/discussion/view/816769). Students need good digital literacy competency as a life skill, not only for their ongoing study. The website of almost any New Zealand primary or secondary school reflects this commitment. When a colleague commented that "if our kids are doing it then we need to be doing it- they're the digital generation," she was also describing the situation for our mature students as parents and community members who happen to be first-generation immigrants.

Reflection is also a key component; as Barrett (2010, p. 6) says, "The real value of an e-portfolio is in the reflection and learning that is documented therein, not just the collection of work." It was therefore important that the portfolio consisted of work or artefacts collected for a purpose: to show the student's "learning journey" (Barrett, 2010, p. 6) and to show that he or she had reflected on that learning process and on their own development of skills and knowledge. Since the portfolio was going to be entirely in English, students' proficiency level (CEFR A2-B1 at the start of their level 3 course) was going to limit their ability to express reflective thinking. Perhaps there is a case for encouraging students to do this in their first language and then using Google Translate (if a teacher is not bilingual) to understand what they have said. However, this idea has not been further explored so far.

There is not an extensive literature which discusses the use of e-portfolios as an assessment for language learners, although Alawdat (2012) found that the strongest evidence for benefits from e-portfolio work was for improving writing. The formative potential for writing development is in my view greatly enhanced by the use of Google Drive or Microsoft's OneDrive for drafting and feedback. This can also be very effective using social media. Barrot (2016) wrote about students using closed groups on FaceBook to post drafts of their writing for comment and critique. The students were using a familiar platform, something which was already part of their lives, so they found this easier to do. Colleagues at Unitec who use Google Sites for their course when teaching technical skills (automotive engineering) use FaceBook as an easy way for their students to interact with their lecturer, including posting videos of both student and teacher doing tasks. However, many of our EAL students are not FaceBook users, so they wouldn't have the advantage of familiarity. Most, however, are social media users so they understand the concept.

Learner autonomy is a goal which we pursue in our programme. Apart from the intrinsic value of developing the ability to learn independently, budgetary constraints have reduced the amount of face-to-face contact time students have with their teachers. Currently, students in a 60 credit (full-time) programme have 16 hours per week in class. This includes up to four hours

in a computer lab and two hours in a modern learning environment. There are good independent learning resources on our main campus, including free WiFi, computer and laptop availability in the learning commons and a dedicated language learning centre in the library. Students are expected to do about 16 hours of self-study. A substantial proportion of their e-portfolio tasks are necessarily going to be done independently.

Two valuable aspects of the authenticity and process orientation are being able to use real life events via video and audio recordings and photos as visual records, and being able to take the spotlight off artificial or contrived language situations. Other writers (Huang & Hung, 2010) have found that e-portfolio work improved the speaking performance of their Chinese students, who are also the largest ethnic group amongst our students. Zhong (2013) found that Chinese learners' WTC (Willingness to Communicate) was more enhanced by pair and collaborative, than teacher-led, activities. The e-portfolio design included these types of activities, especially in the earlier, formative stages.

Another aspect which I think enhances students' learning is that of being able to rehearse and practise (if not necessarily perfect) some of their work, especially their speaking skills. This might be an important part of many adult learners' self-identity and sense of self-worth. One student told me that she made 18 rehearsal attempts at a one-minute video introducing herself before she was satisfied enough with her performance to upload attempt number 19. This is an unusual level of perfectionism, but another dimension to this is the "virtual (online) identity which we all have now, as an idealised version of ourselves. Constructing these online identities is often a collaborative process" (Mallan & Giardina, 2009). It was important for me to be aware that working on an e-portfolio is not isolated from what is happening in the wider community. The digital revolution affects us all in multiple ways.

At an early stage of the design process, I wrote a set of marking/achievement criteria. These were then reviewed by the teaching team in a robust discussion to produce the final version. (See Appendix 2.) Based mainly on Barratt's work cited above, the final mark for the portfolio awards 30% of the marks for completing work, including task achievement and punctuality, 30% for the quality of the students' English language performance when speaking or writing (whether this is at, above or below the expected level), 30% for progression (improvement over time) and 10% for the quality of the student's written or spoken reflections. The weighting given to the e-portfolio assessment itself varied according to which courses the students were enrolled in, as did the tasks that they were given. At level 4, the General English NZCEL course has a portfolio worth 65% of the total course assessment, whereas the academic course has 50%, whereas at level 3 the academic course e-portfolio has a weighting of 25%. These are all significant parts of what a student is expected to achieve, and it is impossible to get the qualification without passing this assessment.

In order to set up the assessment, I had to teach myself how to use Google Sites. I did this almost completely by finding relevant information and examples such as Dr Helen Barrett's e-portfolios (http://www.electronicportfolios.org), by reading technical information online and by watching YouTube videos. A lot of trial and error took place, and in fact the e-portfolio has continued to evolve and be refined or tweaked every semester. The basic process involved is to set up a Google Site which contains the instructions, information and pages which I want all the students to have, and then to publish this site as a template which students can access. This is the process shown in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1: A template for students to access

As I worked through this design and development process, I became strongly aware of two things. One of these was that there was not much 'how to' information which was suitable for either students or for teachers like myself: people who were not technology experts or enthusiasts. The other finding was that my experience and skills as an English language teacher (and that of my colleagues) were the most important part of the process.

My response to the limited amount of technical guidance available was, where necessary, to create written and video guides to show students and colleagues how to do tasks such as to copy and personalise a template, edit their site and upload artefacts. These resources are very much of the homemade variety, with virtually non-existent production values, but of course there is now a vast online community of people, many of them teachers, who produce 'how to' material, so my homespun versions simply joined this pool of material. An example of this is the video made using screencast.com of which the URL is shown above. This video directs teachers to a "sandpit" site which I have also created, so that they can start learning the basic skills they will need. I found that neither teachers nor students needed more than basic skills for editing their Google Sites. This does not mean that there are not technical pitfalls which can occur, but generally digital skills have not been as much of a problem as they were perceived to be prior to the introduction of the assessment.

I found myself reflecting on the importance of being an experienced and skilled ESL practitioner when engaging in a process like this: developing an assessment which was largely a new idea for us, for our students and perhaps generally in English language teaching. I found that the model shown below in Figure 2 was very helpful.

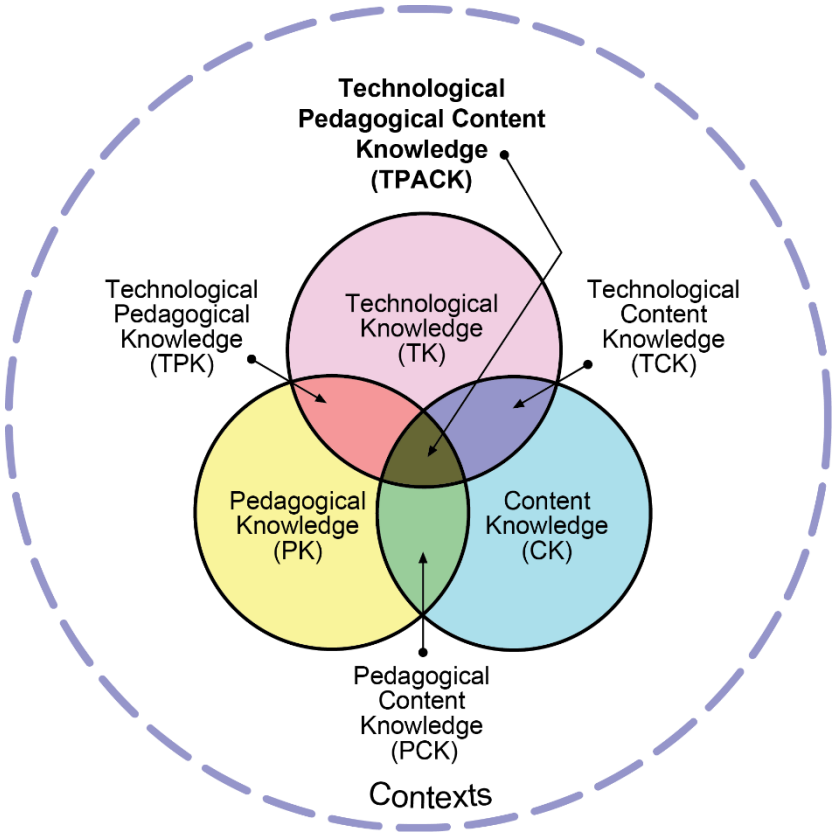

*Figure 2:*The TPACK model (Tpack.org)

Using the TPACK model, my content knowledge (CK) was that of teaching ESL, teaching academic literacy and our programme in general. My pedagogical knowledge (PK) was not only about teaching adults in general, but also about how to make information and instructions comprehensible to learners with limited English. The technological (TK) element came partly from experience of teaching using various forms of technology and partly from the up-skilling that I had to do to develop the e-portfolio. It was clear to me that, as this model shows, the different elements synthesised together: no part could operate without the others.

This was an important realisation for me as a practitioner. I felt that I needed to document or record the process I had been through, and to share it with other teachers. At the very least, they could avoid some of the time-wasting mistakes or problems I had encountered. I did this by using a google site which has become a scrapbook collection of materials, links and reflections, and which is publically available on the Web. My experience has suggested to me that teachers do not need to be technological experts in order to set up an e-portfolio assessment, but they do need to have the other "CK" and "PK" types of expertise. (See Figure 3 below.)

Figure 3: My google site ((https://sites.google.com/site/sarahclesol2016/)

The e-portfolio in practice

The Level 3 e-portfolio assessment, over which I have oversight, has now been in full operation for two years. Seven cohorts of students or around 800 individuals have completed this assessment now, with about 90% of them being successful. Many students' feedback on this part of their course has been positive. They enjoy the collaborative learning that they participate in and they enjoy using technology. Some say that they did not feel confident about using technology to start with, but felt very good about it once they had mastered some new skills.

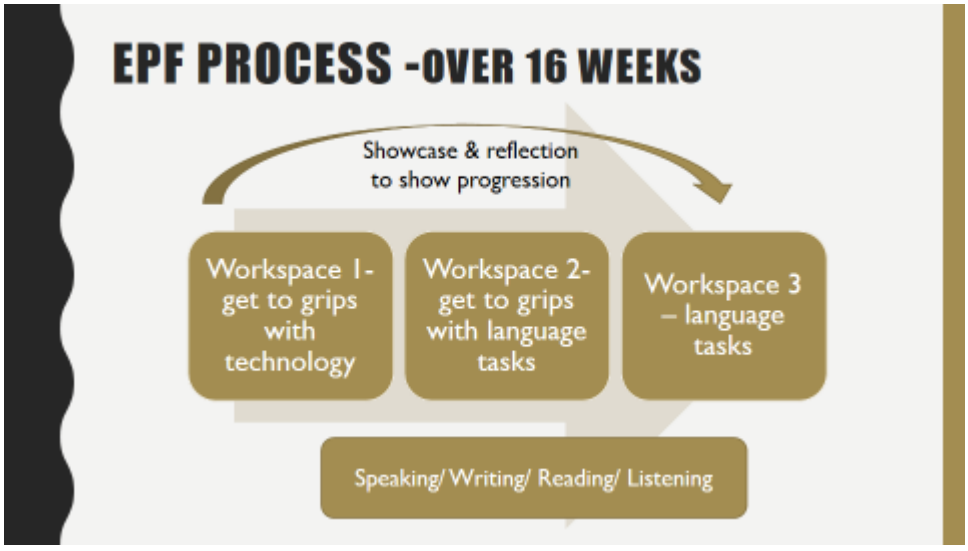

Figure 4: The structure of students' e-portfolios

The diagram above shows basically how the Level 3 students' e-portfolio is structured. Most of the tasks are based on their textbook and course materials. At the start of the course, they are asked to do things such as video record a conversation with a classmate about learning strategies and upload paragraphs they have written. At the end, in Workspace 3, they choose a

topic which is related to their future studies or interests and read, write and give a short presentation about it. During the process of completing these tasks, students do a lot of collaborative work together and they use English for authentic, real-world communication.

Figure 5: Level 3 students working on an e-portfolio speaking task

The illustration above (Figure 5) is typical of this: it shows students in the planning stage of a group discussion speaking task. They are looking up information on their own devices, writing notes on group whiteboards and following instructions on the COW (Computers on wheels) screens. Subsequently, they will review other groups' notes and produce a common set of guidelines on how to do the task. The students seem to be completely engaged in this activity and they are almost exclusively using English for authentic and focussed interaction.

A key element of the e-portfolio is the 'showcase' at the end of the course where students are asked to reflect on and illustrate their progress. When this is done well, it clearly demonstrates that the student has a good understanding of what they have learned. Many students produce interesting versions of the showcase, which often serve as not only a self-evaluation but also provide teachers with feedback on our own work and on our courses. (With the proviso that this is an assessed piece of work, a fact that students are keenly aware of, and therefore they may avoid being as critical as they might be when they are anonymous.) A typical showcase written by a young Chinese student called Chen is attached (see Appendix 1). He explains, and illustrates by reference to his artefacts, that he has developed the ability to speak confidently and without reading from his notes when giving a short presentation. The most important element is that these are Chen's own words, in which he explains his own progress.

Conclusion

My experience so far suggests that an e-portfolio does align very well with second language pedagogy. It seems to promote learners' autonomy, develops their digital literacy and gives them experience of authentic communication and real-life engagement. Given the relative thinness of literature about these perceived benefits, further investigation and research would be well warranted. However, as the TPACK model helped to illustrate, EAL teachers need not

be shy about their own ability to adopt and develop this type of assessment. It can be done without extensive resources and high levels of technical expertise. EAL practitioners should feel confident that they can bring digital literacy and online assessment to their students' tables.

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Appendix 1

A typical showcase

Showcase Level 3

In this section of my Portfolio I have chosen the Best examples of my work From level 3.

Workspace one- speaking	*it's not good and clearly and i have obvious grammar problems*
Workspace two - speaking	*I fell that i and my partners have good conmunication during this vedio, it's better than last time*
The first presentation	*So nervous and speak it following a notes book*
The second presentation	*I'm more confident this time, I don't speak with notes book but sometimes i speak following the screen*
The last presentation	*The last, I'm nervous as usual but i'm quite confident and i speak quite fluently without notes book i also think my PPT is pretty good as it don't have many words and structure is nice with some animations*

Appendix 2

NZCEL Level 3 and 4 e-portfolio Marking Criteria

Name_____ ID number _____ Class_____ Total marks _____

CRITERIA	Poor- E (less than 12)	Not adequate- D (12-14.5)	Adequate- C (15-19)	Good – B (19.5-23.5)	Excellent- A (24-30)
1 Completion 30% (All skills in both Workspace and Showcase) ___ /30	Less than 40% of the **artefacts** are uploaded and/or are inadequately organised. Showcase not completed or artefacts are very limited in their response to the task. There is little evidence that the portfolio is the student's own work.	40% of the **artefacts** are uploaded and/or are mostly inadequately organised. Artefacts are not sufficient for each skill area and/or are not adequately extended. Student's work has been supported to a level that there is little evidence of student's own work.	60% of the **artefacts** are uploaded and are adequately organised Showcase includes the required artefacts from each skill area Extension and relevance are adequate Student's work has been supported but there is sufficient evidence of student's own work	At least 80% of the **artefacts** are uploaded and are well organised. Showcase includes the required artefacts from each skill area Artefacts could be more fully extended. Artefacts are relevant to the task. Student's own work	**All** of the required **artefacts** are uploaded and are very well organised Showcase includes the required artefacts from each skill area Artefacts are fully extended and relevant to the task. Student's own work.
2 Quality of language output 30% (15% each for Speaking and Writing in <u>Showcase)</u> ___ /30	**Writing** Unsatisfactory use of language for the level throughout. **Speaking** Unsatisfactory use of language and pronunciation features for the level.	**Writing** Inadequate/inconsistent evidence of satisfactory use of language for the level throughout. **Speaking** Inadequate or inconsistent evidence of satisfactory use of language and pronunciation features for the level.	**Writing** Evidence of satisfactory use of language for the level. **Speaking** Evidence of satisfactory use of language and an adequate range of pronunciation features for the level.	**Writing** Evidence of good use of language for the level. **Speaking** Evidence of good use of language for the level and a good range of pronunciation features for the level.	**Writing** Strong evidence of very good use of language for the level in artefacts. **Speaking** Strong evidence of very good use of language and the use of a range of pronunciation features for the level.

