January 2017

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Zeina Hojeij
Zayed University, zeina.hojeij@zu.ac.ae

Zoe Hurley
Zayed University, zoe.hurley@zu.ac.ae

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Recommended Citation
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Abstract
Many teachers consider themselves digital immigrants who struggle to keep up with student digital natives. Whether or not this dichotomy still holds true, in a 21st Century context of teaching and learning, is debatable not least of all because of the exponential development of apps and mobile learning technology. Nevertheless, it is sometimes difficult for educators to know where to begin and for students to know how best to use it to advance their studies and improve their writing.

Focusing on university students at a pre-university English as Second Language (ESL) program in Dubai, this paper discusses how mobile learning and the use of a range of apps can foster peer and self-editing, aid noticing and enhance ownership of the writing process. It is argued that flipping corrective feedback helps students to notice their errors and spend more time developing their writing.

Keywords
Peer editing, Self-editing, Mobile technology, Flipped learning

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This research article is available in International Journal for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning: https://digitalcommons.georgiasouthern.edu/ij-sotl/vol11/iss1/4
The Triple Flip: Using Technology for Peer and Self-Editing of Writing

Zeina Hojeij1 and Zoe Hurley2

1College of Education, Zayed University, Dubai, United Arab Emirates
2Academic Bridge Program, Zayed University, Dubai, United Arab Emirates

(Received 23 September 2015; Accepted 08 December 2016)

Many teachers consider themselves digital immigrants who struggle to keep up with student digital natives. Whether or not this dichotomy still holds true, in a 21st Century context of teaching and learning, is debatable not least of all because of the exponential development of apps and mobile learning technology. Nevertheless, it is sometimes difficult for educators to know where to begin and for students to know how best to use it to advance their studies and improve their writing. Focusing on university students at a pre-university English as Second Language (ESL) program in Dubai, this paper discusses how mobile learning and the use of a range of apps can foster peer and self-editing, aid noticing and enhance ownership of the writing process. It is argued that flipping corrective feedback helps students to notice their errors and spend more time developing their writing.

INTRODUCTION

The research initially focused on the apps Explain Everything, Notability and Edmodo which were explored to facilitate peer and self-editing to enhance ownership of the writing process. Subsequently, following an initial pilot, and in view of the expanding market of apps, the paper incorporates apps that are categorized according to function. These include: Powtoon, Thinglink, Showbie, Schoology and others. The overall process is termed the ‘Triple Flip’ and seeks to integrate self and peer editing processes with authentic publishing opportunities.

The limitations of teacher driven corrective feedback on ESL student writing have been extensively studied as has research emphasizing the value of student self-editing based on the Noticing Hypothesis. When teachers provide corrective written feedback highlighting learners’ weaknesses, the process is passive. The Noticing Hypothesis states “SLA is largely driven by what learners notice in TL input and what they understand the significance of noticed input to be” (Iwanaka & Takatskuka, 2007, p. 57). Essentially, Schmidt came up with the Noticing Hypothesis based on his own personal experiences as an adult learner of Portuguese. As a result, he hypothesized that only when L2 learners become aware of the linguistic form in the input, do they begin to acquire it. His basic claim is that input can only be acquired once the learner notices it, which is when it is consciously registered. Schmidt & Frota (1986) indicate that being exposed to information in class is not enough for input to be retained and/or used. They argue that it is a must for the learner to consciously notice and become aware of the input structures in order to be able to use them. As such, their L2 premise is that there is no L2 learning without conscious noticing. Relating to the current research project, learners were given the opportunity to notice their errors in writing through the use of the mobile apps for their self and peer editing.

With the development of mobile learning there has been a huge interest in flipped learning. Teachers have been encouraged to make videos and presentations that learners can access outside the classroom. However, it is debatable to what extent this is student-centered, proactive or beneficial. Also it is incredibly time consuming on behalf of teachers. Conversely, the study arises out of concerns over the extent to which mobile technology really enhances learning and which theoretical basis it stems from. It could be argued that the emphasis still seems to be on the teacher rather than being student centered. Other concerns are that technology is diluting learning and that mobile learning practices are a kind of ‘tech fluff’ or ‘edutainment.’

