AFFECTIVE AND SOCIAL FACTORS IN A PROJECT-BASED WRITING COURSE

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ABSTRACT

Much of the work in academic writing has focused on the cognitive rather than the affective and social aspects involved in project-based writing. Emphasis in past research has been on skills and processes of writing rather than on affective factors such as motivation, attitudes, feelings or social factors involving intrapersonal and interpersonal communication. However, according to Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (SCT), social factors play an important role in collaborative learning and are considered to be a constitutive element of cognition (1978, 1986). Using this theory of learning as a starting point, the aim of this paper is to determine the affective and social factors involved in project-based writing in an academic writing course at Nanyang Technological University. Specifically, the four motivational aspects that will be considered are curiosity, challenge, confidence and control as reflected in student responses to an online questionnaire and their reflections on the course. It is hoped that the findings of this research will further our understanding of the role of affective and social factors in project-based writing courses in settings where students are collaborating face-to-face to complete the course tasks and assignments.

Keywords: Academic Writing, Collaborative Learning, Social and Affective Factors, Project-based Course, Student Reflections, Online Questionnaire.

INTRODUCTION

Research on academic writing has tended to focus on the cognitive rather than the affective and social aspects involved in project-based writing instruction. However, in developmental psychology (Wenger, 1998; Lea & Nicoll, 2002), there has been a major shift in that cognitive, social and emotional development are not viewed separately but as integrated in any kind of learning. This shift is apparent even in writing courses in both first language and second language settings. In the past, research on academic writing focused on the linguistic and cognitive rather than the affective and social aspects of learning. While linguistic and cognitive factors are concerned with language improvements and development of critical thinking in writing courses, the affective and social factors emphasize the emotional responses of learners when interacting with self and others in the learning situation (Lucas, 2007). In project-based courses which involve collaborative learning, affective and social factors inevitably have an impact on the linguistic and cognitive

dimensions of learning.

The affective dimension of learning covers the feelings that students experience when producing the various tasks for their individual and group projects. Specifically, this dimension "addresses issues related to the success, failure, challenges, strong and weak points, outcomes, benefits of the activities as they apply to criteria you are attempting to satisfy" (Jones & Shelton, 2006: 55). Kathpalia and Heah (2008) have further categorized the affective dimension as being self-oriented (e.g. like/dislike, enjoyment, satisfaction, surprise, challenge, confidence etc.), task-oriented (e.g. easy/difficult, useful etc.) and tutor oriented (e.g. appreciation, praise etc.) in relation to writing courses.

As for the social dimension of learning, it is relationship oriented and encompasses observations of self and others, with the former representing intrapersonal communication and the latter, interpersonal communication (Jones & Shelton, 2006). Intrapersonal communication refers to the internal dialogue students have with themselves during the process of writing and interpersonal communication

includes discussions they are involved in while interacting with peers and tutors. Some indicators of intrapersonal communication are student introspections that lead to awareness of their strengths and weaknesses and insights into useful writing strategies (Kathpalia & Heah, 2008). On the other hand, interpersonal communication would include peer review, tutor feedback on writing, group work and awareness of readers as reflected in students writing (Kathpalia & Heah, 2008). The social dimension shows that writing is not a lonely individualistic activity but involves other participants such as the targeted reader and those who provide support in the form of peers and tutors.

In past research on writing, emphasis has been on skills and processes of writing rather than on affective factors such as motivation, attitudes, feelings or social factors involving intrapersonal and interpersonal communication. Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (SCT) can be applied to the writing process as it emphasizes the role of social factors in collaborative language learning (1978, 1986). According to this theory, social factors are a constitutive element of cognition and higher forms of learning can be achieved only through social interaction with others. In the context of writing, this would mean that a writer internalizes the external dialogue with teachers, resulting in a "socially constructed dialogic mind" (Villamil & Guerrero, 2006: 24). In other words, social interaction is the bridge to cognitive development and in order to transform lower forms of thinking into higher forms of reasoning and problem solving, the writer's mind needs to be socioculturally mediated. The three types of mediation possible are mediation by others, mediation by self, and mediation by artifacts (Lantolf, 2000). In the context of writing, these would translate into mediation by tutors and peers, reflections by students on their writing experience and artifacts such as sample texts, writing guidelines and other course materials.

Adopting Vygotsky's sociocultural theory as the starting point, this paper explores the social and affective issues of learning situations in a project-based academic writing course at the Nanyang Technological University. Specifically, the four affective and social factors that are examined are curiosity, challenge, confidence and control

as reflected in student responses to an online questionnaire and their reflections on the course. The main objective is to determine whether there is a correspondence between these four motivational factors and the features of the course in terms of curriculum objectives, outcomes and learning processes. A strong match between student motivation and course features would mean that the curriculum planners have managed to bridge the gap between cognitive and social aspects of learning in the course. The findings will be significant as they will not only provide teachers an insight into student expectations but also enable them to adjust their own expectations accordingly.

