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The enhancement of student performance at Fort Hare University through the Language and Writing Advancement Program

A B S T R A C T This paper seeks to identify and measure the development of the students' proficiency in academic writing. It shows how one can eat and finish the whole elephant in the writing context by taking few pieces at a time in terms of drafts under the auspices of highly trained language and writing consultants. A group of students who had been submitting their work to the language and writing consultants was monitored and their writing challenges recorded over time. An analysis of their growth was made to evaluate the impact of the program on the beneficiaries. Some of the hallmarks of this program that were seen to be getting the students to meaningfully engage with academic discourse are the nature of feedback given to students, consultation processes and the inculcation of the culture of active learning. Language and Writing Advancement Program (LWAP) is one of the programs offered at Fort Hare's Teaching and Learning Centre. It forms part of the peer assisted student services (PASS) programs. PASS offers an integrated approach to learning as it covers a number of learning advancement programs namely supplemental instruction (SI), LWAP, writing centre, basic tutor training program, credit-bearing certificate in the facilitation of learning, academic orientation, placement and access testing and academic consultations.

Keywords: Language and Writing Advancement Program; language and writing consultants; academic writing; feedback; active learning.

1. Background and Introduction

The struggle to cope with academic discourse is a serious concern for many university students in South Africa. This has been exacerbated by the fact that many universities have had to increase their student intake because of the need for more funding as the funding formula for higher education institutions (HEIs) is also based on the number of students enrolled. There is also an increased demand in society for more skilled people/graduates which then increases the need for higher education. The secondary education system has unfortunately not been able to meet the higher education demand in terms of the volume and quality of matriculants. This has led to the admission of many under prepared students and consequently an increase in demand for academic support programmes.

The demand for academic support programs is exacerbated by the fact that writing for academic purpose is quite a challenge for students yet writing is the most common medium of communication used by students to express their ideas to their lecturers. Bartholomew (1995:273) emphasises the difficulty students face at university and notes that:

> Every time a student sits down to write for us, he has to invent the university for the occasion. He has to invent the university by assembling and mimicking its language, finding some compromise between idiosyncrasy, a personal history, the requirements of the convention and the history of the discipline. He has to learn to speak our language, to speak as we do, to try on the peculiar ways of knowing, selecting, evaluating, reporting, concluding, and arguing that define the discourse of the community.

In a research Twalo (1997) conducted at Rhodes University on 'Process Writing in a Multilingual Setting', he discovered that under-preparedness in terms of university academic discourse was also a problem for students who had done well in matric and were from privileged academic backgrounds. This then means that the problem is much bigger for the senate discretionary exemption (SDE) students. These are students admitted at university despite the fact that they did not obtain the matriculation exemption which is the normal requirement for university admission to study a bachelor's degree. This under-preparedness has resulted in many students' progression from school to university not being a smooth one as students encounter challenges socially and academically. Sadly many universities do not have adequate mechanisms in place to address their students' under-preparedness.

At Fort Hare University, the insufficiency of the academic support programs is, *inter alia*, manifested by the low throughput rate it has. According to the 2006 stats[1], 22.81% students completed a three year qualification within the required duration and 34.02% took two years longer to complete; 28.37% completed a four year qualification within the required duration and 34.01% took two years longer to complete. There are a number of factors that are responsible for this low throughput rate like the fact that most Fort Hare students are second language English speakers, the foundation laid in secondary education does not enable them to effectively cope with higher education demands, their ability to communicate their ideas well in writing and verbally is not strong enough to enable them to make strong arguments when writing assignments and so on.

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[1]   Bally, 2007

Furthermore, the widening of access to HEIs which exacerbated the problem of big classes resulted in some lecturers having to find coping mechanisms. There is, for instance, continued reduction of writing intensive courses and replacement with multiple choice formats to reduce marking load. At times, they also require students to do group assignments so as to have a manageable number of scripts to work through. These have their advantages and disadvantages and one disadvantage related to this study is that they fall short in terms of giving the students a fair chance to practise writing. This has serious implications as writing is not learnt by just reading about it but by practising it.