The research therefore investigates how mobile learning and the use of a range of apps aid peer and self-editing, enhance noticing, improve writing and increase student ownership. It considered how the structuring of app architecture facilitated a cascade of peer and self-editing processes to develop writing as well as providing authentic publishing opportunities.

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

Although the limitations of teacher driven corrective feedback on student writing have been extensively studied, as has research emphasizing the value of student self-editing based on the Noticing Hypothesis, there is currently very little in-depth research relating to the use of apps to improve academic writing.

Whilst students may have a lack of knowledge about how to improve their writing in a second language, some teachers could be doubtful or lack the skills to use technology to help students peer and self-edit. Nevertheless, 21st Century teaching and learning are reframing traditional pedagogies, contexts for learning as well as the direction and reception of knowledge.

Therefore, it is within this spirit that a discussion of how a layering of apps, or a construction of app architecture, can create a dynamic learning environment for students to improve their own writing through increasing their autonomy and sense of control. The process, termed ‘The Triple Flip,’ was not seeking to replicate traditional pedagogies but aimed to harness technology to create new structures and training for peer and self-editing of writing. The learning process is not restricted to the classroom or bound within traditional hierarchies of teacher–student control and reception. Potentially, flipping corrective feedback therefore becomes a win-win situation for both teachers and learners by using technology to create new structures and processes for noticing, improving and sharing written work.

Innovation and Value of the Triple Flip

The Triple Flip has a number of key affordances that foster innovative digital collaboration between learners and teachers. It offers greater interactions between learners and teachers in a manner that overrides the (imagined) division between digital natives and immigrants.

https://doi.org/10.20429/ijsotl.2017.110104
Simultaneously, the approach provides a structure for shifting traditional writing activities of the classroom from an individual to a collaborative group setting. The researchers argue that technology could be harnessed to structure a more purposeful and process based approach to writing.

Hypothesis

The expected outcomes of the project are higher student engagement and motivation due to the ubiquitous features of mobile learning, a stronger sense of autonomy and control over the academic process. Furthermore, mobile learning tools allow for sharing of the students’ academic writing was anticipated due to the socially collective practice of peer editing, forum discussions and authentic publication opportunities.

Review of the Literature

Drawing on insights from Interactionist approaches to language and the Noticing Hypothesis, we believe that mobile applications can be effective tools for self-editing as they aid the students in noticing errors; assist acquisition and encourage learner ownership and autonomy.

In terms of SLA, learners must be exposed to appropriate input to achieve these variables. Van Lier stresses peer interaction is essential to provide the necessary scaffolding and motivation.

In terms of writing pedagogy, teacher-driven corrective input is arguably one-way and whilst highlighting learners’ errors, the process of leading and directing of students and does not necessarily develop their autonomous output.

Researchers such as Schmidt (2010) claim the learning process itself is important and peer editing would augment this by prompting learners’ awareness of their errors by providing an atmosphere for noticing and learning the difference between the produced interlanguage forms and the target language forms.

Furthermore, the rise of awareness, autonomy and authenticity, learning outside the classroom is as important, if not more so, than within. Van Lier believes learners should be given more control of what, how and when they wish to learn. At the same time, students need to be guided in learning to notice their errors. A possible solution therefore is to draw on developments in mobile learning.

The concept of the flipped classroom be integrated to facilitate students in learning to notice their errors, during peer or self-editing, so that they can work autonomously beyond the classroom.

Flipped classes are a relatively new phenomenon in education. The idea of flipped learning, or student preparation before class, was popularized by Khan Academy. Since then, several variations have emerged, such as assigning homework, voice commentaries and stickies in engaging students in the peer and self-editing process.

Flipped apps as mobile learning platforms, such as Edmodo and Schoology, provide authentic publishing platforms, audience and peer discussion forums to motivate learners to improve their writing!

Whilst there was a use of a range of apps, the research was not app specific but rather concerned with the processes of how apps can be integrated in the process of teaching and learning. The flipped classroom model could be harnessed to structure a more purposeful and process based approach to writing.

