# WORKING TOGETHER: PLANTING THE SEED
## KIA PIHI AI TE MAHI NGĀTAHI

# Working Together: Planting the Seed
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Christina Gera • EDITOR

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*Proceedings of the 2012 Annual International Conference of the Association of Tertiary Learning Advisors of Aotearoa/New Zealand (ATLAANZ)*

*21 November – 23 November 2012, Hamilton, New Zealand*

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**ATLAANZ**

ASSOCIATION OF
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OF AOTEAROA/NEW ZEALAND

Working together: Planting the seed: Proceedings of the 2012 Annual International Conference of the Association of Tertiary Learning Advisors of Aotearoa/New Zealand (ATLAANZ)

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# Preface and acknowledgements

The articles in this publication underwent a double-blind refereeing process using at least two referees. Statistics relating to the conference and to this publication are included in Appendix 1.

I am extremely grateful to the referees who contributed both their time and their expertise to the process of review. Many of the contributing authors expressed their appreciation of the feedback received throughout the reviewing and editing process.

The referees for this publication were:

| | | |
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| Andrea Haines | Ann Pocock | Caitriona Cameron |
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| Mary Roberts | Dr Sean Sturm | Dr Susan Carter |

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank the contributors, who both presented at the conference, and in addition took the time and dedication to write up their presentation topic.

Christina Gera
Student Learning Services
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# Foreword

The ATLAANZ annual conference in 2012 was held at Wintec in Hamilton. The theme of the conference was *Working together; Planting the Seed*. This theme was well chosen to reflect the reality of working in the professional field of Learning Advising. The theme of working together also reflected very nicely the newly initiated regional hui, which were run in Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch over the mid-year break for the first time. These hui gave learning advisors the opportunity to get together during the year to learn from and lean on each other for support in these challenging times. Traditionally this only happened at the annual conference in November. Not only did the hui offer this additional forum for our members, but for the first time also gave members a regional rather than a national focus.

 Many excellent presentations around the theme of *Working together; Planting the Seed* were given at the conference, and this volume of the proceedings from the conference is a sample of this outstanding work. I would like to thank the contributors, the reviewers, and the editor, Christina Gera, for all the time they have dedicated and the effort they have put into getting these proceedings published. Much of their private time has gone into this work, and it is heartening to see the dedication of our members in doing this work.


Ken Cage
ATLAANZ President
2013

# Editor's introduction

The 2012 ATLAANZ conference theme *Working together: Planting the seed* was chosen to reflect two aspects of working together. First, it reflects the way Learning Advisors work together, both with staff and students, with the aim of building students' academic capability. Second, as mentioned briefly in the preface and acknowledgments, the conference theme also reflected that staff from different tertiary institutes were working together to facilitate a conference. We thank the University of Waikato for assisting us with conference planning in the initial stages and we also thank Massey University, Albany, for working with us throughout the year.

Workshops and presentations at the conference covered a wide range of areas and themes including: students' critical thinking, postgraduate student academic support, international students, students transitioning into tertiary study, and online learning and resources. From the contributions to the proceedings three main themes emerged: tools to assist students with their academic development, students' orientation, and the importance of reflection for Learning Advisors both on our practice on our own academic development.

Janet van Randow outlines the development of the Diagnostic English Language Needs Assessment (DELNA) which was introduced at the Auckland of University as an optional tool that English as Additional Language (EAL) students could use to improve their English. This was later made compulsory for EAL students. Janet draws on students' anonymous online evaluations over 11 years, to present a discussion of their response to DELNA being made a requirement. This article also focuses on the language advisory session and the uptake of advice given during this session.

Barbara Morris outlines the journey undertaken at the Western Institute of Technology at Taranaki (WITT) to explore making available to all students a free open source referencing management system. Zotero was chosen as the most suitable. This article reports on student uptake and response to Zotero.

Lois Burns' article outlines the development of interactive tools designed to assist postgraduate students with their academic writing. One benefit of students using these tools was that the students were more likely to be able to produce writing that was analytical, critical or evaluative as compared to descriptive.

Emma Osborne outlines an incentive by Massey University, Wellington, to include in the new student orientation programme a workshop in which students were encouraged to engage in critical thinking through activity based learning in a lecture setting.

Hanna Craig and Ximena Riquelme outline how an Online Orientation Workshop was developed and trialled at their institute, the Open Polytechnic of New Zealand. Their paper describes the online orientation workshop, its learning outcomes, the design process and the key features of the workshop.

Caroline Malthus explores the purpose of reflective practice for Learning Advisors and considers the usefulness of a range of tools for reflection on one-to-one teaching. Caroline presents a reflective practice checklist and 'wheel of learning advising' which Learning Advisors could use as prompts to review one-to-one sessions. She invites Learning Advisors to take part in further trialling of the reflective practice checklist and 'wheel of learning advising'.

Sean Sturm's article entitled *"Physician, heal thyself": What we can learn from our own writing advice* argues that Learning Advisors (including himself) are often loathe to reflect on their own writing practices. His article, which includes reflection of his own writing practices throughout, provides strategies for Learning Advisors on how to become productive writers.

# The DELNA language advisory session:
## How do students respond?

Janet von Randow [1]
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New Zealand

## Abstract

Over the past two decades, the role of the academic English language advisor in English-medium universities worldwide has become salient, as the numbers of English as an Additional Language (EAL) students seeking out English-medium institutions have grown. In order to make the most of their tertiary studies many of these students need assistance to further develop their language proficiency. For this reason, in 2002, the University of Auckland implemented the post-entry Diagnostic English Language Needs Assessment (DELNA), to identify those most in need of language enrichment and to advise them about the appropriate language courses on campus. Initially the advice was sent by email but, in a further step in 2005, the role of Language Advisor was established, acting on student requests for a personal discussion of their assessment results. This role was premised on a policy of voluntary follow-up by students, based on the philosophy that they should take some responsibility for their own learning needs (Read, 2008). Subsequent analyses of uptake (Read, forthcoming) showed, however, that it was the weaker students in general who bypassed the opportunity to receive guidance. In response, certain faculties and departments introduced a requirement for students not only to access the advice but also to act on it. Recognising the importance of student input in the assessment process (Shohamy, 2001), this paper draws on students' anonymous online evaluations over 11 years, in order to discuss their response to the DELNA requirement, with a particular focus on the language advisory session and the uptake of advice.

## Introduction

The language profile of English-medium universities worldwide began changing in the 1980s, as migration and the recruitment of foreign fee-paying students increased the number of EAL students on their campuses. It quickly became evident that language advice and guidance were going to be imperative if these students were to succeed in their studies, and yet not all institutions were prepared for this. Defining the role of a language advisor was something that universities in the United Kingdom, for example, only began addressing in the 1990s (Mozzon-Mcpherson & Vismans, 2001).

At that time at the University of Auckland, where migration, principally from the Pacific and Asia in the previous two decades, was affecting the language profile, academics had begun to discuss the language issue (Ellis & Hattie, 1999; Gravatt, Richards & Lewis, 1997; Moran, 1995) and to attribute the larger than normal failure rate to students' lack of English proficiency. As a response to their concerns, the university introduced the post-entry diagnostic English language needs assessment, DELNA, to be administered to the whole first-year cohort to identify those students with levels of language that would be a barrier to academic success and to guide them to the appropriate English language credit courses or other language enrichment services on campus (Elder & Erlam, 2001).

In the first two years, a small number of faculties and departments adopted DELNA and administered the assessment in a lecture slot to all the students in a particular course, with all results and advice being sent by email. The first investigation of student responses to DELNA advice (Bright & von Randow, 2004) showed convincingly that they wanted to meet with a person to discuss the language profile generated from the results of the three diagnostic tasks (the listening, the reading and the writing) and have the language enrichment options explained. In 2005, increased funding meant that a DELNA Language Advisor could be appointed, and an analysis of students' DELNA bands showed that the more proficient students immediately accepted the invitation to meet with her. The weakest, on the other hand, did not and they were not followed up, as the original thinking was that language enrichment would be more effective if the students were self-motivated (Read, 2008).

This philosophy, however, did not suit the faculties and schools whose students needed to identify their language needs early and work on them throughout their studies in order to gain professional registration and perform effectively in the workplace once they graduated. The Faculties of Business and Economics (now the Business School), Engineering, and Education and the Schools of Pharmacy and Nursing therefore made DELNA, attending the advisory session and the uptake of advice compulsory. The Faculty of Arts followed suit in 2009 with their special admission students, and in 2011, DELNA became compulsory for all doctoral students.

This trend towards greater compulsion has impacted on DELNA. The first component of its two phase structure is a 30-minute online screening, which filters out proficient English users, and then the remaining students take the second component, a two-hour pen-and-paper diagnosis (for details of the DELNA assessments see www.delna. auckland.ac.nz). Although the Screening has been compulsory for first-year students since 2006, doing the Diagnosis and acting on DELNA's advice had been seen as a voluntary decision for the students. However, increasing compulsion has raised the stakes involved, particularly for students who have to take a credit course as part of the language enrichment they must undertake. The Language Advisor's role also changed once a requirement to take the advice was included. The DELNA team (the researcher and colleagues) were concerned about these changes, and this led to an

investigation into students' response to the DELNA requirement, their experience of the advisory session and the factors which influenced their uptake, or not, of language advice.

To carry out this investigation, 2000 student responses to an anonymous online evaluation gathered over 11 years of DELNA (to view the questionnaire see www.delnatask.com/evaluation/) were exported to and analysed in Microsoft Excel and NVivo. Further feedback was provided in 23 interviews with students who wanted to come in and talk in more detail about language and their university experience. Their interview responses demonstrated that this experience is significantly enhanced as they take up some form of language enrichment and their language skills improve.

The University of Auckland wants its students "to reach their academic potential within a climate of excellence" (University of Auckland, 2005, p.8), and by providing language enrichment opportunities has accepted its responsibility to help students do this. Students, on the other hand, also need to accept theirs by taking DELNA and, if required, consciously improving their language skills. In fact, many were not accepting this responsibility and the DELNA team was conscious of the need to conduct the assessment with the collaboration and cooperation of those assessed (Shohamy, 2001). In this way their feedback could be used to benefit future students through the improvements made to the process (Read & von Randow, in review) and their positive experiences could be passed on to their peers (Richardson, 2005). This article focuses first on students' response to the DELNA requirement and then on their response to the advisory session, integrating their actual feedback (from the drop-down boxes in the online questionnaire) throughout.

## The DELNA requirement

*Student uptake of DELNA 2002–2012*
During the period 2002-2012 there was increasing student uptake of DELNA with significant numbers of students acknowledging the benefits gained through the assessment process. Initially, however, many English-speaking background (ESB) students reacted negatively because their faculties required their whole first-year cohorts (see Table 1) to take the two-hour assessment.

> I speak English and only English, I was forced to do the DELNA test by the University of Auckland I am completely capable at communicating with the English Language (2003) [1]

They felt it was unnecessary and a waste of time.

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[1] Please note that all students' feedback is from the anonymous online questionnaire and is quoted verbatim.

Testing students who speak English as a first language seems to me to be a waste of both time and resources, resources which could be far more effectively utilised on students who actually need the assistance (2003).

Table 1. *DELNA uptake 2002–2003*

|  | **2002** | **2003** |
|---|---|---|
| Screening | 245 | 139 |
| Diagnosis | 1,111 | 1,904 |

This attitude changed considerably when, from 2004, the 30-minute Screening, now administered online, could be used as originally intended, to exempt proficient English users from further assessment. The introduction of an online booking site also meant students simply booked a session independently and attended. The ESB students even began to enjoy this rather novel language assessment (Read, 2008) and the uptake of the Screening, as can be seen in Table 2, improved.

Table 2. *DELNA uptake 2004–2005*

|  | **2004** | **2005** |
|---|---|---|
| Screening | 2,524 | 3,964 |
| Diagnosis | 2,500 | 1,120 |

By 2006, the DELNA Screening had become a requirement; students took the Screening first and the Diagnosis only if it was indicated. Those students above two pre-set cut scores were identified as "Good" and "Satisfactory"; the latter being emailed advice about language enrichment at Student Learning Services. Students below those cut-scores were recommended to do the Diagnosis and then meet with the Language Advisor (Elder & von Randow, 2008).

While uptake of the Screening continued to improve, uptake of the Diagnosis did not, and although 28% of the first-year cohort was identified each year as needing to take the Diagnosis, only just over half complied.

Table 3. *DELNA uptake 2006–2012*

|  | **2006** | **2007** | **2008** | **2009** | **2010** | **2011** | **2012** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Screening | 5,487 | 5,602 | 5,681 | 6,713 | 7,190 | 7,543 | 8,141 |
| Diagnosis | 718 | 708 | 906 | 1,500 | 1,148 | 1,199 | 1,353 |

From 2009, however, more faculties began requiring their students to take the recommended Diagnosis, resulting in the change in those figures in Table 3 and the subsequent increase in the number coming to get the important language advice.

*Student response to DELNA 2002–2012*
At the end of each semester, the students who have been advised to take some form of English language enrichment post DELNA are invited by email to complete the anonymous online evaluation questionnaire and the response rate fluctuates between 20–23%. The figures and student comments in this paper come from this sample, which, though small, provides important feedback.
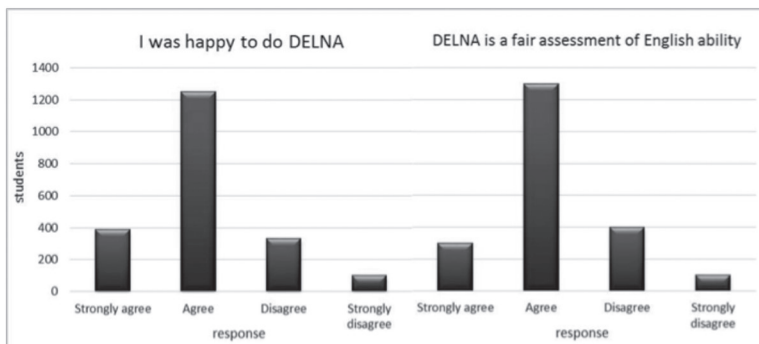


Figure 1. *Response to DELNA 2002–2012*

As can be seen from Figure 1, although there are a significant number of students who object to DELNA and their results, the majority are generally positive and find it a fair assessment of their English ability. Many students, particularly EAL students, welcomed it.

> I really support the program. I thinlk it's a good initiative to try and counteract with students difficulties especially those who don't have Engllish as their first language (2003).

The fact that it was beneficial has been noted.

> It is very helpful that the assessment is link with the learning support (2010).

In spite of the largely positive evaluation responses, half of the students who did the Diagnosis did not collect their results and meet with the Language Advisor, so from 2007, to find out what students thought about the advisory session, specific questions about that experience were added to the questionnaire.

## The Advisory Session

*The appointment of the Language Advisor*
In 2005, when the DELNA Language Advisor was appointed, students were able to follow the Diagnosis with a one-on-one interview, which is seen as vital after a diagnostic assessment (Knoch, 2012), and which they had requested. Although recently such interviews have been criticised for not being "value for money" (Arkoudis, Baik & Richardson, 2012), they have been much appreciated by those students taking advantage of them in Auckland and have been described as "the crux … the heart of good academic advising" (Fox, 2008, p. 342).

In this one-on-one session, the DELNA Language Advisor has to convince students of the benefits of developing their academic literacy and of consistently working on their language skills throughout their degree programme. It has been a challenge, but creativity, diplomatic perseverance and on-going collaboration with faculty staff and student learning services have played a role in gradually increasing compliance. In 2005, there were 88 advisory sessions, and in 2012, by which time there were also three part-time DELNA Language Advisors in the Faculty of Education, 829 advisory sessions took place.

While the increasing numbers are encouraging, there is considerable concern about those who do not take advantage of the advisory sessions, as the analysis of their GPAs shows that the majority are at the lower end of the grading scale (Read, forthcoming), suggesting that they need DELNA's advice and guidance.

*Students invited to the advisory session*
The students invited to attend an advisory session are those who have an average DELNA band of 6.5 or lower over the three skills of listening, reading and writing. Students who have a writing band of 6, in spite of having a slightly higher average band, are also asked to come in. Table 4 broadly describes these bands; a more detailed description can be found in the DELNA handbook (see www.delna.auckland.ac.nz ).

Table 4. *DELNA Bands*

| Band(s) | Description |
|---------|-------------|
| 8 & 9 | Will independently acquire academic literacy |
| 7 | Use of academic language enrichment opportunities recommended |
| 6 | Further instruction in academic English skills recommended |
| 4 & 5 | At risk of failure – English credit courses highly recommended |

*Student response to the advisory session*
The first students to respond to the initial email asking them to make an appointment to collect their DELNA profile and discuss language enrichment are generally those with an average band close to 6.5, while students with average bands of less than 6, who are struggling with their courses, often need a phone call or a text reminder.

