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The Triple Flip: Using Technology for Peer and Self-Editing of Writing

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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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The Triple Flip: Using Technology for Peer and Self-Editing of Writing

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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 pay attention to and 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 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.

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.

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Simultaneously, the approach provides a structure for shifting traditional writing activities of the classroom from an individual to a collaborative process. With the combination of technology, the transactional and collaborative writing tasks that students will engage with in the workplace and situate learning within the social construction of knowledge (Kalin, 2012).

In the process, incorporating both synchronous and asynchronous features, provide an articulation of structured digital collaborative activities for producing, processing and sharing writing that are not bounded temporally or spatially.

Participants
The female participants are students at Zayed University, Dubai, United Arab Emirates. The participants who are 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 academic writing in English. These essays served as the criteria 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 students were all in the same class for the full semester term with one instructor. 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 in 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 of purpose to learn. At the same time, students need to be guided in learning to notice their errors; assist acquisition and encourage learner ownership and autonomy.

In terms of SLA, learners must be exposed to appropriate input to produce accurate output. Van Lier (1996), drawing on Vygotsky (1978) advances three essential affective factors for this input and output thesis, which include awareness: autonomy and authenticity.

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 providing input related to the needs of the students and does not necessarily develop their autonomous output.

Researchers such as Schmidt (2010) claim the learning process is a social one and pedagogical input would augment students’ awareness of their errors by providing an atmosphere for noticing and learn the difference between the produced interlanguage forms and the target language forms.

The flipped approach to teaching and learning has become a reality in modern times, technology and collaborative learning have become the symbol of this new teaching approach. As he developed more and more videos, he eventually developed his own website Khan Academy and has ever since become the symbol of this new teaching approach.

Whilst there was a use of a range of apps, the research was not app specific but rather concerned with the processes of how student engagement and motivation was achieved. By using the technology, the students’ academic writing was anticipated due to the socially constructed 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 writing as they aid the students in noticing errors; assist acquisition and encourage learner ownership and autonomy.

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The flipped approach to teaching and learning has become so popular because of the vast availability of online resources. Students relate to it because of the technological appeal and interaction thus resulting in a more beneficial process (Zhu, 1995; Stanely, 1992). Peer feedback can be supported and justified by many researchers as being a tool for the development of the sociocultural theory. Each of these theories emphasizes peer response as a major component in helping learners improve their writing. Peer editing and feedback not only helps learners to revise their work but it also gives them a sense of student ownership and control of the process writing experience more purposeful, meaningful, and communicative (Kalin, 2013). Rahimi explains that peer feedback has a different impact on learning and revision process for second language editing. That is why it is more manageable for the students to apply as it is also less threatening and more specific and effective for revision at times.

The research questions that in the modern classroom, students have the technological aptitude and flexibility; however, they lack awareness of purpose. They do not know or realize how they are learning from the integration of the various digital tools they use in class. Kalin calls this technical dexterity vs. rhetorical dexterity. Kalin indicates that it is the teacher’s mission to provide the students with this awareness in order for them to become more than just users, but actual “producers of content” (p. 2).

To achieve this, teachers must educate their students in the “multilitieracies of technology – functional, critical, and rhetorical” in order to involve them in the conversation about the use of technology (Kalin, 2012, p.2). This is achievable through the use of collaborative technologies in the classroom, in which will prepare the students for collaboration in the real world. Kalin explains, “Collaborative learning promotes knowing, thinking and communicating in a process that opens up opportunities for each other, and to search each other for meaning. In the process, students foster a community of common understanding and common purpose.”

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 incorporation of technology. What teachers must keep in mind is the importance of their teaching how to collaborate. Collaboration must be purposeful and intentional and as such, there are certain skills to be scaffolded prior to collaboration.