The University of Fort Hare's Teaching and Learning Centre has thus come up with a number of programs to support the students and improve their academic performance. The LWAP was then established to help the students with their assignments, proposals and research reports. It is one of the academic support programs offered at the University of Fort Hare by the Teaching and Learning Centre's (TLC's) Learning Advancement Unit (LAU) to help students cope with academic discourse.

Given this background, this paper then seeks to question some of the assumptions upon which some of the teachings of academic language and writing are based. It probes the efficacy of the methods used for teaching academic language and writing. The effectiveness of the assessment feedback in terms of enhancing the academic literacy of the students is also discussed. An effective way of giving feedback which is used in the Language and Writing Advancement Program (LWAP) is expounded and recommended as an alternative. This paper also explains what LWAP is, why and how it is run. The impact measurement made was to ascertain the value of the program to students and verify if it works or not. It thus responded to the question 'How do we know the program works?' The peer collaborative method is shown to be a good alternative in terms of assisting the academic staff in handling big student numbers and helping them to learn in a comfortable environment.

2. Language and Writing Advancement Program

The language and writing advancement program is one of the programs offered within the framework of the Peer Assisted Student Services (PASS). The concept of PASS captures the essence of the modus operandi for all the programs offered under it, as the peer collaborative learning culture is the hallmark that characterises all the programs offered in LAU. Some of the programs offered in the integrated learning model of PASS include the Writing Centre which is where LWAP services are offered and administered, Supplemental Instruction (SI) which mainly focuses on helping the students understand the subject content and the Certificate in the Facilitation of Learning (CFL) which is aimed at training SI leaders, tutors and language and writing consultants (LWCs).

The LWCs are recruited from the five faculties we have: Law, Science and Agriculture, Social Science and Humanities, Management and Commerce as well as Education. The rationale is that since academic discourse is discipline specific, the consultants should then be highly competent in their respective disciplines and also be well versed with the applicable academic writing conventions. The criteria for selection is that the applicant must: (1) be a senior student (under grad or post grad); (2) be a high performer academically; (3) be recommended

by the lecturer and head of department; (4) perform well during interviews and training and (5) be willing to undergo training and fulfil all its requirements. The training they receive is offered in the form of the CFL. This is worth 20 credits and is offered at national qualifications framework (NQF) level 6. The credits are awarded at the completion of 200 notional hours of learning including contact time, self study and assessment. The assessment is based on the building of a competent portfolio of evidence. The training includes 8 shared learning sessions (SLS) and 4 portfolio building workshops. The learning outcomes are to: (1) Prepare the learners and learning environment; (2) Create communication and support strategies within groups; (3) Relate new knowledge to prior learning; (4) Scope the intended learning intervention; (5) Implement the learning strategy; (6) Consolidate the learning; (7) Evaluate the learning process and (8) Maintain an effective and efficient administrative system. The portfolio building workshops are to train and support the LWCs on building their portfolios. The portfolios are then formatively assessed quarterly and summative assessment is done in the fourth quarter which then determines who is eligible for the certificate.

Some of the quality assurance mechanisms built within the system are observations. The LWCs are supposed to be observed at least once a term by a peer and a supervisor, thus there should be a total of 8 observations done on each LWC annually. They are supposed to include the observation feedbacks in their portfolios and show how their practice has developed as a result of the feedback from the observers. They are also encouraged to use the four lenses or angles suggested by Brookfield (1995) to view their facilitation practice namely: yourself, peers, students and literature. They then include these in their portfolios to show the alignment or non alignment of their practices to various perspectives. All these systems as well as their checks and balances ensure that the LWCs are supported and developed in being better facilitators of learning.

