PUTTING PEDAGOGICAL WRITING THEORIES INTO PRACTICE
USING ONLINE COLLABORATIVE TOOLS AND COMPUTER-
MEDIATED COMMUNICATION

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Abstract
This presentation will take the audience on a journey through recent pedagogical writing theories and show how they can be implemented and enhanced by modern technology. We start with how “Process writing” developed into “Post Process” writing by placing more emphasis on the social aspect, viewing writing as a social construct rather than an individual one. We then move onto genre-based pedagogy specifically the stage known as “Joint construction”. Modern Technology can not only facilitate these developments but also redefine and drive them by allowing students to collaborate more easily with each other and with their tutor. Using online writing tools such as “Gogledocs” or adapting office management systems like “Quip”, students can work on the same writing task and use text to chat with each other and their tutor about the content, organization and language they need to complete the task. The presentation will show how technology can be used to open new channels of communication between the students and the tutor. This will be demonstrated by a study that examined the effects computer-mediated communication had on the academic writing skills of a group of intermediate female Arabic students studying Academic English in a Middle Eastern university. The students used a collaborative writing tool called “Quip” to write a series of essays. This tool allowed the tutor to support the students’ writing throughout the process. The support was in the form of synchronous and asynchronous text-based chat and direct corrective feedback which meant the tutor could provide support to the students when they were outside the classroom. A discourse analysis of the dialogic chat reveals how it was used by the students and the tutor. The tutor acted as a “participant observer” to record his thoughts and the perceptions of the students during the course. In addition, surveys were given at the start and end of the course to gain further insights into the students’ opinions. Although research has been undertaken into the effect of synchronous or asynchronous computer-mediated communication before, there has been little looking at the effects of them in combination. Furthermore, much of the prior research has originated in the Far East and there has been little study of Arabic learners. Results showed that many students exploited the opportunity to engage in dialogic interaction via text and benefited more from the support that the tutor was able to provide than from peer support. The students seemed to spend an increased time editing and improving their essays as they responded to feedback both in the form of dialogic interaction and more specific focused feedback from the tutor. The use of technology allowed the tutor to be part of the process of writing from the early stages of the task and to “co-construct” the essay with the students thus changing the dynamic between the tutor and the students and the process of writing itself. This study provides a useful insight into how technology can be used to develop and redefine traditional teaching techniques and can be an important tool for implementing the new approach of joint construction in genre-based pedagogy.

Keywords: process writing, post process, genre-based pedagogy, collaborative writing, technology.

1 INTRODUCTION
Writing pedagogies are constantly changing and the development of new technology is having a profound effect on the way we write and teach writing. This article will take the reader on a brief journey through some of the different writing pedagogies and then examine how their main features are represented in the online collaborative writing tools that are available. Finally, it will consider the new pedagogical developments that are emerging from the use of technology in education.

2 PROCESS WRITING AND FEEDBACK
I would like to begin with a brief analysis of the development of recent writing pedagogies. We should start with the idea of Process Writing which broke the act of writing down into a clear process –
planning, writing, first draft, tutor feedback, second draft and final submission. This process allowed the student to improve their writing by responding to feedback suggested by the teacher. There has been much discussion about the most effective type of feedback. Ellis [1] identified various types of feedback including direct feedback, where the teacher provides the correct form, and indirect feedback, where the error is highlighted but not corrected. Research [2] suggests that “metalinguistic indirect corrective feedback”, where the tutor highlights the error and indicates the type using a metalanguage such as “ww” for “wrong word”, can be more effective than direct feedback as it encourages the students to think for themselves. By allowing for error correction and editing of the written task, process writing blended a formative approach with a summative approach and allowed the student to, hopefully, learn from his/her mistakes.

3 “POST-PROCESS THEORY” AND SOCIO-CULTURAL THEORY

However, Process Writing faced criticism by post-process theorists for being too prescriptive and creating a “Theory of writing” or a “series of generalizations…that supposedly hold true most of the time” [3]. They also argued that it did not take into account the social nature of writing. The socio-cultural approach, as described by Vygotsky [4], viewed learning as a social construct that happens first on the interpersonal (social) level and then on the intrapersonal (individual) level. From this, it can be argued that students will learn more effectively from studying collaboratively rather than independently. This describes the idea of Mediation in socio-cultural theory. The other important concept is the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). This refers to the difference between what a student can learn independently and what they can learn with the help of a more competent other. This can clearly refer to the support provided by the teacher. Although this happens in most traditional forms of teaching including Process Writing, it could be argued that any practice that put more emphasis on the communicative interaction between the teacher and the student would be beneficial to the student.

