Teaching Writing in a Web-based Environment

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• Changes from within and without TESOL affect our work as English teachers.
• ICT, educational technology and students’ online literacy practices are outside forces.
• Teachers have to keep up with their students.
• The use of ICT in the English Language classroom should be personalized or homegrown.
• From designer-methods to teacher-designed methods
• The reality of the prevalence of ICT in everyday experiences

• Current views of learning, knowledge and knowledge transmission within the new information age
• A transformed education system that will manifest the outcomes of “access, quality, equity, unity, and efficiency.”

• One aspect of transformation concerns ICT: “Leverage ICT to scale up quality learning across Malaysia”
• Provide Internet access and virtual learning environment via *1BestariNet* for all 10,000 schools by 2013

• Augment online content to share best practices starting with a video library of *Guru Cemerlang* (Excellent Teachers) delivering lessons in critical subjects in 2013

• Maximise use of ICT for distance and self-paced learning to expand access to high-quality teaching regardless of location or student skill level
The reality

• Despite the efforts and budget allocated in the promotion of ICT, its usage in schools has not been up to expectations.
  • 2010 survey: 80% of teachers use less than one hour of ICT a week.
  • 2010 survey: A third of students perceive their teachers as regular users of ICT.
  • 2012 UNESCO review: ICT usage has not really advanced beyond the use of word-processing applications in the computer as an instructional tool.
• Your own personal experience?
Tan, Ng & Saw (2011)

- 120 out of 218 secondary school English teachers said they used the Internet in their teaching.
- Internet use ranged from inside the classroom to outside the classroom.
- Downloaded learning materials (42.9%), looked up sample question papers online (28.7%), used emails to communicate with students (15.8%), set up a class discussion (5.3%) and set online quizzes (3.6%)
- Dominant type of activity: Sourcing of information
- Less dominant: Online interaction with students
Tan, Ng & Saw (2011)

• The frequencies of conducting an online lesson in the classroom/computer lab are as follows:
  • 6.6% once a week
  • 23.8% a few times a month
  • 20.5% once a month
  • 49.2% once in a few months

• While these English teachers claimed to integrate the Internet in classroom teaching, they actually spent very little time on it.
Practice on a small scale

• There are individual English teachers integrating ICT in their everyday practices.
• Small scale use and investigation of ICT in English Language teaching in specific contexts
• Recent MELTA conferences, AsiaTEFL conferences
Three online teaching experiences

Project 1: **Narrative Writing Platform** via Facebook –
teacher's presence

Project 2: **WebQLM** via WebQuest –
teacher's plan and choice of texts/activities

Project 3: **Online Discussion Forum** via moodle (a Learning Management System) –
teacher's absence
• Narrative writing at Form 4 level
• A closed group within Facebook for 6 students and their teacher: *Narrative Writing II*
• This online platform consists of
  • Tutor Platform
  • Learner Platform
• The Tutor Platform is the place where the teacher posts her instructions and materials (Notes on abstract, orientation, complicating action, evaluation, resolution and coda. Models are given.)
• The Learner Platform is the place where the students post their essays for feedback from their peers and teacher.
• There are 3 writing tasks (Tasks 1, 2 & 3).
• For each task, students write two versions.
• After receiving the teacher’s input each student writes an essay and posts it on the Learner Platform for comments. Online interactions take place.
• Using the comments given each student writes the second version and posts the improved essay online again.
• The cycle is repeated for 3 tasks.
Teacher input:

Task 1

The title of this week’s essay is: “Describe the most embarrassing experience you have had.” To write this essay you need to read the following steps:

Be clear about the question and think of possible situations you could write on.

It is good to incorporate real experiences in your story as you will be able to put in interesting and vivid details about them. Your story should be logical and consistent.

Use dialogue at certain points of your story to create a dramatic impact.

Use appropriate vocabulary and sentence structures.

The possible situations for the above title are:

- Torn trousers
- Slipped on a banana skin
- Being fooled on April Fool’s Day
- Late for school

Write the essay according to the Labov and Waletzky’s narrative structure.
The procedure

1. **Pretest**
   - Week 1

2. **Teacher uploads materials on the narrative structure**
   - Week 2

3. **Teacher uploads essay title & supporting materials**

4. **Students post essay – version (a)**

5. **Peer + Teacher Feedback**

6. **Students post essay – improved version (b)**
   - (This is repeated for all three writing tasks.)