3 Progression 30% (Writing and/or speaking artefacts) ___/30	Either no artefacts to show progression or artefacts indicate a lack of progression towards **writing and/or speaking** outcomes for the level. Feedback has not been responded to.	Artefacts show that the student has made weak or limited progress towards the **writing and/or speaking** outcomes for the level. Feedback has rarely been responded to as appropriate for the level	Artefacts show that the student has made progress towards the **writing and/or speaking** outcomes for the level. Feedback has sometimes been responded to as appropriate for the level	Artefacts clearly show the student has made progress and has achieved the **writing and/or speaking** outcomes for this level. Feedback has mostly been responded to as appropriate for the level	Artefacts clearly show the student has made good progress and consistently works at a higher than expected level given the **writing and/or speaking** outcomes for this level. Feedback has been responded to as appropriate for the level.
	Poor- E (less than 4)	**Not adequate- D (4-4.5)**	**Adequate- C (5-6)**	**Good – B (6.5-7.5)**	**Excellent- A (8-10)**
4 Reflections 10% ___/10	No evidence of depth and breadth of reflection during the course.	Little evidence of depth and breadth of reflection during the course.	Adequate depth and breadth of reflection during the course.	Good evidence of depth and breadth of reflection during the course.	Strong evidence of depth and breadth of reflection during the course.

ASSESSING ELLS IN NEW ZEALAND PRIMARY SCHOOLS: GAPS BETWEEN THE LITERATURE, POLICY, AND PRACTICE

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Abstract

In February 2015, all New Zealand schools moved to assessing English Language Learners (ELLs) using the English Language Learning Progressions (ELLP) to determine eligibility for additional funding to support these learners. This paper firstly provides the background to the current assessment situation, and summarises the literature regarding key principles of assessment. It then describes key guidelines made available to schools by the Ministry of Education for using the new assessment system, particularly the use of 'overall teacher judgements' (OTJs). The paper then presents findings from interviews with three primary school English language specialist teachers regarding their experiences with using the new system, known as 'ELLP assessment'. The gaps that exist between the literature, Ministry guidelines, and ESOL teacher practice are described, and recommendations are made for bridging these gaps. Currently little is known regarding teacher practice in regard to ELLP Assessment, so this study fills a gap in the literature relating to the assessment of young ELLs in the New Zealand context.

Introduction and overview

The steady increase in the number of English language learners (ELLs) in the New Zealand primary school population over the last two decades has also resulted in greater awareness of the need to adequately cater for their learning needs. As a result, the Ministry of Education provides additional funding for schools to support the teaching and learning of ELLs who fall below given benchmarks. In order for schools to receive the funding, teachers are now required to make overall teacher judgements (OTJs) about learners' language skills in relation to the English Language Learning Progressions (ELLP) document (Ministry of Education, 2008), a process which is known as 'ELLP assessment.'

This paper begins by providing a summary of ELLP assessment, and also the wider assessment context, including the use of OTJs. It then summarises key concepts from the assessment literature, followed by a description of Ministry of Education policy, or guidelines regarding assessment in general, OTJs and ELLP assessment. The paper then reports on findings from a study of assessment practices of English language specialist teachers, known as ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) teachers, and compares these practices with statements in the literature and with Ministry expectations in regard to ELLP assessment. This is followed by a summary of the apparent gaps between the literature, Ministry policy, and teacher practice. The paper concludes with recommendations for ways in which these gaps might be closed.

What is ELLP assessment?

English language learners in New Zealand primary schools are assessed for a number of reasons. They are usually assessed on entry to a school, to gather information about their general English proficiency. As part of the New Zealand school system, ELLs must be assessed against National Standards in Literacy and Numeracy, and in curriculum areas. ELLs are also

assessed twice yearly against the English Language Learning Progressions (ELLP). This document was originally written to "help teachers to choose content, vocabulary, and tasks that are appropriate to each learner's age, stage, and language-learning needs" (Ministry of Education, 2008, p. 2). However, schools were required from the beginning of 2015 to also use the ELLP to rate ELLs' English language skills, in order to apply for ESOL funding from the Ministry. This funding is "available to schools for the provision of English language support for migrant and refugee background students with the highest English language learning needs" (Ministry of Education, 2014). Support usually takes the form of assistance from teacher aides in mainstream classrooms, or withdrawal classes with ESOL teachers.

The assessment of ELLs to determine funding eligibility can therefore be regarded as high-stakes assessment, as learners may or may not receive additional support depending on their assessed level, and schools may or may not be able to provide support, depending on the funding received. As there is a time limit for ESOL funding (three years for New Zealand-born children and five years for refugee and migrant children), ELLs may still be in need of additional support even if the school is not receiving the funding. In fact, two of the teachers reported that they continued to provide ESOL support to some ELLs whose funding allocation has ended, but other schools may not do this. McKay (2006) defines 'high-stakes' decisions as those that "are likely to affect students' lives and decisions which are difficult to correct." (p. 20). She also notes: "Many assessment procedures are more high-stakes for students than we think, since many decisions that teachers and schools make have a cumulative effect on students' futures" (p. 20).

The wider assessment context: Standards and overall teacher judgements

Beginning with trials in 2013 and becoming mandatory in 2015, the move from an earlier 'comparison with cohort' assessment process to the current ELLP-referenced assessment has come about in the wider context of the introduction of literacy and numeracy standards in New Zealand schools (Ministry of Education, 2010). As Poskitt & Mitchell (2012) state, "Critical to the implementation of National Standards in New Zealand is the notion of standards and the centrality of the OTJ [overall teacher judgement" (p. 54). In the move to ELLP assessment, New Zealand primary teachers are now also required to make OTJs regarding their ELLs in relation to the ELLP, as well as in relation to literacy and numeracy standards. The process of forming OTJs is described as "drawing on and applying the evidence gathered up to a particular point in time in order to make an overall judgment about a student's progress and achievement" (Ministry of Education, n.d.a.).

Klenowski & Wyatt-Smith (2010) point out that teacher judgements "can be made dependable if standards are promulgated in appropriate forms and teachers have the requisite conceptual tools and professional training" (p. 113). Concerns about OTJs have also been summarised by Poskitt & Mitchell (2012), who note that OTJs can be problematic unless teachers are clear about what constitutes an OTJ, teachers have common understandings of standards, such understandings are supported by clear criteria and exemplars of student work, and teachers engage in moderation processes (p. 61). Although for ELLP assessment teachers are working with learning progressions, rather than standards, these conditions would also apply to the OTJs that they form in relation to the ELLP descriptors.

Key assessment concepts

A central concept found in the literature is that the ultimate purpose of assessment is to improve learning (e.g. Fairtest, 2009), and this is often described as 'Assessment for learning'. The literature also distinguishes between assessment for formative and for summative

purposes, and formative assessment is often used interchangeably with Assessment for Learning (e.g. Education Services Australia, n.d.). This concept refers to occasions when information about student learning "is collected during teaching", that is, "while the student's language skills are being formed" (Richards, 2015, p. 676). Formative assessment also "leads to feedback that is used by students to improve their learning" (Richards, p. 677). Assessment for summative purposes refers to assessment which "measures the product of a student's learning" (Harmer, 2015, p. 408), and is "given at the end of a learning period" (Murray & Christison, 2011, p. 181). However, it has been argued that assessment designated as 'summative' can also be used formatively (e.g. Darr, 2011). As Poskitt and Mitchell (2012) note, "New Zealand values the central role of formative assessment in improving learning and teaching, and the professionalism of its teachers" (p. 55).

Another distinction is made between formal assessment, which involves systematic, planned sampling techniques, and informal assessment, which is conducted as part of classroom activities (Brown & Abeywickrama, 2010, p. 6). There has been increasing recognition of the important role that informal assessment plays in teaching and learning. McKay (2006) points out: "Many assessment procedures for younger learners are embedded in classroom teaching" (p, 145), and these often include informal strategies such as 'incidental observation' and 'on-the-run assessment', or informal, instruction-embedded assessment. However, McKay notes that formal or planned assessment activities can and should also be used in the classroom, including strategies such as planned observation, conferences, self-assessment, and classroom tests, and also that "Keeping records is an integral part of classroom assessment" (p. 169).

Underlying all assessment decisions, a number of principles are referred to in the literature. Although these principles may be prioritised differently, three are most commonly identified as being the most important. For example, Brown (2001) states:

> If in your language teaching you can attend to the practicality, reliability and validity of tests of language, whether those tests are classroom tests…or final exams, or proficiency tests, then you are well on your way to making accurate judgements about the competence of the learners with whom you are working (p. 389).

A knowledge of the purposes and types of assessment, as well as key principles underlying assessment would seem to be necessary if teachers are to implement assessment which provides useful and usable evidence of student learning. 'Assessment literate' teachers have been described as those who "have a comprehensive knowledge and understanding of the principles underpinning, and methods associated with, sound assessment practice" (Dixon & Hawe, 2015, p. 81). However, it has also been suggested that assessment literacy may refer to "the level of knowledge of assessment concepts required by individuals to interact with assessment in a meaningful way, depending on their situation" (Berry & O'Sullivan, 2016, p. 5).

Ministry of Education assessment guidelines

In line with the wider assessment literature, the Ministry of Education (n.d.b.) states on their *Assessment Online* website that "the primary purpose of assessment is to improve students' learning and teachers' teaching as both respond to the information it provides." Similarly, there is ample information for teachers on the website regarding formative and summative assessment, with a clear focus on formative assessment. For example, the Ministry states: "A good teacher practises formative assessment constantly on an informal basis through classroom observation and interaction." Further advice is that "both the teacher and the student

will gain information from the assessment and use it collaboratively to plan future learning activities." Regarding assessment principles, the Ministry of Education (2005), writing in the context of assessing ELLs, states that "All assessment tools and processes … should be reviewed against three criteria – validity, reliability and usability" (p. 10). These are clearly defined for teachers, as follows:

- Validity is the extent to which as assessment tool or process actually measures what it sets out to measure.
- Reliability is the extent to which as assessment task is consistent in measuring what it sets out to measure.
- Usability is the extent to which an assessment tool is practical and yields results that users can easily understand, interpret, and make generalisations from.

Clear statements and guidelines have also been provided by the Ministry of Education (2015) relating to ELLP assessment. Three key guidelines are as follows: Teachers will "use a wide range of assessment tasks, activities and observations to make an OTJ (overall teacher judgment) with reference to the various descriptors on the ELLP matrices"; these tasks will… "include formative and summative assessments, standardised tests and both formal and informal observations"; and the process of formulating an OTJ is… "based on your school's usual age-appropriate assessment tools, activities, and observations", and "should not be seen as additional to the school's normal assessment schedule but as an integral part of it."

The Ministry has provided a number of resources to assist teachers to complete ELLP Assessment. Workshops for ESOL teachers were held in 2013 and 2014 to enable trialling of the new system, and it was expected that ESOL teachers would conduct professional development for mainstream teachers. An online professional learning module has been provided which gives instructions for completing ELLP assessment (Ministry of Education, 2015). There is also ongoing support for teachers through an email discussion forum. However, these resources are located on the ESOL Online website (Ministry of Education, n.d.c), which may not be known to all mainstream teachers. Further professional development support may be available through the teacher-managed ESOL Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) in each region.

The present study

In the second half of 2015, I carried out a small qualitative study, using semi-structured interviews, investigating three ESOL teachers' practices and thinking regarding ELLP assessment.

Participants

As seen in Table 1, below, the participants were all experienced ESOL teachers, and they were responsible for reasonable numbers of ELLs. The teachers' role in ELLP assessment varied slightly, with Teacher A carrying this out together with mainstream teachers, Teacher B proactively assisting them (e.g. suggesting suitable assessment activities, offering assistance) and Teacher C, who was happy to collaborate with mainstream teachers if required.

When asked whether they had completed any professional development regarding ELLP Assessment, all three teachers reported that they had attended a workshop in 2013 about using the ELLP for funding eligibility, but that this workshop had not provided guidance about the number and type of assessments to use to arrive at an OTJ, or how to form an OTJ; it had focused only on the scoring system for ELLP Assessment. When asked if they were familiar with the online professional learning module for completing ELLP assessment, one of the

teachers reported that she had used it when leading professional development for mainstream staff in her school. However, none was using the ESOL Online website regularly; one teacher stated that it was "difficult to navigate through," and another reported: "Whenever I go there, it's not very satisfying". Regarding the PLCs, the teachers reported that theirs had been inactive for over a year at the time of the research (mid-late 2015), so they had not been able to compare or moderate their ELLP assessment practices with other ESOL teachers.

Table 1: ESOL teacher participants

	Teacher A	Teacher B	Teacher C
Years of ESOL experience	16	20	29
No. of funded ELLs 2015	30	50	67
Role in the assessment of ELLs for ESOL funding	Assesses ELLs together with mainstream teachers.	Proactively assists mainstream teachers.	Collaborates with mainstream teachers as required.

Research questions

The key questions below, accompanied by appropriate follow-up or probing questions, were asked in the interviews, which took just over an hour. The questions reflect my efforts, as researcher, to uncover teachers' practices in relation to key assessment concepts found in the literature and in Ministry policy summarised above i.e., teachers' knowledge or awareness of the purposes of assessment and assessment principles, as well as the range and types of assessment measures used for ELLP Assessment.

1) How do you see the purposes of ELLP Assessment?
2) Which assessment principles do you take into account or recommend when planning and delivering ELLP Assessment?
3) Which assessment measures do you use or recommend for ELLP Assessment?
4) What are the positive aspects of using the ELLP for assessment?
5) What are the challenges with using the ELLP for assessment?

Teachers' responses to the questions above are grouped in the Findings below into three areas, corresponding to the first three questions. Teachers' responses to the last two questions are also included under these headings, as appropriate.

Findings

Teachers' perceptions of the purposes of ELLP assessment

The teachers reported that they preferred ELLP assessment to the previous cohort- based assessment, for two main reasons: firstly, because mainstream teachers learn more about their learners than they did in the past, as they now have the primary responsibility for completing the assessment (in the past the ESOL teacher completed the funding assessment); secondly, completing the assessment helps teachers focus on the next teaching and learning steps for their ELLs. The following comments were made:

> "The new system gives us a model for pulling the teachers in. The huge advantage is we're sharing information"

> "It's not so much the document, it's more involving mainstream teachers more with the assessment. The impact for these students on teaching is surely going to be far more positive in terms of knowing those learners and how we go from there with that knowledge"

The teachers were presented with a list of possible purposes for assessment, and were asked to say which were relevant to them when completing ELLP assessment. As seen in Table 2 below, they agreed that they are rating overall language proficiency as well as the specific language skills. However, they considered the other possible assessment purposes slightly differently. None of the teachers reported that ELLP assessment had a formative purpose. This was unexpected in light of the comments above, and may be because they saw this assessment as informing their own work with ELLs (e.g. for placement, monitoring or diagnosis), but not something that teachers would use to give feedback to a learner. Teacher C commented: "I think this system helps you plan more for 'where to next' ", but also "I don't think ELLP [Assessment] is used to give student feedback." Teacher B's comment reveals another reason for this view: "I see more formative as what I'm doing during the lesson...when I'm observing how they're managing."

Table 2: Teachers' perceptions of the purposes of ELLP assessment

	Teacher A	Teacher B	Teacher C
Rating of overall language proficiency	✓	✓	✓
Rating of specific language skills	✓	✓	✓
Monitoring/Progress	✓	–	✓
Placement	✓	–	✓
Diagnostic	–	✓	✓
Summative/Achievement		✓	✓
Formative	–	–	–

Teachers' awareness of assessment principles

When interviewing the teachers, the phrase 'assessment principles' was not used, to avoid the implication that teachers were expected to know a set of principles. Instead, teachers were asked what 'important considerations' were for them as they planned and delivered ELLP assessment. Although only one teacher used assessment terminology (valid, reliable, manageable), their comments indicate that they had a reasonable degree of assessment literacy as it pertains to their own teaching and assessment situations. Table 3, below, shows teacher comments categorised according to features of assessment principles described in Brown and Abeywickrama (2010).

Table 3: Teachers' awareness of assessment principles when planning and delivering ELLP assessment.

	Comments relating to validity	Comments relating to Reliability	Comments relating to Practicality
Teacher A	"Must be needs-based." "Must use effective tools e.g. videos" "Must tap into what teachers are already doing." "Focus on assessment of academic, not social, language."		"Should be able to be done quickly." "Should be done after other assessments."
Teacher B	"Does it tell us what we're wanting to know?" "Ask the right questions."	"Is it reliable – does it give the same results as other classroom-based assessment, relative to cohort?" "Strive for consistency by the assessor." "Assess ELLs away from the mainstream class."	"Must be manageable for the classroom teacher, in terms of time." "Is it part of what teachers already do?"
Teacher C	"Start with prior knowledge about learners." "Select assessments known to be useful." "Eliminate assessments that are too difficult." "Make the assessment within the reach of the learner."	"Ensure students won't be stressed by assessment." "Give encouragement and positive feedback for all attempts." "Provide a quiet, private environment." "Turn assessment into a game." "Not in front of their peers."	"Don't plan to assess too much in one session."