Many students are somewhat taken aback to be asked to see the Language Advisor:

> I was shocked at first but then thought well it is better to know the truth and be able to do something about it (2003).

The advisory session, however, enables such students to talk about their own view of their language skills and be listened to:

> She took time to listen to what I had to say about my thoughts on my language skill difficulties and she gave me excellent advice on how to work through these issues. I walked away feeling so confident in myself (2010).

Many are nervous and not quite sure what to expect. They may be ambivalent about their language ability and even defensive, so it is the Language Advisor's job to put them at their ease:

> She was absolutely awesome. So helpful and very approachable (2011).

The advisors tailor their advice, working with knowledge of what a student's first language is, the length of time they have been in New Zealand, the university course they are enrolled in and possibly self-reported NCEA or IELTS results. For some ESB and highly proficient students, for example, a few writing workshops will be sufficient:

> The advisor told me to join in the workshop to improve my English, and it does work (2009).

Even sceptical students who felt they did not need DELNA have realised that getting the right advice at the right time can make a difference:

> Although my english is fluent, taking the courses that was recommended by DELNA has helped me- although others may think its recommended for overseas students with little English it does help others to improve their writing skills like myself (2010).

*Student response to the advice*
The majority of the responses from students attending the advisory sessions are positive. While the self-motivated and those who are required to act on the advice mostly do so immediately, others may wait until the following semester or the following year when they can, for example, fit an academic English credit course, in listening and reading, writing or presentation into their programme. The advice

given to many of these students is that they should take such a course (now with the acronym, ACADENG, previously, ESOL) so that they get 12 weeks of course work with constant written feedback and monitoring:

> I took ESOL101 Academic English Writing paper last semester thanks to DELNA's help and advice. That was surely timely and appropriate guide for me. I received a great help through the class (2005).

As many students are unable to fit an ACADENG course into their degree programme, it is not surprising that students choose the workshops, consultations and learning resources available at English Language Enrichment (ELE) and Student Learning rather than a credit course. As Figure 2 shows, however, while some students report that they actually did take up one of the language enrichment options, others say they are intending to do this and may or may not follow up this good intention in the following semester.
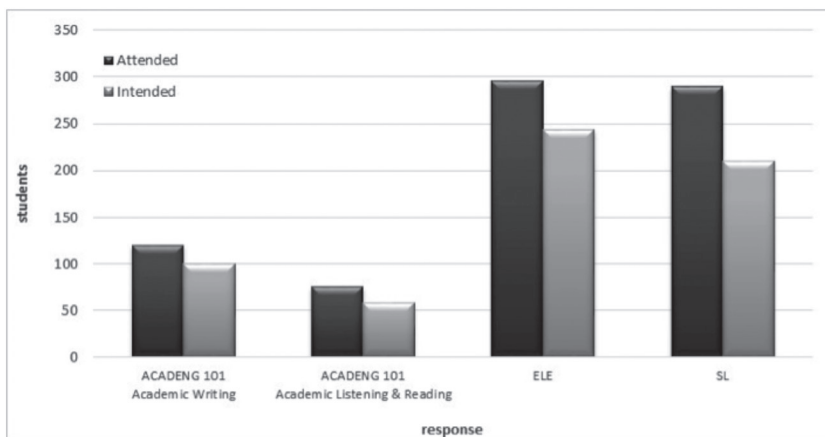


Figure 2. *Responses to four language enrichment options 2002–2012*

## *Required uptake*
Over the 11 years only 54% of the respondents said that they acted on the advice given, which is disappointing. It has, therefore, been interesting to focus on the students who are now required to take the advice.

The engineering, pharmacy and nursing students take an online non-credit course, created in ELE in collaboration with DELNA. This involves the students in 10 hours online, two consultations at ELE, and an exit test (plus an oral assessment for pharmacy and nursing students), with many maintaining contact with ELE throughout their studies. Education students devise an independent progress plan with their language advisors and keep a learning journal that is shared with the advisory staff,

who monitor progress before an exit test. While not all students in these faculties initially acknowledge that they need assistance, with hindsight they recognise the benefits and express this in follow-up interviews:

> In Semester one a friend and I went to about 10 workshops on writing and other things…may not have done that without the DELNA experience and talking to Jenni, etc. The workshops were really worthwhile (2011).

Special admission students in the Faculty of Arts, who may not have had recent experience of formal education, must take an English language credit course recommended by the DELNA Language Advisor after their Diagnosis. Almost without exception these students realise that these courses address some very real needs:

> I needed this, it really took me back to basics (2010).

Business students are directed by the language advisor to the tutorials within their degree programmes. For those in the lowest DELNA bands there is an additional discipline-specific language tutorial which many may avoid by not attending the advisory session and thus, not getting the necessary information. Then before the beginning of Semester 2 there is often a rush of advisory appointments because those students have just failed one or more courses and are urgently looking for help:

> I have to repeat a course. I know it is my writing. You can't get on without good writing (2012).

For the doctoral students post-Diagnosis, there is a language enrichment programme tailored to their individual needs that they follow throughout their first year of provisional registration and report on at the end of that year in an exit interview. For some, this entails an English credit course, which may at first seem like a burden but it is generally acknowledged to have been extremely helpful.

> This semester SCIGEN101…very useful for me.… useful for research degree. I think it is very helpful for my studying in future (2012).

Both the students and the supervisors value the time that the Language Advisor spends to make the provisional year language goals attainable and worthwhile. As one supervisor said:

> I am fully supportive of the DELNA and ELE schemes and am happy to work with my student to improve all aspects of her English comprehension and writing…the English language enrichment programme will be of great benefit to her in both her PhD and beyond (2012).

*No uptake*

The students who do not collect their DELNA profiles or who do not take the advice generally believe that they have no time for this (see Figure 3). They need time to find their bearings at the beginning of their first year, to travel to the university and to fit in their part-time jobs, their families and their sporting commitments. Timetables in many programmes make it impossible for students to take an ACADENG course and students already dealing with language difficulties are taking up to four courses in their first semester, which makes time a major issue.
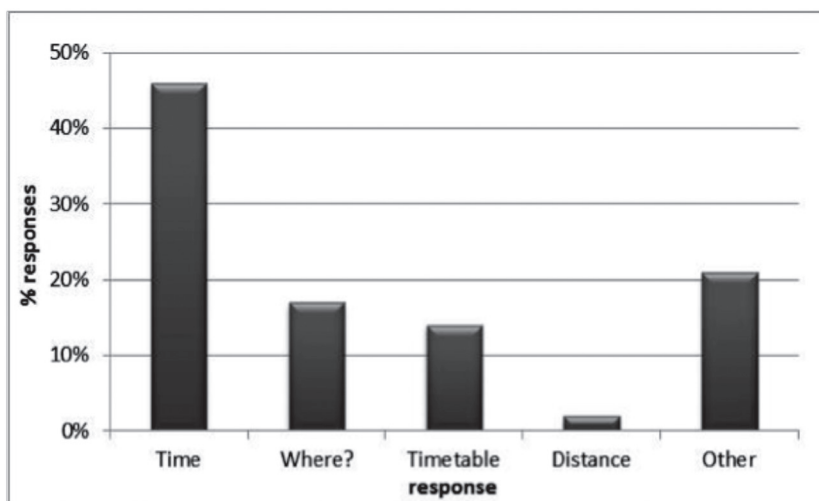


Figure 3. *Students' reasons for non-uptake of language enrichment*

Those asking 'where' are also a concern. The advertising, the talking and the information in faculty and course handbooks and on the university websites should alert students to the services available and where they can be found. Those who come to the advisory session have this question answered immediately.

For the students who are our focus, however, coping with all the demands of university study and weak language skills simply increases their burden. The time that they felt they did not have is spent repeating courses, with all the added stress that brings in terms of cost: social, financial and psychological (Banerjee, 2003; Bright & von Randow, 2008).

*Time well spent*

Those students who do collect their DELNA profiles and get the appropriate language advice, on the other hand, tell us that it is time well spent:

> My English language adviser told me to attend some useful language enrichment sessions regarding to my listening and this is turns out to be very good. Now I am almost OK with the listening and understand the NZ English (2012).

During the advisory session they are helped to plan their language learning:

> I was given a website to search for work shops that were available at the student learning centre, very helpful and i made sure i took advantage of it to improve goals that i had set out for the semester (2012).

*The issue of compulsion*

Originally we wanted to leave the initiative up to the students to do DELNA and take up language enrichment, but gradually it has become clear that in order for many students to help themselves, there has to be a little pressure to motivate them:

> I knind off knew what i was expecting but still it was helpful to hear from another person's perspective ... this is a good wake up call, giving me that extra push to do something about it ... to improve myself and better yet for my future (2010).

This need for some pressure was observed in a study of four students who had received advice post DELNA and followed it conscientiously (Magalhaes, 2010), and the faculties who require DELNA and insist on uptake of advice also understand this. Language acquisition requires input and effort; it does not happen by osmosis.

> Yes, I thought that when I just come from Iran here, I just think that my English will be magically better – with just being in an English country speaking. But it is not magicking! (2011).

## Conclusion

The University of Auckland implemented DELNA to identify students with language needs and enable them to get the language input that is needed to further develop their language skills and increase their chance of academic success. Over 11 years, as this paper shows, DELNA has played a significant part in this process.

Through frequent consultation with the principal stakeholders, notably students, some critical changes have been made. The DELNA team has learnt from the students' anonymous online evaluation comments over 11 years, making improvements in the administration of the assessment, and passing on students' experience to their peers so that they too will be encouraged to improve their own language skills. Furthermore, the overwhelmingly positive response from those students who have benefitted from

the DELNA advisory session suggests that helping students help themselves brings results. The advisory interview therefore is time well spent, as getting the best advice as early as possible means time saved in the long run.

There are certain limitations to this study. Its relatively small scope and the voluntary nature of student responses, such that students with more positive experiences of the advisory session were more likely to complete the questionnaire, suggest that more research is needed to follow up the issues raised here. The fact that a significant minority did not take advantage of the advisory session, and thus missed the advice and assistance that is crucial following such an assessment, raises the question of compulsory follow-up. As faculties gradually have come to understand something of the prolonged process of academic literacy acquisition, they have also become aware that leaving uptake to the students' initiative is not always productive. This is a belief shared by the DELNA team, in spite of the original philosophy that uptake of language enrichment should be left up to the students.

English-medium universities across the world are currently grappling with the question of how best to address the language needs of their increasingly diverse student populations and have established a number of ways of addressing this issue. Amongst these, the value of language advising is now widely recognised as a means of raising the quality of an institution's academic outcomes. A crucial aspect of this development, as this paper suggests, is now to ensure that the benefits of the advisory sessions are taken up by all students who need language assistance on their path to learning success.

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# A journey to access free open source referencing management systems (FOSRMS): Zotero

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## Abstract

Investigations into increased cost effective service provisions at the Western Institute of Technology at Taranaki (WITT) Learning Resource Centre (LRC) resulted in a request for the LRC to find ways to reduce one-to-one support. One suggestion was to put in place a cost-effective, user-friendly and pedagogically appropriate referencing management system (RMS) which would enable students to engage constructively, effectively and independently with the conventions of scholarly citation, namely referencing. This journey involved exploring programme options, carrying out a viability pilot study and following up with a review of student usage or 'uptake' project.

As a result of this, WITT seemingly became the first New Zealand tertiary educational institute to install an equitable option, namely a free, open sourced referencing management system (FOSRMS) (Zotero) across campus. Student involvement and support for the project resulted in a higher than anticipated uptake with approximately 85% of students using either Zotero or other electronic options. The flow-on effect of this is greater student independence as fewer students appear to be seeking referencing support at the LRC.

## Introduction

Institutional budgetary cuts tend to have a ripple-down effect, which is felt throughout all departments, including Learning Resource Centres (LRCs). Budgetary cuts at WITT instigated a search to improve cost efficiencies in the LRC tutor's time. Reduction in student individualised appointment times was the main target and it was evident, from LRC statistics that working with students on referencing took a considerable amount of that time. A two-pronged approach was decided upon. Firstly, a concerted effort was pursued to shift the main topics being requested in one-to-one sessions into the classroom workshops. Secondly, student access to RMS across campus was introduced. Introducing RMS availability to students, such as Endnote, is not a new innovation for tertiary education, but proprietary software incurs considerable annual charges to the institutions and/or its students, and consequently their provision implies inequity, in that only those who can afford them can have them.

The introduction of a RMS into our institution involved a three-year journey. This included a suitability quest and comparative review of free open source RMS (FOSRMS); a pilot project involving working with students to determine suitability for polytechnic students; and after a presentation at the 2011 ATLAANZ conference, a request from conference session attendees to do a student usage project twelve months after Zotero was installed across campus.

## Background

WITT's financial restraints, during the last five to ten years, resulted in an across campus search for more cost effective institutional options that would simultaneously maintain and/or improve services. During 2011 the WITT LRC service reviewed its provisions as part of this process with the goal of improving staff time usage. Identified commonalities across individualised appointment times and discipline (departmental subjects) support revealed that the requests for American Psychological Association (APA) referencing and writing assignments utilised the most significant amounts of LRC tutor's time. A two-pronged approach was recommended:

i. increased in-class, integrated, course related, activity based, study skills (academic literacy) programmes

ii. the introduction of FOSRMS.

The first was implemented via an integrated academic literacy package which involved LRC staff teaching the programme but working closely with academic staff to design, implement and evaluate a study skills programme based on student and course related study needs. The second resulted in this exploratory project to identify a suitable FOSRMS package, to complete a pilot project to determine viability of across campus implementation and to monitor student uptake. This project had the potential to provide multiple benefits at different institutional levels:

i. institutionally: a cost saving with improved service provision;

ii. for Faculty staff: a reduction in marking time;

iii. for the Learning Centre: a reduction of individualised tuition time;

iv. for students: increased efficiency, independence and choice.

WITT had previously had a RMS (Endnote) available on campus, but it was discontinued due to a low cost/benefit ratio; essentially, it was under-utilised and was costing approximately $40 per user per year. It had only been available to staff, but due to the complexity of the package, few used it. Discussion with 2011 ATLAANZ conference participants also suggested that the student uptake of Endnote, in some of the institutions, was also limited for similar reasons.

During 2011, WITT students were taught to reference manually and introduced to free online tools such as 'Style Wizard' (EB Communications, 2009) and/or 'Son of Citation' (Warlick & The Landmark Project, 2010). Unfortunately, both packages

could only compile one reference at a time and they did not save the entries. This meant the reference list still had to be generated manually and even then, the error rating in many of the entries was high, thus contributing to the high usage of LRC individualised appointments.

## Why use a referencing manager (RMS)?

Part of this exploration process involved being able to justify the introduction of RMS for student usage as WITT students had never been offered this option before. The exploration revealed that the academic rigour involved in accurate referencing/citation when writing articles or assignments had always presented challenges to all writers (Angelo, 2010). To meet this challenge, referencing managers were designed – 1983, Bookends for Apple, followed in 1988 by Endnote (Wikipedia Foundation Inc., 2012). As RMS have been in existence for the past three decades and are still being used today, this indicates that writers find these tools useful.

The accuracy and consistency that RMS offers in comparison to manually completing the process, is succinctly summarised by Nagel (2011) (Figure 1 & 2). Manually, all articles have to be filed, sorted and entered individually both in text and then compiled alphabetically into a reference list; a process often seen as an arduous and extremely time consuming (Nagel, 2011). Utilising a RMS involves inserting all readings into a library and then checking for accuracy. For in-text referencing, the appropriate source is selected and inserted in the text, then, with the 'click of button', all items used are automatically organised, sorted and inserted into the reference list; a major saving of time.

With APA comprising of over 90 different formats for a reference list (American Psychological Association [APA], 2010), referencing presents a challenging complexity, especially for new and returning students. The process involves considerable typing with the potential for errors in formatting and missed sources, for example. Disadvantages include the time to learn RMS and the potential for 'computer glitches'.
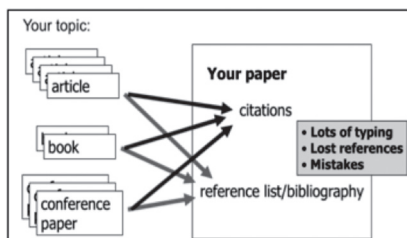


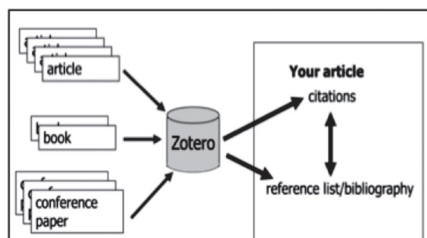Figure 1. *Referencing manually (Nagel, 2011, slide 4)*

Figure 2. *Referencing with a management tool (RMS) (Nagel, 2011, slide 5)*

The automaticity of the process is what Gilmour and Cobus-Kuo (2011) refer to as "a boon to scholars who find themselves spending far too much time navigating the intricacies of multiple citation styles" ("Citing references", para. 1). They further noted that any manual alteration that may be necessary is quicker than generating a reference list manually. James (2012) and Owens (2010) go so far as to suggest that all students from secondary to PhD should all utilise the timesaving tools that this technology presents to them, especially if they are free.