7. **Posttest**
   - Week 8

8. **Learning and Interaction on Narrative Writing II Platform and Completion of 3 writing tasks**
   - Weeks 2-7
Findings of the study (Annamalai, Tan & Amelia, 2013; Annamalai, 2014)

### Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students</th>
<th>Pretest</th>
<th>1(a)</th>
<th>1(b)</th>
<th>2(a)</th>
<th>2(b)</th>
<th>3(a)</th>
<th>3(b)</th>
<th>Post test</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
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<td>66</td>
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</tr>
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</table>

(a)=first version, (b)=improved version

### Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students</th>
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<th>L</th>
<th>V</th>
<th>M</th>
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<th>O</th>
<th>C</th>
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<td>18</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>84</td>
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</tbody>
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O=organisation, C=content, L=language, V=vocabulary, M=mechanics
Findings of the study

Figure 1  Comparison between pretest and post test scores
Teaching Presence on the Platform:

Setting the direction for participation

• What do you all think about Monster KBlue's essay?
• I will read through your essay and comment.

Motivating

• ...don’t feel so bad Deer Tommy. You are doing great.
• We are here to help each other and improve to be better...
• you have provided good vocabulary
• good suggestion

Giving direct feedback

• ... scared stiff means when you get so scared, you can't move at all.
Teaching Presence on the Platform:

Encouraging peer feedback

• You can use the suggestion of Peony Moon to describe the situation when...

• Joyce gave some word choices...

Scaffolding

• ...interesting story yet you could make it better by developing more details. I find that the story is kind of dry without development. You can use similar story but add on some interesting development into paragraph with idiomatic expression and higher level vocabulary.

• Try to practice on this simple exercise by finding meaning of the idiomatic expressions

• All of you are having problem in knowing the correct tenses to use in your essays. Here is a link which contains variety of online exercises and tests all of you.
Project 2: *WebQLM* (Tan-Ooi, 2014)

- Argumentative writing at Form 6 (MUET) level
- 4 units developed
  - Introduction to Argumentative Writing - Playing Video Games: Good or Bad?
  - Cell Phone: Is it a necessity at school?
  - Bioengineering Food - A Harvest of Fear?
  - Human Cloning: Dead or Alive?
- To be used in the computer lab and also outside the class
Introduction to Argumentative Writing - Playing Video Games: Good or Bad?
WebQLM (Tan-Ooi, 2014)

• Uses existing inquiry-based lesson formats known as WebQuests to develop 4 units of lessons.
• The WebQuest lesson template makes use of selected online resources to engage students.
• The format includes Introduction, Task, Process, Evaluation, Conclusion and Teacher Page.
• To make WebQuests, use either Zunal WebQuest Maker (http://zunal.com/index.php) or QuestGarden (http://questgarden.com/author/overview.php)
• Tasks are wide-ranging.
• Tasks include brainstorming for points, sketching mindmaps, role play, writing newsletters and essays, designing scrapbooks and oral presentations.
• Tasks reinforce students' understanding of argumentative writing and the importance of providing justifications for taking a particular standpoint.
A lesson plan (Unit 3) in *WebQLM* (Tan-Ooi, 2014)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lesson</th>
<th>Lessons 1-4 (4-5 days)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>400 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic</td>
<td>Bioengineering Food-A Harvest of Fear?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific Objectives</td>
<td>By the end of this lesson, students are able to:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1. explore and gather information on concerns or fears of GM foods, characteristics of food crops selectively bred and some harmful effects of selective breeding, and 10 types of genetically engineered foods</td>
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<td></td>
<td>2. produce a well-illustrated journal or scrapbook on GM foods</td>
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<td></td>
<td>3. write an essay in 350 words why genetically foods are harmful or helpful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. create a well-informed newsletter on issues of GM foods and combine the written essay in one column of the newsletter</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Procedures:** *(refer to WebQuest* [http://www.zunal.com/process.php?w=119882])*