When teachers were asked about challenges encountered with ELLP assessment, all three teachers reported a concern about the consistency of mainstream teacher judgements i.e. rater reliability (Brown and Abeywickrama, 2010), as reflected in the following comments:

"There might be different interpretations – it's not standard across the school".

"I don't trust the teachers… they'd have everyone on Stage 2"

"Mainstream teachers rate too highly, in general"

Another concern for the teachers, also relating to rater reliability, was the challenges that mainstream teachers may encounter with the descriptors in the ELLP document, which serve as the benchmarks against which ELLs are rated. One reported that even as an ESOL teacher she had "had to learn how to interpret the descriptors". Other comments indicating potential sources of rater unreliability connected to the descriptors included:

> "Some of the descriptors are confusing for mainstream teachers"
>
> "Some things seem to be positive and some things seem to be negative – it doesn't make sense to me"
>
> "The descriptors on the matrices I don't think are thorough - I guess they wanted to make it user friendly and not too onerous, but in a way maybe that's made it hard to define between one stage and another"

Also related to reliability is the process of moderation, which the literature indicates is essential for consistency of teacher judgements. All three teachers reported that moderation was being conducted only very informally by teachers within their schools, for example if a mainstream teacher was unsure about a judgement and approached the ESOL teacher for guidance. One of the participants referred to the Ministry of Education ESOL verifiers, who periodically check that teachers are accurately rating ELLs against the ELLP, as a form of external moderation.

Assessment activities used or recommended for ELLP assessment

Types of assessment activities

Asked whether they use or recommend formal or informal assessment activities for ELLP assessment, teachers indicated that they used a combination of these. They reported that the more formal mainstream assessment activities of 'running records' and 'writing exemplars' produced for National Standards are being used for OTJs about ELLs' reading and writing skills, whereas informal observations and conversations are the basis for teachers' judgements about listening and speaking skills. Their comments included:

> "A lot of schools… are relying on the running record, and for the writing, we've got the writing exemplars"
>
> "Where it might be open would be assessing listening and speaking…I think teachers tend to rely on observation in the classroom"
>
> "The listening is the trickiest one, and it's all guesswork really"

Range of assessment activities

In order to ascertain whether a 'wide range' of assessment activities was being used for ELLP assessment, teachers were asked to list the assessment activities that they use, or recommend that mainstream teachers use. They were also asked whether they preferred sourcing their own assessment tasks (there are no prescribed assessment activities for ELLP assessment), or being provided with a list of suggested assessment activities (as was the case with the previous system). One teacher commented: "I remember this feeling of reinventing the wheel… why didn't they (Ministry of Education) trial tools and recommend tools?" Another offered the opinion that it was "a cop-out" on the part of the Ministry.

As seen in Table 4, below, there was a relatively short list of assessment activities provided by the teachers. They reported that mainstream teachers also rely on informal classroom observations of ELLs to arrive at their OTJs, particularly for listening and speaking. Although two of the ESOL teachers suggested that mainstream teachers conduct an oral interview as evidence of an ELL's listening and speaking skills, the third reported that in her school these OTJs were based solely on classroom observations. All three were concerned about the assessment of listening and speaking skills because they are not assessed in mainstream classes. One teacher commented: "It's the oral [language assessment] - that's the tricky one", another asking "What *do* we (schools) do for listening and speaking?" (the implied answer being "very little or nothing").

Table 4: Assessment activities used or recommended for ELLP assessment

	Teacher A	Teacher B	Teacher C
Listening			
Speaking			
Reading	Running Records; match with 'PM Reader' levels	Running records; match with 'Ready to Read' levels	Running records; other assessments done for National Standards
Writing	Independent writing sample, mainstream class	Unassisted writing done for English curriculum	Unassisted writing sample/s

Teachers also reported that one writing sample would likely be the main evidence of ELLs' writing skills, and this would usually be a sample completed for National Standards assessment. When asked if one sample was enough, one of the teachers responded: "Well it has to be. If I was to do an OTJ – what would I be doing – three samples for (x) kids, no, no…" This comment perhaps indicates that although she is aware that several samples of language are preferable for an OTJ, neither she nor the mainstream teachers have time to do a 'proper' OTJ.

Conclusions: Gaps between the literature, policy, and practice

The findings indicate that there may be a number of gaps between the literature and teacher practice in regard to ELLP assessment, as well as between Ministry policy and teacher practice. However, as the data obtained from the study is limited, and cannot be generalised, the gaps described below are best thought of as tentative conclusions, with further research needed.

Firstly, while the literature indicates that the main purpose of assessment is to improve learning, it appears that the ESOL teachers do not see ELLP assessment primarily as having a formative purpose in relation to providing feedback to learners. While they acknowledge that mainstream teachers will find out more about their ELLs from completing the assessment, which may indirectly lead to improved teaching and learning, there seems to be no direct use of the information obtained from the assessment to plan further learning for ELLs. Secondly, there appears to be heavy reliance on evidence obtained from informal classroom observations of ELLs, particularly for OTJs about oral language skills. Although the literature acknowledges

that informal assessment is appropriate for younger learners, the evidence obtained from informal assessment may not be as reliable as that obtained from formal assessment, making a balance of the two preferable. Thirdly, teachers' comments indicate that time is a key consideration in deciding on assessment activities, with a preference for those that are quick and easy for teachers to use. This may indicate that practicality is being prioritised at the expense of validity and reliability.

The literature also indicates that for teachers to arrive at sound OTJs, they need to have a clear understanding of the standards that they are judging learners' performance against. However, it seems that this may not be the case, as teachers reported that mainstream teachers have difficulties with understanding the ELLP descriptors, some of which contain linguistic terminology likely to be unfamiliar to them. Finally, while the literature indicates that moderation of OTJs is essential for ensuring consistency of judgements between teachers, moderation was not being carried out systematically by the teachers interviewed.

There also seem to be gaps between the Ministry of Education guidelines for ELLP assessment and teacher practice. Firstly, although the Ministry advocates using 'a wide range' of assessment tools to rate learners against the ELLP, this would not appear to be the case (Table 4, above). Although this range would be extended if informal classroom assessments and observations were included, evidence from these is difficult to account for. The term 'a wide range' seems to be problematic, as the Ministry has not given clear guidance as to what this means. Another gap appears to exist between Ministry provision of online resources to assist teachers assessing ELLs, and their use by teachers. These resources are unlikely to be known or used by mainstream teachers, as even the ESOL teachers in the study were not familiar with them. Further, there seems to be a gap between the Ministry advice that ELLP assessment should be "based on your school's usual age-appropriate assessment tools, activities, and observations" and teacher practice. As the National Literacy Standards do not require assessment of oral language skills, there may be very little, if any, evidence of these skills which can be derived from 'usual' mainstream assessment activities. Finally, there seems to be a gap between some of the assessment activities reported by teachers and the descriptors in the ELLP. For example, running records provide information about reading behaviours, whereas the ELLP Reading descriptors describe features of texts. Similarly, there seem to be no direct links between informal observations of listening and speaking and the ELLP descriptors.

Recommendations

There are a number of actions which could be taken to ensure that both ESOL teachers and mainstream teachers are able to make sound OTJs about their ELLs' language skills. One recommendation is that the Ministry firstly clarifies how the term 'a wide range' of assessment activities should be interpreted, and then what constitutes an appropriate set of assessment activities that teachers can use to gather evidence for forming their OTJs for ELLP assessment. This would seem to be particularly important for oral language skills. A further recommendation is that the Ministry should provide information and examples of how evidence obtained from either formal or informal assessment activities can be aligned to the ELLP descriptors. An additional recommendation is that schools find ways to provide time for both ESOL and mainstream teachers to source appropriate tasks for ELLP assessment.

Time is also needed for other aspects of ELLP assessment. Time is needed for teachers to complete some formal moderation, to ensure more reliable judgements. Time is also needed for both ESOL and mainstream teachers to become more familiar with the ELLP descriptors,

so that teachers are clear about what the 'standards' are. In addition, it appears that ESOL teachers, who are expected to play a leading role in their school in regard to ELLP assessment, need more time to fulfill this role more effectively. This could take the form of inter-school professional development workshops - all three teachers mentioned that they did not know how other schools were carrying out ELLP assessment.

To summarise, the current study has revealed some of the gaps that currently appear to exist between recommended practice regarding ELLP Assessment, and the actual practice of teachers in New Zealand primary schools, drawing on information reported by ESOL specialist teachers. However, although ESOL teachers play an important supporting role in ELLP assessment, mainstream teachers now have the chief responsibility for judging ELLs' language skills for this assessment. Future research is therefore needed which focuses on the practices and attitudes of mainstream teachers as they carry out ELLP Assessment.

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FLIPPING TEACHER OBSERVATIONS: MAXIMISING TEACHER AGENCY AND DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

Despite the purported purpose of in-service teacher observations as being developmental, they are often used as tools for evaluating teacher performance. We suggest an alternative approach which brings the tangible benefits of professional development to the very start of the process, thereby flipping the traditional observation procedure. This process is called CORE: Collaboration, Observation, Reflection and Extension. It is this first Collaborative step that brings development to the fore. This collaboration is also an opportunity to 'get inside' the teacher's thinking and explore their tacit and explicit understandings and potentially to negotiate interpretations. We outline the CORE procedure, and explain what each step entails. We also present our findings of adopting this approach at an English language school in New Zealand. Narrative inquiry data is triangulated by collecting data from the observers, the teachers being observed and the manager. This observation framework has applications in a variety of educational contexts.

Flipping teacher observations: maximising teacher agency and development

Classroom observations of teachers occur in many different teaching environments and for various reasons. Malderez (2003) outlines four main purposes: training, professional development, evaluation and research. Despite these different categories, it is regrettable that observations have mainly been used for evaluation, even when presented as being a part of training or development. This is particularly true in the context of in-service teachers, which is our focus here. The most common form of a traditional observation is the teacher submits a lesson plan, the teacher is observed using a set of either known or unknown criteria and then feedback is given to the teacher in written and/or spoken form. This feedback is often evaluative and teachers may feel this judgment and possibly regard observations as a threat. This can lead to tension not only in the classroom but also between the teacher and the observer at any pre- or post-observation meetings (Sheal, 1989).

One of the main issues underlying this tension is power. The fact that there are standards which need to be adhered to can create a power relationship (Freeman, 1982). The observer is in a power-rich position whereas the teacher is in a power-poor position. Such an imbalance means that this traditional approach has many disadvantages. Williams (1989) found that teachers often played a very small role in observations, with some describing the exchange as "threatening frightening and …. an ordeal" (p. 86). She adds that there is often no room for individual, personalized tailoring and that it is a prescriptive, one-size-fits-all approach. While there may be teachers who feel comfortable with this power dynamic, there is nevertheless a lack of teacher agency in observations about their own teaching practice.

Attempts have been made to rectify this disjunction. One such way has been to encourage teachers to reflect on their own teaching rather than being evaluated by an observer. Different researchers have implemented this in different ways, depending on the context and theoretical approach used. For example, Wang & Seth (1998) reassigned the roles of teacher and observer to 'Speaker' and 'Understander', based on Edge's (1992) idea of co-operative development. The main function of the Understander is to "provide opportunities for reflection, rather than

provide evaluative comments, thus leaving the teacher to explore and discover fresh insights" (p. 207). Freeman (1982) similarly advocates the Non-Directive approach, based on Carl Rogers' work (1951, 1961). Here the observer provides a reflection and integration of the teacher's own goals and performance. There are other less-theoretically related suggestions too. Williams (1989) recommends the use of questionnaires before and after the lesson to help guide teachers more effectively, both in terms of planning better lessons and self-evaluation. Alternatively, Marshall and Young (2009) suggest that rather than using a standard observation checklist, teachers specify beforehand the areas in which they would like feedback. Bailey (2006, p. 81) proposes "negotiated observations", but this relates to teachers choosing when to be observed, as opposed to any negotiation of lesson planning and delivery.

Increasing teacher agency in these ways is welcomed. However, these methods do lack a specific focus on continual professional development. This is one of the five key areas in the Cambridge English Teaching Framework (Cambridge English, 2014) and is specifically linked to improving classroom practice. The main drawback of all the aforementioned methods of observation is that any recommendations made to develop practice may not necessarily be taken up. It is entirely up to the teacher if and when they would like to try out the suggestions. This leads to the very real possibility that teachers can simply go from one observation to another without achieving the intended outcome of developing standards of teaching practice. Teachers may well know in theory what they ought to do to better their practice but the onus is on their own internal motivation to enact this.

We therefore felt in our professional contexts that teachers needed to be empowered towards more effective practice before teaching a class, rather than only afterwards. This led to the creation of an alternative observation procedure in which the developmental aspect is flipped to the fore.

Introducing CORE

We have developed a new framework for observations that we call CORE. This stands for:

Collaboration
Observation
Reflection
Extension.

Each of these elements will be described in turn.

Collaboration

The first stage of the framework is Collaboration. This comprises a 15 to 30 minute session prior to the observation in which the teacher and observer develop a mutually negotiated lesson. Teachers come prepared with a description of the lesson they have planned. As this is open to crafting, and in order to reduce the teacher's workload, we have found that a verbal description of the lesson and learning outcome is sufficient at this stage.

While the teacher is describing their plan, the observer simply listens, and perhaps asks questions regarding how certain elements will be implemented or to clarify any unclear aspects. It is important at this stage to direct the nature of this discourse to the student learning outcomes, learning activities and tasks, rather than on the teacher. Once the observer has understood the shape of the lesson, and only if necessary, suggestions can be made as to what elements could be done in an alternative way. In this way, there are two professionals collaborating on the plan, with the observer being more distanced and therefore a useful second voice. By focusing on how tasks are chosen to make learning happen, this helps to focus the

conversation on why certain decisions may be more effective than others.

This collaborative planning time is also an ideal opportunity for the teacher to ask for specific guidance on a task or activity that they have wanted to try but perhaps have been too hesitant. This pre-observation stage can also be invaluable in establishing the aims of the lesson. For example, in our experience this stage brought up the fact that an observed teacher had the understanding that oral error correction was expected in the lesson, when this was not the case. This conversation allowed the focus to return to the students' learning needs and as a result, the desired learning outcomes for that lesson.

For the observer, the aim is to understand the teacher's thought processes and to 'flip' any developmental suggestions that usually follow a lesson to the very start, so that teachers can, should they choose, try incorporating the very aspect they would benefit by improving on. As Stuhlman et al., (2010) point out, what teachers want the most is learning how to improve their lesson delivery and how to implement activities. Therefore, this tangible benefit of development can be fulfilled from the beginning of the process.

We have found that this aspect of collaborative planning is maximized when it takes place in the classroom itself. This way, it is easier for both the teacher and the observer to visualize the lesson, and also take into account any implications regarding classroom layout. We have found this particularly useful with less experienced teachers. Such an additional step of having this collaboration in the same physical space as the observed lesson helps bridge the space between lesson-as-blueprint and lesson-as-action.

Observation

Observation is when the collaborator watches how the co-operatively planned lesson works in practice. This therefore shifts the focus away from observing the teacher per se to considering how the mutually planned lesson works. At this stage, what exactly is observed can vary from institution to institution as each usually has their own method to evaluate the lesson. Teachers can also select which aspect they would like to be observed on during the pre-observation discussion. This element we feel has the most flexibility to suit each educational environment.

Another aspect of the observation stage is that the observer should also pay attention to how the negotiated elements of the lesson plan are interpreted in the actual delivery. This will help the observers hone their own skills for future collaborative lesson planning. Every opportunity to observe is an opportunity to learn about teaching and we hope that this is the spirit with which observers enter the classroom.

In our experience, we have found it beneficial for observers to say a few words prior to the lesson as to the reason why they are there. It would be useful to remind students that they are not the focus and they should behave as usual. This may well prove effective also in educational settings with continuous intakes, as students may not have experienced this before.