A key proponent of “Post Process” theory, Thomas Kent, called for a new relationship between the teacher and the student where the teacher would “actively collaborate with their students” [6]. Breuch argues that this creates a “dialogic pedagogy” requiring “two-way rather than one-way communication” where “teachers move away from a transmission model of education and towards a transformative model that includes active participation from both teachers and students as collaborators” [7].

4 GENRE-BASED PEDAGOGY

This idea of “actively collaborating” or co-constructing the text with the students is also reflected in the new genre-based pedagogy approach. This develops a teacher/learning cycle which starts with the tutor deconstructing a particular genre for the students. The second stage is “joint construction” where the teacher constructs an example of the genre with the students. The final stage is independent construction where the students work on a task on their own. But this still requires various levels of feedback which resemble the process writing approach with a first draft and final draft. Hyland argues that the theory behind this approach also derives from Vygotsky and the “interactive collaboration between the teacher and the student” [8]. In this case, the teacher provides explicit support to the student based on the specific genre. The teacher is engaged in “joint construction” with the student and is “actively collaborating” but arguably plays a more “authoritative role” [8] than in Kent’s pedagogy. Indeed, Kent has been criticized for being too vague about the how to implement “post process” theory and some academics, such as Dobrin, have suggested that it should remain a theory [9]. Perhaps genre-based pedagogy can be viewed as a practical form of “post process theory”.

5 COMMON ELEMENTS

From an examination of the development of writing pedagogy, we can see several common issues emerging. The communication between the tutor and the students is clearly a vital element of the writing process in terms of the ZPD. The teacher should be able to “actively collaborate” and jointly construct the text with the students but also needs to be able to give appropriate feedback. The students also need to be able to communicate effectively with each other as a form of mediation to discuss their ideas and provide peer support. This is especially important when learning a second
language - if the mediation takes place in that second language, then the students are using the L2 for a genuine communicative purpose.

6 THE ROLE OF TECHNOLOGY

For technology to support these pedagogical issues it therefore needs to provide new and effective methods of communication between the tutor and the students and between the students themselves. There are online collaborative writing tools that allow a number of people to work on the same document from different locations and at different times. Some have a “chatbox” where collaborators can text chat both synchronously and asynchronously about the shared document. By providing a tool that allows students to collaborate effectively on a shared text while not all having to be present in the same place and at the same time, clearly provides opportunities for effective mediation. It also allows the tutor to be more involved in the process of writing. As one of the collaborators on the document, the tutor can monitor the students’ work, and also be part of their group and collaborate with them to construct the text. The tutor can “actively collaborate” and co-construct the text with the students. This is clearly fulfilling the demands of the post-process theorists and thus providing a way for the theory to become practice.

There are several online tools that provide opportunities for collaborative writing such as “GoogleDocs”, “Word Online”, “Quip”, “Zoho”, “Ethernet”. They all have different features, for example “Zoho” now has a grammar and spell checker called “Zia” which can be of great help to language learners. However, it could be argued that this detracts from their actual learning by doing the work for them. “Word Online” allows for synchronous Skype conversation which opens another channel of communication. For the research described in this article, “Quip” was chosen as it seemed to be very user-friendly particularly the “chatbox” which had a more informal style than “Googledocs” and “Word Online”. Indeed, the chatbox in “Quip” allows the use of emojis which it was thought might appeal to the students as it resembles the kind of chat they are used to on their mobile phones.

7 RESEARCH USING “QUIP”

Research was conducted into the use of “Quip” as a collaborative writing tool with a group of twenty-two female students from a university in the Middle East. The analysis reveals some of the pedagogic features that an online writing tool can provide. Working in groups of three or four, the students produced six different academic written tasks over the course of a semester. These tasks were completed in “Quip” which allowed the tutor to co-construct the text with the students from the start of the writing process.