1. Course Information and Data

The course entitled HW102 The Art of Academic Writing is offered to second year students in the School of Biological Sciences (SBS) at the Nanyang Technological University (NTU). It is a semester long, project-based course that introduces students to the basic conventions of scientific writing; rhetorical structure of scientific genres such as proposals, research papers and critiques; grammatical and stylistic conventions of these genres; and ethics and responsibility in academic writing. As for approach, the course integrates both "product" and "process" teaching approaches to ensure that the focus is not just on the final product or genre but also on the process that writers go through when composing these genres. While the lectures in the course introduce students to the rhetorical structure and linguistic features of typical genres by means of sample texts, the tutorials are hands-on sessions where students practice the writing of these genres. With its potential for focusing on the product and process of learning, this combined approach gives an insight into processes involved in self-diagnosis and self-improvement as well as the meta-cognitive skills of thinking, through the use of self-reflection, peer evaluation and tutor feedback.

The course assignments include writing a proposal and research report in project groups and writing the abstract of the report individually. All these assignments are related as the proposal is a precursor to the final report - it is a preliminary research plan of the students' research project and the abstract is based on the final report. These

assignments are inquiry based, taking the students through the complete research cycle of identifying a research topic, searching for relevant readings, formulating a hypothesis, collecting and analyzing the data and reporting the findings of the research. In addition to the project-based assignments, student reflections are an important aspect of the course. Students are required to reflect on their learning and write weekly weblogs on topics introduced to them in lectures and tutorials. This promotes deep learning as reflections are a "mental process through which human beings convert experience into personal knowledge" (Jones & Shelton, 2006:51).

Another defining feature of the course is feedback in the form of teacher and peer feedback on writing tasks. In process-based writing classes, feedback plays an important role in writing as it encourages and consolidates learning. In fact, formative feedback not only guides students in developing their composition skills but also shapes their future writing (Hyland & Hyland, 2006). Tutors in this course support student writers by providing feedback and suggesting revisions during the process of writing itself rather than at the end of it, focusing on the development and discovery of meaning rather than on mechanical accuracy. Apart from tutor feedback, peer feedback is an important aspect of the course. It was introduced into the course as writing experts claim that it is beneficial to both the writer and student reviewer in that the student writer gets feedback from multiple perspectives rather than from the teacher alone and the student reviewer gains confidence, perspective and critical thinking skills by reading peer drafts on similar tasks (Ferris, 2003). However, to be effective, students need to be trained in peer response and the practice sessions need to be structured properly (Berg, 1999; Stanley, 1992). As such, students in this course were coached by explaining the role of peer response, modeling peer response using a sample text, introducing a peer response form and practicing the process in pairs using a peer-evaluation checklist.

At the end of the course, students were required to complete an online course evaluation form which was posted on EdveNTUe, the e-learning platform for students at NTU. The questions in the form were based on the different aspects of the course such as course objectives, content, assignments and approach. Course questionnaires are the most common method of assessing student responses after they have completed a course. Such questionnaires are directed at measuring learners' affective state as the course designers often ask students about their responses to the learning experience, for example, whether they liked or disliked it, enjoyed or hated it, learnt something from it or found it a waste of time.

Therefore, in this paper, we start with student responses to the survey questionnaire but move a step further to analyze students' reflections to understand more about affective factors in relation to the course. Reflections were analyzed to support the survey findings because of the role they play in learning, linking experiences and emotions to the neural pathways of the brain where information and ideas are stored and can be recalled (Fink, 2004). Student reflections were particularly useful for this study as they provided a rich source of data, enabling us to gain insight into students' personal development and into how they managed their emotions throughout the learning process.

2. Methodology for Analyzing Student Motivation

The course questionnaire and student reflections were the main sources of data in this study. Altogether, there were 110 students from the batch of SBS students in Academic Year 2009/10 (Semester 1) who responded to the online questionnaire. The reflective pieces analyzed were those submitted by students at the end of the 13-week semester as their final assignment for the course. Based on the assignment requirements, students had to select and include 3 weblogs from their weekly entries and write an opening paragraph to justify their choice. There were 140 reflective texts from 5 tutorial groups, with each group comprising 28 students.

The questionnaire was divided into two parts, with the first section focusing on questions related to the course and second on questions based on Eureka, the online project management system that students utilized for collaborating on their course assignments. For this study, only the first part of the questionnaire was considered as it was designed by the course coordinators to assess students' evaluation of the course. The second part was

designed by the Centre for Educational and Learning Technologies to assess the features of the project management software available to NTU students. The first section consisted of 20 questions, 18 of which were closed-ended rating questions and the remaining 2 were open-ended questions, seeking the opinions of respondents (Refer to the Appendix for the questionnaire).

Using Keller's Model of Motivation (1987), the questions in the survey were sorted out into the four categories of curiosity, challenge, confidence, and control. Based on this model, Jones and Issroff (2005) defined the categories as follows:

Curiosity: Arousing a learner's curiosity through the surprise element in instructional tactics (i.e. leading the learner into new areas of the subject to find sensible explanations).

Challenge: Providing moderate levels of risk and uncertain outcomes to motivate the learner to engage with the materials (i.e. avoiding tasks that are too easy or difficult).