Reflection

In the third stage of CORE, teachers are asked to think by themselves about a list of questions following the observed lesson prior to meeting again for the final stage of Extension. Data-led reflection is a key element of reflective practice recently advocated by Walsh & Mann (2015) and information from the observed lesson can provide such data. Mechanisms for self-reflection have increasingly been introduced within observation situations to encourage

teachers to think critically about their practice. Williams (1989), for example, used a fixed list of reflection questions. While we agree that teachers do benefit from feeling more secure when they know what they will need to reflect on, we suggest a mixture of four fixed questions and three questions tailored to the observed lesson. When observers are skilled teachers with more training, qualifications and experience, their expertise can be used to direct the self-reflection questions in an appropriate and useful manner. This can prevent certain aspects from being overlooked by the teacher.

We suggest the following four questions as standard:

1. *What key learning took place during the lesson?*
2. *How would you describe the atmosphere in class?*
3. *What did you think worked well in class?*
4. *What would you have changed, if anything?*

By mixing the standard reflection questions and tailored ones, we show that CORE offers an individualized, rather than one-size fits all approach. Examples of tailored reflection questions we have asked teachers include:

> One aspect that you mentioned in the pre-observation session was effective concept checking. How do you think this went during the lesson?
>
> You commented that the students were a bit too quiet during the pair work reading activity. Why do you think this was the case and how could you overcome it next time?

In practical terms, we have found it useful in our role as collaborators to bear in mind these tailored questions during the observation itself. This means that we are able to produce a personalized reflection form for the teacher shortly after the class has finished. Accordingly, the teacher will have the lesson fresh in their mind, maximising the opportunity for critical reflection on the choices they made in the classroom. We ask teachers to return this form to the observer within 24 hours of the lesson. This allows the observer to 'get inside' the teacher's head and see what they are thinking, thus putting the observer in an informed position for the final part of the process. We have found that as we do not ask teachers to write a lesson plan for the observed lesson that teachers are willing to engage with this much smaller addition to their existing workload. We do however limit the questions to one A4 piece of paper in order to keep it short and to the point, and limit the danger that teachers do not engage with this aspect by seeing it simply as an administrative exercise.

Extension

Extension refers to what has previously been called a post-observation meeting. Before, this stage might have been filled with tension as the teacher was waiting to receive their evaluation. However, since the collaborator has been involved from the very start of the lesson and the reflection form has already guided the teacher, this meeting is less likely to be fraught with nervous anticipation. Again, we see this as a collaborative session, using the reflection form as the point of departure for the discussion. We choose to focus on positive elements of the lesson before commenting on any points that can be improved upon. At this stage, we have found that the use of questioning and suggesting, rather than telling, is paramount to ensure the right balance of support and challenge. In addition, we recommend that teachers and observers choose to use this session to set two or three developmental goals.

These four distinct elements of CORE ensure that teachers are in the driving seat of the

observation process yet are fully able to call on the expertise of the collaborator. We feel it is essential that the observer has the ability to support teachers by not being dominant in the observation process, and to be malleable and adaptable in order to bring out the very best in each teacher in an individualized manner. They also need to be able to prioritize one or two key points from each observation that the teacher can reflect on, rather than receiving broad feedback on multiple areas of practice.

The present study

With this novel framework derived from both principles and practice, we wanted to introduce this new approach at an English language school based in Auckland, New Zealand. This institute primarily offers General English classes to international students with levels ranging from Beginners to Advanced. In order to evaluate the suggested framework for maximizing teacher agency for in-service teacher development observations, we had the following research question: How do stakeholders in the observation process (teachers, observers, managers) view CORE in comparison to the traditional observational method?

Participants

Three sets of participants were consulted in our study: teachers, observers and the school manager. The aim of this was to triangulate the data by comparing these different sources, as advocated by others (e.g., Long, 2005). Such a method provides deeper insights and adds to the validity of the data presented below. Initially, all twelve English teachers were consulted about their views on the traditional model of observation which had thus far been the model used. Four teachers were then observed using the CORE process and their thoughts on the new approach were followed-up in more detail. The second data set comes from an interview with the school manager who was formerly a teacher. He had been in his management role for five years. The third and final data set comes from the first two authors who are senior teachers in the faculty. Author 1 is DELTA-qualified with over 13 years of teaching experience and has completed an MA in Applied Linguistics. Author 2 has been teaching for seven years and has an MTESOL. We share a common philosophy of mentoring and believe that a key part of our role is to provide support to teachers.

Data collection procedures

Pre-observation questionnaire

All twelve English language teachers were invited to complete an anonymous online questionnaire about their views on observations in general. This took place before we began introducing the CORE approach.

Conducting observations using the CORE approach

The second stage of our research study involved observing four teachers using the CORE approach. These particular teachers were chosen as they had worked at the school for a year or longer and would thus be able to make comparisons between the previous observation method and CORE. The authors of this paper were the observers; Author 1 worked with Teachers A and B and Author 2 with Teachers C and D.

Questionnaires and interviews

The final stage involved collecting data from all three sets of participants. The four observed teachers were asked to complete a questionnaire comprising nine questions on how they viewed this new alternative approach to observation. The school manager was interviewed in a semi-structured manner to find out his thoughts on CORE and why he decided to implement it. Lastly, the authors, in their role as observers, wrote a short summary of their experiences using CORE.

Results and Discussion

Triangulating data from the three major stakeholders of teachers being observed, the observers and the school manager, four major themes emerged. The first theme is a lack of agency during traditional observations. The other three themes related to CORE; these were reducing tension, increased experimentation and lasting change.

Traditional observations and lack of agency

Of the twelve teachers in the English faculty, five responded to the pre-observation questionnaire. This yielded a response rate of 42%, which is consistent with the typical rate of 30-40% for questionnaires distributed to employees within a company (Fryrear, 2015). Combining this with data from the manager's interview, a major theme of Lack of Teacher Agency in the traditional observation approach emerged. For example, Respondent 1, referring to the traditional post-observation meeting wrote: "if something is said that I don't agree with, I probably wouldn't challenge it". This is in line with Vásquez & Reppen's (2007) findings that teachers were generally passive during observation meetings, reflecting the common nature of the top-down relationship between the observer and teacher. On a similar note, the manager commented that "The problem with the existing process was that the focus was on the observation and that … had the potential to lead to a kind of telling…...Change is always going to be more effective if it's self-initiated." In contrast to the traditional observation method, the CORE approach was found to facilitate greater teacher involvement. This was evidenced through increased experimentation, lasting change and reducing tension.

Increased Experimentation

The second major theme that arose from all three stakeholders was the greater effort made to try something new in the classroom. For example, Teacher C found the observation a good opportunity to try out a new type of activity, knowing that there was support from the observer throughout the process. Teacher B also commented that they had intended students to work alone on a jigsaw reading but that following the Collaboration stage, this was changed to a pairwork activity so that they could help each other understand the text. This slight change to the initial lesson plan enlarged on the original idea and enhanced the final lesson learning outcome. These examples of experimenting with something new or simply trying a different way of doing things is also what the school manager is in favour of. From the observers' point of view, the increased experimentation aspect is also mutually beneficial as they can likewise learn from the teachers and build it into their own practice.

Lasting change

One of the most beneficial aspects of the CORE observation process was that long-term adjustments to teaching and work practice were found by all stakeholders. The school manager liked that by using CORE as the standard observation practice, this helped to build the collaborative ethos throughout the school, and promoted a culture of shared practice. He found that by having fewer observations through the year but being more in-depth and meaningful in this four-step process, that developing teaching practice led to lasting change. This was echoed

by all the teachers; for example, organizing boardwork better (Teacher B) and more effective monitoring of students (Teacher D).

Reduced Tension

One of the main themes was the view that the CORE process was seen as a less pressured way to conduct observations, to the extent that Teacher B said that they found it "*really enjoyable*". This stemmed from the collaborative lesson planning element i.e. "It made me feel that [Author 1] was on my side and not a person coming in to judge my work. I felt comfortable … and loved the feedback session after the lesson." Similarly, Teacher A said that knowing that the observer was aware of the content of the lesson and that they contributed to the lesson planning "enhances the feeling of collaboration rather than a 'them and us' scenario". Teacher D also found that the Collaboration stage made the observation "relevant and more meaningful."

Interestingly, the school manager pointed out that it is far more important for in-service teacher observations to focus on the developmental aspect, as "there are so many other feedback loops that if there were any problems, you would know already". Students and their agents are often quite vocal about expressing their views should there be any dissatisfaction with lesson delivery. To enhance the developmental aspect of observations, the school manager felt that one key element to help reduce the tension in the process is to have observers who teachers feel comfortable talking to, are open and empathetic. Observers who understand and believe in the value of collaborative practice are essential in helping to reduce tension in observations.

From our viewpoint as the observers, we felt it was important to be happy to take a back seat during the initial pre-observation meeting (Collaboration) and simply listen to the planned lesson, asking questions where necessary. As Freeman (1982, pp. 25-26) notes when discussing the Non-Directive approach, "the observer must understand and accept that his/her experience is to be drawn on as a resource but is never to overpower or dominate that of the teacher". We were aware that we wanted to keep the process as collaborative as possible and minimize any potential sources of tension. This meant that the extent to which the lesson plan was mutually negotiated varied according to the teacher and their level of experience. Balancing when and how to make suggestions is a skill to be refined. Others have started this process already by showing more awareness of the distribution of talk during observation meetings and giving more agency to the teachers during such meetings (Vásquez & Reppen, 2007).

Conclusion

Whereas past approaches may have not given teachers enough agency in the observation process, CORE (Collaboration-Observation-Reflection-Extension) attempts to redress this balance. Furthermore, this collaborative approach has the very real benefit of 'flipping' the developmental aspect to the beginning of the process. A small-scale study has shown that the benefits of CORE include reducing tension, increasing experimentation in the classroom and promoting lasting change in teaching practice. For this reason, we hope that teachers will no longer face observations with trepidation but in fact, look forward to them.

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ENGLISH FOR ACADEMIC PURPOSES: A BRIDGE TO THE UNIVERSITY

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Abstract

Because of current worldwide demand for academic English courses that prepare students for university education, many TESOL teachers are now being asked to take on the teaching English for Academic Purposes (EAP), often with little background or training in this specialised branch of language teaching. In addressing this situation and seeking to raise awareness of EAP, this paper firstly outlines the field of EAP by defining what it is, providing a brief history and considering student need at the different levels at which EAP is offered. The paper then discusses practitioner-related issues, including the knowledge base that informs EAP, the requisite teacher competencies and the two ways in which EAP is conceptualised in tertiary contexts. The paper concludes by making recommendations relating to the ongoing support and development of EAP teachers.

Introduction and Overview

During the last three decades, there has been rapid growth in the numbers of *English for Academic Purposes* (hereafter EAP) courses around the world. These are courses that prepare students for English-medium academic study, or support students already enrolled in universities or some other branch of tertiary education. EAP has developed from general English language teaching, but it is now fair to say that it has emerged as a parallel discourse community with its own research literature, professional associations and conferences around the world. In addressing the theme of the CLESOL 2016 conference of *Learners in Context: Bridging the Gaps*, which relates to meeting student need, this paper considers meeting student need through EAP courses, and specifically student need in tertiary contexts.

The paper firstly traces the origins of EAP and provides a current definition of this branch of English language teaching. The next section considers the issue of student need as it is addressed by the different levels of EAP courses. Following that, there is a brief review of the knowledge base of EAP, which includes mention of the contributions of key research streams it draws upon. The paper then discusses the types of knowledge and expertise required by EAP practitioners, drawing upon the *Competency Framework for Teachers of English for Academic Purposes* (BALEAP, 2008). This framework was developed in the UK by the British EAP association (BALEAP) with input from practitioners in other countries including New Zealand. The paper then considers two current conceptualisations of EAP courses; that is, whether EAP is a support activity or an academic discipline in its own right along with the implications of these two quite different views of EAP. The paper concludes with some observations about ways in which the development of EAP can be supported in the New Zealand context.

Background: Origins and definitions of EAP

EAP developed from *English for Specific Purposes* (ESP) courses, which emerged in the 1970s. These were courses where the content and the aims of the teaching are determined by the needs of the learner. ESP courses were first developed for scientists and engineers working in the rapidly-developing oil industry in North Africa and the Middle East during this period. Robinson (1980) suggests that most of the early ESP courses were “post-experience” courses

for professionals, such as scientists and engineers, who had already studied or practised their subject area in their L1 contexts. They were taking ESP courses in order to relocate their existing knowledge and professional practice within English-medium contexts. On the other hand, she suggests that EAP courses were pre-experience courses, developed when, "[w]ithin the area of skills, either language skills or study skills, many students lack the required competence in their L1" (p. 25). EAP courses are taken before or during degree study while the early ESP courses were post-degree courses. The term *English for Academic Purposes* was first used as the title of the published proceedings of a conference held at the University of Birmingham in the UK in 1975. At that time, the focus of EAP was mainly on the development of study skills. However, now it is fair to say that the scope of EAP has broadened considerably, and the following definition of EAP is the one that is now most commonly used: "[it is] the teaching of English with the specific aim of helping learners to study, conduct research or teach in that language" (Flowerdew & Peacock, 2001, p. 8**).** Within EAP, two types of courses have emerged: *English for Specific Academic Purposes* (ESAP); these are courses where all of the students are preparing for study in one discipline; and, English for General *Academic Purposes* (EGAP); these courses will include students preparing to study in different disciplines.

Student need and EAP

EAP courses have always been a 'needs-driven' educational activity, focusing on students' present or future academic language needs. However, understanding student need in relation to academic competencies must be considered in relation to the stage or level of academic education at which the EAP course is located. EAP is essentially taught at three levels: pre-tertiary (often called *pre-sessional*) such as foundation studies courses, undergraduate level (*in-sessional*) and increasingly at postgraduate level. At each level, because of the different types of learner need, the focus of the course clearly will be different.

Pre-sessional EAP courses, such as foundation studies or other pre-tertiary English courses usually cannot meet student target needs in terms of a single discipline-specific focus. For example, they cannot just focus on the texts and practices of business, or of the humanities or of science - unless of course it is known that all of the students within a class group will be studying in only one of those subject areas. In relation to their language development and the performance of certain types of task, students at this level need to be gaining generic, procedural knowledge, and in particular in relation to academic literacy and especially writing. Rather than topic-connected knowledge, they need to be developing what Widdowson (1983) refers to as *capacity*.

The next level is that of in-sessional EAP courses, such as undergraduate courses. Here, meeting the students' target needs usually involves further addressing the language needs (and, again, the writing needs) of students at this level. In New Zealand, these students will usually have gained entry to tertiary education on the basis of an overall average IELTS Academic Module score of 6.0. However, it is important to realise the limitations of this proficiency level. The IELTS testing organisation recommends that an overall average IELTS score of 6.0 is probably suitable as an entry level to "linguistically less demanding training courses" (IELTS Guide for Educational Institutions, 2015, p. 13). Therefore, students entering undergraduate university courses with this English proficiency level will still face a range of language problems. At this level, the most pressing need of these students is to develop the means to interrogate and respond to the requirements of undergraduate assignment genres**,** which is not a straightforward issue. As Johns (1997) says, these assignment genres are difficult to pin down and almost casually named. Also, according to theorists in the academic literacies movement, they vary greatly in their expectations because they are shaped by the particular epistemologies

of different subject areas (Lea & Street, 1998). Students at this level, therefore, need to begin to understand the types of *identity*, *orientation* and *discursive resource*s that the assignments of particular disciplines require. This issue is multiplied in the case of undergraduates taking interdisciplinary degrees, facing courses and assignments in a variety of subject areas.

The third level of EAP is that of postgraduate courses. These will usually focus on academic tasks requiring students to engage with primary reports of research. These tasks may typically include summaries of readings, reviews, extended essays, annotated bibliographies, and actual research writing, such as for masters dissertations or PhD theses – including literature reviews, methodology sections, reporting findings, writing discussions. In some ways this area of EAP is the one that is informed by the most extensive body of research. However, at this level, the EAP courses will still often be interdisciplinary – that is, taken by students from different subject areas. Therefore, the EAP course at this level will still need to provide opportunities to examine disciplinary differences in the academic and research-reporting genres.

The knowledge base of EAP

In addressing student need at the different levels of EAP, course designers and teachers over the years have drawn upon theory and research from a variety of sources. Brief mention is made here of five research streams that have become part of the knowledge base of EAP: systemic functional linguistics, genre theory, corpus linguistics, academic literacies and critical EAP. This sections serves to illustrate the multi-facetted and complex nature of EAP and how its knowledge base differs somewhat from that drawn upon in regular TESOL practice.