Overall, making RMS available to all students would provide them with a tool that would save time, result in greater accuracy and consistency, meet the demands of academic rigour and free up time to allow them to focus more intently on what they enrolled for – course content.

## Choosing the appropriate RMS tool for WITT students

In 2011, an exploratory project was initiated to explore available packages. The criteria for selection included the need to:

- compile and format in-text APA referencing;
- automatically generate a reference list/bibliography,
- to be free/open sourced, and
- be user friendly for polytechnic undergraduate students.

The focus on APA was predetermined due to a previous institutional decision that had standardised referencing across campus to make student transitioning between programmes more seamless.

Both the University of Auckland (UoA) and Auckland University of Technology (AUT), during the time of the study, mentioned software on their LRC websites (the original sources of 'Style Wizard' and 'Son of Citation') (AUT, 2012; UoA, 2012). Of the RMS mentioned on these two sites only Endnote seemingly had institutional support.

A literature search of RMS studies identified a comprehensive comparative study of 30 different programs (Wikipedia Foundation Inc., 2012). With this greater awareness, the essential criteria expanded to include:

- work within a Windows or Mac environment,
- be able to function within Word and Open Office,
- be password protectable, and
- work on the existing WITT system.

A desirables list included:

- exportable/importable between packages enabling libraries to be moved to and from other systems to facilitate student needs if they moved between institutions ,and
- have an rss feed.

The first criteria (free and open sourced) reduced the choice available to 17 RMS. Focussing on WITT student based criteria (Word or Open Office either on a PC or Mac), twelve others were eliminated reducing the list to five (Table 1).

Zotero was the only one that met both the necessary and desirable criteria. It was not only open source, but was updated regularly, from user feedback, by educational professionals. Their latest development, making Zotero mobile, increased its desirability. Although Mendeley offered a free 'Earth' account, the full version had a monthly charge. A private company owned it which Barsky (2010) suggested could be a considerable disadvantage as it could disappear at any time.

Table 1. *The highest rating referencing managers according to student need.*

| Packages left | Free | Open Source | Windows, & Mac | Word/open office | APA style | Password protected | Export to Endnote | Rss feed | Pub med links |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Aigaion | 1 | 1 | 1 | x | 1 | 1 | x | x | x |
| Docear | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | x | 1 | x | x |
| JabRef | 1 | 1 | 1 | x | 1 | x | 1 | x | 1 |
| Mendeley | ? | ? | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Zotero | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |

An important consideration, missed in the initial analysis, was the accuracy of the programs; a problem that had caused concern with previously used tools. Gilmour and Cobus-Kuo (2011) provided a comparative accuracy analysis of four tools (CitULike; Mendeley, RefWorks and Zotero) of which only Zotero and Mendeley were free. This study reviewed the four tools against five referencing styles, including APA, measuring number of errors, errors per citation and error-free citation. Overall, for APA, Zotero had the best results for a free package - a little above Mendeley.

Other comparative studies (Barsky, 2010; Fenner, 2010; Gilmour & Cobus-Kuo, 2011; University of California, 2012) positively evaluated Zotero and Mendeley but Zotero was described as simpler. Angelo's (2010) research also reported support for Zotero's because it was "simply easier to use than the alternatives and provided the same level of functionality [such as Endnote]" (p. 72-73).

Zotero's use of cloud-based technology is a major bonus despite it only working from a Firefox platform. Because it is cloud based, it works directly with the internet in a similar way to Facebook thus the information is stored externally, is accessible from any computer in the world and automatically facilitates direct entries from websites or library databases. The package can be installed on home computers and at WITT and synchronised from wherever it is used. Unless an institution already accesses the Firefox platform this is a potential obstacle, one which WITT did not have to address as the WITT library computer system already utilised it. A standalone version was also available for those without internet access at home.

Finally, a further reason for the LRC's choice of Zotero was because according George Mason University (2012) over 180 tertiary institutions from around the world, including Yale, Harvard (United States of America) and the University of Cambridge (England) recommended using Zotero (George Mason University, 2012).

*Learning Centre pilot project*
Once Zotero was chosen as the preferred package, a group of students enrolled in one of WITT's degree programmes were offered the opportunity to trial the tool. A volunteer was chosen to independently explore the package, which he then shared with other class members. All the students who learned the program endorsed the project and the LRC presented the results to WITT management and the research committees. The volunteer's summation of the project: "I've found Zotero to be an excellent tool in the writing of my first few essays. EASY and FREE – two of my favourite things. [It was] so beneficial to my learning …initially [I] really struggled with APA ... perfect result in referencing now. I think I was the only one in my class" (M. Fabri, WITT Bachelor of Social Science student, personal communication, March 29, 2011). He first thought using Zotero might be considered a 'bit of a cheat', but concluded that his focus was course material, not referencing. The management and research committees subsequently approved the installation across campus for 2012.

After presenting the first stage at the 2011 ATLAANZ conference (ATLAANZ, 2011) participants expressed an interest in student uptake of the package and this resulted in a follow up project and a further presentation at the 2012 conference. The initial volunteer, with the LRC staff, produced three follow up teaching videos (Morris & Fabris, 2012) that were installed on the WITT Library site as teaching tools

## 2012 Project: Student uptake

*Method*

During 2012, a project was set up to determine student uptake and ease of usage of Zotero. Questionnaires were distributed through the library website and hard copies were available in the library for any interested students to complete. A level four university preparation class (L4), who had classroom instruction on APA, Zotero and Son of Citation, also had the questionnaires given to them to determine whether learning to use the package in class was more effective than self-instruction.

Data collected included age, gender and ethnicity of participants, followed by their process preference and their reasons for usage/non-usage of Zotero. The data for the two groups (the generic responses and the L4 group) was collated using Excel and colour coded based on their referencing preference selection. The project was given low risk ethics approval.

All courses who utilised the academic literacy in-class programme across campus were taught to do APA manually; level four and above had both Zotero and Son of Citation demonstrated, but not necessarily taught to them at a 'hands on' level; and level one to three were only introduced to Son of Citation. At that time, although Zotero was freely available across campus, very few faculty staff knew it existed which resulted in some expressing a little resistance to student use. Those who had experience with it, encouraged students to use it. Those academic staff who were less enthusiastic about the use of Zotero argued that it was important that students first understood the referencing process before being shown how to use a referencing tool. As a result, teaching of APA and the RMS were graduated according to levels of study. Handouts on installing and using Zotero were freely available on the LRC handout stand and teaching videos utilising WITT students were put the WITT Library website.

*Results*

Forty student responses were received back from the questionnaires: 18 from the generic student population and 22 from a level 4 class. All respondents were required to use APA for assignments. Those who responded from the generic student population were from levels two to six (Figure 3) although there was a higher interest from level four and above. The class sample was all level four.
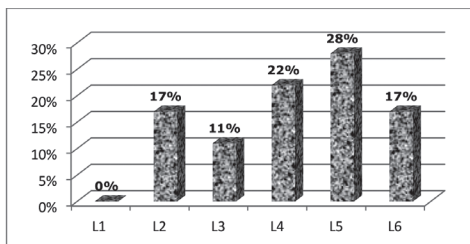


Figure 3. *Percentage of generic population participants and their levels of study*

Both groups were mainly female (78%, generic; 68%, L4), aged under 30 (67%, generic; 77%, L4) with 20% more Pākeha than Māori (Table 2).

Table 2: *Demographics: Gender, ethnicity and age of participants*

| Sample | Male | Female | Māori | Pākeha | International | Other (International with NZ Citizenship) | Under 20 | 20-29 | 30-39 | 40-49 | Over 50 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Generic | 22% | 78% | 33% | 55% | 6% | 6% | 16.5% | 50% | 11% | 6% | 16.5% |
| L4 Class | 32% | 68% | 27% | 59% | 0% | 14% | 45% | 32% | 5% | 18% | 0% |
| Total | 28% | 72% | 30% | 57% | 3% | 10% | 33% | 40% | 7% | 13% | 7% |

The generic group reported that 39% were self-taught to use Zotero from LRC handouts, 22% were taught by other students and 39% requested teaching from the LRC. Overall, 72% either were taught in class or visited the LRC for follow up support.

The overall response from the 40 questionnaires completed to referencing methods used, revealed that after 12 month institutional accessibility to electronic referencing (Son of Citation and/or Zotero), 85% of the survey participants had utilised the tools (52.5% Zotero only; 17.5% Son of Citation only; 12.5% mixed methods; 2.5% other) whereas only 15% chose to reference manually. Those who chose to solely reference manually explained that their choice related to a lack of home access to computers or lack of computer skills, they had not had time to trial it thoroughly, wanted to understand referencing properly before using it and found that it did not work in the free version of Word.



Figure 4: *Whole sample referencing method preferences*

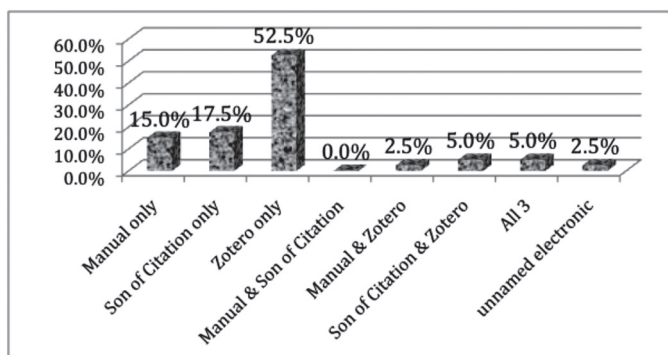One student from the generic group reported used electronic referencing which was neither Zotero nor Son of Citation. Twelve and a half per cent indicated that they used varying methods depending on the amount of referencing required in an assignment. If there were only one or two references, they frequently did them manually (Figure 4).

When comparing the 'Zotero only' uptake between the two groups, the difference was minimal with only 4.5% more using it from L4 group. The main difference between groups related to the apparent L4 lesser usage of Son of Citation (8.6%) but greater (7.1%) manual only uptake (Table 3). Reasons for this were not given.

Table 3: *Comparison of generic group and L4 class referencing method preferences*

| | Manual only | Son of Citation only | Zotero only | Manual & Son of Citation | Manual & Zotero | Son of Citation & Zotero | All 3 | unnamed electronic |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| All | 15.0% | 17.5% | 52.5% | 0.0% | 2.5% | 5.0% | 5.0% | 2.5% |
| L4 Class | 18.2% | 13.6% | 54.5% | 0.0% | 0.0% | 4.5% | 9.1% | 0.0% |
| Generic Group | 11.1% | 22.2% | 50.0% | 0.0% | 5.6% | 5.6% | 0.0% | 5.6% |

Students across both groups reported the main reasons for Zotero usage related to ease of use, the time saved, ease of modification, how it helped with keeping track of references and that it was free (Table 4).

Table 4. *Students main reasons for using Zotero.*

| Ease of Use | Time saved | Easy to modify | Not used |
|---|---|---|---|
| 23 (57.5%) | 9 (22.5%) | 2 (5%) | 6 (15%) |

The reasons for not using Zotero as identified by the generic group:

- "quicker manually and I can then fully understand referencing" (10)
- "using Son of Citation, I don't have my own computer yet (2)
- "had difficulty loading/syncing on different computers, "had difficulty citing my references"
- "Zotero needs to accept all identifying doi numbers. Not accepting some NZ books. I need to put more info into the library" (11)
- "learnt about it too late for my project" (14).

There were fewer identified challenges for the L4 class although one identified that it did not work on MS Word free edition. Most of the issues raised were taken to the LRC and support was given to get the programme working, although some issues were beyond LRC expertise, such as it not working on the free edition of Word.

Because much of the literature reviewed discussed the ease of installation and use as an advantage, students were asked to share their experience with putting Zotero onto their computers. It was a three-step process, namely downloading Firefox, Zotero and plugin applications that linked Zotero to Word. The students' responses unanimously supported the ease of installation suggested although generally those who attended classes seemed to find it easiest (Figure 5 & Figure 6).

One of the findings of this project was how easy it was for most students to take over the installation and learning process themselves, especially if they had attended classes. Only five of the 40 (12.5%) students experienced any difficulties with installing or using Zotero. There did not seem to be demographic factors affecting the difficulty. All five were from the generic group; all were female, one of the six was Maori (16%); there was the only international and three of the ten Pākeha (30%). Age wise, three (60%) were between 20 and 29, one was under 20 and one was over 50 years of age. No problems were experienced if classes were attended. Students verbally expressed that it took about 15 – 30 minutes to load the three packages and register. It took 15 minutes to learn the package and approximately one-hour practice, while working on an assignment, for it to become part of the learner's tool kit.
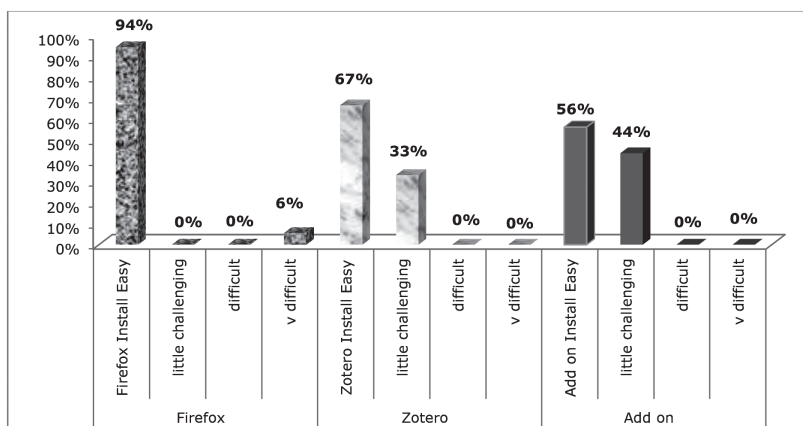


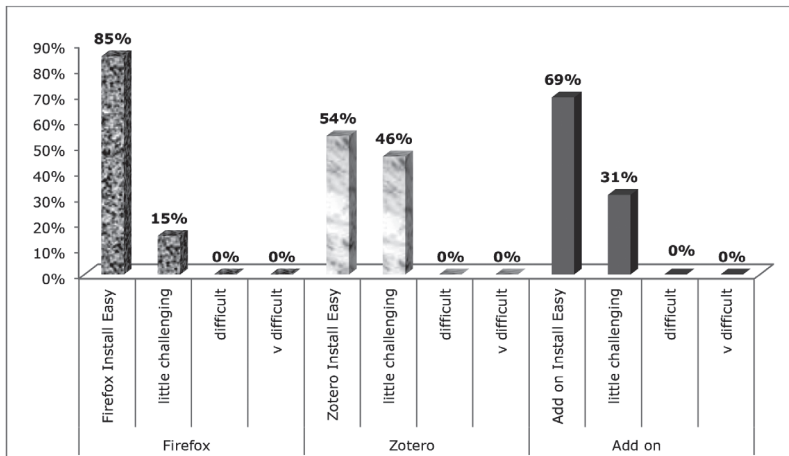Figure 5: *L4 installation levels of difficulty*

Figure 6: *Generic group installation levels of difficulty*

## Reflections

Initially, this project was explored to find potential benefits at multiple levels. Firstly, institutionally, it provided a service previously unavailable to WITT students and with minimal cost, namely installation and maintenance by IT and LRC staff time, but this would have occurred with any such software. The presentation of OSFRMS, whether it is Zotero or others such as Mendeley, does demonstrate a potential saving to both students and the institution (when supplied to staff). According to the University of Auckland, the current cost of Endnote (the equivalent proprietary software) to students is $60.00 (The University of Auckland Library, 2013). Secondly, anecdotal discussion with academic staff has indicated a considerable time saving in marking, but this needs further investigation. Thirdly, interim LRC statistics, pertaining to service usage, indicate less time by LRC staff being spent on the mechanics of referencing, but more is spent assisting students load and learn to use Zotero, especially for the generic group. This is seen as an interim change until a full in-class teaching programme is developed across campus. Conclusive information will not be available until the end of 2013.