To sum up, flipping the writing process to include collaborative peer editing and feedback is an effective practice for teaching academic process writing. The literature indicates that training students to be more efficient on active learning; there is an increase in student engagement; student engagement on students’ process writing. The working hypothesis was that student engagement would increase in classroom academic writing which the learners can learn best through social interaction with peers. “Peer review provides opportunities for literacy learning because reviewers and writers vary in their strengths, preferred modes of communication, and collaborative goals.” (Kalin, 2012, p. 294). With that being said, pairing students with different abilities helps both learners to increase each other’s writing proficiency. As a result, development will occur through peer review when the learner engages with the written text and during revision. This includes asking questions, providing feedback, and instructing on error correction.

Kalin’s own research conducted on peer editing shows that training enhances the experience and efficiency of peer evaluation. Learners who received training on how to edit and review had a more rewarding overall experience as they were able to generate more valuable feedback and to engage in more active feedback. That is why it is more manageable for the students to apply as it is also less threatening and more specific and effective for revision at times.

The Triple Flip” 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!
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. The students were asked to give a detailed account of how they went through the stages of their writing process. The Triple Flip process. The researchers felt that this triangulation was important to preserve both subjectivities of the students while 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 that the students needed to be guided more carefully in the editing process and to be given clear instructions about what they should be doing. 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 Notability. As a result, it was also revealed that the students had access to Powtoon videos; peer, self and teacher conferencing editing and reviewing, drafting and publishing activities.

In the next stage of the study, students were engaged in the same staged process of receiving input through Powtoon videos; peer, self and teacher conferencing editing and reviewing, drafting and publishing activities. In the second stage of the study, students were engaged in unstructured interviews, in both English and Arabic, as part of their program. As such, they engaged in unstructured interviews, in both English and Arabic.

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 examples and an equal 14% also 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.

Alternating as 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 during the traditional classroom context rather than beyond a mobile device. What is not clear is whether they would have viewed the videos outside the classroom if they did not the opportunity to watch them within.

In terms of the editing apps, Notability and Edmodo for peer and self-editing, 63% said to the contrary that they found them very useful and 35% found them a waste of time. In the unstructured interviews and discussions, students remarked that the apps cumbersome and disliked the voice recording since it made them slow and showed peer editing, responses on the app did not encourage them to write more positively with 14% finding the process very useful, 78% finding it useful and 14% finding it was a waste of time. So whilst some of the students were skeptical about the specific 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 Triple Flip is that it is process rather app specific.

The study was based on the premise that traditional teacher corrective feedback was a passive activity on behalf of students. Conversely, a combination of traditional teacher driven feedback, peer review and technology are all significant variables that help students improve their written work.

As an analysis of students’ writings 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 critical criteria for assessing their writing.

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. Interestingly, they stated that the process helped them to find their own mistakes. Looking at the results specifically, 56% found the peer editing useful explaining that they felt improved their writing by increasing their awareness of spelling and syntax. As for the apps themselves, only 46% found Notability helpful in the editing process. Many expressed their dislike of this app as opposed to their comfort with Edmodo and Powtoon. Edmodo was the favorite of the three chosen apps with 40% of the students indicating they enjoyed using it especially because it allowed them to read each other’s work and to comment and give feedback. The peer discussion platform was a major motivator in their re-writing process. 67% said they benefited the most from allowing their classmates to read their work and comment on it. Edmodo, 33% found the Powtoon videos to be useful as a reference as well as quite attractive. Only 56% were in favor of using Notability for the recording and editing.

Regarding their confidence at editing their own writing after going through the training for this project, 60% answered they felt quite confident when it came to editing their own writing as well as content. They explained that the training provided allowed for noticing certain errors, which they hadn’t been aware of earlier. When it comes to their least favorite experiences during this process, 60% said correcting, 30% disliked reworking their essays, and 10% did not enjoy explaining and discussing the errors with their classmates. There was a general view that more preparation was necessary before actually editing the essays.
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 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 ‘walk-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 their 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 length in class. Since all students were familiar with the requirements of this type of essay, the quality of their work was surely affected, which in turn influenced the self and peer-editing processes.

Finally, this research project has helped to highlight some of the possibilities of using technology to help students review their writing using collaborative and authentic methods. Conversely, it indicates that whilst students want functional, efficient applications they also require teacher input and support in using these. Nevertheless, there were definite improvements in terms of the quality of their writing.

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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