1. **Pre-writing Activities**
   a) name some GM foods
   b) discuss the purpose of producing GM foods

2. **Scientific Exploration (Group Work)**
   a) In a group of 3, each student selects a role
   b) explore and gather information to produce an illustrated journal/scrapbook on GM foods

3. **Group Writing Activities**
   a) discuss and write newsletter articles on issues of GM foods, the advantages and disadvantages of GM foods, issues of labelling, fears and concerns, the truth about GM food and some views and opinions cited
   b) each member writes an essay why genetically modified foods are harmful or helpful
   c) create a newsletter using the template given and insert all the written articles and the three essays
The procedure

1. Develop an Argumentative Writing unit using the WebQuest lesson template.
2. Send to Zunal WebQuest Maker to check and publish it.
3. Repeat the above 2 steps for 4 units.
4. Compile 4 units under the module name of "WebQLM".
6. Pretest.
7. Teaching and learning using WebQLM.
8. Post test.
9. The study.
• The study used a single group pretest post test quasi-experimental design, N=68.

• The mean score of the pre-test was 37.51 (SD 9.92) while the mean score of the post-test was 47.78 (SD 10.31).

• The students had obtained higher scores in argumentative writing after receiving the WebQLM instruction, with an average gain of 10.27.

• The paired samples t-test found the difference to be statistically significant, where t (67) = 16.12, p = 0.00.
Findings of the study (Tan-Ooi, 2014)

Positive comments from participants:
- The WebQLM learning site is user friendly and guides them with scaffolded tasks. The navigation is clear and easy to follow.
- The links to the relevant information helps in the completion of their tasks.
- The teacher's choice of relevant sites saves them time in locating appropriate information.
- The issues and topics of discussion are interesting and within their everyday experiences.
- The activities are challenging and they have to read and use the information to complete their tasks.
- Preparing the scrapbook and pamphlet is enjoyable and enables them to show their creativity.

Negative Comments from participants:
- Internet connection problems
- Lack language proficiency to understand some of the contents provided
• Paraphrasing at B.Ed. (TESOL) year one level
• Online postings on eLearn were obtained from an online assignment given to 43 first year students enrolled in a writing course.
• The online assignment contributed 10% to the writing course which was evaluated fully through course work.
• Since the total enrolment was quite high, the students were divided into four forum groups (Forums A to D).
• The forum was opened for a duration of 20 days to enable the students to do two things:
  1. To paraphrase a sentence that was posted by the lecturer
  2. To comment on any coursemate’s posts
• The minimum number of posts was two but there was no restriction on the number of posts after this.
• In each forum a sentence was posted by the lecturer for the students to respond to (i.e. to paraphrase). Each group received a different text.
• After the assignment was submitted, a questionnaire was administered to get students’ views.
Online discussion forum preliminary findings (Tan, work in progress)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>No. of participants</th>
<th>No. of posts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Forum A</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forum B</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forum C</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forum D</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>43</td>
<td>161</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Paraphrase Text
by PROFESOR MADYA DR. TAN KOK ENG
This is your text to paraphrase. You need to submit your post and then comment on a friend's post. Use the Reply button.

The strategy of copying sentences and phrases from online sources led to improved grades in the students’ writing tasks and the use of borrowing for academic survival.

Re: Paraphrase Text
by KEL - Friday, 10 April 2015, 3:25 PM
In order to get better grades in writing tasks and survive in academic, students use the name of borrowing in copying sentences and phrases from online sources.

Re: Paraphrase Text
by CHKY - Friday, 10 April 2015, 4:16 PM
Textual borrowing strategy have been used by students through online sources in their writing tasks in order to survive academically and this shows improvement in their grades.

Re: Paraphrase Text
by CHKY - Friday, 10 April 2015, 4:20 PM
KEL, I think you paraphrase it well! Just a kind suggestion. Maybe you can use " to survive academically"?

Re: Paraphrase Text
by NUAF Saturday, 11 April 2015, 4:27 AM
Grades improvement in students' writing tasks are induced by the act of plagiarism from online sources which on the other hand, helps them to survive academically.