Most of them have admitted that the training plays an important role in ensuring that they do not just have good knowledge of the subjects but they are also good at passing the subject knowledge to others as well. In assisting students, they also draw from their discourse insight, knowledge and experience with the subject. This helps in terms of raising relevant and effective questions in order to get the students to focus on central issues in relation to the question they address. They need to help the students to problematise and address issues thus giving their own voices a space. When they respond to an assignment, they give priority to higher order concerns (ability to evaluate, synthesize, critique and be logical) and lower order concerns (spelling, grammar and punctuation) are addressed secondarily.

Henning *et al* (2005:4) suggest that in answering assignment questions, students should reformulate the question in their own words. They should also 'problematise' the topic, or reformulate it as an issue or problem to be solved" (*Ibid*). This means generating questions to help clarify the different perspectives from which the question could be approached and eventually selecting a specific, meaningful perspective from which the students can adopt a stance. Since academic writing is mostly persuasive or argumentative in nature, the writer explores and presents ideas to get the audience to "attend to what you have to say even if they do not necessarily agree with you" (p. 5).

Haitt and Rooke. (2002:71) assert that "At the heart of all good writing is having something you want to write about". This then requires the students to problematise the assignments given to them by the lecturer. When the LWCs assist them in doing this, they raise questions around:

1. the assumptions made by the author(s); 2. research instruments used by author(s); 3. the range of differences and agreements in perspectives by author(s) in the same field; 4. levels of satisfaction of the substantiation made by the author(s), that is, questioning if the reasons given are adequate evidence for the stance chosen; 5. source and reliability of evidence; 6. the advantages and disadvantages of the position and for whom; 7. the quality of the argument (too narrow or too broad) and 8. biases.

Problematising or raising issues around the essay is just one of the tools that are helpful in getting the students to look critically at their own world. In this way they do not write assignments for assignment sake but for the development of the students cognitively, academically, socially and otherwise. Freire's (1968:13) conviction is:

> that every human being, no matter how 'ignorant' or submerged in the 'culture of silence' he may be, is capable of looking critically at his world in a dialogical encounter with others. Provided with the proper tools for such encounter, he can gradually perceive his personal and social reality as well as the contradictions in it, become conscious of his own perception of that reality, and deal critically with it.

Henning *et al* (2005: xv) argue that "Writing is an integral part of the research process". They argue that the writing process has multiple integrated steps like gathering information, reading, data arrangement to form a case, incorporation of evidence to substantiate the case and consequently drawing conclusion(s). They note that academic writing is not just about the accumulation of information and patching it on a research paper but an advancement of "a particular point of view (thesis) in response to the research" (p. 5). Race[2] avers that successful learning can only take place where there is motivation of the learner, feedback on how the learning is going and opportunity to make sense of what is learned.

The three points raised by Race cover some of the duties discharged by the LWCs. When they respond to students' writing, they point out areas of improvement as well as areas of excellence so as to encourage the students while getting them to improve their writing. They are given a forty-eight hour turn-around time for responding to assignments. After responding in writing, if there is a need, the consultants organise consultations with students whose language and writing areas of improvement are significant. The students also take initiatives to make consultation bookings to seek more clarity about their language and writing challenges. At the writing centre, there is always a facilitator on duty to: (1) make bookings for students who wish to have a consultation; (2) receive assignments and give them to the relevant LWC; (3) return assignments with LWCs responses to students; (4) assist students who are doing internet research and (5) monitor the venue.

The following diagram and subsequent discussion shows the writing cycle employed in LWAP.

2.1 Writing workshops

Writing workshops are conducted for all the students in a particular course. They are run by the LWCs in collaboration with the PASS Coordinator. When lecturers give the students

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2   In Martin H Murray 1999 who took the idea from Brown and Smith, 1996.