Four findings of particular interest to LRC staff were:

- The student uptake of Zotero (65%) was much higher than anticipated.
- With the introduction of RMS, an important benefit emerging is that it now takes less time to teach the mechanics (the 'hows') of referencing thus providing more time to work on the pragmatics and ethics underlying when and where referencing should be used, to lessen the chance for plagiarism.
- Although students can install and learn Zotero independently, fewer difficulties were experienced if they had in-class tuition.

- At the 2011 ATLAANZ conference a member raised concerns relating to students already having made a commitment to Endnote. Zotero is just another option, although, if a full change-over was anticipated or desired, transitioning could occur quite simply as libraries (data collection) between each are transferable.

*Final thought to ponder*
If an institution is only providing/recommending proprietary software is this a discriminatory practice that provides unfair economic advantage to those who can afford RMS? The provision of OSFRMS, irrespective of which package, provides greater equity to all students.

## Conclusion

What began as an exploration for improving WITT LRC staff time utilisation within a challenging fiscal tertiary environment provided the platform for identifying a tool that is providing multiple benefits across the institution. Referencing Management Systems, such as Endnote, are widely used across New Zealand and other worldwide institutions but the associated costs eliminated them as an option for WITT. What is relatively new in New Zealand is the use of a free, open source option (FOSRMS), namely Zotero. This alternative has provided WITT staff and students access to an economic and pedagogically appropriate academic, time saving tool. Zotero has withstood close scrutiny from the academic and cyber communities and met all the criteria considered essential to meet WITT student needs. This project explored options and listened to the student voice. This voice has given a fairly powerful message that FOSRMS have provided students with a more equitable option that has made referencing less challenging, however; it is not the answer for all. Although 85% of students are using RMS (65% Zotero), 15% still choose to reference manually. Our responsibility, as LRC educators, is to provide our institutions, academic staff and learners with enough information for them to make informed choices about processes that will enhance the student learning experience. After twelve months exposure to the FOSRMS, WITT students have substantiated Puckett's (2011) thoughts when he stated if "the 20th century tool for writers was the typewriter; its 21st century counterpart is the word processor. In the same way, if a 20th century tool for researchers was the index card scribbled with citation notes, its 21st century equivalent is Zotero" ( p. 2). Referencing managers are not the answer for all, but do provide an option for writers, irrespective of whether they are secondary, first year tertiary or more advanced students.

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# The development of an interactive writing tool

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## Abstract

This paper outlines the development of a series of interactive tools designed to support a group of postgraduate students with their academic writing. The development began in response to a request to support a group of postgraduate university students with the aim being to enable them to have a better understanding of analytical writing and to produce Masters Exegeses with a higher level of analytical writing. The initial interactive tool was used in a workshop context and was designed to help students differentiate between descriptive, analytical and critical/evaluative writing and move their writing towards more critical writing. Student feedback from this workshop led me to further consider what the process of academic writing entailed and how to support the crafting process and the shift from being a writer to being a reader of that writing. A second interactive tool was designed to facilitate this shift, while at the same time offering prompting questions to support a move from descriptive to analytical, critical and evaluative writing. This tool was modified to include the acronym for a commonly used prompt to suggest useful processes in writing, such as elaboration and linking. Finally, a third interactive tool was designed to facilitate the editing process as a whole. Further iterations of the interactive tool are planned and investigation has begun into the possibility of creating a piece of interactive software based on the models already in use.

## Background context

This series of work began following the request from a postgraduate Creative Arts programme coordinator who reported that, although students gained good grades at Masters Thesis examination, the thesis examiners reported that the level of analytical writing from the students could be higher. The problem posed for me in designing a workshop to address this issue was how to support these students to firstly understand what analytical writing was and then to develop analytical writing in their exegesis writing. An exegesis is the written explanation detailing the thinking behind and the development of a student design or art project that accompanies a creative project in examination for Masters of Design and Fine Arts.

I thought an interactive workshop structured to facilitate students to examine and discuss their own writing would be a good way to start addressing the identified need. When developing a plan for an interactive workshop with the students, I had two main concerns. The first concern was how to present the relatively abstract concept of critical analysis to a group of postgraduate university students whose main focus was creative work. In order to address this aspect, I focussed on the creation of a manipulative tool that enabled the students to engage in activities that helped them differentiate between descriptive and analytical writing and facilitated the crafting of writing from a descriptive style to a more analytical style. As a teacher, observation of the powers of manipulation of concrete objects to facilitate discussion and understanding of more abstract ideas led me to believe that such an approach might be useful. These observations are supported by early models of experiential learning proposed by theorists such as Lewin, Dewey and Piaget (as cited in Kolb, 1984). Kolb (1984) aptly summarises experiential learning as: "the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience" (p. 38).

Kolb's (1984) principle, in conjunction with an understanding of learning styles such as those described by Honey and Mumford (1992, as cited in McLoughlin, 1999) was applied to the design of the workshop activities. The activities involved experimentation, in the form of manipulating phrases of the students' own writing, followed by a process of review and reflection, via discussion, about the writing. The purpose of these activities was to help students understand characteristics of different styles of writing and to consider whether their own writing was descriptive, analytical or critical/evaluative.

Another concern was to create a device that would give the students the ability to independently continue to analyse and improve their own writing through crafting whenever they were engaged in the writing process. This tool will be described in the section below. I believed that such a take- away device would offer the opportunity for full integration of the learner's knowledge as described by McLoughlin (1999) to fulfil the final stage of the learning cycle proposed by Honey and Mumford (1992, as cited in McLoughlin, 1999). It was hoped that effective learning and development of understanding would thus continue long after the initial workshop had taken place. As a learning advisor, I feel that it is important to continue enabling students to develop their independent learning skills. It was with this dual purpose of developing initial understanding of the stylistic differences in writing and creating a useful interactive tool for further independent use, after introduction of the tool to students during the workshop, that the first model was designed.

## Stage one: Writing workshop one

Research on analytical and critical writing in a tertiary context led me to the Learning Development site at Plymouth University and a very useful model for developing writing which encompasses a series of focusing questions which can act as prompts to enable students to produce a certain writing style. For example, it was suggested

that questions such as When? and Where? tend to elicit a descriptive response whilst questions such as How? and Why? tend to elicit a more analytical response, and a question such as So what? tends to elicit a more critical response (Plymouth University, 2010).

Material from this site was adapted to form the basis of a chart style worksheet which divided writing into three categories: descriptive, analytical and critical/evaluative writing. These three categories were designed to create an awareness of the different writing styles and enable clear differentiation of descriptive writing from analytical and critical/evaluative writing. Material about reflective writing from Portsmouth University (n.d.) was also adapted into the chart, giving a fourth category. This category was reflective writing, which was important in the workshop context, as exegesis writing requires students to consider and reflect on their own meaning making in a creative arts context.

In order to facilitate self-analysis of student writing, the chart was designed to be printed in landscape on A3 paper with space under each category for the students to place their writing according to which questions it best answered (see Figure 1).

After a brief introduction to the concept and aim of the workshop, the students were invited to cut their writing into phrases and place the phrases into the appropriate frame space on the chart. Students had previously been asked to bring a printed, double spaced, single sided sample of their writing to the workshop. After this activity, students were then encouraged to form small groups of two or three and discuss the rationale for placing their phrases into each portion of the framework. The purpose of this small group discussion was for the students to have the opportunity to discuss their thinking about their writing and consider the more abstract concepts of writing styles. This discussion, it was hoped, would enable them to further learn about and understand the difference between descriptive, analytical and critical/evaluative writing, after the concrete experience of physically placing phrases of their writing into different parts on the A3 chart. The significance of discussion to the learning process is a concept espoused by Freire (1998), who claims: "Learning is a process where knowledge is presented to us, then shaped through understanding, discussion and reflection" (n.p.).

Much discussion arose from this activity as the students justified why they had categorised their writing into the different sections on the chart. It was also observed that, while most students engaged readily in the activity, a few declared they were not writers and had no interest in discussing their writing.

# Developing a specific writing style

| Style | Descriptive | Analytical | Critical / evaluative | Reflective |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Examples of Questions to ask | **What** is this about? <br> **Who** is this by? <br> **When** does this occur? | **How** does this occur? <br> **Why** did this occur? <br> **What** if this were wrong? <br> **What** are the alternatives? | **So what?** <br> What does this mean? <br> What are the implications? <br> **What next?** <br> Is it transferable? <br> How and where else can it be applied? | Exploration and explanation of events <br> usually written in past tense <br> What are my next steps? <br> What have I learnt from this? |
| Example phrases or words | This project is focused on....... <br> In the context of... | The alternatives to this are.... <br> If....x was not done then y would happen | The implications of this are..... <br> This experience was convincing in that..... | For me, the most significant learning was...... <br> I thought/felt |
| My writing | | | | |

Figure 1. *Chart for writing workshop one.*

Material from Plymouth University (2010) was adapted  into the chart as the basis of three categories: descriptive, analytical and critical/evaluative writing. Material from Portsmouth University (n.d.) was also adapted into the chart, giving a fourth category of reflective writing.

The second part of the workshop involved the students looking at where most of their writing was placed on the chart and then, using the prompting questions on the chart,  discussing what they would have to do to move their writing to a more critical, analytical level.  Again there was much discussion generated about the writing.  From observation it became clear that the students, once alerted to the characteristics of each style of writing, were able to differentiate between descriptive, analytical and critical/evaluative writing.  Furthermore, once they had become aware of how they could modify their writing in order to move it from one category to another, they became quite animated and, working in groups, began crafting their writing to make it more analytical or critical.  Oral feedback from the students reflected that they were able to examine their writing and categorize it according to style.  The

students also reflected that the prompting questions were useful in enabling them to craft their writing to become more analytical, critical, evaluative or reflective. Once the workshop was completed, the students took the charts away with them to use independently with their writing.

## Stage two: Writing workshop two

A later discussion with the Masters course coordinator followed feedback comments from a student supervisor and it appeared that this focus on writing style may have been initiated too early in the writing process and possibly may have served to stifle the creative flow of the students' writing. It became apparent that these students required not only an understanding of the difference between different styles of writing such as descriptive and critical writing, but also that greater attention needed to be given to the writing process and when the kind of analysis of writing suggested by the chart should be conducted. What has also become very clear through the development of this interactive tool was that writing is a much more complex, non-linear process than I initially perceived it to be.

Reading research by Winchester (2007) about the writing and editing process led to the development of another workshop which attempted to address several issues. The first issue was the facilitation of the shift from being a writer to being a reader of that writing, so that students could have a supported way of reviewing what they had written. The second issue was to situate the crafting process within the task of writing. The final issue addressed was how to support students to maintain a creative flow in their writing whilst becoming more aware of the writing styles they were using. This workshop explored the writing process and postulated where the students might enter into a crafting exercise such as we had introduced in the initial workshop. See Figure 2 for the segment of the worksheet situating the crafting process in writing that was presented to the students in writing workshop two.
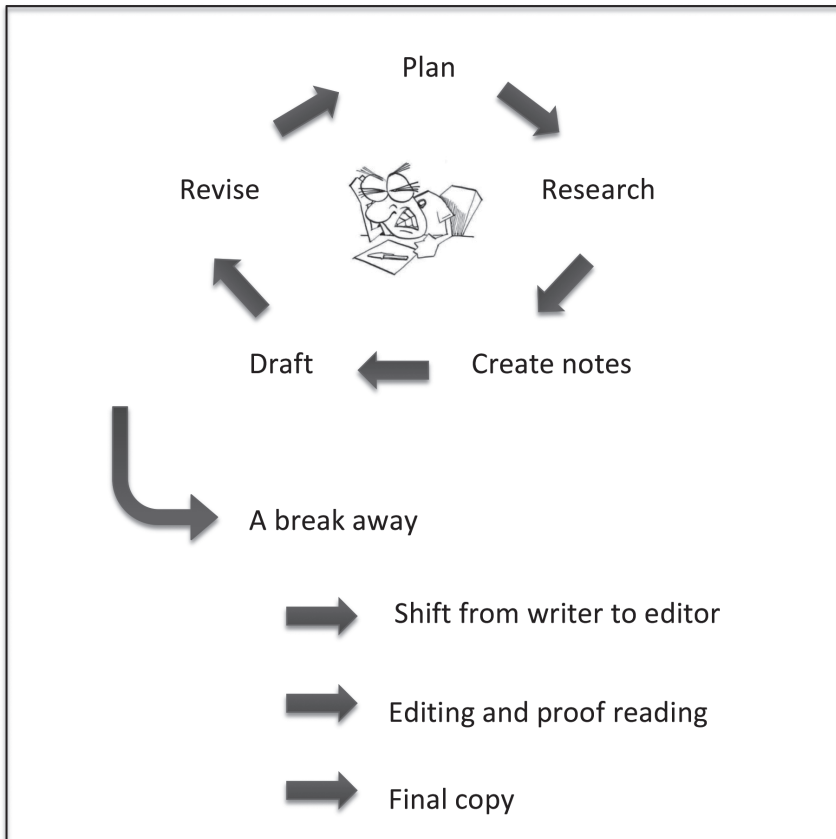
Figure 2. *Worksheet presented for writing workshop two*

Further details of how the student could approach each stage of revising, editing and proof reading were also included in the workshop hand-outs, along with suggested websites for students to access for individual support. After delivering and reviewing the second workshop, the coordinator and I both felt that this workshop went some way in addressing the concerns about creative flow whilst providing the students with a deeper understanding of writing styles and the writing process itself. The full worksheet, which contained further accompanying advice and recommended websites also offered the students a way to continue to develop their understanding in independent, needs based manner.

However, since the creation of the second workshop, I have been further influenced by the model described by S. Starfield (personal communication, September 3, 2012). Working in an Australian tertiary education context supporting thesis writing at university, Starfield proposes that writing is a very complex process and that the shift from being a writer to being a reader of that writing is fluid and on-going throughout the different stages of the writing process. Future worksheets presented to students will reflect this new understanding of complexity and fluidity.

## Stage Three: The interactive writing tool

The response of students who were offered the chart in the first workshop to help them develop a more critical voice in their writing, had been very positive. Moreover, outside the context of the original exegesis workshop, the chart had been used as a discussion point with many students in individual consultations when they had asked about critical and analytical writing. It was anecdotally reported by several students that they found the so what question the most useful. However, the cutting up of the writing to place on the chart, although facilitating an understanding of analytical writing and offering much opportunity for discussion, was not the most practical or time efficient way to enable students to anlayse their writing. I still felt that there had been some merit in the original interactive tool and so gave further thought as to how it could be developed in a way that was not so intrusive in first draft writing, and could be used as required by the students when they wished to review their writing.

Bearing in mind my preference for having a manipulative tool, I designed a frame to go around student writing with the key prompting questions from the original chart up the side and across the top of the frame.

The concept behind this thinking was that once the writing was drafted, the student could place the frame over the printed draft and run this draft through the frame to interrogate the writing with the prompting questions on the frame. Thus the student would be able to analyse the writing to ascertain the writing style, then craft the writing to give an analytical or critical/evaluative response, or, if required, a reflective response. Students who were offered this frame were keen to use it and understood its application. One student reported that she did not know how it worked, but that the tool enabled her to move outside her writing and then to critique it in a way she had not been able to previously.

A further refinement of the tool was the addition of a directional arrow across the top and colour to the side panels to visually encourage the students to make a movement to more analytical writing.  The window was narrowed vertically and widened horizontally to keep the focus on one paragraph of writing at a time.  The acronym PERL and its explanations (Point, Elaboration, Relevance, and Link) were included in the appropriate side and top panels (See Figure 4).  Some tutors use the ideas behind this acronym to prompt higher level writing in analysis of research and I thought the inclusion of this acronym would reinforce such prompting.
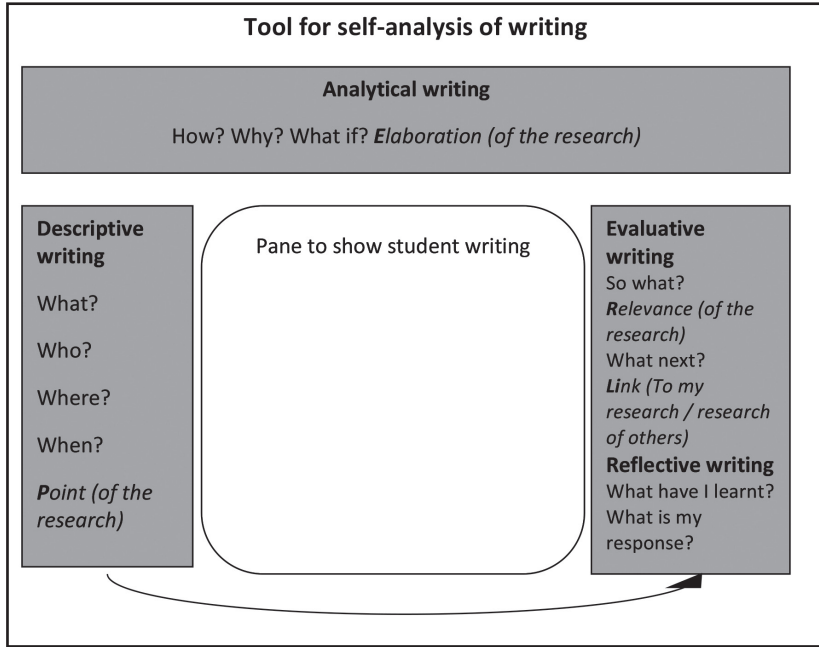
Figure 3. *Stage Three. The interactive writing tool*

## Stage Four: An interactive editing tool

Using the principle of a tactile tool with prompting questions, a further model was created to provide a specific tool for editing (See Figure 4). This interactive tool was based on the process of editing as outlined in a video on OWLL Massey University, by Martin McMorrow (n.d).