Participants

The participant is female students at Zayed University, Dubai, UAE. As part of the University’s Program for studying English as a Second Language. In order to exit the course they need to gain a Band 5 in IELTS. They are first language Arabic speakers and are of Emirati nationality. A large proportion of the students are the first members of their families to enroll in a university education.

Class Make-up

Two groups of students were involved in the study. All participants were females whose native language is Arabic. The learners were all enrolled in a foundations English program at university. Their ages ranged between 18-21 years old. All the students in this study were of Arabic ethnicity with no differences in their nationalities. All participants had their own iPads with the necessary apps for this study. As part of the students’ class' objectives, they were required to write a problem-solution essay referencing external sources of information. These essays served as the content for the current research.

The first group consisted of pre-intermediate learners of English with a current IELTS Band 3 – 5. 17 students took part in the process and were interviewed in both Arabic and English. The participants had their own iPads with the necessary apps for this study. As part of the students’ class’ objectives, they were required to write a problem-solution essay referencing external sources of information. These essays served as the content for the current research.

The second group involved 15 students who received 20 contact hours of core English per week. The students were all in the same class for the full semester term with one teacher. It is worth noting that levels of literacy in the United Arab Emirates have accelerated since independence in 1971 and a huge investment in education subsequently. Female education is also a high priority of Emiratisation and there is a real sense that educating Emirati females will be a huge benefit to the nation. (MFNC/A, 2009).

Research Questions

The study was conducted in three stages reflecting the teaching and seeks to answer the following questions:

1) How effective are apps that allow teachers to flip the learning environment and provide materials and videos offering effective cues and models in guiding students’ peer and self-editing through structure, content and language?

2) How has scaffolding, voice commentaries and stickies in engaging students in the peer and self-editing process?

3) How would apps and mobile learning platforms, such as Edmodo and Schoology, provide authentic publishing platforms, audience and peer discussion forums to motivate learners to improve their writing?

To achieve this, teachers must educate their students in the “multiliteracies of technology – functional, critical, and rhetorical” in order to involve them in the conversation about the use of technology (Kalnin, 2012, p. 2). This is achievable through the use of collaborative technologies in the classroom, in which we will provide the students for collaboration in the real world. Kalnin explains, “Collaborative learning promotes knowing, thinking and acting in socially-constructed ways. It allows students to work together, to consider each other, and to search each other for meaning. In the process, students foster a common community understanding of content” (Kalnin, 2012, p. 2).

By considering the way in which students already communicate in modern times, technology and collaborative learning have become intertwined. As such, no collaboration in the modern classroom is complete without the use of technology. The study aims at answering “what is the importance of teaching their students how to collaborate. Collaboration must be purposeful and intentional and as such, there are certain skills to be scaffolded prior to collaboration” (Herreid & Schiller, 2013).

To sum up, flipping the writing process to include collaborative peer editing and feedback is an effective practice for teaching academic process writing. Literature indicates that training is necessary in order for the learners to gain useful feedback on content and language structure. Moreover, the interaction between the editor and the writer can lead to long-term improvements in the quality of writing. The marriage between the flipped method and peer editing can have advantageous results on the process of writing provided the learners are exposed to enough training.

Methodology

Qualitative research methods were triangulated to include data collected from a survey, unstructured interviews, narrative practices and observations of the students’ writing at each stage of the research. The combination of these techniques can help us understand how students may take a more active role in the assessment of their writing and how the range of apps could function as a tool to facilitate this. Student experiences were at the center of the project to ensure that the initiative was dialogic and learners’
Data Collection
Firstly, students completed a survey questioning them on three stages of the writing process. This survey consisted of attitudinal questions to gather data about their subjective responses. Secondly, they engaged in unstructured interviews, in both English and Arabic, so they could reflect verbally on their experiences of the process. Thirdly, writing samples they had produced individually were paired up and accessed through the website, The Trip Flip process. The researchers felt that this triangulation was important to preserve both subjectivities of the students whilst maintaining a robust and empirical quality to the project.

Process
The initial pilot of the project surveyed students across three stages of being taught a discursive essay. Findings from the pilot indicated the students needed to be guided more carefully in the editing process and to be given clear instructions about what they were intended for. As a result, a series of editing activities were developed that involved a checklist of processes that included micro-editing for grammatical issues as well as macro concerns including structure and organization; content and ideas; style and register.