Figure 1: The writing cycle employed in LWAP.
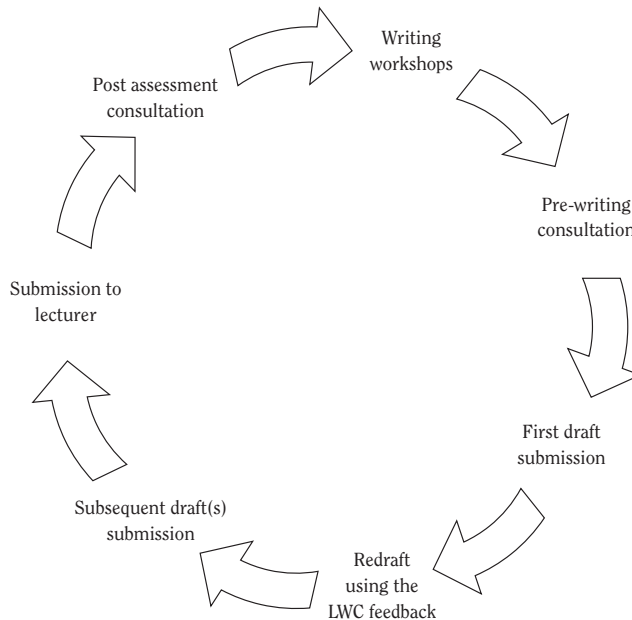
assignments, they also request the LAU to run a writing workshop preparing the students for the assignment. The workshops are another way in which the stakeholders – lecturers, students and academic support staff – collaborate to address writing challenges.

The workshops cover the writing principles for the discipline and guide students towards academically accepted writing practices. They also serve as a marketing platform to make students aware of the services offered in LAU like the fact that they can submit their drafts and that they can come for consultations at any stage of the writing process.

2.2 Consultations

The purpose for the consultations is to listen to students' challenge(s) and collectively find appropriate solution(s) on issues related to language and writing. The LWC would first have to find out the gap between what the student knows and what s/he should know so s/he may pitch appropriately.

Prewriting consultation helps the students to brainstorm and plan the writing piece. Post assessment submission helps to explain, for instance, to a student who got 99% how to get the remaining 1% using the lecturer's feedback which explains where the 1% is. The process of consultations and drafts offers the LWCs a chance to observe the students' development of writing skills. Since the students receive guidance and encouragement, their self esteem and confidence in writing gets enhanced. The LWCs act as soundboards to which students can throw in their ideas and get developmental feedback. The LWCs offer a supportive and constructively critical audience for the students' writing. This then is a safe environment for the students to apply the writing theory they had learnt and reflect on their own writing.

The advantage of working in a well managed collaborative setting allays the fears students have about the writing process.

The one-to-one consultations help the students to discuss their writing challenges with trained LWCs in an atmosphere of peer collaborative learning. "The collaborative nature of the work means that [students] can learn about writing from each other: trying things out, being reassured their ideas work and borrowing ideas from each other to extend their own skills" (Haitt and Rooke, 2002:76). The value of this service in improving academic writing abilities lies in the students' participation in the learning process as the LWCs don't solve the problems for the students. Instead, they facilitate the learning process by finding out from the students what they understand / do not understand and guide them towards acceptable academic practices. This is based on the notion that it is not teaching but learning that should be at the core of learning and teaching activities.

The fact that students know that there is a trained consultant who is always dedicated towards interacting with them about their own writing at any phase of the writing process is quite a relief. Students are encouraged to visit the Writing Centre for pre writing consultations, during the drafting and redrafting stages and for post assessment consultations.

Our consultations are based on the desire to create independent learners and thinkers. We emphasize the need for constant participation in the learning process. Benjamin Franklin (2007) aptly captures our philosophy in this regard:

> Tell me and I forget,
>
> Show me and I remember,
>
> Involve me and I understand.

We thus seek to develop the students' confidence in academic writing and get them to grasp the contours of academic discourse. Hence, we provide a developmental service which seeks to create a breed of students who work independently but collaboratively so that they may tap on one another's strengths for the achievement of the common goal which is learning. This is the kind of support and environment that enhances the empowerment of the students so that they may not be dependent on the lecturer or the LWC. When they have developed their skills and gained confidence, they then competently do most of their tasks with less uncertainty about the writing requirements. Lao Tzu's (2007) conviction about dependence nicely summarises our philosophy for this practice:

> Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day;
>
> Teach him how to fish and you feed him for a lifetime.