![Figure 1. "Quip" - a collaborative writing tool showing corrective feedback and collaborative dialogue with LRE’s](2281)
The tutor could engage in computer-mediated communication in the form of text chat or “collaborative dialogue” [10] with the students both synchronously and asynchronously about content, structure, lexis or grammar (See Fig.1). In addition, more focused indirect (metalinguistic) corrective feedback (CF) could be provided in the form of highlights on the text indicating types of linguistic errors. Once errors had been fixed, they were deleted and the tutor could give more feedback. The amount of student engagement with each other and with the tutor was calculated by analyzing the text chat or collaborative dialogue in the form of Language-related episodes. An LRE is defined as “any part of a dialogue where students talk about the language they are producing, question their language use or self-correct their language production” [11]. The amount of student exposure to highlighted corrective feedback (CF) was also calculated. The totals of both these sets of data were then compared with students’ individual performances in three different paper based written tasks – an entry task, a midterm and final exam. The results showed that students who engaged more with the tutor in the form of chat in the “chatbox” and were exposed to more instances of metalinguistic corrective feedback not only scored higher in the final exams but also improved their grades more than the other students throughout the course. These quantitative results suggested that the use of Quip as a collaborative writing tool had a positive influence on the students’ ability to write an academic essay in a second language. This was reinforced by the quantitative data, such as participant observation, which included informal interviews with the students. Students said that “chatbox means I get more help from my teacher” and they liked that “the teacher highlights mistakes and we correct them many times to have a high mark”. They enjoyed using emojis: “We can use smiling faces, hands clap, cry, same as texting. Nowadays all students use chat to talk to friends”.

The research concluded that the chatbox effectively meant the tutor could co-construct the text with the students thus opening an effective new channel of communication between the tutor and the students [12]. In addition, the use of mobile technology meant that the students received frequent notifications that edits or comments had been made to their essay and this meant they checked and edited it more often. Thus some students spent considerably more time working on their essay than they would have done if they had not been using a mobile online collaborative tool.

8 CONCLUSIONS

We can see that in this case, Quip fulfilled many of the pedagogic requirements that we identified earlier: it facilitated effective communication between the tutor and the students and between the students themselves; the communication between the tutor and the students was particularly effective as it allowed for different types of communication including synchronous, asynchronous and more focused metalinguistic feedback. Technology clearly fulfilled the demands set by a post process writing theory that places more emphasis on the social aspect of writing. The tutor clearly actively collaborated with the students throughout the writing process.

It also showed how technology itself can have a positive effect on writing pedagogy. The use of mobile technology – having the app on their phones – meant that some of the students were more engaged in the task and did more work than they would normally do. This, in turn, improved their academic writing and English language skills. It demonstrated how technology changed the essential components of the process writing approach and made it faster and more effective.

Having seen the technology in action, it is possible to see how it could be developed further to make an even more effective writing tool. For example, being able to easily change who has access to each document would be a useful pedagogical exercise. The students would then be able to review the work of another group. Indeed, the groups could be changed so different students could work on different documents. This could be facilitated by a page of classroom management that could be administered by the tutor. This may improve the peer collaboration that was not deemed so successful in the Quip research. Some of the existing tools have links to dictionaries and a thesaurus but this could be developed to providing content specific to the course itself, such as source materials or information pages added by the tutor. There could be methods of communication including recorded messages or live oral chat. An initial stage that creates the groups and allows for changes and a post stage that could collate and highlight common errors and record grades could develop the tool into an effective classroom application.
9 FUTURE IMPLICATIONS

While there are many websites and apps that facilitate effective collaboration for writing between tutors and students, there does not seem to be one designed for education that has all of the pedagogical features so far identified. Most of the collaborative tools are designed for business models as a form of office management. Quip, for example, is an office management system which offers many features that are not needed as a classroom tool. What is needed is an analysis of all the collaborative writing tools on the internet, identifying the most useful features and comparing these to the most important pedagogical needs. Then a new writing tool should be designed that combines all these features and adds the new ones that have been suggested such as classroom management features, links to source material and more forms of communication. The resulting tool should be multi-platform for use on mobile phones as well as computers and could be generic so it could be used in every educational establishment for any task that involved writing and collaborative work.

REFERENCES