Systemic functional linguistics

Systemic functional linguistics (hereafter SFL) research is concerned with what is called *register*, which links the analysis of social or academic contexts with their use of specific linguistic features in their spoken or written texts. An example is Halliday's analysis of scientific texts (1990/2002, pp. 169-173), in which he found a predominance of nominalisations and causal relations. Another example is Woodward-Kron's (2008) research of student texts, where she found technicality expressed by elaborating nominal groups or non-defining relative clauses. Essentially SFL studies link linguistic elements to their use in specific contexts. This type of knowledge can potentially inform EAP courses as part of developing students' textual competence.

Genre theory

Genre theory refers to the different approaches that have been used to categorise and analyze texts. Relevant genre studies have focused on the types of spoken and written text that EAP students are typically required to produce, such as essays, lab reports, literature reviews, dissertations and oral presentations. Two streams of genre research have contributed to EAP; these are the English for Specific Purposes (ESP) approach to genre, based on Swales' work (1990, 2004) and the approach to genre influenced by SFL (Martin, 1984; Martin & Rose, 2008). Of the two, it is Swales' approach to genre that is best known and has had the largest influence on EAP and classroom practitioner knowledge. However, in terms of pedagogy, genre-based instruction using the teaching/learning cycle developed by teachers influenced by SFL is widely used.

Corpus linguistics

Corpus linguistics is not a theory of language as such, but refers to analytical methods whereby large samples of naturally-occurring language (corpora), in the form of written texts or transcriptions of spoken language, are subjected to computer-mediated analysis. Corpus

based enquiries can reveal information about the frequency of occurrence of particular linguistic items in a corpus through creating a *wordlist*. *Concordance* searches of specific words (from the wordlist) can reveal information about the use of a linguistic item in patterns and phrases. An important contribution of corpus linguistics to EAP has been research that identifies the vocabulary necessary to function in academic contexts in the form of word lists, such as Coxhead's *Academic Wordlist* (2006), and Gardner and Davies' *Academic Vocabulary List* (2014). Corpus methods have proven a useful tool for EAP by providing empirical linguistic data, specifically information about vocabulary.

Academic literacies

Academic literacies theorists and researchers aim to expose and challenge the types of institutional power relations and gatekeeping practices faced by novice or second language writers in academic contexts. Studies have included investigations of ideologies, power relations, hierarchies and preferred behaviours of the academic environments within which students are required to write (Ivanic, 1998; Lea & Stierer, 2000). Work by academic literacies researchers contributes to EAP by raising teacher awareness of the types of ideological, institutional and political issues that the student writer must navigate when trying to enter an academic discourse community. The approach also encourages EAP practitioners themselves to be aware of the institutional and ideological constraints that relate to their own role in the academic world.

Critical EAP

Critical EAP is largely a North American theoretical approach and its leading proponent, Benesch (1993), proposes that EAP classes should "embrace an ideology of resistance . . . and a pedagogy of critical academic ESL" (p. 716). In expounding this position, Benesch (2001) proposes that the EAP classes "should offer flexibility about topic selection, leaving room for a variety of possibilities: teacher choice, student choice and whole-class choice" (p. 84). She proposes that EAP classes, as well as being based on needs analysis, should also take account of *rights analysis*, to provide a "framework for understanding and responding to the power relations" that students will encounter in academic courses (p. 108). As the result of the 'rights analysis' of an educational context, EAP teachers will assist students to acquire the capacity to question and resist both the content and method of delivery of courses. Following such an approach, the classroom is seen as a site of struggle where students are involved in shaping what takes place by their active participation.

As a result of the complexity of EAP and the different research streams that have been drawn upon to support the discipline, there is now a considerable research literature of EAP reported in journals, including: *Journal of English for Academic Purposes, English for Specific Purposes, Journal of Pragmatics, Ibérica, System, Applied Linguistics* and *ELT Journal*. There is also a range of practitioner-focused book publications that provide an overview of practice in the field (Alexander, Argent & Spence, 2008; Bruce, 2011; Charles & Pecorari, 2015; de Chazal, 2014; Hyland, 2006). Becoming aware of and drawing upon this extensive (and growing) knowledge base of EAP is important for practitioners entering the field as well as for more experienced practitioners.

EAP teacher competencies: Four areas of practitioner knowledge

In this section, four areas of knowledge and expertise are proposed as necessary to an EAP teacher's formative development and ongoing practice. The four areas are: *academic practice, EAP students, curriculum development* and *programme delivery*. The discussion here draws on

the *Competency Framework for Teachers of English for Academic Purposes* (hereafter CFTEAP) produced by BALEAP (2008).

The first area of teacher knowledge relates to *academic practice.* In this area, the CFTEAP identifies teacher competencies relating to: academic contexts, disciplinary differences, academic discourse and personal development. In the area of academic practice, EAP teachers' knowledge and expertise should include: *experience* of participating in a university community. (For example, if you are teaching about research writing, it is helpful to have had experience of doing research writing yourself.) It includes knowledge of theories of community and of the research methods used to investigate disciplinary discourses and texts (such as, ethnography, genre analysis and corpus methods). Being able to apply a theoretical model and perform research on academic environments enables EAP practitioners to carry out *target situation analyses* of academic communities. Potentially this type of research could focus on how an academic community organises itself, aspects of its discipline-specific knowledge, the genres that community members use to communicate with each other, and the meta-knowledge of a particular subject community, such as its course organisation and methods of teaching, communication and assessment.

The second area of teacher knowledge relates to students. In this area, the CFTEAP document identifies teacher competencies relating to student need, student critical thinking and student autonomy. In this area, the EAP teacher's knowledge and expertise should include the tools necessary to understand students' prior cognitive training, their previous educational experiences, and their current expectations of educational institutions. It is important that the teacher knows how to undertake student profiling, language testing and course evaluation. This area also includes understanding the need for students to develop the two key dispositions of *critical thinking* and *autonomy* in order to participate effectively in future academic courses. These dispositions can only be developed gradually over time, and need to be embedded within the syllabus, materials and methodology of an EAP course.

The third area of teacher knowledge relates to curriculum development. In this area, the CFTEAP document identifies teacher competencies relating to syllabus and programme development, text processing and text creation. Here, EAP teachers' knowledge and expertise should include knowing how to relate needs analysis findings, theories of discourse and theories of learning to the development of syllabus goals and objectives. Teacher expertise in this area involves a complex synthesis that includes knowledge of discourse analysis, approaches to syllabus design and materials development as well as theories of learning. Furthermore, all of this will be driven by insights from needs analyses.

The fourth area of knowledge is that of programme implementation. In this area, the CFTEAP identifies teacher competencies relating to teaching practice and assessment practice. In this area, EAP teachers need to have knowledge of appropriate methodologies for delivering and assessing EAP courses. The practical elements of teaching methodology and creating and implementing achievement testing are important areas of knowledge in EAP just as much as in other areas of English language teaching. In relation to methodology, EAP units of instruction will tend to have larger textual and discursive outcomes than general English language teaching, which again requires appropriate pedagogical approaches. Similarly, the testing of speaking and writing in ways that involve the production of larger texts requires appropriate theoretical knowledge.

Current conceptualisation of EAP courses and the implications for practitioner roles

As I see it, there are now two ways of conceptualising EAP courses: the first is EAP as a support activity, such as is the case with health services, counselling or learning support; and the second is EAP as an academic discipline. The support activity approach still treats EAP as language acquisition for general proficiency development**,** and practitioners in such contexts are seen as developing students' linguistic knowledge and communicative skills. On the other hand, taking an academic discipline approach, practitioners are teaching language as it is embedded in the practices, discourses and texts of the academic world, a world that EAP students aspire to enter, or which they are already trying to negotiate their way through. Here, the focus is not just on language as the linguistic trace of a discourse process, rather it is the whole discourse process itself that is under consideration, including the language**.** Those taking the support-activity approach are focused on developing the overall communicative competence of the student. However, the academic discipline approach addresses students' capacity for language use as it is shaped by particular disciplines, their epistemologies and the particular genres they use for communicating knowledge. In addition, the support activity approach sees EAP as taking place within limited (and often quite unrealistic) time frames, whereas the academic discipline approach sees the development of students' discourse competence as a longer term enterprise. Finally, the support-activity approach sees EAP as a commodified subject, teachable from finite commercial courses, while the academic discipline approach sees it as drawing upon a wide range of resources. Certainly the commercially produced materials are a vital, core element, but so too is the teacher's own ongoing and developing knowledge of EAP research.

Where EAP is conceptualised as a support activity, the practitioner's role is primarily seen as teaching language – the four skills – for proficiency development, although employing materials and tasks that have a more academic focus. It involves teaching "study skills", such as accessing, organising, presenting and referencing knowledge, but not necessarily developing what Waters and Waters (2001) call *study competence* because of the decontextualised nature of the tasks and activities employed. It involves teaching critical thinking as the application of logic to propositions or problem-solving, in the belief that once acquired, this ability is transferable and can be used in different academic contexts in the future. However, where EAP is seen as an academic discipline, the practitioner's focus is rather on developing the student's capacity to understand and use language in different contexts and, in particular, develop awareness of the discursive influences on language that arise from context. It involves developing students' ability as discourse analysts so that they can unravel and participate in the discourses of the particular academic community that they aspire to join; and, it involves developing awareness of critical thinking as an evaluative judgment shaped by the epistemology, research methods and communicative values and genres of the particular discipline within which it occurs.

Conclusion: Supporting the development of EAP in New Zealand

With the increased demand for English-medium university education worldwide, the profile of students seeking to undertake English language study in the New Zealand context has changed in recent years. While many students formerly required general English language proficiency, such as for residency, there is now a growing demand for EAP courses in order to enter tertiary education. Because of the demand for this type of course, TESOL teachers are often being asked to make the shift into teaching EAP, often without suitable training or professional development support. However, as this paper points out, EAP is a specialist branch of English language teaching with its own literature, pedagogy and practice frameworks;

moreover, it requires specialist teacher education in addition to that offered for more general English language teaching. *Initial teacher education* (ITE) for teachers of English language, therefore, now needs to include courses that focus on ESP and EAP practice, courses that provide novice teachers with a clear sense of this scope of this branch of English language teaching along with the commitment to scholarship and research that it involves. However, ITE leads to the much longer process of *teacher development*, something that occurs over time as practitioners are engaged in practice, undertake professional development and connect with the workshops and symposia of their particular academic community. Campion's (2016) study that examined the experiences of British TESOL teachers moving into EAP emphasises the importance for new practitioners to connect regularly with a community of experienced teachers as part of the knowledge-building process in this field. Campion's findings, therefore, raise the issue of the need for symposia and conferences in the New Zealand context that include a focus on EAP. Furthermore, ongoing teacher development also involves regular engagement with the professional and research literature of EAP, which requires access to the books and academic journals of the field. While we need to embrace and become involved in EAP in the New Zealand context, we also need to ensure that it is supported by appropriate teacher education, access to the resources of its knowledge base and ongoing teacher development and mutual exchange through the meetings and activities of an active EAP community.

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CHANGES AND DEVELOPMENTS IN THE SYLLABUSES UNDERPINNING ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEXTBOOKS: ADDRESSING THE GAP

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Abstract

There is a wide range of views on the functions of language textbooks and the extent of their usefulness. Nevertheless, they play a key role in many instructed language learning contexts. It is therefore important to determine how and why they are constructed in particular ways. Since the middle decades of the 20th century, many changes and developments in the area of language syllabus design have been proposed. The study reported here sets out to provide an overview of these proposals and to determine what impact, if any, they have had on a representative sample of general English language textbooks designed for adult learners of English and produced by major publishers. What was found, overall, was a tendency towards accommodation of new perspectives rather than the total replacement of earlier ones. By the mid-60s, textbook writers were beginning to incorporate aspects of situational syllabus design proposals into what remained essentially structural syllabuses, the result being situationalised structural syllabuses with incipient functionalisation, which in the 1970s were becoming more fully functionalised. From the 1990s onwards, a growing tendency to place less emphasis on functional specification (and sometimes also on structural specification) was detected, with more emphasis on lexical specification and on discourse features added to the mix. Overall, the writers of the chosen commercially available general English language textbooks designed for adult learners appear to have been wary of adopting approaches to syllabus design that are grounded in one particular perspective, preferring to draw upon a range of different proposals while, in general, retaining a strong focus on the progressive grammatical structuring that characterises the structural syllabus.

Introduction and overview

A number of proposals relating to the overall design of syllabuses for the teaching and learning of additional languages have emerged since around the middle of the last century. The aim of this study was to determine what, if any, impact these proposals have had on a representative sample of general English (GE) language textbooks designed for adults. A number of textbooks related to language teaching and language teacher training address the variety of syllabus types and methods introduced since the 1960s (e.g. Christison & Murray, 2011; Larsen - Freeman & Anderson, 2011). In addition, a range of researchers have revealed differing perspectives on the value and role of textbooks in language teaching. In terms of studies analysing the value and role of textbooks, some researchers have looked at methodology (e.g. McGrath, 2002; Kervas-Doukas, 1996; Nunan, 1987; Sato & Kleinsasser, 1999) and some researchers have also proposed a variety of criteria evaluation lists for the analysis of English language textbooks (e.g. McGrath, 2006; Brown, 1998; Chambers, 1997; Sheldon, 1988). However, there appear to be no studies that have directly focused on an analysis of the impact of syllabus types on the design of textbooks published over the past half a century. The research reported on in this article attempts to address this aspect of the analysis of language textbook design.

The research reported on here is part of a bigger research project. This particular part of the

research is based on the selection and analysis, in relation to their underlying syllabus types, of textbooks produced from the 1960s onwards. In view of the ubiquity of textbooks (Hutchinson and Torres, 1994, p. 315) and the fact that they may actually serve as a substitute for independently designed course syllabuses (Fullan, 1991, p. 70), it was considered that such a review might reveal interesting information on the syllabus-types underpinning some courses and, therefore, programmes in General English courses. The dependence on textbooks and their underpinning syllabus suggests that the hidden syllabus (Crombie, 1985b) underlying textbook design inevitably dictates the syllabus that teachers follow.

Literature review: Language syllabus designs

Setting the context

Since the early decades of the 20th century, there have been a number of major changes and developments in ways of thinking about and analysing human behaviour, including human learning, culture, communication and social organisation. Many of these changes and developments, which have impacted on education generally as well as on languages education, were brought about by events surrounding World Wars I and II and have come to be associated with a range of phenomena collectively referred to as 'globalisation', which since the 1970s seems to be linked to the ideology of neo-liberalism. Although there are a range of opinions on the definitional boundaries surrounding the term neo-liberalism, it essentially "involves policies that promote free trade, open markets and minimum state intervention in business endeavours" (Fester & Johnson, 2015, pp. 123-124). What is also not in dispute is the fact that globalisation, in its most recent manifestation (including serial migration and the outsourcing of production and services), has resulted in a huge increase in the use of a few languages (mainly English). Graddol (2006) suggests that the consequence of this huge increase has been a massive increase in the teaching of these languages. Fester & Johnson (2015, p.124) state that this huge increase relates "to learners of all ages in a wide variety of contexts and settings along with a substantial challenge to the relevance of traditional distinctions between 'first language' and 'second language' and between 'native speaker' and 'non-native speaker'.

Proposals for the design of syllabuses for general English language programmes

The first half of the 20th century represented a high point in the development of structural, rule-governed approaches to the analysis and understanding of human behaviour and human artifacts. Within psychology, behaviourism, according to which thoughts and feelings as well as actions are described scientifically without reference to mental states, was the dominant paradigm (see, for example, Watson, 1913). Structuralism within linguistics, first fully articulated in *Cours de linguistique générale* (Saussure, 1916), treated human languages as formal systems in which meaning is mediated by system-internal differences. Developments in language syllabus design in the 1950s reflected the structuralist and behaviourist orientation of much thinking at that time.

As early as the latter part of the 1960s, linguistic structuralism (which provided the theoretical underpinning of the structural syllabuses) and behaviourism (which underpinned the audio-lingual methodology that typically accompanied *structural syllabuses*) began to be subject to a major challenge. This challenge reflected the beginning of a move away from behaviourism and linguistic structuralism and towards a more rationalist and context-centred understanding of human behaviour and human language. Situations and topics began to play an increasingly important part in the syllabus design process, reflecting a growing belief that "language . . . is best learned and remembered when presented in contextual settings" (Johnson, 2002, p. 179). What emerged were proposals relating to what came to be known as the *situational syllabus*. In this syllabus, 'real-life' contexts or situations (e.g. at the post office or

in school) provided the primary organising principle, with grammar and vocabulary being selected and organised on the basis of the likelihood of its occurring in the context of the situations and/or topics selected (Ur, 2012, p. 188).