LWAP empowers the students to navigate their own way in academic discourse through genuinely collaborating with peers in an effort to get them to 'fish' for themselves in the academic writing context. The other advantage of this peer collaborative learning is that it is devoid of the institutionalised power which lecturers have over their students. There is a traditional tension in terms of the roles of the teacher as a coach and a judge in the classroom. "The coach nurtures the individual and tries to develop that individual's potential; the judge assesses that

individual's work in relation to 'an obligation to knowledge and society (Elbow, 1983: 327)[3]'". While Elbow thinks that this conflict in roles cannot be resolved, we have mitigated its effects through the establishment of the peer collaborative system. The LWCs do not wear the judges' hats as they do not assess the students' work but simply make recommendations on what they know to be good practice. It is the student's responsibility to decide to take the advice or not. This also helps in terms of keeping ownership of the assignment with the student, as they need to own and identify with the process and product of their own writing so as to stay intrinsically motivated. Consequently, LWAP teaches academic writing to students in a way that involves them in the process of acquiring new ideas so that they can maintain their sense of belonging to the learning process.

Gedalof (1998)[4] makes three points which exemplify the benefits of peer collaboration and intrinsic motivation:

1. A good teacher will motivate and teach students how to learn, rather than simply provide good notes or a body of facts.
2. Teaching students that they can learn from one another is more valuable than teaching them directly.
3. Students who study and work together in a well-constructed, cooperative learning environment learn more than those who do not.

The peer collaborative model also counters the effects of the traditional teacher-student relationship. Freire's (1968:57) analysis of the teacher-student relationship is that it "involves a narrating Subject (the teacher) and patient, listening objects (the students). The contents, whether values or empirical dimensions of reality, tend in the process of being narrated to become lifeless and petrified".

The active learning approach used in LWAP counters the objectification of the students Freire alludes to. In LWAP the services are free and voluntary. Since the students take responsibility for their learning, they seek help for the writing challenges they have thus being accountable for their academic performance. The LWAP approach enhances the sense of purpose and pleasure students find by expressing themselves through writing. It also attempts to stimulate the desire to engage in writing activities with a positive attitude, which seeks to find joy, meaning, challenge, pleasure, interest, fulfilment and sense of achievement in the exercise.

Lack of competence in using academic writing and consequent frustrations sometimes cause students to dislike the subject and have a negative attitude towards it. The attachment of marks to assignments, for instance, encourages or discourages students and those whose desire, passion, interest and will is not yet developed tend to be easily discouraged by low marks. Such an environment is a fertile ground for the development of a negative attitude towards the course.

LWAP seeks to get the students to look beyond marks and try to find value, meaning and purpose in writing and this helps them in terms of the choices they make about writing and

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[3] In Bullock and Trimbur (1991: 190)

[4] In Martin H Murray (1999: 160)

in writing. McCrimmon (1976) calls writing an act of continual choice making. The more students get acculturated into academic discourse, the more often they will make appropriate choices. Since the students need to maintain ownership of their writing, the LWCs often advise them to decide what to accept or reject from what they are suggesting. They, however, need to motivate for their choices so that they may sharpen their skills of communicating their ideas effectively in writing and/or verbally.

In addition to sharpening their communication skills, they also sharpen their listening skills as well. They do this through explaining the task to the LWC, say what they need help with, explain what they have written and the reasoning behind it and also listen to the LWC's contribution. This encourages critical thinking as they would have to defend their positions and accept or reject new ideas from the LWC. Such defence or motivation for acceptance of an idea requires effective communication.