**Editing tool**

**Think of the reader. Have I used:** key words? Signposting? Linked ideas –sentence to sentence, paragraph to paragraph? Related paragraphs to assignment topic? Read my work out aloud? Checked my punctuation?

**Think of the word count.**

**Can I:**

Replace phrases with words?

Remove repetition?

Ensure that each paragraph deals with one idea?

Pane to show student writing

**Think of referencing.**

Are all my claims supported with a reference?

Figure 4. *Stage Four. The interactive editing tool*

Following a short workshop demonstrating the use of the chart and interactive tools at the 2012 ATLAANZ conference, several attendees expressed an interest in using the tools in their tertiary institutions. Copies were distributed upon request. Several more iterations of the interactive writing tool are planned, including some that will function on structure rather than style.

All versions of the tool have been offered to and used by a number of students across a range of levels and in many subject areas outside of the original Master of Design workshop context. Oral response to the tool has been positive with students reporting it useful in both the crafting and editing processes, as well as for developing an understanding of the characteristics of the different styles of writing. One student involved in the peer mentoring system found the A3 chart so useful that she used it with the students she was mentoring.

Lamination of the tools has ensured that they are reusable and robust. However, I was concerned that not all students produce paper copies of their work anymore and so it was with this in mind that I began work on stage 5 of the interactive writing tool.

## Stage Five: The development of an electronic writing tool

The final stage of the project was to write up a brief for the tool to be converted into a piece of software. After discussion with the manager of a design laboratory, a written brief for software requirements was prepared. At the point of writing this article, advice has come back that the software in the form of a Windows plugin will require considerable expertise and be costly to develop. Further investigation is now proceeding into the possibility that the tool will become part of a web based design and into funding possibilities. It may be that the development of the writing tool could become part of a research project and as such funding for development may be available.

## Conclusion

Initially this project had started out as the design, planning and delivery of a workshop for Masters levels students to support the understanding and development of analytical writing within a context of exegesis writing. The process of designing and delivering this workshop and the reflective discussion that followed led me to consider a variety of aspects of the writing task and to consider when and how intervention to improve quality of writing could take place. This in turn had led to the development of interactive tools that could be used by the students independently as and when required. The initial design of the tools to analyse writing style has been extended to encompass the editing process. Anecdotal feedback from students about these interactive tools has been positive and the ideas have been responded to favourably by colleagues at a conference workshop. Exactly how the usefulness of such items can be gauged in a meaningful way is a further point of reflection and possible research. However, what can be said is that these interactive tools seem to provide a useful framework for developing a discussion about the characteristics of different writing styles and offer a mechanism through which students at tertiary level can begin to analyse and modify their own academic writing.

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# Active learning in large groups: A case study from new students' orientation

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## Abstract

Learning to think critically is an important part of students' first year of tertiary study. The learning advisors at Massey University's Wellington campus expanded their input into orientation week to address this skill area. To make optimal use of the time allocated, we wanted to present key critical thinking concepts in a manner that would engage students in active learning. This decision was informed by literature which indicated that active learning approaches facilitate greater retention of ideas, engagement and motivation. We also viewed critical thinking as a skill that is best learned by doing. Challenges we faced included: adapting active learning approaches for use in the designated venues which were traditional tiered lecture theatres; and delivering these workshops to large groups of students with few staff facilitating. In order to implement active approaches in a large group setting we minimised the lecture type style of delivery to briefly address the content of the session, presented concepts briefly, and then asked students to practise these skills in small groups using a range of activities. Feedback from students on the workshop style was very positive and a brief review of the written material that students completed showed that most groups had been able to complete the activities in the time allocated, indicating that the tasks were pitched at a suitable level. Overall, this session indicated that using activity-based learning was a viable means of teaching in a lecture setting.

## Re-orienting orientation

The methods used by learning advisors to present academic skills during orientation week at Massey University's Wellington campus underwent considerable change in the period 2011-2012. Prior to 2011, the Student Learning Centre offered Study Smart, which was an optional one-day course for which students were required to pre-register and pay a nominal fee to cover printed resources (J. Wutzler, personal communication, August 3, 2012). This course covered topics such as expectations regarding studying at university, skills such as reading, note-taking, library use and writing for assignments. The structure and facilitation style format of the workshop encouraged active student participation through self-evaluation, quizzes, small group discussions and workbook activities. Attendance was typically 60-80 students out of a new student intake of 1,000-1,200 students (J. Wutzler, personal communication, August 3 & 6, 2012).

In 2011, these optional workshops were removed from orientation in favour of presenting a condensed version of the same programme to all new students. The new sessions were framed as part of the main orientation programme rather than as an optional extra. In order to deliver our programme to a larger number of students, it was determined that we would use the format of 2.5 hour sessions, broken up with short breaks which would be presented in lecture theatres to groups of up to 200 students at a time. After reflecting on this approach, it was decided that aiming to present key academic skills to all first year students during orientation was a worthwhile move because students were keen to develop their study skills at this point in the semester. However, many students found the condensed format overwhelming; students attending consultations with learning advisors early in the semester reported that they found academic orientation too full and were concerned that they may have missed important information. With this in mind, we moved towards a new way of presenting.

The approach adopted in 2012 was presenting less content in a much more active format. Rather than attempting to give students an overview of all the major academic skills they would need in the semester ahead, we put greater emphasis on making sure students were aware of services on campus and that they knew where to ask for help in future. We also offered students a taster of two skill areas: critical thinking and group work skills. Although these sessions would be presented under similar conditions to the previous year's orientation, we decided that on the basis of strong theoretical support for active learning, it was worth adopting this approach to enhance students' understanding, engagement and motivation in learning about critical thinking and group work.

## Rationale for active learning: Reviewing the literature

Active learning covers a wide range of approaches. The common thread connecting these varied approaches is that they require students to put into practice the material they are learning often through working with other students. This means students consolidate their learning and gain immediate feedback on whether they have understood the concepts. The literature explored below suggests that active learning approaches improve students' retention of information (as evidenced in assessment results), enhance student concentration, and promote student engagement and enjoyment.

In the context of the large group lecture, typical active learning approaches included small group discussions around questions the lecturer posed (Huerta, 2007), role plays and debates (Revell & Wainwright, 2009), and solving problems in groups (Gardner & Belland, 2012; Revell & Wainwright, 2009). Other approaches that required students to work individually included handouts where students are required to fill in missing information (Jakee, 2011), posing questions for reflection throughout the lecture (Fata-Hartley, 2011; Huerta, 2007) or using brief quizzes (Gier & Kreiner, 2009). Some studies also include active learning tasks that were designed to be completed

by students between lectures (Fata-Hartley, 2011; Smith & Cardaciotto, 2011). Others also included the use of multimedia elements such as short videos (Cavanagh, 2011) or animations (Gardner & Belland, 2012) in their discussion of active learning strategies.

Studies that compare active learning methods with traditional approaches to lecturing show that incorporating active learning methods in teaching enhances students' retention of lecture content, as evidenced through students' assessment results and self-assessment. For example, Huerta (2007) compared student performance in a first year governmental studies course at a Texan university that used traditional lecture methods with the same course in three subsequent semesters, where each used a different combination of active learning techniques. These active learning approaches used across the three semesters were question-based outlines in the first active learning semester, question-based outlines with small group discussion in the second, and these two approaches with the addition of student-created study outlines in the third active learning semester. The mean results of the five assessments students undertook throughout the semester were compared and it was found that there was a significant increase in students' mean test scores in seven out of fifteen of the active learning assessments compared to the non-active condition. In no assessment was there a significant decrease in students' mean scores in the active learning conditions compared to the non-active conditions. Likewise, in a study of undergraduate psychology students at two Midwestern American universities, Gier and Kreiner (2009) found significantly improved scores in tests and the final exam from students in a class which incorporated content-based questions followed by brief discussion compared to the students from a similar class where the authors used only PowerPoint and handouts to support their teaching.

These findings showing improved exam results are consistent with studies which show students self-report higher levels of learning in courses using active learning techniques. Smith and Cardaciotto (2011) compared the perceptions of students enrolled in a first year psychology course at an American university who completed content-based reviews of material taught in class with students taking the same course who completed activity-based revision tasks. Students answered questions on whether they perceived the activities to be a useful way of learning about the topics and whether they personally had found the activities useful. Significant increases in the active learning group were found for seven out of the nine course modules. Cavanagh's (2011) study of second year students in a mathematics education course also showed that students found activity-based learning to be helpful. Students participated in 'lectorials', which combined segments of lecturing with cooperative activities of 10-15 minutes in duration. The success of this format was evidenced both by student questionnaires showing that students viewed the cooperative activities as valuable for their learning, and by the high rate of attendance in class despite the voluntary nature of the lectorials and the fact that students were able to view the lectorials online without attending class.

It is possible that using a variety of teaching methods is more important than using active learning strategies. The studies reviewed in this paper generally used short segments of traditional lecturing broken up with brief activities. This approach is supported by Cavanagh (2011), and Revell and Wainwright (2009), who note that frequent changes in activity types enabled students to maintain focus for longer periods of time. Young, Robinson and Alberts (2009) note that this "vigilance decrement" (p. 53) sets in 10-30 minutes into a lecture and argue that "any variation in presentation or media can only help to maintain attention and facilitate deeper learning approaches in all lectures" (p. 53). Interestingly, Huerta (2007) found that there was not a great difference in student results between the three courses he taught which each used a different combination of active learning methods, suggesting that perhaps frequent changes in activity type are more important than the choice of particular activities. More evidence that the particular choice of activity may be less important comes from Breckler and Yu (2011), who examined the relationship between teaching styles, learning preferences and students' performance in an advanced physiology paper. They compared the performance of students with a preference for kinaesthetic learning against students who did not select kinaesthetic learning as one of their preferred styles, and found that both groups of students showed a comparable improvement in understanding when a hands-on activity was incorporated into the instruction, compared to when the traditional lecture method was used. This indicates that active learning approaches can be beneficial to students even when they are not aligned with students' preferred learning approaches. Overall, it appears that active learning methods, or indeed any changes in activity, such as using audiovisual extracts, facilitate increased recall and comprehension because breaking the lecture into smaller segments with frequent activity changes facilitates greater concentration. Because it appeared that using an active and segmented format for the workshop was more important than the choice of particular activities, the learning advisors decided that it was appropriate to prioritise ease of implementation in selecting activities for use in the workshop.

Active learning engages students of all abilities. Biggs (2012) argues that students who are considered academically able and highly motivated typically utilise a wide range of learning strategies regardless of the style of teaching used. These strategies will in turn benefit these students throughout their studies. On the other hand, students who are considered less able or motivated typically engage in the material only at the level required to complete the task at hand. This means that when a low level of engagement is required, such as in the typical lecture, these students will use surface approaches to learning. However, Biggs (2012) posits that when these students engage in tasks which call for higher-order skills such as problem-based learning, they use approaches associated with deep learning. Because critical thinking requires students to use

what Biggs (2012) identifies as higher-order skills such as comparing and contrasting, making connections between ideas and reflecting on their experiences, using active learning approaches is a logical way of teaching critical thinking.

Literature examining students' experience of lectures suggests that students generally find courses which use active learning approaches more enjoyable. For example, Revell and Wainwright (2009) found that in a series of focus group and individual interviews with students and staff in the geography department of Brunel University, both groups consistently identified "a high degree of student participation and interaction" (p. 214) as a key component of effective lectures. This finding is consistent with Huerta's (2007) review of end-of-semester evaluations in which 79% of students in the classes which used active learning rated the learning opportunities in the class favourably, compared to 57% of students in the class that did not use active learning. Likewise, the percentage of students who would recommend the lecturer was 85% in the active learning classes, compared to 59% in the non-active classes. On the other hand, Smith and Cardaciotto (2011) surveyed tertiary student responses to two different sets of activities to be completed outside of class and found that although students indicated they experienced a greater degree of challenge and felt they attained a greater depth of understanding when they participated in active learning tasks, they did not report that they enjoyed these tasks more than students who took part in exercises that did not use active learning principles. Overall though, it appears there is reasonable support for the notion that students enjoy learning through activity, suggesting that using this approach would allow the learning advisors to create a positive and enjoyable learning experience for students in orientation.

## Strategies and approaches to our orientation workshop

While there is strong pedagogical support for active learning methods, Huerta (2007) observes that many instructors believe that scaling these approaches up from small groups to use in large lectures is not feasible. Although the practicalities of taking an active learning approach initially seemed somewhat daunting, past presentations by colleagues using this approach with smaller groups had been very successful. One of the inspirations for the project was Burns' (2011) report on presenting key aspects of a literature review in the form of short activities. Students moved between stations completing activities such as comparing different designs of literature reviews, discussing how these designs could be used in their own work and comparing approaches to introducing literature. The success of this workshop showed that small-group, discussion-based learning was a viable way for learning advisors to present study skills to students. On this basis, the learning advisors decided to scale up this type of activity-based approach for use in orientation. In adapting the critical thinking workshop, one of the challenges that we faced was that the layout of lecture theatres was fixed, which put limits on students moving around. A second limitation was that as there would be a number of presentations running simultaneously across the campus, there were few staff members available for each session. This meant that we

would need to be reasonably certain that students could complete the activities with minimal staff support. Choosing group work activities was one way of increasing the likelihood that most students would be able to complete the tasks successfully without further assistance from learning advisors due to the diversity of skill levels in each group.

Planning for orientation took into account the need for frequent changes between activities and the advantages of asking students to work in small groups. The format for the session was a 5-10 minute explanation of an idea followed by a 5-10 minute active learning task relating to that concept. Resources for these activities were distributed to students at the beginning of the session. This approach made giving directions about which resources to use much easier. The first three activities focussed on elements of critical reading, as taken from Massey's online model (Massey University, 2011). In these tasks students were asked to read three short texts that related to water quality in New Zealand. They were then asked to find information on the background of the text (such as the kind of source, who published the text and who the intended audience was), the likely purpose of the text and the evidence that was included in the text. The final three activities looked at critical writing. The aim was that in participating in this session, students would begin to:

- Consider what makes a reliable source,
- Identify claims in a text,
- Identify types of supporting evidence,
- Distinguish descriptive and critical writing, and
- Use appropriate language to introduce the literature.

Prior to presenting these sessions, I delivered a practice presentation to my colleagues. They suggested that I include definitions of key academic terms such as argument, reduce the amount of reading in the activity packs, shorten some of the activities and provide greater scaffolding for the activities. On reflection, I realised that I had over-estimated the reading skills that some of the new intake of students would have and that it was important to make sure that the activities did not rely too heavily on students being able to read texts quickly. Reducing the content of the activity packs would not compromise active learning; in fact, reducing the amount of time students needed to spend reading would allow for more time discussing the ideas in the texts. The process of having the material reviewed by my colleagues was beneficial and it enabled me to adhere to the aim of reducing the material covered in favour of ensuring that students experienced mastery of the content we did cover.

## Observations and implications

*Handouts*
The activities in the session were supplemented with paper-based resources. Three of these required students to fill in the blanks with information they found in short

extracts of texts. The remaining three activities required students to categorise statements/words or to place them on a continuum. Rather than having students move to different activities, they were given packs of activities to work through in small groups. Resources were colour-coded so that the presenter could refer to the required activity as, for example, the green grid or the set of yellow cards. In each grid, some of the answers were completed in order to provide appropriate scaffolding. These decisions meant that groups required minimal individual input with the organisational aspects of the task. Handouts collected at the end of the session were largely completed or near-completed, indicating that level of activities and the time allotted were appropriate for most students.