Emerging a little later was the *notional* or *notional/functional syllabus* design proposal which was developed within the context of the work of the Council of Europe, influenced by the research of Austin (1962) and Searle (1969) on speech act theory, and presented in the 1970s by Wilkins (1976). In this syllabus type which also, in common with the situational syllabus, reflected the increasing contextualisation of linguistic studies, the primary focus was on notions, functions and modal meanings. Notions were defined by Wilkins (1976) as "'ideational', 'cognitive' or 'propositional' meaning[s]" which could "be expressed through grammatical systems in different languages" (p. 21). They include semantico-grammatical categories, such as time, duration, frequency, sequence, quantity, dimension and location, and modal meanings, in which the truth of propositions was subject "to some kind of contingency or modification" (p. 83), and include probability, possibility, affirmation and negation. Functions (illocutionary forces), defined as "what we *do* through language" (p. 41) or "what the speaker intends to achieve" (p. 43), include greetings, suggestions, reasons, agreement and disagreement, and approval and disapproval.

In the 1980s, proposals relating to what are commonly referred to as *lexical syllabuses* began to emerge, reflecting the massive increase in corpus-based linguistic research which accompanied the increasingly widespread use of computers. Emerging out of this corpus-based research was the understanding that language use was more formulaic than had been believed in the heyday of the type of rationalist approach to language that had been proposed by Noam Chomsky (see, for example, Chomsky, 1965). Thus, for example, Sinclair and Renouf (1988), who put forward a proposal for the lexical syllabus, observed that, in practice, the immense combinatorial possibilities of language are often subordinated to a preference for repeated co-occurrences of lexical items/chunks. It was this that motivated the development of this new syllabus type, one in which vocabulary is at the core. According to Willis (1990), this type of syllabus "does not dictate what will be learned and in what order" but "offers the learner experience of a tiny but balanced corpus of natural language from which it is possible to make generalisations about the language as a whole" (xii).

Also emerging in the 1980s, and also reflecting the increasing contextualisation of linguistic enquiry, was a proposal relating to a discourse-based syllabus what is referred to as the *relational syllabus* (Crombie, 1985a & b), which involves a combination of a top-down and bottom-up approach. The starting point is cognitive processes (e.g. comparison/contrast and logical sequence) and the semantic relationships that arise out of these processes (e.g. denial-correction, means-purpose and reason-result). Semantic relations are grouped together into 'relational frames', that is, combinations and sequences that typically occur in association with certain text-types (e.g. in advertisements or various types of report). Each of the semantic relations is then linked to one or more encodings, that is, to one or more ways in which it is typically expressed within the context of the relational frame in focus. Thus, for example, among the many different ways in which the reason-result relation can be encoded are sentences that include the subordinator 'because', the preposition 'because of' or the noun 'reason'.

Another syllabus type emerging in the 1980s was what is referred to as the *procedural syllabus* (Prabhu, 1987). This syllabus type is made up of tasks graded in terms of conceptual difficulty, with no attempt being made to plan the linguistic content of lessons in advance and

with teaching that focuses on form being discouraged. Out of this proposal there later emerged what is now commonly referred to as the *task-based syllabus*, that is, a syllabus type in which tasks, rather than, for example, linguistic structures or functions, form the primary unit of planning. It is important to note here that there is a major difference between task-based and task-supported approaches. In the former, course content is specified in terms of tasks (i.e. tasks constitute the syllabus). In the latter, tasks simply form a part of the learning cycle. Thus, Loschky and Bley-Vroman (1993, pp. 154-156), in arguing that tasks should accompany, rather than constitute the language syllabus, noted that tasks should constitute an important part of the implementation of a syllabus (of whatever type).

In view of the number and variety of proposals relating to syllabus design that have emerged since the second half of the 20th century, it is not surprising to find that there have been many calls for compromise, for syllabuses that combine aspects of a number of different proposals. One of these was the *core and spiral syllabus* design proposal forwarded by Brumfit (1980) in which the grammatical system constituted the core of the syllabus, with notions, functions and situations spiralling around the core. Another was the *proportional syllabus* proposed by Yalden (1983) in which an initial 'structural phase' (in which formal and ideational meaning are the focus of attention) is followed by a number of 'communicative phases' (focusing on functional, discoursal and rhetorical components) and a final 'specialised phase'.

Having provided a recount of the development of different syllabus types proposed from the 1960s, the following section will provide a brief insight into the variety of perspective on the role and value of textbooks.

The focus of this study is essentially on an analysis of the impact of syllabus types on the design of textbooks published over the past half a century. However, a methodological approach that has had a significant impact on textbook writers since the 1980s, has been communicative language teaching (CLT). It is therefore worth discussing the impact of this approach on textbook writers. The notion of communicative language teaching which emerged alongside the notion of communicative competence or communicative competencies has been understood in a variety of different ways at different times. Littlewood (1981, pp. 6 & 77-78) defined communicative language teaching as involving *skills* (manipulation of the language system, ability to relate form and communicative function, understanding of the social meanings of linguistic forms, and strategic control in the use of language to communicate effectively in specific situations) and *general principles* (the communication principle, the task principle, and the meaningfulness principle). Nunan (1991, pp. 279-295) has argued that it includes emphasis on learning to communicate through interaction in the target language, introduction of authentic texts into the learning situation, provision of opportunities for learners to focus, not only on language but also on the learning process itself, enhancement of the learner's own personal experiences as important contributing elements to classroom learning; and the attempt to link classroom language learning with language activities outside the classroom.

Differing perspectives on the role and value of textbooks

As mentioned earlier, Hutchinson and Torres (1994, p. 315) have referred to the ubiquity of textbooks in English language teaching, noting that millions are sold each year. Harwood (2014, p. 1) states that it is important to focus on textbook research as "most teachers are required to use them to some degree", thereby highlighting the ubiquity of textbooks. In addition, Fullan (1991, p. 70) has observed that approved textbooks often take the place of the

curriculum. However, opinions differ as to the value or potential value of textbooks. Allwright (1981, pp. 6-8) argues that they are generally inflexible and reflect the preferences and biases of their authors, and Sheldon (1988, p. 239) notes that many of them make false claims and have serious design flaws and practical shortcomings. On the other hand, Harmer (1998, p. 117) notes that textbooks can give teachers ideas about what to teach and how to teach, and Hutchinson and Torres (1994, p. 323) point out that they can help with innovation and support teachers through periods of change. Richards (1998, 2001) addresses both the advantages and limitations to the use of textbooks and provides guidelines for teachers on evaluating course books. McGrath (2013) highlights the crucial need for teachers to be educated in course book evaluation and design and provides advice on adapting textbooks according to needs in the classroom.

Textbooks clearly play a prominent role in language learning classrooms. This research provides insight into the syllabus types underpinning the design of a range of commercially produced textbooks that have been or are widely used in the English language teaching context and could provide clearer perspectives on the syllabus types impacting on English language learning classrooms.

The present study

As mentioned above, this was part of a bigger research project that used a multi-method approach. The research question relevant to this study was:

> In what ways, and to what extent (if at all) have the syllabuses underpinning a sample of widely used textbooks (designed for general English language purposes) that are intended primarily for adult learners of English changed since the 1960s, and can any major influences or trends be detected in relation to any such changes?

The original research involves triangulation, the same issue, namely that of the impact of syllabus design proposals on those professionally involved in the teaching of additional languages, being approached from three different angles using different methods/techniques in each case. In all stages of this research, the critical literature review related to syllabus types plays a major role. All the categories relating to the syllabus design proposals outlined in the literature review were central to the approach of the analysis of a sample of widely used English language textbooks published from the mid-1960s onwards (the key focus of the research reported on here). The study focused on textbooks used in the tertiary education sector, the reason for a primary focus on this sector being the fact that those involved in this sector are generally not constrained by, or not as constrained by, national curricula in the way in which those involved in the primary and secondary education sectors frequently are. Hence, the textbooks chosen for analysis are textbooks that are used or were used extensively in the tertiary English language teaching education sector.

In selecting textbooks for analysis, a number of factors were taken into consideration. Among these were extent of use and date of first publication. In most cases, only textbooks that were, or had been, widely available and were, or had been, widely used around the time of their publication were included. In view of the impossibility of analysing a very large number of textbooks in any useful detail, a decision was made, in the case of series, to select only one of the books in the series for analysis since the principles guiding the selection and organisation of content did not appear to differ in any fundamental ways from one textbook to another in the same series.

In most cases, where textbooks are/were accompanied by teachers' guides, these guides were found to centre primarily on methodology rather than syllabus and so these guides proved to be of little direct relevance in relation to the primary focus of the analyses. However, where they do/did contain relevant information, this has been included.

So far as the textbook analysis itself is concerned, decisions made in relation to the approach adopted were largely determined by aspects of syllabus types revealed in the review of the literature (see literature review above and Fester, 2014, pp. 8-55, relating to the design of language syllabuses from the 1960s). The principles underlying each of the key syllabus types were used to establish the core criteria for the textbook analysis. On the basis of that review, a list of key words (e.g. 'topic'; 'situation/al/ised'; 'notion'; 'task'; 'task-based'; 'task-supported') was produced. The next stage was to conduct content analysis, checking for occurrences of these key words (or cognates of them) in each of the textbooks analyzed and noting the way/s in which they were used and the extent to which that usage reflected usages in the source literature included in the review. Next, taking into account the results of the keyword search, each of the textbooks was examined for indications that the content was structured in ways that were consistent with one or more of the syllabus design types identified in the literature review. As the textbooks analysed were published at different times, some well before certain syllabus design proposals were forwarded, the focus key words guiding the analyses were fewer in the case of the books published earlier, with the number of focus key words gradually increasing in relation to later dates of first publication. Thus, for example, the keywords guiding the analysis of textbooks published in the 1960s and early 1970s included 'structural', 'lexical', 'situational' and 'topic-based' but excluded 'notional' and 'functional' which related to syllabus types published after in the late 1970s.

The first two textbooks analyzed were *Situational English* (The Commonwealth Office of Education, 1965) and *New Concept English* (Alexander, 1967). Both of them were first published in the mid-1960s. Hence, the main focus points in relation to which the analyses of these textbooks were conducted relate to structural, lexical, situational and topical content. The first two volumes in the *Strategies* series (Abbs & Freebairn, 1977 & 1979) were, however, published in the late 1970s, that is, after proposals relating to the development of notion-functional syllabuses (see literature review above). Therefore, the focus points guiding the analysis in this case were extended to include notions and functions. In the case of textbooks published in the early 1990s onwards, such as *New Headway* (Soars & Soars, 1996-2003), *Landmark* (Haines & Stewart, 2000), *New Cutting Edge* (Moor & Cunningham, 1999-2010), *Touchstone* (McCarthy, McCarten & Sandiford (2005-2006) and *Cambridge English Empower Intermediate* (Doff, Thaine, Puchta, Stranks & Lewis-Jones, 2015), first publication occurred after all of the major syllabus design proposals discussed above had been developed. For this reason, the analysis needed to centre on a wider range of focus points, including vocabulary, syntax, coherence and cohesion, genre, text-type, cross-disciplinary organisational structures, and skills and sub-skills. Thus, the focus points guiding the analysis of different textbooks vary depending on the date of publication of the textbooks and, hence, the possible impact of different proposals relating to syllabus design.

Results and discussion

Reporting on the textbook analysis

Having provided a recount of the development of different syllabus types proposed from the 1960s as well as insight into the methods used to choose and analyze language learning textbooks, the following section will report on the findings of the textbook analysis and provide a discussion with regard to the syllabus proposals underpinning them. For the scope of this

article it is not possible to include the detailed analysis for each textbook, therefore the author has included the key summary findings related to the groups of textbooks analyzed (for a detailed analysis of the textbooks from the 1960s to 2010, see Fester, 2014). Please note a summary analysis of the *Cambridge English Empower* (2013) textbook was included in this article as an update for a more recently published textbook).

Textbooks from the 1960s

The 1960s saw a strong focus on the structural syllabus and behaviourism associated with it, but these two concepts began to be challenged in the later part of that decade (see literature review above). This challenge led to the shift towards a focus on topics and situations. Taking these core syllabus issues available at the time into account, the criteria used for the analysis of the textbooks from this period included, (i) evaluating the grammar focus (whether the sentences were contextualised or decontextualised sentences, discrete grammar points or meaning focused), (ii) evidence of a topic or situation focus - often evident in the naming of the unit (topic names rather than grammatical focus names) and whether the core vocabulary related do an overarching topic or situation) in each textbook unit.

The two textbooks analyzed that were produced in the 1960s were from *Situational English* (The Commonwealth Office of Education, 1965) and *New Concept English* (Alexander, 1967). In each case, the underlying syllabuses were found to be largely structural. Thus, for example, in *Situational English,* we find what is described as "a syllabus of grammatical points - i.e. of items which function in sentence structure . . . arranged in an order which allows each new . . . item to be taught as the only new . . . item in a sentence-pattern otherwise composed of known . . . items", with "vocabulary items being . . . chosen because they are typical vocabulary commonly associated with the sentence-patterns taught" (*Situational English: Teacher's Book*, Part 1, pp. 3 & 4). In both textbooks, however, there is clear evidence of situationalisation of the essentially structural syllabus (See Table 1). In the case of *Situational English,* this is evidenced in (a) the presentation of structures in situational contexts (which determines, to some extent at least, their ordering), (b) the inclusion, in the early stages, of "[a] few more complex sentence-patterns [which] are needed . . . because they are socially useful", and (c) the appearance of some more lexically-focused units, which include some topic-related vocabulary items (e.g. relating to the weather) and/or vocabulary items that are considered to be of particular importance (e.g. numbers, colours). In the case of *New Concept English,* the situationalisation is more thorough, with several structures and/or formulaically realised functions (e.g. greetings) generally being introduced together within the context of a particular situation.

Textbooks from the 1970s and 1980s

The 1970s saw the emergence of the notional or notional/functional syllabus related to the work conducted by the Council of Europe and proposed in the 1970s by Wilkins (1973) (see the literature review above). In light of the addition of these syllabus types in the 1970s, the textbooks chosen from the 1970s were analyzed according to the features expected in a textbook that had evidence of a structural syllabus underpinning as well as any criteria expected in a textbook that also had a notional/ functional syllabus underlying it. The 1980s saw a shift towards corpus-based research with a resulting emergence of what became known as the lexical syllabus (It is worth mentioning here that the technical field of Corpus Linguistics became more prominent in the 1990s; see for example Kennedy, 1998). Emerging in the 1980s was the relational syllabus proposed by Crombie (1985a & b), which also raised awareness of the need for more contextualising and a focus on a discourse-based syllabus. The procedural syllabus (Prahbu, 1987) was another syllabus type introduced in the 1980s (see above) with a strong

focus on task- based (task graded) criteria. From the 1980s there was also a clear focus on a more communicative approach to the methodological suggestions and tasks which are included in the textbook units. The textbooks used for analysis in this section are *Kernel Lessons* (O'Neill, 1971) and *Strategies* (Abbs & Freebairn, 1975) and *Network 1* (Eastwood, Kay, Mackin & Strevens, 1980).

In *Kernel Lessons* (1971) first published in the early 1970s, we find, once again, a largely situationalised structural syllabus, but one in which there is also evidence of functionalisation, with one section of each unit being organised, in part, around some commonly occurring functions, such as apologising. (See Table 1.) By the mid-1970s, as exemplified in *Strategies*, the impact of an increasing focus on language functions in the work of linguists associated with the Council of Europe was beginning to be reflected in the design of the syllabuses underpinning commercially available textbooks. Thus, for example, in the Teachers' book, the syllabus underlying *Strategies* (Abbs & Freebairn, 1975) is described as being "functional rather than structural", a syllabus in which "[the] structural contents have been selected as being appropriate to . . . particular functions" so that "the student will see the immediate practical application of what he [sic] is learning while covering the more important structures of the language in a graded sequence" (Abbs & Freebairn, 1975, p. iv). In fact, however, although there is some material in *Strategies* that is clearly functionally organised (the functions highlighted being often those that are generally realised formulaically, such as greetings and introductions), what are essentially lexico-grammatically organised units often have the superficial appearance of being functional because of the way in which they are introduced (e.g. *Talk about the weather; Ask and talk about the past*). Overall, while the syllabus underpinning *Strategies* is very similar in many ways to the situationalised structural one that characterised *Kernel Lessons*, a considerably increased emphasis on vocabulary and, to some extent, linguistic functions means that it would be more appropriate to refer to the syllabus as a situationalised and functionalised lexico-structural one. In the case of *Network 1* (Eastwood et al., 1980), there was an increasing tendency to provide notional labelling (e.g. possession) for what remained essentially morphological and/or grammatical categories (e.g., possessive adjectives), with very little evidence of any significant impact of research on discourse analysis. Overall, what we have are variants of the core and spiral approach to syllabus design recommended by Brumfit (1980), in which "notional, functional and situational specifications can be conceived of as a spiral round a basically grammatical [and lexical] core" (p. 6).