Bullock and Trimbur (1991: 180) aptly capture the need for learners to communicate effectively thus:

> Learners construct knowledge for themselves. Learning is not something that happens to learners, but something they make happen to and for themselves with the help of others. So, the more students write to themselves and talk to one another about what they are trying to learn, the more they own and take responsibility for their own education. And the less, by implication, they depend on the teacher to tell them what to think and know.

Freire (1968: 64) observed the link between thinking and communication and suggested that "Authentic thinking, thinking that is concerned about reality, does not take place in ivory tower isolation, but only in communication". When communication of ideas is poor, authentic thinking also gets stifled. It is for this reason that in LWAP we serve as catalysts for students' thinking and communication (written and verbal) so that they maintain ownership of their written work and also feel that the product is the 'fruit of their labour'.

2.3 Drafts and feedback

Single and multiple draft assignments were analysed to identify and measure the development of students' proficiency in academic writing. For the purpose of this paper, three students' work was selected on the basis of the different areas of development and writing practice which they exhibit as well as the different levels of the LWC feedback impact which ranged from no impact to significant impact. The aim was to distinguish the different kinds of feedback given and assess the potential impact they would have on the students.

Student 1 (Shows the results of ineffective feedback and good recommendations)

Draft 1	Draft 2
The student wrote "Also bring about more society built on equality, equity, social justice and democracy". LWC response "Restructure".	The student wrote "Also bring about more society built on equality, equity, social justice and democracy". LWC response "Expression".
3 pages	8 pages as a result of the LWCs recommendation to give more details, evidence and examples to clarify the points made.

Student 2 (Shows the results of effective feedback)

Draft 1	Draft 2
Moves straight into discussion without an introduction. LWC Response "Where is the introduction?"	Gives an introduction: (1) Tells what the study is about; (2) Points out what is to be focused on in sequence.
Sources not acknowledged. LWC Response "Which publication is used here?"	Sources acknowledged.
Some language errors. The LWC highlights the errors and discuss them during consultation with the student	Language errors rectified.

Student 3 (Shows the need for as many drafts as required)

Draft 1	Draft 2	Draft 3
Response by LWC 1 "There is need for more research on …"	Response by LWC 2 "a well researched paper".	
Incorrect structure (inappropriate use of headings which impact on the flow of argument). The LWC points out what is wrong with the use of subheadings and suggests an alternative effective use of opening sentences.	Subheadings removed and rearrangement of the argument in such a way that it shows transitions.	
	Areas of improvement – introduction and conclusion (jumps into an argument and ends with no sense of closure). LWC advises on why and how to introduce and conclude an argument.	Introduction – states the purpose of the essay. Notes areas of focus. Delineates sequence of issues to be dealt with. Conclusion – Clear ending with a round up of argument.

Student 3 shows that writing is a process whose length cannot be prescribed as it is determined by the student's needs and challenges as they rise. The natural process of writing is beautifully captured in a self evaluation report of a student called Joanne Pilgrim whom Peter Elbow (1981:6) taught as she avers:

> I've learned how to take more control over my writing while still giving it free reign. … I've learned the value of not expecting a twelve year old child to come out when you're giving birth to a baby; that any writing needs time after its birth so it can change and grow and eventually reach its potential. I've come to realise that you most probably won't find a pearl if you pick up oysters once a year. So I will try and write a lot-a whole lot- and not expect that every piece emerge a gem. I'll learn to put up with (maybe even enjoy) the bad stuff, remembering that the more I do of it, the closer I get to coming out with something good. When I feel that a good idea has emerged, but I don't know where to follow it, I won't feel that it's a lost cause- that its moment has passed. I'll let it sit for a while and then go back to it with renewed energy until I can make something whole out of it, or decide that I've gone as far as I can with it.

This reflection is very helpful in terms of those who either want to get it right the first time or think that the first draft is the final draft. Billie Jean King (2007) the American tennis champion aptly defined the philosophy of redoing things when she said "Champions keep playing until they get it right". One of the key factors that get people to keep trying until they get it right is the feedback they receive from those around them. The role of the feedback from those around us is akin to that of the feedback system used in flights which informs the pilot how far they are from the point of departure, destination, ground and so on. Students need to get this kind of feedback for guidance and reassurance purposes thus enhancing their confidence in academic writing.