A further issue arising out of the pilot was that not all of the students had access to the app Notability since it is not free. It was therefore decided that this app could be substituted for the free app Educreations. As a result, it was also revealed that the students preferred Educreations. This feature had to be about the process of using a range of apps to carry out a specific editing, reviewing, drafting and publishing activities.

The results of the study, students were engaged in the same tripped stage of a process of receiving input through Powtoon videos; peer, self and teacher conferencing and writing and then having their writing published on Edmodo for discussion. A detailed description of the process can be found in the following steps:

Fp. 1: Input with Powtoon
The first flip consisted of input writing videos using the video-making platform Powtoon, accessed at www.powtoon.com. Powtoon is a fun and user-friendly tool for making presentations in a cartoon style. The website offers a range of educational templates, which were used to create input for this project. It is possible for users to create videos using the free templates offered if they do not wish to pay for a subscription. The website includes the website’s logo and jingle at the end of each video, while the videos under the paid subscription do not.

The researchers designed and created a series of short videos based on topics related to the curriculum of the course being taught. The Powtoon videos ranged in length from 3-5 minutes and did not include any voice instructions. All instruction was based on written text that was visible on the screen. The videos were uploaded and asked the students to draft and e-mail their drafts to each other. Notability allows the students to view their partners’ essays in PDF format as email attachments. They reviewed each other’s essays and gave recorded verbal feedback and written comments on the work. The teachers received all the written feedback they receive. After the feedback, the students met for peer editing sessions in class and the revisions were discussed in detail to clarify all points of feedback. The teachers at this point were monitoring the discussions and pair meetings to make sure everyone was adhering to the requirements of the assignment. As a result, this flip was student-centered with remote teacher supervision. After this was concluded, the students were then asked to write their second drafts based on the peer feedback they had received. The second drafts were published in Edmodo for class sharing as the Third Flip.

Fp. 2: The Notability Process
The second step of the process, or the second flip, involved using the app Notability to peer edit each other’s work. Notability is a paid app, which is required at our institution for all the students who engage in this activity. As such, the second flip involved using the app Notability so students could reflect on their preliminary drafts. The process includes micro-editing for grammatical issues as well as macro concerns including structure and organization; content and ideas; style and register.

Fp. 3: The Edmodo Process
The third flip involved publishing the edited essays in Edmodo. Edmodo is a fun and user-friendly tool for making presentations in a cartoon style. The website offers a range of educational templates, which were used to create this process in the project. It is possible for users to create videos using the free templates offered if they do not wish to pay for a subscription. The website includes the website’s logo and jingle at the end of each video, while the videos under the paid subscription do not.

Data Results and Analyses
Group 1: Results of the survey and unstructured interviews
In response to the question of whether enough writing models were provided, the feedback was generally positive with 79% answering that a good number of examples were given. Conversely, 14% answered that there were too many models and an equal 14% said there were not enough. These variables relate to individual differences with the majority of the group responding favorably to the use of written models. Opinions relating to the use of video support for writing, 71% found the videos useful although only 14% said they watched them outside the classroom. In terms of the flipped classroom concept, this variable indicates that learning was occurring within the traditional classroom context rather than beyond on a mobile device. What is not clear, however, is that they would have viewed the videos outside of the classroom if they did not have the opportunity to watch them within the ballpark. In terms of the editing apps, Notability and Educreations for peer editing were valued by the majority students as they found them very useful and 35% found them a waste of time. In the unstructured interviews and discussions, students commented that the apps cumbersome and disliked the voice recording since it made the app difficult to use and showed peer editing responses. Students were more positive with 14% finding the process very useful, 78% finding it useful and 14% finding it a waste of time. So whilst some of the students were skeptical about the particular apps and their specific features they were enthusiastic about the process they facilitated. This indicates more user-friendly apps should be found. It also suggests that students need to be consulted in terms of app selection and their preferences should be considered. In terms of the overall study, the feature of the Trip Flip is that it is process rather app specific.