As well as using paper-based resources for group activities, students were given a short summary of the key points to take away at the end of the session. This resource was included at the suggestion of a colleague, who advised that many students appreciate tangible resources (rather than just online resources) to refer back to. Initially, I was hesitant about whether this kind of static resource would aid active learning. However, studies suggest that students regard handouts as a valuable supplement to lectures (Sakraida & Draus, 2005), and respond positively to handouts which have a worksheet component such as requiring students to fill in missing information (Jakee, 2011; Revel & Wainwright, 2009). Such resources provide a clear and engaging structure to the lecture (Jakee, 2011; Revel & Wainwright, 2009). For future presentations, it would be worth including individual worksheets which provide students with a record of what they have covered in the presentation.

*Timing*
Groups of students completed tasks at different rates, although most students were able to complete most of the tasks in the given time. Some of the activities were structured with tasks to complete first and extension questions for those who finished early. This structure of core and extension questions worked well and is something I would like to expand in future presentations. MacKay (2006) suggests that for groups of diverse learners it is important to consider ways to reduce "the fear of not being able to keep up" (p. 45). One strategy to do this is by dividing activities into what MacKay (2006) describes as "all must...most should...some could" (2006, p. 47) whereby all students complete the first activity, which covers the main concept, and learners who have done this are then able to attempt a variety of subsequent revision strategies. MacKay (2006) recommends that there is a variety of activity types involved at each level so that students who only complete the first level of core tasks still encounter a range of activities. These recommendations are worth considering for future presentations, for example, the first three activities used in the session required students to find and fill in information; for future presentations, it may be beneficial to use a greater range of approaches to cater for a diverse range of learning preferences.

## Dominance of reading and writing

The workshop could have been improved by offering a greater range of hands-on or visual activities in addition to activities based on written language. The workshop utilised short segments of lecturing, interspersed with activities which relied on reading and writing skills. It also incorporated other modes of learning, such as kinaesthetic learning by physically rearranging cards into categories or on a continuum. To some degree, this reflects the reality of university study, which is often based around these written skills. However, it is also important to bear in mind that many students prefer to learn through means other than written channels. Breckler and Yu (2011), for example, indicate that although only half the students they surveyed indicated that they preferred a kinaesthetic learning style, hands-on activities were almost universally popular with students in an undergraduate biology class, and led to improved performance across the class. As another approach, Gill (2011) found that students both rated video segments as valuable elements of lectures and were highly engaged in learning from them. Similarly, Schrad (2010) found that "students overwhelmingly responded positively" (p. 763) to lecturing which incorporated short video clips of popular media. In light of these findings, it would be well worth using a mix of video and print sources for students to evaluate.

## Student-student interaction

I facilitated two of the four sessions on critical thinking. Although the overall response from students in both groups was positive, I observed that there was a higher level of interaction between students in the second group. Whereas both groups participated willingly and completed the activities, the second group seemed more ready to engage in discussion, ask questions and volunteer opinions. One possible explanation for this is that the second group had just completed another session, Problem Solving 101, covering group work and problem solving skills for first year students. In this session, students completed an initial group-based problem-solving activity, engaged in a structured reflection on their approach to group work and then had the opportunity to try out new approaches to group work in a second scenario-based learning activity. Thus the students were primed for interactive group work when they commenced the critical thinking workshop. Higher levels of participation in the second group may indicate the value of allowing time for students to develop their group work skills before undertaking small group activity-based learning. In a study of second year tertiary students across a semester-long course, Scott-Ladd and Chan (2008) found that students need time and instruction to develop skills for working in groups. They also found that more developed group work skills correlated with students viewing group work more positively. While new students' orientation takes place in a much shorter time frame, there may still be benefits of considering cumulative learning across sessions with regards to preparing students for group work. As is often the case in organising large events, timetabling was driven by logistical concerns such as the availability of lecture theatres, time taken to move

across campus and coordinating with other fixed events in orientation week. However, the unintended benefits of the previous group work session show that, inasmuch as it is feasible to do so, it is worth considering how we can prepare students for positive activity-based and group-based learning experiences.

## Additional staff support

I presented two sessions with an additional learning advisor in the room, who assisted with welcoming students, and distributing materials. During the activity slots, both advisors circulated the room and observed progress on the activities. Students were able to call on the advisors to ask for assistance. The ratio of staff members to students (two learning advisors, 150 students in the larger session, working in groups of 3-4) was sufficient to allow the advisors to check in briefly with each group on most activities. Having a second person available to welcome students and to support the logistics of the presentation was valuable, especially when we encountered difficulties with the sound system. Co-presenting the session would be another option to consider for future presentations.

## Conclusion

Despite the constraints of the lecture theatre, using an active learning approach to teach critical thinking skills proved to be a viable approach during new students' orientation. Taking this approach offers benefits across a range of criteria, including increasing students' interest and engagement, and maximising the material that is understood and retained. Forward planning in regards to resources meant that it was possible to present these sessions smoothly with two staff members. The positive flow-on effects of students' participation in other sessions running during orientation suggests that it is worth considering orientation holistically rather than as a series of discreet activities. Future presentations could utilise a greater range of media such as using popular video clips for students to critique rather than just using text-based sources. Video material is consistently rated highly by students and its use would minimise the amount of reading that students need to complete in order to participate in the small group activities evaluating claims and evidence in the texts. This would ensure that participation was less contingent on reading speed and therefore may also facilitate smoother timing of the sessions. More formal evaluation of the sessions would also be useful in order to assess students' perceptions of the activities that they participated in. Ultimately though, the active model for teaching critical thinking skills in orientation has met with success both from a student response and a logistical standpoint.

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# Developing an online orientation workshop for first-year students in a distance education context

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## Introduction

Engagement and success in tertiary study is a key focus of the Tertiary Education Commission's 2010 – 2015 strategy and government funding is currently directly linked to course and qualification completions (Ministry of Education, n.d.). However, this funding system disadvantages distance education institutions as course completion rates are generally lower compared to face-to-face teaching institutions (Boyle, Kwon, Ross, & Simpson, 2010; Smith et al., 2011) . This is further complicated by Open Polytechnic (hereafter referred to as the "OP") students being a unique student cohort. OP students are mostly mature students, fitting in study alongside a range of other roles and responsibilities. Because of work and other commitments, such as caring for family, the majority of students study part-time. Of the 34,413students enrolled with the OP in 2012, 68 per cent were in employment and 93 per cent were studying part-time (Open Polytechnic Annual Report, 2012). In addition, more than half of students (60 per cent) are over 30 years of age and have been out of the academic world for some time. In fact, one in five (22 per cent) students studying at the OP do not have any previous formal qualifications (Open Polytechnic Annual Report, 2012).These factors mean that students may arrive at the OP with little understanding of the conventions, language or expectations of the tertiary environment and as such face an even greater learning burden in their first year of study.

Research shows that having a successful first year of study is critical to long-term student success (Earle, 2007; Krause & Coates, 2008, as cited in Grant, Olivier, Rawlings & Ross, 2011) and that early and appropriate learning support has a positive impact on student retention (Crosling, Thomas & Heagney, 2008). It is therefore imperative that suitable support programmes are in place for first-year students. While the Learning Centre at the OP supports all students, it focuses on first-year students in particular in order to help those students make a good start to their study and stay engaged with it[2]. A variety of programmes using a range of technologies have been

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[2] In 2012, the Learning Centre was able to directly support around six thousand students. 3755 first-time students were contacted at least once by the Learning Centre's peer mentor team; 1321 students participated in online study skills workshops; 774 students had individual consultations with learning advisors; and 151 students had their assignments reviewed through the writing support service.

developed by the Learning Centre over recent years. In 2012, an online introduction to study at the OP, known as the Online Orientation Workshop (hereafter referred to as the "Orientation"), was developed and trialled. This paper provides a brief literature review of e-learning design principles and student success factors in e-learning environments. It then describes the Orientation, its learning outcomes, the design process and its key features. At the end it presents conclusions.

## Literature Review

Learning and teaching approaches has been impacted by the development and use of the internet in the last twenty years. Online learning or e-learning are terms used to refer to the usage of internet or the World Wide Web to enhance learning and teaching (Gedik, Kiraz, & Ozden, 2013).

E-learning is different from the more traditional face-to-face model. Learners must interact in a virtual and digital environment where face-to-face interactions amongst facilitators and learners no longer exist. One of the key challenges when developing e-learning courses is the creation of a positive online experience for students where they can feel capable and in control (McAlpine, 2009). Another challenge is to offer clear and accessible content. According to Milne and White (2005), although online learning environments offer exciting new ways to present information, develop skills and build learning communities at a distance, there is an inherent risk in employing untested technology and approaches. Using research as a basis reduces the risk during the design process.

Moises (as cited in Elias, 2011) points out that distance and online students are diverse and have a range of study schedules, timelines, work and family commitments which all affect their availability to study. The OP teaching situation occurs in this context, as discussed previously. Elias (2010) outlines a helpful set of design principles that need to be considered to meet the challenges faced by distance students. Some of these principles are:

- Equitable use: The design and contents should be accessible to all learners, despite their level of ability or location. To achieve this, content should be provided in well-recognised formats that suit learners with different abilities (such as those with hearing, visual or learning impairment) and all be available online.
- Flexible use: To allow for a level of autonomy, learners should have some choice in how they access material. For example, via video or audio script, and be given a selection of topics to choose from. Details of where to find further information should also be included to allow for extra investigation. Further research is usually achieved by links to additional reading or useful external websites.
- Simple and intuitive design: The interface should be easy to understand, regardless of the learner's experience in the online environment. This involves

testing navigation carefully and including tips on where to go next, or how to return to a previous page, when necessary.

- Development of a community of learners and support: The environment should promote interaction and communication among learners, tutors and support staff, through forums and other direct communication methods like phone or email, and information about how to access support services.
- A positive instructional climate: Comments and feedback from the facilitator or tutor should be welcoming and inclusive. A positive learning environment means regular and considered communication from instructors, involvement in discussion forums, and availability for one-on-one consultation.

Furthermore, Merril states the following constructivist principles for design: Learning is promoted when new knowledge is demonstrated to the learner, when existing knowledge is activated as a foundation for new knowledge, and when learners engage in solving real-world problems (as cited in Gedik et al. 2013).

In terms of designing authentic learning activities Olivier, Herrington and Reeves suggest that they need to provide opportunities for students to explore specific topics using a variety of resources, provide opportunity to collaborate, ask questions and reflect on students' beliefs and values (as cited in Gedik et al., 2013). The Orientation presents each module with relevant written and audio-visual content and supports reflection through the provision of quizzes that allow students to test themselves on what they have learned and apply it to their own context. Collaboration with other participants and the facilitator is then encouraged via interactive forums.

In terms of how to structure the information provided online, McAlpine (2009), states that online content needs to be concise, easy to find, easy to read and easy to use. Thus, online courses or workshops should include course pages[1] that meet the following key points:

1. Can people get the gist of the course page in three seconds, without scrolling or reading every word?
2. Does the content of the page look well-organised, calm and orderly?
3. Is the essential information at the top or top left of the page (as most website readers look to the top left first, then down and across, in an 'F' pattern)?
4. Does the first paragraph contain a summary?
5. Are the words familiar and easily understood? Are the sentences 20 words or fewer?
6. Are the paragraphs 65 words or fewer?
7. Does the content use the word "you", speaking directly to the reader?

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[1] Course page here refers to one of a set of webpages that form an online course.

8. Are the links useful, well-placed and up-to-date?
9. Can all readers/learners get the information from this page regardless of their physical abilities, computer browser or systems?

<div align="right">(Adapted from McAlpine, 2009, p. 7)</div>

As well as providing content that is easily accessible to students, the students' own self-regulation of learning is a crucial factor that impacts on their success in e-learning settings, since this form of learning requires high levels of autonomy (Artino, as cited in Hsu, Ching, Mathews & Carr-Chellman, 2009). Self-regulated learning involves "metacognitive, motivational and behavioural processes that are personally initiated to acquire knowledge and skills, such as goal setting, planning, learning strategies, self-reinforcement and self-instruction" (Zimmerman, 2001, p. 13855). Successful students are those who have these skills and are able to reflect on their learning (Hsu et al., 2009). While OP students use skills such as goal setting and planning in their everyday lives and are motivated to study, many of them have been out of the academic environment for some time and therefore may need to learn how to apply these skills to their study as well as learn new skills.

In terms of behaviours, Dabbagh and Kitsantas (as cited in Hsu et al., 2009) state that self-regulated learners are able to identify and request outside resources for assistance to overcome any frustrations they encounter while trying to achieve their study goals. It has been broadly acknowledged that learners who seek help tend to be more successful than learners who do not (Aleven, Stahl, Showorm, Fisher & Wallace, as cited in Hsu et al., 2009). One of the key aims of the OP Learning Centre is to encourage students to seek help early when they face any issues with their study. The OP offers library and learning support, as well as specific support for Māori and Pasifika students.

Self-regulated learners are also able to plan and use calendars for their studies in order to keep themselves informed about assignment due dates and create effective study routines (Hsu et al., 2009). Such simple tools can be forgotten in the initial stages of a course as students become overwhelmed with information overload. Thus, advice on time management strategies is important at the orientation stage.

Finally, Quinn (2006) states that online course design must focus on experiences that allow learners to engage emotionally as well as cognitively with their learning. Therefore, such design should include activities where learners reflect on their goals and achievements, connect the course content with their own personal experiences and interact informally with online peers through chat forums and non-assessed group work.

Effective course design enhances student motivation through the use of a range of learning media, for example, written information, quizzes and audio-visual resources. Such design also addresses learners' different needs and creates engaging learning experiences. In order to provide a positive learning experience to OP students

and motivate them, the Orientation uses a range of formats from simple written information, to "how to" video tutorials using screen capture software, to animated videos. All videos used are brief and concise (each less than a minute long). Several videos were embedded from online sources and others were developed in house, with the goal of addressing common questions that first time students have. Hsu et al. (2009) found that not only do students enjoy video clips as a part of an e-learning course but video clips also have a positive impact on their attitudes towards study.

## Online Orientation Workshop

*Learning Outcomes*
The following learning outcomes of the Orientation were based on findings of the literature review on student success and an audit carried out by the Learning Centre of common issues that arise for first-year students at the OP.

On completion of the Orientation, students will be able to:

- Demonstrate an understanding of time management skills and how to use planning tools to support study,
- Navigate the Online Campus[1] and online course page,
- Identify Open Polytechnic services such as the Library, Learning Centre, Helpdesk and Māori office and where to go for specific help and
- Start to reflect on their study environment and habits.

*Design and Development Process*
The design and development process involved defining the learning outcomes, writing content, and evaluating, selecting and producing resources. This followed the E-ADDIE course development model (Neal, 2011) which links e-learning design principles with the traditional course development stages of analysis, design, development, implementation and evaluation.

Analysis of the Orientation audience looked at both the diversity of the students studying at the OP as well as the technical constraints which existed in each of their individual study environments. This included identifying the level of computer literacy among students and their access to computer hardware, software and the internet. Although most OP students are required to have online access, download times vary depending on their internet plan, so multimedia resources needed to be used judiciously.

Once the first version of the Orientation was finished, it was tested with a group of eight students and several educational design experts. Student feedback was collected through individual surveys that focused on the content, time involved and accessibility

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[1] The Online Campus is the Open Polytechnic's online environment where students access their online courses.

of the resources. Some of the feedback was positive: "It is a fantastic introduction to online study." "It empowers and would definitely motivate new students." "It helps to connect students through the forums and the videos showing how to use the campus, library and so on.."

There were also some technical issues: "Not sure if it's my settings but the pictures didn't load…", "videos are not streaming well on my network connection" and suggestions from students: "More colourful visuals e.g: pictures, flowcharts…", "The layout is too crammed with text and makes it hard to follow and not very engaging" and "I would prefer a cleaner, more graphic layout."

After collecting the feedback from students and educational designers, the team reworked the Orientation layout and content and new animated videos were developed.

On completion of these changes within the Orientation, the new version was migrated into Moodle 2 and delivered to all first-year OP students.

*Learning Management System*
The Orientation was developed in Moodle, the Learning Management System (LMS) of the OP. Moodle is one of the most popular LMSs for designing and facilitating e-learning courses in the tertiary education sector (Zacker as cited in Calvo, Iglesias & Moreno, 2012). It offers a variety of features including forums, videos, webpages and quiz development options.

*Facilitation*
The Orientation is facilitated by a learning advisor from the Learning Centre who enters the online forums at regular intervals in order to add to discussions and answer student queries. All activities are carried out online and there is no face-to-face interaction.