Ferreira (1995) reasons that responding to written work is a skill. Like any other skill, this skill also needs to be taught or developed, enhanced and sharpened. This, therefore, means that subject experts are not necessarily respondent experts. Ferreira (*Ibid*) then suggests that increased skill in responding can be brought about through workshops and staff training courses.

Our experience of training LWCs on giving feedback has been a learning experience for us as well. Some of the observations we have made about the styles of responding which did not significantly enhance the academic development of the students include, *inter alia*, concentration on lower order concerns, focus on peripheral issues and language errors made by the LWCs. Some of these factors relate to the choices the LWCs constantly have to make with regard to maintaining a balance in giving feedback like avoiding being too detailed or less detailed, overly negative or overly positive and concentrating on higher order concerns when there are lower order concerns needing attention as well.

Student 1 and student 3 demonstrate the fact that writing is not a product but a process which can be facilitated through feedback. Clearly the feedback received by student 1 has disabled her in as far as to "Restructure" and "Expression" are concerned. This kind of feedback clearly does not guide the student in terms of thinking broadly and critically. For instance, with the "Restructure" feedback, the student is not guided in terms of 'what exactly to restructure?', 'why it should be restructured?' and 'how it should be restructured?'. In light of this, it is then not surprising that in draft 2 the student did not restructure the sentence perhaps she did not see anything amiss with it, thus she needed a kind of feedback that would stretch her ambit of thinking. One can imagine the frustration the student must have had as a result of not making progress in this area of her assignment and being told that she was wrong yet not guided towards awareness of 'what is wrong?', 'why it is wrong?' and 'how it can be corrected?'

Some of the feedback that was given by the LWCs was reader-based (telling the students how the LWCs felt when they read the assignments). One example of this is this response: "Congratulations on your very interesting piece of paper. I learned a lot from reading it. I was especially intrigued by the section relating to outer space". This had to be discouraged as it is more appropriate for fiction than academic discourse. It also does not show the student how to write an academically sound piece of writing, how to improve what is not right and how to sustain what is right.

We encouraged them to use criterion-based feedback as this helps the students to see to what extent their writing measures up with academic conventions in their discipline. We advised them to avoid addressing everything at one go, so as not to overwhelm the students, but

prioritise and maintain focus. The criteria then captured most of the issues for academic writing namely: coherence, cohesion, argument, logic, evidence, paragraphing, structure, sentencing, referencing, language and so on.

Crème and Lea (1997:2) suggest that "The key to becoming a successful writer at university level is understanding what is required and what is involved in the process of completing assignments. Once you have grasped what it is that you are meant to be doing, writing tasks become much more straightforward". It is in such areas that criterion-based feedback proves to be helpful because it provides clear guidance to the respondent as to what to look out for in the writing. It enhances the development of the writer as it shows areas of improvement as well as areas of excellence. It fosters critical thinking and reflection as the questions posed by the LWC require them to get intrapersonal feedback. This is where the reader-based feedback falls short as it's about the subjective experiences of the reader which cannot be taken to represent a general view. When students have a clear idea of the assessment criteria, they can check their assignments themselves thus their sense of independence would be enhanced.