Group 2: Results of Unstructured Interviews
The results demonstrate that the majority of the students enjoyed the overall experience of peer and self-editing as 53% indicated that it was an interesting and engaging way to approach the writing process. Conversely, a combination of traditional teacher driven feedback, peer review and technology are all significant variables that indicate more user-friendly apps should be found. What remains unclear, however, is whether the students would have developed more positive responses to the apps Notability and Edmodo once they had engaged with them more extensively. As such, the research study results indicate that traditional teacher feedback is the most important factor for improving writing. Alternatively, it could indicate that the students held traditional perceptions of what factors influenced development. Conversely, a combination of traditional teacher driven feedback, peer review and technology are all significant variables that help students improve their written work.

An analysis of students’ writing samples did provide evidence of improvements in students work. These improvements were particularly in terms of content and style although the same number and type of grammatical errors were still occurring. Their ability to discuss their writing with one another and with the teacher also developed as the students started to acquire a meta-language or awareness of their writing. This response to Edmodo also reinforces that the students react more positively in a technology driven environment where they are engaged in writing for a higher order purpose. It is quite clear that the majority of the group responding favorably to the use of technology in the editing process but the overall experience of peer and self-editing as 53% indicated that it was an interesting and engaging way to approach the writing process. Conversely, a combination of traditional teacher driven feedback, peer review and technology are all significant variables that indicate more user-friendly apps should be found. What remains unclear, however, is whether the students would have developed more positive responses to the apps Notability and Edmodo once they had engaged with them more extensively. As such, the research study results indicate that traditional teacher feedback is the most important factor for improving writing. Alternatively, it could indicate that the students held traditional perceptions of what factors influenced development. Conversely, a combination of traditional teacher driven feedback, peer review and technology are all significant variables that help students improve their written work.

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Finally, according to our students’ answers, this experience of the writing process could be improved by offering more training and practice on how to edit, as they were not confident in their abilities as self and peer-editors. Also, they did not like having different partners in different stages of the re-drafting process. Instead, they preferred having the same editing partners throughout.

LIMITATIONS OF STUDY AND FUTURE RECOMMENDATIONS

The limitations of the study are the size of the sample and relatively short period of time over which the study was conducted. Recommendations for future research would include a longer research period and comparisons with other classes and across other academic disciplines.

The next cycle would be for students to create their own Powtoons and videos in order to create their own content for learning. Ideally, teaching should also be flipped, and not just learning in order to make the whole process more student-centered.

Further avenues of research would also involve looking at teachers’ perceptions of the Triple Flip process and possible questions could be how they view their shifting role in the 21st Century ‘wall-less’ classroom. How do they feel about the erosion of the traditional teacher—student hierarchy? Do they feel that students’ writing is improving through this process? Another issue would be the perceptions of managing the peer and self-editing process. What are the practicalities of its facilitation; benefits and limitations of the process?

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Overall, this study looks into using technology to aid peer and self-review of writing suggests that students require careful guidance in both the writing review process as well as the required technology. It also reveals that students do not necessarily find this learner-centered approach an intuitive process and were also not convinced that this is beneficial.

These findings remind us that technology in the classroom, for the purposes of writing instruction, does not supersede the role of the instructor. Students in this study felt that the teacher was a vitally important participant in the teaching and learning cycle. The students’ responses to the apps also indicate that students’ preferences and opinions about the values and usability of technology are vitally important. Students need to be convinced that the application is purposeful and efficient.

The current study argues that apps can aid in the self and peer-editing process provided the students undergo well-planned step-by-step training. This would be helpful to the students as well as teachers who have major time constraints and are unable to give one-on-one effective feedback. Nevertheless, duplicating the process of this study must be done with a major limitation in mind: the students all wrote a problem-solution essay, which had been taught and discussed at a period of time over which the study was conducted. Recommendations for future research would include a longer research period and comparisons with other classes and across other academic disciplines.

The essays improved from draft to final version. The editing devices helped them to notice more of their errors and the prospect of having their writing published on Edmodo prompted them to carefully prepare and check their essays. It is recommended that more training sessions on feedback are needed in order to increase the expertise and confidence of the student reviewers. However, as this is very time consuming, the curriculum of the course must allow for the necessary time to be integrated into the syllabus of the course.

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