*Modules*
To address the learning goals, four modules entitled '*Getting Started*', '*Online Campus*', '*Our services*' and '*Where to next?*' were developed. The figure below shows the Orientations' main page with links (shown as rectangular 'buttons') that take the learner to each module.
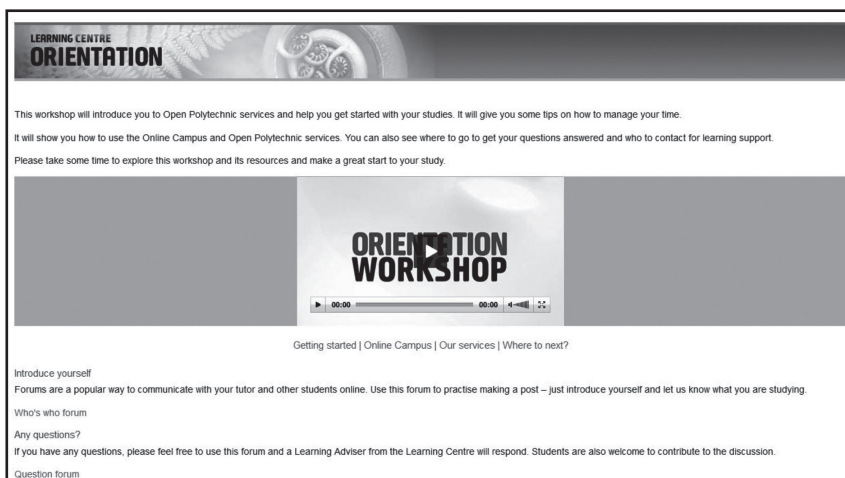
Figure 1. *Online Orientation Workshop main page*

### Getting started
This initial module covers how to be successful at distance learning, why online learning is important and how to develop time management skills required in an e-learning environment.

### Online Campus
The second module looks at navigating the Online Campus environment and provides answers to common questions that new students have about this particular area.

### OP services
The third module outlines OP services and how students can access them, as well as common first-time student issues and where to go for help.

### Where to next?
This final module shows students how to connect with the OP community via the OP Facebook page. It also gives information on further online study workshops run by the Learning Centre.

### Special features
Student and educational designer feedback on the pilot version indicated that the Orientation needed to be more interactive. In response, several features were added which made use of the variety of tools provided by Moodle, including:

- *An introductory video*, presented by a learning advisor, welcoming new students and providing a quick overview of the Orientation.

- A **'Who's who'** forum encouraging students to introduce themselves and get a sense of who else is participating in the Orientation.
- A 'Questions' forum providing an opportunity for students to have their questions answered by a learning advisor.
- **Quizzes** entitled 'Maximizing your studies' and 'Where to go for help' helping raise student awareness of personal study habits and OP services.
- **Weekly and yearly study calendars** provided in Word format so students can use them on their computer or print them out.
- **Links to learning resources and useful external sites** scattered throughout the Orientation to allow students to explore further information independently.
- A **graduation video** to remind students of their long-term goal of successfully completing their qualification.
- Embedded **animated videos** (see figure 2 below) that use a story format to address common issues that first-year students experience and show where to go for help.
- **Video tutorials** using screencast software to show students how to find and access key information in the OP online learning environment. Information includes how to find their course page, how to access the online Student Manual, how to use the OP Library and how to receive study support.
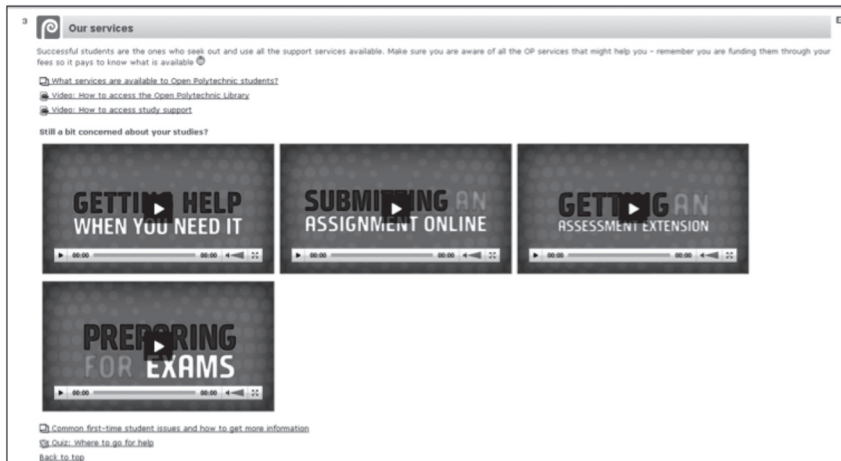


Figure 2. *Module example with animated videos*

## Conclusion

Distance students have diverse study schedules, timelines, and work and family commitments which affect the time and energy they have for study. The Online Orientation Workshop aims to cover the factors that are important for student success, including promoting self-directed learning, so that students can set their learning goals, plan their time, reflect on their knowledge and skills and seek help when required. E-learning principles were applied throughout the design of the Orientation to make the learning experience accessible and motivating. Student autonomy was promoted by offering a flexible "learning menu" where they could choose the modules, resources and the amount of time spent on the Orientation (students who tested it reported spending 1–3 hours on average). In addition to traditional text-based approaches, the use of a variety of methods and media to convey information resulted in an interactive and effective Orientation. This, however, is not the end of the process. The Learning Centre will continue to improve the Orientation based on student feedback in order to further promote study success in the future.

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# Reflecting on one-to-one teaching - What strategies might shed light on our practice?

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## Introduction

Tertiary learning advisors may spend considerable amounts of time teaching individual students in one-to-one consultations, using both face-to-face and online delivery (Carter, 2010; Wilson, Li, Collins & Couchman, 2011, Berry, Collins, Copeman, Harper, Li & Prentice, 2012). Along with other more traditional forms of evaluation, reflection on teaching has been recommended as a method for reviewing and evaluating one-to-one teaching. In December 2012 ATLAANZ adopted a document on Professional Practice (ATLAANZ, 2012) which includes the statement, "learning advisors engage in reflective practice within institutional teams and within the wider community" (p. 3). However there seems to have been little investigation into how this reflection on practice is carried out, and in particular, on whether learning developers/advisors engage in reflection on their individual teaching sessions or if they do reflect, whether they follow any structured formats, such as a rubric, diary, checklist, list of prompts, or other tools.

As Thomson (2012) has noted in her blog on academic writing, "reflection is one of those weasel-ly words that can mean anything and nothing. Most of us acknowledge that we need to do it, but what does it actually mean as a practice?" (para. 1). I believe myself to be a reflective practitioner but when I look at how much time I devote to reflecting on practice and then consider how informal and unsystematic this reflection can be, I can see that I am probably not deriving all potential benefits from this form of review. I have the sense that solutions to some of my one-to-one teaching concerns may be at my fingertips; if I could only find the time, and an appropriate structure, to more consistently review my practice and think my way through to greater clarity about alternative ways of conducting each interaction.

I am therefore interested to investigate to what extent TLAs engage in reflective practice, how colleagues go about reflection if they use it and their beliefs around this practice. This paper assumes that reflective practice is likely to be helpful to the enhancement of teaching practice, difficult though this may be to demonstrate. It also assumes that, like me, other TLAs find it difficult in the course of their working

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lives to consistently and thoroughly reflect on their one-to-one teaching practice. The purpose here is to highlight aspects of reflective practice and consider the usefulness of a range of tools for reflection on one-to-one teaching – in particular a checklist and 'wheel of learning advising' which time-poor TLAs could use as prompts to review one-to-one sessions. The paper concludes by outlining a planned research project to be undertaken with participation from members of ATLAANZ.

## Insights from literature

Most writers on reflection in teaching seem to start with the work of Schön (1983). He describes reflection as 'thoughtful practice' which, according to a later work (Schön, 1987), can include:

1. reflection-in-action – thinking about the work that happens at the time of actually doing the work;

2. reflection-on-action – thinking shortly after an event is finished, usually reviewing what happened, to think about how we could solve problems that arose, or what we could improve on in future practice;

3. reflection-before-action was added by Eraut (1995) – thinking and review prior to practice, as part of the planning stage, a form of reflection that seems to differ from reflection-on-action only in the timing, as it may be done some time after the initial practice rather than immediately.

This early work focused, in the case of Schön, on the role of reflection in the overall work of professionals, rather than specifically on teaching. However, it has been very influential in the application of reflective practice to education.

Reflection is seen as a method of learning which involves thinking things over with the purpose of making the implicit explicit and questioning our practices, knowledge bases and deeply held beliefs. A reflective cycle involves investigating the past in the present in order to generate alternative ways of practicing for the future (Carroll, 2009). The notion seems to relate to the socio-cultural perspective on education which holds that thoughts, statements and actions cannot be disentangled from the context in which they originally occurred. In this perspective Tennant (as cited in Illeris, 2009) sees our experience as "a text which can be reinterpreted and reassessed" (p. 155). Reflection on experience implies taking a certain amount of responsibility for what happens in our work, and assumes that we can make progress in our practice by thinking deeply about it. Usher (as cited in Illeris, 2009), points out that it assumes a willingness to change. In a strong statement about the ongoing nature of reflection on practice, C. Wright Mills (1959) emphasises the link between personal experience and our working lives:

what this means is that you must learn to use your life experience in your intellectual work: continually to examine and interpret it. In this sense, craftsmanship is the centre of yourself and you are personally involved in every intellectual product upon which you may work (as cited in Clegg, 2012, p. 196).

Others have looked at the emotional work component of one-to-one teaching and learning (Huyton, 2009; Mitchell, 2008). Following an electronic survey of members of Association of Learning Developers in Higher Education, Huyton (2009) found that almost three-quarters of them could identify times when, after challenging encounters with students, they needed to 'debrief' or 'offload'. Most reported that in such situations they reflected on such encounters individually and drew on their own professional expertise, rather than on support from colleagues. Huyton claims "the contemporary climate of work intensification has had implications for the emotional well-being of higher education practitioners which are, in part, explained by the lack of discursive space available for collective reflection on practice issues" (p. 14). Clearly, feelings and emotions are significant because of the way they arise unbidden and contribute to reactions. During sessions, feelings can intervene and disrupt thought processes; especially in relation to mistakes or perceived mistakes, so they can be clues to key points about practice. Collective reflection may indeed be useful as a way of dealing with emotions in teaching, but not always be practical within the constraints of busy professional lives. Reflective practice or 'self-reflection' as Berry et al., (2012) term it, can allow for intrapersonal debrief and may be useful before or instead of discussion with colleagues.

Some views, beliefs and concerns of advisors about their one-to-one teaching practice have been exposed as writers comment or reflect on their own teaching experiences (Carter, 2010; Mitchell, 2008). In 2010 Carter reported on results from a survey of ATLAANZ members which looked at how TLAs see their work in individual consultations. This article raises a number of challenges and suggests we interrogate our practice in one-to-one consultations, both for personal professional development and to ensure ethical one-to-one teaching. Reflective practice has also been advocated as a useful option to enable individual review of aspects of one-to-one teaching (Wilson, 2008), as a component of a more general teaching evaluation (Berry et al., 2012) and as a basis for professional development (Wilson et al., 2011). A range of reflective methods have been investigated; in these articles we can see benefit gained from individual recording of questioning techniques (Wilson, 2008), use of discourse analysis (Wilson et al., 2011), journals, audio logs and post-teaching discussions (Berry et al., 2012). Chanock (2000) presents a good example of the use of reflection in her one-to-one teaching and points out that insights gained from one-to-one work enable learning advisors to address student needs more widely, as they engage with academic staff in their institutions. Wilson (2008) provides an excellent case study

of personal reflective practice in action. She focused specifically on her questioning strategies within seven one-to-one sessions, and reflected on student responses. She found that this reflective process deepened her understanding of the varied approaches that questions can play a part in a teaching session.

## Benefits of reflection

Some benefits of reflective practice lie in its potential for articulating thoughts and helping us externalise them (Carroll, 2009; Usher, as cited in Illeris, 2009), as well as for "allowing the context to teach us" (Langer, 1989, as cited in Carroll, 2009, p. 49). Also, in engaging in reflection we focus on the process of our work (Carroll, 2009) and make it more likely that we will apply new understandings to future practice. Reflective practice is claimed to be an effective form of on-going professional development (Walker, 2011). This is attested to in a number of practical guides for teachers in a range of settings (Brookfield, 1995; Ghaye & Ghaye, 1998; Moon, 2004; O'Connor & Diggins, 2002). A further guide to reflective practice (Cowan, 2006) provides both analysis and a range of reflective tools, along with many examples drawn from tertiary education. While generally relevant, this literature does not refer to reflection in the context of one-to-one teaching. The articles mentioned above (Wilson, 2008;: Chanock, 2000) clearly support the benefits of reflecting on one-to-one teaching, and Chanock summarises this by saying. "I was able to learn much that could be fed back into teaching other students" (p. 65), while at the same time emphasising the unique nature of the dialogue with each individual student.

## The challenges of reflection

While reflective practice is usually discussed in highly positive terms, some issues arise concerning its use. Carroll (2009) concedes that individual internal reflection is beneficial but "can allow for self-deception" (p. 43). The link between reflection and action has also been questioned (Mälkki & Lindblom-Ylänne, 2012). Reflection can simply involve looking back on what happened and noticing, rather than acting to improve teaching. Teachers routinely see time as a barrier to reflective practice, perhaps in part because it may not immediately lead to a perceptible outcome or relevant professional development (Brookfield, 1995; Cowan, 2006). A lack of time is undoubtedly genuine, but Brookfield (1995) also points out that time concerns may include, more subtly, doubts about whether reflective thinking is a legitimate way for teachers to spend time at work. He comments that institutional rhetoric may espouse the value of teachers engaging in critical reflection, but not work to create the conditions of openness and acceptance that would allow this activity to flourish. TLAs are likely to feel some discomfort about engaging in reflective practice, if they sense that others do not see it as a valid component of their accountability as learning advisors.

## Dialogic reflective practice

One value of dialogic reflective practice may lie in the opportunity to share ideas that are not fully formed or have perhaps become implicitly coded in some words we routinely use to talk about our practices. As mentioned above, peer dialogue or peer mentoring provides a model for shared discussion of reflective practice (Carroll, 2009); as does narrative therapy as proposed, for TLA use, by Carter (2010). Kato (2012) supports the use of dialogue with a peer in reviewing one-to-one sessions with learners, as well as the use of prompted individual post-session reflection, prior to engagement in dialogue. The individual reflective phase seems essential before moving into a discussion with a colleague. The ground for such a discussion would also need to be carefully prepared, as Kato (2012) and Berry et al. (2012) note, in terms of a carefully articulated learning contract about how the peer discussion on reflection is to be conducted. A contract could include discussion of confidentially, agreement on roles, responsibilities, acknowledgement of status differences, sharing of the floor, nature of feedback given and post-discussion expectations.

## Tools for reflection

The following list outlines a number of strategies, tools or prompts which have been suggested for individual (or self-) reflective practice in teaching and learning and which may be useful for TLAs to explore when reflecting on one-to-one teaching. Some tools or strategies with a peer discussion component follow this.

Primarily individual reflection strategies:

- Journal writing – different forms of written narrative, sometimes following a structured framework of questions (Moon, 2004; Cowan, 2006);
- Critical incident review;
- Voice-recording - oral narrative and/or recorded learning log (Moon, 2004);
- Self-observation via video or audio (Walker, 2011);
- Checklists (Cowan, 2006); and
- Blogging (open to peer comment, but initiated as an individual reflection).

Peer-assisted strategies:

- Peer discussion, peer mentoring, possibly as part of community of practice activity which might include forms of reciprocal peer interviewing or dialogue (Kato, 2012; Wenger, 1998);
- Peer observation of one-to-one teaching, followed by peer dialogue (Berry et al., 2012);
- Structured peer discussion as in peer mentoring, peer supervision (Carroll, 2009);
- The wheel of learning advising (Kato, 2012);

- Critical conversation (Brookfield, 1995);
- Action research – projects adopting a cycle of observe, reflect, implement, evaluate usually with the aim of addressing a specific identified issue or problem (Piggot-Irvine, 2009);
- Discussion of metaphors; and
- Concept-mapping.

Dialogue with a peer could follow use of an individual reflection tool, but conversely discussion with a peer about a specific focus for reflection might lead well to a TLA trialling an individual strategy. Awareness of a range of tools might allow for individual choice and encourage trialling of different approaches to see which work best in terms of promoting enhancement of teaching, and which fit well within time constraints and other work commitments.