Re: Paraphrase Text
by ANFA - Saturday, 11 April 2015, 11:42 PM
Plagiarism from the net sources drives the students towards an ameliorate achievement in writing assignments and the use of borrowing to survive academically.

p/s : please comment so that I can improve :) thanks
Initial observations of posts

• Non threatening atmosphere
• Interactions are beyond ‘I agree with you.’
• Use of social language (emoticons, short forms, etc.) to connect, to encourage, to be polite, to apologize, ...
• Peer support is given and used
• Comments range from general to specific suggestions
• No teacher’s presence
• No conclusive answer or model answer
• Mistakes (grammar and content) in the work
• References are made, links given
• Some students write more posts, some longer posts
Themes from students’ views

1. Encourages participation for shy students
2. Encourages participation due to the flexible features of the forum
3. Social networking online adapted into an educational or learning practice
4. Preference for teacher’s presence to monitor content
5. Preference for teacher’s presence to control interaction
6. Preference for teacher’s absence
7. Learning from each other: Knowledge, skills and experience
8. Learning from each other: The affordances of the online discussion forum
## AN OVERVIEW

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Narrative Writing II</th>
<th>WebQLM</th>
<th>Online Discussion Forum</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Type of writing</strong></td>
<td>Narrative writing</td>
<td>Argumentative writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Features of writing tool</strong></td>
<td>Teacher prepares links to relevant materials to support writing tasks</td>
<td>Teacher prepares links to relevant materials to support writing tasks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uses a closed group within Facebook</td>
<td>Students follow the links and read the materials provided</td>
<td>Students comment on each other’s work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher uploads writing tasks and guiding materials</td>
<td>Group work is essential to finish tasks</td>
<td>Students provide links to online resources to support their comments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online interactions among participants to improve individual essays</td>
<td>Uses online and offline multimedia delivery</td>
<td>Lecturer is totally absent in the interactions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher participates in the online discussion</td>
<td>Materials are given in multimodes - words, pictures, video, audio (i.e. texts, images/pictures, sound/voice)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher gives students online links to supplementary work such as grammar exercises</td>
<td>Materials are combined with opportunities for users to navigate, interact and communicate</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Respondents**

- Six students purposively sampled from a Form 4 class
- 68 students from 2 intact classes sampled randomly from 8 Form 6 classes
- 43 first year B.Ed. (TESOL) students enrolled in a writing course
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Main approach</strong></th>
<th><strong>Quantitative</strong></th>
<th><strong>Qualitative</strong></th>
<th><strong>Research Methodology</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Qualitative</td>
<td>Quantitative</td>
<td>Qualitative</td>
<td>Students' essays, online interactions to accomplish the writing tasks, semi-structured interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>Single group pretest-posttest quasi-experimental design, students’ writing products, questionnaire on attitude towards computer use and web technology, classroom observation checklist, semi-structured interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Students' forum discussions to do a short paraphrase assignment online, questionnaire on views towards the online discussion forum</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Research questions</strong></th>
<th><strong>Research questions</strong></th>
<th><strong>Research questions</strong></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. How does the use of the online narrative writing platform enhance the different aspects of narrative writing?</td>
<td>1. Is there any significant difference in students’ argumentative writing performance before and after using WebQLM?</td>
<td>1. How do students interact and support each other in the online discussion forum to complete an online assignment?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. What are the patterns of interactions (student-student and student-teacher) in the online collaborative learning environment that enhance narrative writing?</td>
<td>2. Which characteristics of WebQLM appeal to the students?</td>
<td>2. What are students’ views on the use of the online discussion forum for the teaching and learning of English?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. What are the students' and teacher's experiences and reflections of using the online narrative writing platform?</td>
<td>3. Between the short and long term WebQuest in WebQLM (SWQ and LWQ), which type is more favourable to the students and why?</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Gloria E. Jacobs, a scholar much concerned with the new literacies of adolescents talks about "The myth of technology as inherently motivating" (Jacobs, 2013).

Set work that involves technology AND friends AND communication.

It’s about pedagogy, not technology.
Plan well so that the potential usefulness of technology can be realised.
Thank you

I wish to thank Universiti Sains Malaysia for the Short Term Grant (304/PGURU/6312067) to carry out the WebQLM project.