The type of hybrid syllabus that began to be detectable in commercially produced general English textbooks of the 1960s (with situationalisation of an essentially grammatical syllabus) gradually evolved during the 1970s and 1980s into an essentially situationalised and functionalised lexico-grammatical syllabus (See Appendix).

Textbooks from the 1990s onwards

As mentioned above, post- 1980s, there were no completely new syllabus types as such that emerged. Therefore, the underlying syllabus principles used for the analysis of the textbooks from the 1990s onwards were essentially the same as those used to analyse the textbooks from the 1980s (see above). The CLT approach continued to impact on the methodology underpinning the textbook designs throughout this period. This section covers the period from the 1990s onwards since textbook series such as *New Headway* (Soars & Soars, 1996-2003) and *New Cutting Edge* (Moor & Cunningham, 1999-2010) used in this analysis span the 1990s and 2000s and essentially display the same underlying features, regardless of the year of publication. The general English textbooks selected that appeared from the 1990s were *New*

Headway (Soars & Soars, 1996-2003), *Landmark* (Haines & Stewart, 2000), *New Cutting Edge* (Moor & Cunningham, 1999-2010), *Touchstone* (McCarthy, McCarten & Sandiford (2005-2006) and *Cambridge English Empower Intermediate* (Doff, Thaine, Puchta, Stranks & Lewis-Jones, 2015).

From the 1990s onwards, the impact of functions tended to be very considerably reduced (see, for example, *New Cutting Edge*, Moor & Cunningham, 2005 & *Cambridge English Empower*, Doff et al., 2015) as awareness of the critical role that context plays in all but formulaically encoded functions grew and, with it, awareness of the limited extent to which functional classification could be systematised. An increased focus on skills (including learning skills) was generally added to the mix as was, in some cases, a limited range of discourse features (*Landmark*, Haines, & Stewart, 2000 & *Cambridge English Empower*, Doff et al., 2015). Occasionally (as in the case of *Landmark*), there has also been considerably reduced emphasis on the inclusion of an organised and progressive grammatical core.

The increasingly complex mix that has made up the underlying syllabuses of commercially produced General English textbooks in recent decades has sometimes led to a successful accommodation/integration of a range of different perspectives on language syllabus design (as in the case of *Touchstone* and *Cambridge English Empower*). Sometimes, however (as in the case of *New Headway* and *Landmark*), the attempt to accommodate differing perspectives has been less successful, leading to what appears to be a somewhat disjointed, even haphazard approach to syllabus specification.

In *New Headway* (Soars & Soars, 1996), even within single units, the various components (grammar, vocabulary, postscript, reading, writing, listening and speaking) sometimes appear to bear little other than a broadly thematic relationship with one another and there is, furthermore, an absence, in some cases, of any clear connection between the unit topic and unit content. There is, in addition, little evidence that careful consideration has been paid to frequency or utility in the selection of vocabulary; while some functions are included, they seem to presented as add-ons, bearing no detectable relationship to the main theme of the unit in which they appear; where language focus points are labelled, that labelling is primarily grammatical rather than notional/ semantic; cohesion appears only sporadically and always in writing sections; and there is little variety in terms of genres and text-types (See Appendix).

A similar situation obtains in the case of *Landmark* (Haines & Stewart, 2000), where the labelling of language indicators may be structurally-, lexically-, notionally- or functionally-focused (with no readily detectable rationale for some of the variations), where neither the situational nor linguistic focus may be maintained from one section to the next, and where attention to discourse features appears to be both sporadic and highly selective (with, for example, a limited range of genres and text-types being exemplified in reading sections).

In *Cambridge English Empower* (Doff et al., 2015), although there is some attention paid to discourse features (mainly in the spoken exercises) and the situational context and linguistic focus appear to be maintained from one section of the unit to the next, there is still a very limited range of genres and text-types exemplified in the units.

In the case of *Landmark* (Haines & Stewart, 2000), there is some evidence of the 'focus on form' approach recommended by Long (1988), with some selected structures that appear in texts (in this case, texts chosen in relation primarily to their lexical focus) receiving attention as they emerge. In the case of *Touchstone* (McCarthy, McCarten & Sandiford, 2005), however,

which is “corpus-informed”, drawing on "extensive research into the corpus of North American English in the Cambridge International Corpus" (McCarthy, McCarten & Sandiford, 2005, *Touchstone 1, Teacher's edition,* p. iv), the syllabus components, are made up largely of situationalised and functionalised lexical, grammatical and phonological specifications. These are supplemented by conversational strategies and skills-based and discourse-based specifications, which appear to have been, in general, carefully selected and integrated. There are, however, some problems associated with the categorisation and treatment of semantic relations, the fact that the rhetorical structuring of texts is largely neglected, and the under-representation of a number of genres.

Conclusion

With very few exceptions, the writers of commercially available English language textbooks that have been produced since the mid-1960s make no *direct* reference to specific syllabus design proposals, although there are several references to the fact that the syllabuses underpinning these textbooks include structures, vocabulary, functions and/or skills and several to a 'balanced' approach to syllabus design. The exceptions to this include some textbooks that appeared in the 1970s and 1980s that were based largely on the authors' interpretation of the functional component of the notional syllabus design proposal (e.g. *Strategies*).

So far as general English language textbooks are concerned, textbook writers appear currently, in general, to traverse the complex terrain of syllabus design in broadly similar ways. The main trend appears to be to design hybrid situationalised, task-supported syllabuses in which a roughly equivalent weighting is given to lexis and grammar, with some consideration also being given to functional specification (often very general functions and/or formulaically encoded functions), skills and sub-skills and, in some cases, conversational management and/or learning strategies and some aspects of cohesion. In general, a primary focus on the language associated with everyday spoken interaction is evident, with written text being given less attention and being represented largely in terms of the narrative/recount and descriptive/classificatory modes and the rhetorical structuring of written texts being largely overlooked. However, in spite of many similarities, the extent to which textbook writers draw upon pedagogically-oriented research varies considerably, as does the overall ordering and coverage at different levels and the extent to which their decision-making appears to be a based on coherent, theoretically-grounded principles.

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Appendix

General English Textbooks: Summary of the core findings

TIME FRAME	TEXTBOOKS ANALYSED	PROMINENT SYLLABUS DESIGN PATTERNS
the 1960s	*Situational English* (The Commonwealth Office of Education, 1965) *New Concept English* (Alexander, 1967)	early 1960s syllabuses firmly rooted in a structural perspective -individual, decontextalised clause & sentence patterns, late 1960s a movement away from a strictly structural syllabus - more situationalisation, lexicalisation and incipient functionalisation of structural syllabus
the 1970s	*Kernel Lessons* (O' Neill, 1971) *Strategies* (Abbs, Ayton & Freebairn, 1977 & 1979)	structural syllabus underpinning , impact of situational*isation and* functional*isation evident* textbook writers claim a more thorough attempt at *functionalisation* but functions interpreted oddly and structures continue to play a vital role
the 1980s	*Network 1* (Eastwood, Kay, Mackin & Strevens, 1980	a tendency to prioritise structural progression while *appearing to* place major emphasis on functional (or notional-functional) orientation, alignment with the Council of Europe work claimed even though a largely situationalised structurally-oriented syllabus in evidence
late 1990s and beyond	*New Headway Intermediate* (Soars & Soars, 1996-2003), *New Cutting Edge* (Moor & Cunningham, 1999-2010) *Touchstone* (McCarthy, McCarten & Sandiford ,2005-2006) *Cambridge English Empower*: *Intermediate* (Doff, Thaine, Puchta, Stranks & Lewis-Jones, 2015)	hybrid syllabus in which there is a primary focus on vocabulary, language structures (often semantically labelled), functions and discourse features (generally organised in relation to topics and/or situations) - becoming the norm

DISCUSSING SMALL GROUP DISCUSSIONS

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Abstract

Although discussion, in pairs or small groups, is positively regarded by language teachers as a second language acquisition strategy, the way in which it is utilised in different contexts varies widely. Observation and experience in both New Zealand and Hong Kong provide many points of reflection, suggesting areas of concern relevant to teaching practice and curriculum design. The importance of these concerns is underlined with reference to the needs of language learners, and pedagogical changes in instructional methods. While affirming the deserved role that discussion plays in the language classroom, a range of implications are reached. Discussion materials need to be thoughtfully prepared; language learners need support and feedback to function well in group discussions, and can benefit from exposure to strategies that will enable them to overcome communication difficulties.

Introduction and background

Discussion serves a range of functions simultaneously that go far beyond language practice and reinforcement of subject matter. It assumes a very important role in learning and teaching, whether online or face to face, in the classroom during a lesson or lecture, teacher-mediated or occurring independently of the teacher. Small group discussion (SGD) is now more important than ever. This paper is primarily concerned with the place of discussion in the learning and teaching contexts of which I have direct experience, which will be outlined after considering some of the many publications on the topic.

Literature review

Speaking and writing are both skills that teachers and learners are tasked with developing. Formatively or developmentally, it is reasonable to suggest that being able to say things in English is a prerequisite for being able to write it. Teachers and educational institutions must focus attention on discussion because, as Blank (2002) has stated, "classroom discourse is clearly deemed to be a handmaiden to literacy" (p. 152). Students need an awareness of the features of SGD, its particular language and discourse patterns, as well as the skills and strategies that will increase their confidence and success in communicating with other speakers of English. Language teachers across the world use SGD as an educational tool with the backing of theories that had their genesis in the early 1980s. For the sake of brevity these theories will not be explored here, but those with an interest should investigate the works of Krashen (1985), Long (1981, 1996, 2014), and Schmidt (2012).

Many trained and experienced teachers can easily suggest ways in which learners can benefit from SGD during instruction. This includes benefits for content learning (gain deeper understanding), reinforcement of vocabulary (individual words and phrases), cultural learning (appreciate diverse points of view in mixed groups), listening skills (recognising what is said), thinking skills (apply reason), improved pronunciation (intonation, word-linking, word and sentence stress), and social or life skills (assertiveness, leadership, cooperation). Zwiers and Crawford (2011, p.15-25) have suggested a further set of discussion benefits for learners in academic contexts: the fostering of creativity, the assessment of learning, the cultivation of

connections, the promotion of equity, development of an inner dialogue, the building of relationships and the building of a confident academic voice or identity.

Knight has written in her blog (2014) "Academic discussions help *all* students develop reasoning skills and deepens understanding of content and multiple perspectives." SGD is therefore beneficial for *both* native speakers and EAL students. Additionally, with increased opportunities for both receptive and productive use of English language many learners gain a broader vocabulary, speaking and listening competence, and greater fluency. To access the benefits of SGD a high level of discussion proficiency is important for those destined for academic study, or who are likely to use discussion in real life with native speakers.

Researchers and educators in different contexts now focus their attention on a set of 'soft skills' relevant for both study and employment. Writing about the European context Tevdovska (2015, p.103-105) noted difficulty in defining soft skills, yet concluded that in English language courses group work involving discussions would integrate communication skills and interpersonal skills while prompting critical thinking and problem solving skills and enhancing content or professional knowledge.

In Malaysia, "the Ministry of Higher Education recommended in 2006 that all public institutions of higher learning embed the development of soft skills within their curricula" (Nikitina & Furuoka, 2012, p.207). The ministry published a soft skills taxonomy with 34 discrete skills grouped under seven headings. Of key interest are those listed as 'communication skills' about self-expression and responding to others. (See Appendix 1.)

Many EAL teachers assume that learners benefit by naturally acquiring L2 language during SGD, but it is not always clear whether all learners are sufficiently equipped to interact. Research conducted by Moattarian and Tahririan (2013) in the Iranian EFL context found that the use of communication strategies varies significantly according to a learner's level of language proficiency. Class size is also often identified as a practical difficulty when using SGD during instruction. Insights and advice to practitioners are offered constructively by Allen & Tanner (2005), who suggest breaking long university Biology lectures to large classes with short discussion sessions that infuse elements of both active learning and collaborative or cooperative learning. Similarly, Smith, Sheppard, Johnson and Johnson (2005) explored options for actively engaging learners in undergraduate Engineering classes and reported that cooperative learning groups (whether informal or formally constructed by the teacher) "provide opportunities for students to be intellectually active and personally interactive both in and outside the classroom." (p. 7) Medical students in India reported increased thinking and improved communication was a result of engagement in group discussion (Annamalai, Manivel & Palanisamy (2015). Ho (2011) carried out a study of SGD amongst postgraduate TESOL students at a US university to investigate how group talk assists learners acquire skills in oral academic discourse. It was found that "participants constantly associated the group tasks with the concepts or terms presented in the lectures or textbooks or drew on their learning or teaching experiences to illustrate their viewpoints." (p. 447).

With changes in education afoot due to the increased use of technology, 'flipping the classroom' makes learners' discussion and interaction more important for learning. As explained by Brame (2013), in the flipped classroom (sometimes called the inverted classroom) learners "…gain first exposure to new material outside of class, usually via reading or lecture videos, and then use class time to do the harder work of assimilating that knowledge, perhaps through problem-solving, discussion, or debates." p. 1) This therefore means that in these new

and emerging academic contexts, there is an increased role for active and collaborative learning. A useful case study of flipping the classroom is provided by McLaughlin et al. (2014), in a redesign of a traditional lecture-based course for medical students. Both teachers and learners are adapting to new approaches to teaching and learning, but for some the adjustment has not been easy or entirely positive. Roehl, Reddy and Shannon (2013) summarise the findings of several studies that investigated the benefits and limitations of the flipped classroom model, and conclude that "At a time when educational institutions face increasing demands to improve learning experiences and capture the attention of Millennial students, the flipped classroom strategy provides an opportunity to address both these concerns." (p. 48) A more thorough review of research on flipped classrooms was completed by O'Flaherty and Phillips (2015). They recognised the opportunity for improving learning through the process of curriculum renewal, while warning that teachers and academics may not fully grasp the processes that need to be followed to successfully flip the classroom.

Given the benefits of SGD as a tool for teaching and learning, it seems a reasonable assumption that teachers could widely employ it as a strategy to enhance learning. My own experience, and that of some other teachers as reported to me, suggests that discussion in the classroom is not always effective, whether for native speakers or EAL learners, and that there are gaps between theory and practice.

The present paper

It is hoped that the present consideration of SGD might stimulate the enhancement of teaching practice and curriculum that in turn will aid language acquisition. This study is less concerned with how learners acquire and use English, but more broadly concerned with the quantity and quality of opportunities learners have for interaction.

Regarding the approach I adopted, I first set about reflecting on my observation of learners who struggle to express themselves in class, and in SGD in particular. Based on my first-hand experience of using discussion as a strategy for teaching and learning, I drew up two lists of observations: one for New Zealand and one for Hong Kong. Each list was divided in two halves: notes about when discussion worked well, and notes on its failings. The New Zealand notes were validated through informal discussion with colleagues teaching in General English and EAP courses, and a range of textbooks were studied for their contribution to learners' discussion skills.

This paper therefore gives a reflective account of my experience as an educator working in two different contexts in which learners were expected to engage in discussion, to compare and contrast the teaching and learning taking place.

Teaching experience

New Zealand

My work experience in this country encompasses teaching both native speakers in secondary school, and second language learners in EAP courses at tertiary level. More specifically, this work has involved teaching general English to students for whom English is an additional language (EAL), and university preparation or foundation courses to international students and native speakers of English. Prior to this, I had been employed in both high schools and middle schools as a teacher of English language and literature to mainstream classes, generally to students for whom English was their first language. Here, it was an awareness of the needs of learners whose first language was not English that motivated me to embark on what has become a career in TESOL.

Hong Kong

For five years between 2009 and 2014, I was employed as a NET (Native English Teacher) at Shek Lei Catholic Secondary School (SLCSS). My work involved explicit instruction in discussion skills, strategies and language specifically to prepare students for the speaking component of the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education (HKDSE), which involved both a small group discussion and a short individual presentation. (See Appendix 2.) Hong Kong students undertake the HKDSE exams and assessments in their final year of study in a range of subjects.