Elbow (1981: 139) suggests that "Revising with feedback is the most powerful way to revise". When one is revising using criteria, revision gets focused as the students would be clear about what is excellent and what needs improvement in their written work. With regard to areas of improvement, they would also know about the aspects of the discourse conventions which still need attention. Hence, Elbow (1981:244) argues that "Criterion-based feedback is more reliable than reader-based feedback". If a respondent says "This paragraph lacks cohesion because you digress from X to Y", the student can verify the respondent's judgement. However, if for the same paragraph the respondent says "This paragraph confused me, as I couldn't tell what exactly you were talking about". Both these paragraphs identify the problem and state what caused it – digression from X to Y (Criterion-based feedback) and unclear discussion (Reader-based feedback). For the purpose of development and not assessment it is advisable not to pass judgement but question a piece of writing. That is, instead of saying "This paragraph lacks cohesion because you digress from X to Y" you might say "Why do you bring in X when you are discussing Y?" This is taking criterion-based feedback beyond a list of do's and don'ts. In addition to enhancing the students' academic writing through the criteria, it helps them to stretch their minds and think critically. This is the questioning criterion-based feedback. The table below shows examples of reader-based feedback, criterion-based feedback and questioning criterion-based feedback.

Reader-based feedback	Criterion-based feedback	Questioning Criterion-based feedback
I felt lost when I got here.	This is irrelevant.	How does this relate to your argument?
I couldn't make sense of your discussion.	This is vague.	What is the effect of X on Y?
I didn't like some of the words you used.	Don't use colloquial language.	Are these words appropriate for formal / academic writing?
I had come across this idea on the preceding pages.	Avoid repetition	Why do you say this again?

I felt like this was not your original idea.	Reference please.	Is this your original idea? If not, shouldn't you acknowledge the sourse?
I thought this needed to be substantiated.	Please give evidence	How do you know that X = Y?

It is evident that since the comments made under the reader-based feedback and criterion-based feedback categories are not self explanatory, the questioning criterion-based feedback helps the student and the respondent to have the same understanding of the 'rules of the game', thus students would have clear guidance about what to do, how to do it and why do it that way. Asking developmental questions encourages the students to work on their assumptions and enhances their passion for learning, finding out more, exploring, arguing, defending or changing their point of view.

Evidence of the efficacy of questioning criterion based feedback by the LWCs is clear in the feedback given to the assignment of student 2. For instance, the question posed to the student "Where is the introduction?" requires the student to think clearly about the concept of introduction so that he may be able identify the introduction from the rest of the assignment. He would have to answer questions like 'What is an introduction?', 'What sets it apart from other parts of the assignment?', 'What purpose does it serve?', 'How long should it be?', 'Where should it be located in the assignment?', 'When should it be included?' and 'How should it be structured?'. These questions would then sharpen the students' understanding of the concept, clarify misconceptions and assumptions and enhance research around it.

The nature of the introduction given in draft 2 shows that the questioning criterion based feedback works as the student in the introduction told the audience what the study is about and later pointed out what is to be focused on in sequence. This feedback clearly had an effect on the student unlike the case of student 1 wherein the LWC used criterion based feedback and told the student to "Restructure" and later told the student "Expression" and the student did not revise the sentence, thus repeated the errors made previously.

3. Conclusion

In conclusion, the paper has shown the need for an effective way of addressing students' writing challenges. It has also shown the inefficacy of some of the ways of teaching academic discourse like the fact that not all feedback is helpful in terms of getting students understand the contours of academic writing. The impact of feedback given to the assignments selected for this paper has shown that it is not any kind of feedback that improves students' academic writing. The questioning criterion-based feedback which engages the students in active learning and critical thinking has been discussed as making significant progress in terms of improving students' understanding of writing conventions. It is shown to be a good vehicle in terms of broadening the students' perspectives and giving them a sense of what is working and what is not in their writing and how to improve it and why it should be improved.

On the basis of the evidence presented, LWAP is clearly playing a crucial role in improving students' academic literacy. The progress made by the selected students is a clear positive response to the question 'How do we know the program works?', as the students showed

improved understanding and development in subsequent drafts. However, the LWCs response which had no impact on the students showed that there is still a room for improvement by the LWCs. This means that the selection, training and supervision of LWCs needs to be improved so as to enhance the quality of feedback that they give to students. This shows, in spite of the credits, the weaknesses of the peer collaborative model. By and large, the model is reputable and effective but it needs to be applied with caution – having proper checks and balances.

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