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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 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 re framing 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.
Simultaneously, the approach provides a structure for shifting traditional writing activities of the classroom from an individual to a collaborative process. Teachers are more representative of 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).

The digital tools utilized 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 participating female students at Zayed University, Dubai, were enrolled in a program requiring 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 female students 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 Arab 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 and relevant reading. These essays served as the context for the current research.

The first group consisted of pre-intermediate level English learners with a current IELTS Band 3 – 5. 17 students took part in the process and were interviewed in both Arabic and English. The second group involved 15 students who received 20 contact hours of core English per week. The students were all in the same class or 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 has shown a marked increase in participation and advancement in educational attainment and training. However, there are still many barriers to female education in the UAE, particularly in terms of access, affordability, and quality of education. Despite these challenges, there has been significant progress in recent years, and the government has placed a strong emphasis on increasing female participation in education.

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 technological strategies, as well as an increase in 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 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 directed corrective input is arguably one-way and whilst highlighting learners’ errors, the process of teaching and learning is one-sided and students and does not necessarily develop their autonomous output.

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

RQ1. Are effective apps that allow teachers to flip the learning environment and provide materials and videos offering careful cues and models in guiding students’ peer and self-editing through structure, content and language? How have such apps been adapted to include voice commentaries and stickies in engaging students in the peer and self-editing process?

RQ2. 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?

RQ3. What are the uses of a range of apps, the research was not app specific but rather concerned with the processes of how mobile technology could be harnessed to structure a more purposeful and process based approach to writing?

Hypothesis
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METHODOLOGY
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 technological tools. Therefore, the role of technology (Kalin, 2012, p.2). This is achievable through the use of “multiliteracies of technology – functional, critical, and rhetorical” (p.2). What teachers must keep in mind is that educators are not just users, but actual “producers of content” (p.2).

To achieve this, teachers must educate their students in the “multiliterracies 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 producing processes, and in many cases, encourages learning between students and teachers.” The participants are female students at Zayed University, Dubai. 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 technological strategies, as well as an increase in the students’ academic writing was anticipated due to the socially collective practice of peer editing, forum discussions and authentic publication opportunities.
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 evaluated for the final stages of the process. The Triple 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 discrete 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 valued the process of being involved with a range of apps to carry out a specific editing, reviewing, drafting and publishing activities.

In the second 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 and then having their writing published on Edmodo for discussion and then allowing students to upload their own edited work. A detailed description of the process can be found in the following steps:

Flip 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 with a range of video animations. 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 Powtoon videos included 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 screen content only. The videos were launched in the class and students were asked to write their first drafts using Microsoft Word.

Flip 2: The Notability Process

The second flip 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 of particular interest in this project as the majority of students did not have access to this app in their college. Notability allows for the annotation of PDFs using highlighters, text notes, sticky notes and voice notes. Students were introduced to the app during a brief presentation and were then asked to use the app to provide feedback on each other’s classmates’ essays. This allows the students to view their partner’s essays in PDF format as email attachments. They reviewed each other’s essays and gave recorded verbal feedback and written comments as well.

In terms of collaborative writing opportunities, the Triple Flip process, group codes can be assigned to individual classes or groups so that online activity is secure. Assignments can be issued to the whole group and can then be shared with either the teacher or the whole group.

Written work can be published on Edmodo throughout the varied stages of the drafting process. Features for annotating text allow collaborative amendments, comments and feedback so that students can collaborate and remain engaged with each other’s texts. Interactions, written comments and voice notes are recorded and can be shared with each other.

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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 practice on how to edit, as they were not confident in their abilities as the writing process could be improved by offering more training 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.

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 ‘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 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 supersed 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 an important participant in the teaching and learning cycle. The students’ perceptions of managing the peer and self-editing process. What are the practicalities of its facilitation; benefits and limitations of the process?

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