I must point out that while some NET teachers had teaching arrangements that differed from mine, there was some consistency in the teaching of small group discussion across the territory. Firstly, NET teachers shared experiences with one another through periodic cluster or regional meetings organised by the NET Section of the Education Bureau. This enabled me to learn from other NET teachers, and to share materials. Secondly, using its connections with other Catholic schools in the diocese, the Shek Lei school occasionally organised interschool discussion practice for students. It must be remembered that all the students and teachers were working towards the same external exam (the HKDSE) which meant teaching was largely exam-oriented. Finally, other than published sets of past exam papers there was a limited range of published coursebooks that supported student learning of discussion strategies and skills.

SGD in New Zealand

In language classes in this country, discussion is mostly a small part of lessons, often preparing learners for something else, such as a reading or writing task; alternatively SGD may follow on after a reading, listening or viewing activity. Discussions are sometimes incidental and loosely structured around one or two questions or a single topic. Textbook tasks frequently call for discussion, leaving it to the teacher to provide appropriate scaffolding. Teachers often assume that students know how to discuss things, and the types of contribution they can and should make to a discussion. Some teachers establish with their students some ground rules for SGD that act as a guideline for participation. Teachers in some New Zealand contexts, however, find students often lack the maturity, self-discipline or willingness to discuss some topics. Furthermore, some EAP classes I have taught here consisted mostly of mainland Chinese students who generally used their first language outside of class, and who had to be reminded on many occasions to use English during their lessons, in pair work and SGD.

SGD taught intensively in Hong Kong secondary schools

My experience was that many local teachers so much valued the opportunities to practice discussion with an inherent focus on output that they emphasised the HKDSE test papers and format above all else as the lesson focus. In part this might be a compensatory gesture attempting to make up for the deficit of speaking practice opportunities these EFL students are able to utilise. Like their neighbours in mainland China, the speaking competence of learners in Hong Kong is negatively influenced by cognitive, linguistic and affective factors as outlined by Wang (2014) who noted that the prevalence of teacher-centred lessons did not provide many opportunities for student talk. Even though Knight in her 2014 blog urges teachers to accept imperfect language spoken during discussions, she also recommends providing learners with language support. Thus, sometimes NETs like myself managed to shift the focus in parts of the lesson towards relevant vocabulary and grammar, or the development of skills and strategies that generally help students engage in meaningful discussions.

Speaking lessons in Hong Kong

The discussion class at SLCSS took a whole lesson of 40 minutes, which was structured in timed phases that exposed students to input of vocabulary and ideas and culminated in an opportunity to practice exam-type discussion questions in groups of four students. Sometimes PowerPoint presentations or video-clips were used as stimuli, while many HKDSE question papers had short texts and/or illustrations as stimulus material. A letter to the editor, for example, might provoke a range of student responses and the focus of the SGD would be the content of a reply. Materials that the students received prior to the discussion often suggested language appropriate to different phases of discussion such as agreeing, disagreeing, soliciting a response, interrupting or asking for clarification. These are somewhat equivalent to the moves and sequences researchers of classroom discourse (e.g., Coulthard, 1985) refer to and analyse in depth. Post-discussion, the SLCSS students received feedback (individually or as a class), and students had a further opportunity to talk for a minute on a related topic, as per the HKDSE examination format.

SGD taught differently in Hong Kong

As previously outlined, the discussion lessons at SLCSS were different to those in New Zealand. Hong Kong students are routinely exposed to discussion as part of assessment, among several separately assessed components in the broader HKDSE English examination. According to their language ability and class level, SLCSS students were generally prepared for discussion with things such as brainstorming, short dictation, multimedia presentations (such as YouTube clips, PowerPoint or Prezi presentations), pronunciation drills, and other language support. Groups were always given three specific discussion questions on a related topic or stimulus, with a further option of discussing any other relevant issue that arises. The SGDs were often task-based, with students engaging in near life-like or authentic contexts. In one discussion class with less able students, for example, learners discussed appropriate prizes for participants in an international sporting event. More able classes prepared ideas for debates about leglislative banning of cigarette smoking in public places, or government responsibility for care of the elderly.

Imperfect SGD in HK

Initially, no student wanted to start the discussion, and some students were extremely anxious about speaking English. In some instances students lacked awareness of the unintentional messages their body language conveys. There was frequent mispronunciation of key topic words, and excessive use of fillers when learners searched for the right words to say. Individual words might be misused, or used in the wrong part of speech. Less proficient learners commonly ignore what was said by others, sometimes even repeating material already mentioned. Despite being given time to prepare, some learners did not make brief notes as suggested or had difficulty remembering and managing their ideas, while others quickly ran out of things to say or failed to explain their point. Many less-proficient students were note-dependent, tending to read from their prepared notes and failing to make eye contact.

During lessons, before SGD started, students would often be taught standard phrases they could employ, such as to indicate agreement, or ask others for their opinion. These were routinely supplied in HK textbooks and my own self-made materials. However, a drawback in providing less proficient students with set expressions or formulaic language they could use to move from one phase of the discussion to another was that some students relied so heavily on them, that the interaction lost spontaneity. Some remembered only a few of the stock expressions and used them repetitively, or in an indiscriminate manner, unaware of the

subtleties of correct usage in the discussion context. Also, a fallback that many Hong Kong students used when contributing was to give more examples, using up their allocated speaking time, but not moving the discussion towards any conclusion. Some students unwittingly contradicted themselves. Utterances could contain lots of grammar errors (some fossilised, some new), and lack elaboration, supporting examples or reasoning. In discussions of more difficult topics some students found they lacked the lexical knowledge needed to explain themselves clearly, or struggled to access and use vocabulary they had only just been exposed to.

Commonalities I experienced in New Zealand and Hong Kong

It is clear that in both contexts most learners engaged in purposeful and generally meaningful discussions. Certainly students in both contexts received input before and during SGD. Teachers provided learners with background material orally and visually, whether in a spontaneous manner (such as in reflective teacher talk) or in a more planned way (perhaps through multimedia presentation). Textbook readings and illustrations, and prepared stimulus material provide vocabulary support together with focus questions intended to scaffold student engagement in SGD. The context of the lesson and the nature of the students would generally determine the type and level of scaffolding provided.

It was noted that some students dominated discussions, while others contributed little. Furthermore, some interactions were very superficial, and many students found self-expression difficult. In both countries, I noticed that some EAL students translated their contributions from their first language (L1), and they were often unaware of the inherent pitfalls and traps in doing so until it was pointed out to them. In mixed ability classes in both contexts some of the more able students were expected to help the less able, but this assumed that they could and wanted to do so. Sometimes the 'helper' might correct a grammar or vocabulary error, offer a helpful word to complete an utterance, or supply an idea in L1, but at other times no assistance would be forthcoming when it was most needed.

For teachers in both contexts the practical reality of teaching a large class of students made SGD very difficult. The classroom atmosphere was not always conducive, and it was difficult for teachers to address the divergent needs and interests of mixed ability classes. In some classes learners were sometimes pushed into sink or swim situations; with minimal scaffolding some students were out of their depths on unfamiliar topics, or trying to converse about intellectual concepts with students who were their academic superiors. With EAL students there may be some use of L1, and often discussion took the form of simple sharing of information, rather than more exploratory interaction, such as engagement and response to what others said. On occasions, whether they were tired or for some other reason, learners participated half-heartedly or minimally.

Helpful strategies

According to Moattarian & Tahririan (2013) learners overcome communication problems using a range of strategies. Teachers of English and those involved in designing lesson materials ought to focus on improving students' strategic competence. Many teachers in the two contexts, on becoming aware of the failings of the students' discussions, try to provide appropriate types of support and feedback to address their learners' needs. Others do make adjustments to the lesson planning and/or the materials used to facilitate learning. It could be helpful, for example to provide students with a list of speaking points, to give targeted feedback to specific individuals, to spend more time pre-teaching vocabulary, to re-visit a topic previously discussed, or to have students observe another group's discussion.

There may be variables beyond the teacher's control that influence the teacher's choice of strategies: these include class size, noise levels and ambience of the classroom, timetabling and curriculum factors. In Hong Kong, for example, some newly-appointed NET teachers found co-teaching discussion classes with local colleagues required a major adjustment. Also, in the EAP context in New Zealand the academic or themed content drives lessons so much that it is sometimes at the expense of language learning *per se*. All students find it difficult to discuss topics that are outside the scope of their experience, just beyond their reach, lexically and academically. The challenge remains for teachers, given the various limitations, to strike the best balance in planning lessons while being mindful of both their own best interests and those of their learners.

Materials for SGD

An analysis of discussion questions posed in a number of published General English and EAP textbooks often found that students were merely being asked if they knew the 'correct' answer, and that questions were often aligned with standards or learning targets. Rather than actually discuss a matter in an interactive manner, students were frequently prompted to recall, remember, recount or demonstrate their understanding. In one speaking and listening textbook, for example, students were asked to 'discuss' how three different inventions had changed the world, whether they were still being used, and if the inventions had led to other discoveries. In another textbook, students were prompted to indicate whether they would like to visit a particular country they had read about, and asked to share facts about festivals taking place there such as when and where they happen. Was this intended to be a test of reading comprehension, or had the purpose of discussion in the language classroom been deliberately diminished?

It is not the writer's purpose to lay critical blame on either publishers or the authors of textbooks. However, discussion topics and questions meant to stimulate active discussion were frequently instead supplanted by typical questions a teacher might pose during the course of a lesson. This type of question format seems at odds with the core skills of academic discourse as outlined by Zwiers & Crawford (2011) that includes the notion that discussion provides synthesis of points, elaboration and clarification of ideas, while challenging and building on learners' understanding.

Walsh & Sattes (2015) specifically advise that discussion questions ought to be true or authentic, be open-ended or divergent, stimulate responses at higher cognitive levels, engage students personally and emotionally, and lead to other questions. Given this advice, teachers would be wise to address and revise materials they might otherwise be tempted to use for the sake of convenience. Similarly, it might be useful and timely for educators to re-evaluate the role of SGD within their curriculum frameworks, and the way in which this tool for language development is being used by classroom teachers.

Implications

Given knowledge about the value of SGD as a tool for teaching and learning, it seems a reasonable assumption that teachers could widely employ it as a technique or strategy to enhance learning. My own experience, and that of some other teachers as reported to me, suggests that discussion in the classroom is not always effective, whether for native speakers or EAL learners, and that gaps exist between theory and practice. Moreover, it is quite likely that in both contexts a number of teachers do not or cannot make the kinds of changes required to meet the learners' immediate needs for effective participation in discussion.

As this study is largely reflective in nature and the findings are not easily verified, some readers may dispute its observations. However, in the course of working on this paper I have found evidence that when teachers are canvassed by researchers for information about the use and effectiveness of particular teaching strategies they sometimes misrepresent reality. Teachers and students alike are sometimes not the most objective people to gather information from about what happens in SGD; each is governed by their own pre-conceptions, experience and skill set.

While it would be unreasonable to expect our EAL students to quickly reach native-like proficiency, there are many salient features of spoken communication to learn about and be aware of as they occur in SGD. These include (to name some of them) changes of verb tense, defining and redefining of key words, problem framing, brevity, elaboration, paraphrasing, hedging, sarcasm, aggression, passivity, formality, authority, preference and bias, linguistic and non-verbal cues, fact and opinion, logic, quality of examples, emotion, questioning, signposting, uncertainty, and signs of understanding or misunderstanding. Prioritising these and seeing where they might fit with other curriculum content would be a good place to start.

Mohr & Mohr, (2007) give a response "protocol" that encourages teachers to identify the good use of English language, and give recognition for the development of concepts and deeper or broader thinking. They suggest that the teacher might say they like the student's expression, repeating the language used. Teachers might praise a good response to a discussion question and ask the student or students why the concept or idea is important to the discussion or to broader society. Technology or alternative classroom arrangements could be useful interventions that would capture more opportunities for formative feedback to be given.

In most contexts the critical variable teachers generally have some control over is the choice of discussion topic, and how it is structured or scaffolded for learners. Are students asked to focus on one question or several, and what level of thinking and reflection does it require? Is the discussion constrained by the stimulus material, or is it meant to lead to new questions, issues and understandings?

Textbooks and scaffolding material needs to be developed and chosen carefully with learner needs in mind, giving appropriate emphasis to the balanced development of language skills, and broader soft skills. Aspects of classroom and lesson management can be designed to consolidate opportunities for SGD, making the interactions meaningful learning opportunities and ensuring learners receive feedback on their developing discussion skills.

Finally, teachers can look for ways to employ new technologies and strategies within their teaching programmes that facilitate and support the content and language learning aims of SGD. The online platform "Kahoot!" (https://getkahoot.com/), for example, could be used with students' smartphones to gather learner opinions on aspects of a topic, providing instant statistical results and feedback that can be the stimulus for the SGD that follows.

Academic institutions with fee-paying EAL international students need to take special note of the need to develop their learners' speaking and SGD interaction skills. Indeed, as Guo and Lin (2016) have proposed, "Learning discipline specific communicative norms is crucial for academic success in higher education, especially for EFL students in institutions using English-medium instruction." (p. 17) Failure to provide suitable learning support and appropriate training could jeopardise a student's academic success, and subsequent employment prospects. Such events, in turn, have the potential to harm the reputation of the institution itself.

Conclusion

There is much that learners can gain from SGD as a teaching strategy. It is up to teachers to control some of the variables that limit the efficacy of this approach. While being sensitive to the needs and expectations of the many stakeholders, it may be timely for educators and their institutions to review curriculum and pedagogical approaches in light of the global challenges and issues raised by this study.

There is scope for further research and investigation into the types of input or scaffolding learners find useful or necessary for functioning in SGD, and when or how it best supports language learning. Many scholars are also interested in that lexical set of words or phrases learners would find helpful for academic discussion – an analysis that could be derived from specific corpus studies. A newly developing area for scholarly research that uses video and other technology is the investigation of things like learners' non-verbal behaviours during SGD via multimodal corpus linguistics. There is also scope for further investigations into the types of errors learners of different proficiency tend to make in SGD, into SGD assessment tools, and into the role and impact of feedback on L2 gain.

If teachers can systematically and effectively help learners bridge the gap between their limited experience and competence, and the communicative language needed to participate meaningfully in purposeful SGDs they would be making the world a better place.

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Appendix 1

Soft Skills taxonomy (Ministry of Higher Education, Malaysia, 2006)

Skills	Brief Summary
(1) Communication skills	-Ability to deliver ideas with clarity and confidence, both in written and oral forms -Ability to practice good listening skills and to give response -Ability to give presentation clearly and with confidence, according to the level of the audience -Ability to use technology during presentation* -Ability to negotiate and reach a consensus* -Ability to communicate with people from different cultural backgrounds* -Ability to expand one's own communicative skill* -Ability to use non-oral skills*
(2) Critical thinking and problem solving skills	-Ability to identify and analyze problems in a complex situation and to make a justifiable evaluation -Ability to expand and improve one's thinking skills such as give an explanation, analyze, and evaluate a discussion -Ability to find ideas and alternative solutions -Ability to think out of the box* -Ability to make conclusions based on valid proof* -Ability to persevere and give full attention to the given task* -Ability to understand and adapt oneself to the culture of the community and new working environment*
(3) Team work	-Ability to build good relations and have good interaction with other people and work with them effectively towards achieving common goals -Ability to understand and switch between the roles of the group leader and a team member -Ability to recognise and respect the attitudes, behaviours, and beliefs of other people -Ability to contribute to the planning and to coordinate the group work* -Be responsible about the group's decision*
(4) Lifelong learning and information management skills	-Ability to search and manage relevant information from various sources -Ability to receive new ideas and a capability for autonomous learning -Ability to develop an inquiring mind and the thirst for knowledge*

Note: Skills marked with an asterisk were considered by the Ministry of Higher Education (Malaysia) to be "good to have" while the others were identified as skills that graduates "must have".

Appendix 2

HKDSE Speaking Assessment Criteria

To assess the ability of candidates to:

- express information and ideas (e.g. personal experiences, feelings, opinions, imaginative ideas and evaluative remarks) with suitable elaboration
- convey meaning using a range of vocabulary and language patterns appropriate to the context, purpose and audience
- establish and maintain relationships/spoken exchanges using formulaic expressions and appropriate communication strategies (e.g. making an appropriate opening and closing, negotiating meaning, making suggestions, using appropriate degrees of formality)
- produce coherent and structured speeches with ideas effectively/clearly presented and developed
- pronounce words clearly and accurately
- use appropriate pace, volume, intonation, stress, eye contact and gesture to support effective communication.

Source: Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority
Chapter 2 Curriculum and Assessment Guide. Retrieved from:
http://www.hkeaa.edu.hk/DocLibrary/HKDSE/Subject_Information/eng_lang/2016hkdse-e-elang.pdf