## Personal Observations

My own efforts at reflective practice are both consistent and sporadic. They are consistent in the sense that I regularly do mental review of some of my one-to-one teaching sessions, particularly when a session has not gone well. Writing notes, talking to other TLAs and sporadic attempts at keeping a journal are the main strategies I use. As noted above, many authors endorse journal writing (Moon, 2004, Cowan 2006), but my success with this reflective tool is mixed. Writing is invariably helpful because it externalises the issue and enables me to develop some perspective on the options I may have had in the session. It is probably effective but can be slow and cumbersome; I ramble and it is not always easy to crystallise key points from the texts I produce. Bullet point notes work better for me but it is sometimes hard to recapture the full thought later. I do not always get to the point of identifying key points I want to work on. The reflection on practice I engage in therefore works as a one-off learning activity after a particular session, but I am uncertain whether it prompts long-term changes in my teaching practice. However, on occasion I notice that in a one-to-one consultation I put into practice a thought or strategy that occurred to me in an earlier post-teaching reflection. This has occurred both when working with the same student again and when working with a different student.

## Next steps

As a result of considering the role of reflective practice in one-to-one teaching I became curious about the extent to which there could be evidence of a culture of reflective practice within our profession. I also wanted to see if I could develop some ways of prompting and recording reflective thinking which could help to take advantage of short breaks between teaching sessions. In 2012 I therefore applied for and received ethical approval for a research project into reflection (Unitec Research Ethics Committee, 2012, personal communication). The research question for the project is:

What is the role of reflection in the 1:1 teaching practice of tertiary language and learning advisors?

Specifically it aims to explore the following questions:

1. What are the perceptions of TLAs on the role of reflection before, during or after their 1:1 teaching?

2. To what extent are TLAs regularly reviewing, evaluating or reflecting on 1:1 teaching?

3. What is the potential for and value of using specific reflection tools and practices as a means of improving their one-to-one work?

My intention is that this will initially focus on asking participants to trial two reflective practice tools – a checklist that I have drafted that allows participants to include their own specific points for observations and reflections; and a wheel of learning advising (adapted with permission from Kato, 2012) which participating TLAs will be encouraged to adapt as they see fit.

In order to explore the above questions with participants, I plan to use a qualitative approach which includes data collection methods, survey questionnaires and focus groups, the latter of which may have to be limited geographically to where I am based. It seemed to me that we learning advisors could benefit from both reflecting on and considering the potential of reflection for what Carter (2010) refers to as this 'closed door' form of teaching. This could contribute to our on-going professional development and strengthen discussion of our work with other academic colleagues. It may also be of value given the current lack of structured and specific training for one-to-one teaching. Indirectly I hope that students may benefit from their advisors both engaging in regular and structured consideration of teaching strategies and sharing insights with colleagues.

I conducted a pilot study for this work in 2012, when two colleagues and I trialled the first iteration of the two tools. I saw this trial as an opportunity to refine the tools and the instructions given for their use. I extended the trial to a wider group of learning centre colleagues and will trial the planned survey questionnaire with this group before inviting members of the wider ATLAANZ community of practice to participate. Following the analysis of survey data, I hope to share some findings in focus group discussions with colleagues. In the focus groups, participants will also have the opportunity to review some further tools for prompting reflection and for recording responses, and comment on their potential usefulness.

## Conclusion

This paper has discussed some understandings of the term 'reflective practice'. It has also considered reflection on one-to-one consultations as a means of both interrogating practices and reviewing the informational, interpersonal and emotional

dimensions of this work. From a personal perspective, I have noticed that my assumptions about one-to-one teaching and learning are based substantially on my needs as a learner and my reactions to my own learning. This observation alone seems to support both my continued engagement in individual reflective practice on teaching and the value that might be found in discussion with TLA peers. Colleagues will no doubt have a wide range of experiences and views on the topic. Now that ATLAANZ members have agreed to a professional practice document that says we engage in reflective practice, it seems timely to explore its potential to help us enhance and share insights on our one-to-one teaching.

Note: If you are interested in participating in the trial of the two tools – the reflective practice checklist and the modified Wheel of Learning Advising (Kato, 2012), please email me at cmalthus@unitec.ac.nz for a participant information sheet and consent form.

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# "Physician, heal thyself": What we can learn from our own writing advice

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> O, I have ta'en / Too little care of this! Take physic, pomp, / Expose thyself to feel what wretches feel...(Shakespeare, 1992, p. 183, 3.4.32–34)

## Introduction: freeing myself to write

Is writing cure or curse (Derrida, 1981)? In the academy, more and more writing is demanded of us; this goes for staff and students alike (Hoskin, 1993). It is something of a curse. And for we Learning Advisors, though scholarship in the traditional sense of keeping up with research in our discipline (the "scholarship of application") might be devalued by our managers, researching and writing about our teaching (the "scholarship of teaching") is on the increase and increasingly endorsed by them (Boyer, 1990, p. 16).

However, although we teach strategic reading and writing strategies to enable our students to take control of the writing process and to practise their various literacies, we are often loath to take our own medicine, to reflect on our writing practice (Hillocks, 1995) – despite embracing reflective practice in our teaching (Schön, 1987). Here I briefly reflect on how I hope to learn from the advice that I give students about writing to become more productive as a writer; how I hope to cure my writing ills, or, to put it more loftily, how I can take care of my writing self (Foucault, 1988).

For me, becoming productive as a scholarly writer is not about whether or not my "research environment" is productive (Bland & Ruffin, 1992), though this is where much of the scholarship on productivity has focussed (see Dundar & Lewis, 1998; Ramsden, 1994). But, in large part, my research environment – how "research-conducive" my institution might be (Bland & Ruffin, 1992, p. 385) – is out of my control. Nor, for me, is becoming productive really about freedom from teaching or other pressures (Boice & Jones, 1984; see Marsh & Hattie, 2002), what might be called a negative freedom (Berlin, 1969). We Learning Advisors, like other academics, tend to put teaching first; we treat it, along with service to committees, as what we must do, and schedule everything else around it.

Thus, for me, becoming productive as a scholarly writer is about freeing myself to write: what might be called a positive freedom (Berlin, 1969). I am, I think, my own worst enemy when it comes to writing, and I'm sure this is the case with most

academics, though they might not care, or dare, to admit it (see Cameron, Nairn & Higgins (2009); Hartley & Knapper, 1984; Sword, 2010). If I am to write well, or, at least, better (if not "differently" [Sword, 2009, p. 320]), the easiest place to start is with me.

Freeing myself to write, then, involves two tasks:

1. to learn to manage my time better to allow time for writing, to free up time to write; and

2. to learn not to be too careful too early in the writing process to allow writing to do its work.

For the first task, it is Robert Boice's (1997) four steps to productivity that I look to; for the second, it is Peter Elbow's (2010) strategies to structure free writing. In the spirit of writing as a method of inquiry, as "a way of finding out about yourself and your topic" (Richardson, 1987, p. 923), in what follows I reflect on what these highly productive scholars can teach us about scholarly productivity.

Because I know that once I start writing I never have trouble doing it, I must allow myself to write and to free write. If this sounds like self-help talk, in a sense it is. I want to make "Physician, heal thyself!" my maxim – and it is perhaps one that other scholarly writers might also make their own.

## Writing time

> If we wait for the moment when everything – absolutely everything – is ready, we shall never begin. (Turgenev, 1920, p. 6)

Boice's monograph Professors as Writers: A Self-Help Guide to Productive Writing (1990) sums up his many articles on scholarly productivity; that text is itself summarised in his essay "Strategies for Enhancing Scholarly Productivity" (1997). His first question for scholars is this: why don't we write?

### Why don't we write?
According to Boice (1997), we scholars don't write for both institutional and individual reasons. The institutional reasons are three. First, our "usual intellectual styles" get in the way: until graduate level, we are asked to focus on "mastering facts and principles", rather than writing skills or productivity, so we are not trained to do it (p. 19). Secondly, our learnt "elitism" makes us snobbish and scrupulous (p. 20). That is to say, published writers say that too many people are already publishing, and that unpublished writers have nothing to say; unpublished writers say that writing must be new – and easy. Thirdly, "our surroundings," that is, our workplace and workload, are allowed to "determine our productivity" (p. 20). This last reason is the one most of us admit.

More importantly, we don't write for individual reasons: due to "maladaptive habits of thinking about and practising writing" (Boice, 1997, p. 21). We think that we are too busy (teaching) to write, so we binge, busy ourselves overly and overrate writing, "making writing [our] highest priority" (p. 23). In fact, writing does not require large blocks of uninterrupted time, and writers are more productive when they make writing "a modest, realistic priority" (p. 23). I know that I write most often in binges in the face of externally imposed deadlines (a classic extrinsic motivation), which is the case with most of my academic work, including this essay. However, I write most freely when I write out of interest or for enjoyment (an intrinsic motivation), which is the case with my blogging and only occasionally the case with my academic work.

So how can we break these "maladaptive habits of thinking about and practicing writing" (p. 21)? Or, that is to say, how can we write?

*How can we write?*
Boice (1997) suggests that to free up time to write we "force daily writing sessions regardless of [the] writers' readiness and motivation" (p. 23) – but offer a reward on completion, a carrot-and-stick strategy that he calls "contingency management" (Boice, 1983), a term that he takes from cognitive behavioural therapy.

He advocates four steps to productivity. In short, we must establish:

1. momentum by free-writing at the start of a session – and learning to leave holes in manuscripts;

2. a regimen of writing regularly on work days, preferably in the morning when we're fresh, and without interruption, preferably at our "sacred writing desk" (1997, p. 24);

3. comfort by stretching and/or moving every hour, monitoring our tongue position (we are tense when our tongue is against the roof of the mouth, so we should drop it) and avoiding negative self-talk; and

4. social skills as a writer, that is, seek the support of 'sponsors' and their advice on our writing and teaching.

Interestingly, the steps spell out "MaRaCaS," a useful mnemonic (see Higbee, 1979): momentum, a regimen, comfort and social skills.

In summary, then, for Boice (1997),

> [T]he habits that make the differences between productivity and unproductivity . . . consist . . . of 1) writing before feeling ready, at first in spontaneous fashion; 2) writing in brief, daily sessions amid busy workdays; 3) finding comfort in writing via exercises in relaxation and positive thinking; and 4) making writing more public and publicly orientated. (p. 32)

Some of this I do already. I write as I read, so as to get writing underway. I carry around my laptop and an iPod in case inspiration strikes: the iPod is great to record myself talking about an idea that I don't want to evaporate when I can't pull out my laptop. I blog ideas-in-progress and then assemble them into pieces of writing. Relax, finding comfort in writing, I do not. (I do need to monitor my tongue position: it is not something I would ever have thought of before.) Nor do I write in writing groups – Silvia talks about "agraphia groups" (2007, p. 50), groups for 'uncomfortable' writers. And more importantly, I don't write as regularly – or "brief[ly]" – as I would like (Boice, 1997, p. 32). My "proximal goal" is to establish a writing regimen, though whether to write on waking or on first getting to work, or to keep free an hour each morning I have not yet decided; my "distal goal," to plan a writing programme a year or more ahead – because, at this point, I write reactively rather than proactively (Bandura & Schunk, 1981, p. 587).

Part one of my intervention, then, is to try Boice's method to learn to manage my time better to allow time for writing.

## Really writing

> I am quite content to go down to posterity as a scissors and paste man. (Joyce, 1966, p. 297)

When it comes to my second task, of learning not to be too careful too early in the writing process to allow writing to do its work, Peter Elbow, who popularised "free writing" in Writing Without Teachers (1973), is the past master. Essentially, free writing is writing without editing, an exercise in " 'automatic writing' " (Elbow, 1973, p. 3), or to recall Boice (1990), "writing before feeling ready, at first in spontaneous

fashion" (p. 32). The problem, for Elbow, is that "editing goes on at the same time as producing" (1973, p. 5). He elaborates in "The Need for Care: Easy Speaking Onto the Page Is Never Enough":

> The problem is unrelenting care – the feeling that you can never relax your skeptical scrutiny. Most of us, if we want to write productively, need some relief from vigilance, some time for no care in putting down words – so we don't choke off the rich supply that is actually available to all of us. Most of us benefit from learning to write down words and ideas before knowing whether they are acceptable or good. (Elbow, 2010, p. 3)

Thus, because, as Elbow puts it in Writing Without Teachers, "almost everyone interposes a massive and complicated series of editings between the time the words start to be born into consciousness and when they finally come . . . off the pencil or typewriter [or computer!] onto the page," free writing allows us to not edit both "spelling and grammar" and "unacceptable thoughts and feelings" as we write; it allows us to produce (1973, p. 5). We simply write on a topic without stopping for, say, ten or twenty minutes, or 200 to 300 words; then, we do it again . . . and again.

But once we have produced something that looks promising, what are we to do with it? We need to structure it or to find the structure in it. Elbow (2010) offers two ways for writers to structure free writing, to allow them to meld "careless mental speaking and careful mental writing" (p. 1), or free writing and rewriting. They are "collage form" and "the skeleton process" (p. 3).

### Collage form

To structure our free writing, we can use what Elbow (2010) calls "collage form":

> [A]fter you have done a lot of freely and carelessly generated writing, you can just pick out the passages you like best, do minimal revising or editing, and put them together in whatever order strikes you as intuitively interesting or fruitful. (p. 4)

This process works well even for formal writing because, as he puts it,

> [It] helps reassure you that there is actually good stuff in all the chaos you produced. It helps you clear away all the distracting mess and see the good bits. (p. 4)

We can then easily cut and paste the bits into different orders, "pleasing or compelling or interesting" – and, if we wish, fill in the gaps and supply an introduction and conclusion (p. 4).

This kind of "Franken-writing" (my mnemonic is Frankenstein's monster) can thus enable us to try out different narrative structures. I already do this, in a sense, when I piece together my writing from blog posts.

However, sometimes we want to find the structure hidden in our work. This requires that we use a different process.

*The skeleton process*
To find the structure hidden in our writing, we can use what Elbow (2010) calls "the skeleton process."

"Skeleton-writing" proceeds as follows.

1. "Look for any passage that somehow feels pertinent. [. . .] For each important passage, create a tiny summary germ sentence" (p. 5). These are our bones.

2. "[M]ark . . . the ones that feel important or central. Then look through these marked ones and figure out your main idea. [. . .] If you can, write out this implied main idea in a . . . germ sentence" too (p. 6). (This is the spine, perhaps – though Elbow doesn't call it this).

3. "Start by looking at the germ sentences that seem most important. Looking at them together, try to figure out a sequence . . . for these main points." Now we have a skeleton, "a good sequence of sentences where each point follows the previous one naturally and where the whole sequence is going somewhere and has a felt shape – like a good story" (p. 7).

4. Flesh out the essay into a draft (a body, perhaps).

Bones, spine, skeleton and body together make an essay (my mnemonic is a dancing skeleton).

This process also works as a strategy to revise a draft, or even a completed piece of writing. But, at bottom, as Elbow puts it,

> [T]he skeleton process is a method for clarifying thinking – a way to harness critical detachment – which is just what's needed for giving feedback to yourself. (p. 7)

In essence, collage form and the skeleton process are great ways to get perspective on our own writing and to get our story straight, so to speak (they can also be used collaboratively, of course). They are "disciplined ways to use care" (p. 7), that is to say, they enable "substantive revising" (p. 8).

Part two of my intervention, then: try Elbow's method to learn not to be too careful too early in the writing process to allow writing to do its work.

## Conclusion: "Physician, heal thyself"

Thus, because I know that once I start writing I never have trouble doing it, freeing myself to write involves two tasks: to learn to manage my time better and to learn not to be too careful too early in the writing process. To do so is to exercise my positive freedom (Berlin, 1969). It is to free myself to write and thus to heal myself – or, at least, my writing self. If the two steps of my intervention in my writing practice do not resonate with other Learning Advisors, I hope at least that my maxim "Physician, heal thyself!" is one that other Learning Advisors might make their own as scholarly writers. To take our own medicine in this way, to reflect on and "experiment" with our writing practice (Hillocks, 1995, pp. 32–37), is at the very least to put ourselves in the place of our students and, hopefully, to feel better about our, and our students', "wretched" writing.

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## Appendix 1: Statistics relating to the refereed proceedings

A total of 31 presentations were included in the 2012 ATLAANZ conference programme. Subsequently a total of 10 papers were submitted to be considered for the refereed proceedings of the conference. Table 1 shows the distribution of referees' recommendations across the categories available.

Table 1: *Distribution of Refeeres' Recommendations by Category*

| Category | Number of recommendations |
|---|---|
| Accept for refereed publication as presented | 0 |
| Accept with minor revisions | 12 |
| Accept with major revisions | 8 |
| Reject | 0 |
| **Total** | **20** |

Of the 10 papers submitted for review, three were withdrawn for refereed publication by the authors. The rest were accepted for publication once revision had been completed.