Confidence: Selecting tasks according to learner's previous achievements.

Control: Promoting ownership of learning by allowing learners to select tasks and goals to achieve or avoid as well as to decide on degree of effort to pursue chosen goals.

There is a strong correspondence between the four motivational aspects and the curriculum and learning processes of the academic writing course designed for the science students. Table 1 sets out the main features of the course that correspond with the motivational categories.

For the purpose of analysis, the survey questions that highlighted the various features of the course were grouped according to the dimensions of curiosity, challenge, confidence and control. The groupings are presented in Table 2.

The findings of the survey along with extracts from student reflections will be presented in the next section to highlight student attitude towards the course in terms of the four motivational factors of curiosity, challenge, confidence and control.

3. Analysis of Student Motivation

Applying Keller's motivational categories to student survey

Motivational Categories	Course Features
Curiosity	Exploring scientific topics Learning about own writing strategies Experimenting with scientific language
Challenge	Working independently on projects but with adequate "scaffolding" in the form of lectures, tutorials, guidelines and conferencing sessions
Confidence	The goals and outcomes of learning: Composing – Developing macro and micro-skills of writing scientific genres Reading – Reading scholarly articles effectively and critically Documenting – Learning responsible and ethical practices
Control	Choice of group members Choice of report topic, report type, research questions and methodology Distribution of work among group members Feedback on course and tutors

Table 1. Correspondence between Motivational Categories and Course Features

Curiosity

1. Please rate the following statements.
   HW102 helps me to develop better scientific thinking.
   HW102 helps me understand my strengths in writing and the areas I need to improve.
   HW102 helps me appreciate the power of language.

   [Not at all, A little, Some, Very much]

2. Indicate your agreement with this statement: "HW102 has provided me with opportunity to explore in-depth a topic that interests me."

   [Strongly agree, Agree, Do not agree]

Challenge

3. The level of difficulty of writing tasks in HW102 is set:

   [Too high, Just right, Low, Too low]

4. The degree of support I received during the course to help develop my writing skills:

   Exceeds expectations
   Meets most of my expectations
   Meets some of my expectations
   Does not meet my expectations

Confidence

5. Please rate the following statements.
   HW102 helps me gain confidence in writing in English.
   HW102 helps me learn how to write a research paper.
   HW102 helps me learn how to read research articles more effectively and critically.
   HW102 helps me learn how to document prior research and avoid plagiarism.

   [Not at all, A little, Some, Very much]

Control

6. Please rate the following in terms of their usefulness: Lectures, Model texts, Analyzing research articles, Peer reviewing, Group work, Project work.

   [Not at all, A little, Some, Very much]

Note: Survey questions that did not fall under the four motivational categories have been omitted from this study.

Table 2. Grouping of Survey Questions

responses and their reflections revealed the extent to which the academic writing course fulfilled their expectations in terms of curiosity, challenge, confidence and control. The

quantitative analysis was computed automatically by the survey questionnaire software in EdveNTUre whereas the qualitative analysis involved reviewing students' reflective weblogs to identify comments that reflected the four aspects of motivation. The findings are presented and discussed below according to data type – responses to the closed-ended questions, open-ended questions and reflective assignment.

3.1 Responses to Closed-ended Questions

The survey responses related to the curiosity aspect of the course showed that the curiosity of the majority of the students was triggered in all the aspects of the course. The findings are represented in Table 3.

Combining the positive points in the response scale, the areas of curiosity with high scores include developing scientific thinking (73%), understanding personal strengths (86%), appreciating the power of language (88%) and exploring a topic of interest (81%).

The findings are encouraging as the curriculum planners of the course have set up a science corner in the library to raise the interest of science students through a collection of interesting scientific books, magazines and audio-visual resources. To pique student curiosity about the scientific world, links are provided to students on EdveNTUre of interesting science websites (e.g. Weird Science sites and Ig Nobel Prizes).

Through writing workshops and conferencing sessions, students are encouraged to reflect on their strengths and weaknesses in writing as well as that of their peers so that they can capitalize on their strengths and overcome their weaknesses. In this context, Bloom's taxonomy of lower and higher order thinking skills (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001) has proved to be a useful tool for measuring their own level of

cognition and also in progressing from the lower level thinking processes of recall, comprehension and application to the higher level skills of analysis, synthesis, evaluation and creativity in their own writing.

Students are also introduced to metalanguage in the field of writing through Swales' CARS (Create a Research Space) model and to other organizational principles through interesting and memorable analogies (e.g. the analogy of Universe>Galaxy>Star to explain the progression from general to specific information in introductions of research papers). The students are particularly fascinated by the role of hedging and qualifications in scientific writing to formulate claims of appropriate strength depending upon their certainty about their claims.

Another aspect of the course that appeals to students is the freedom to select their own topic of research. This ensures a high level of curiosity and interest in the project topic as the entire course revolves around researching, reporting and presenting this topic. Not surprisingly, 81% of the students agreed that this was a motivating factor in the course.

As for the challenge posed by the course, most students (82%) indicated that the level of difficulty was just right. The challenging aspect of the course is that students have to select their own research topic, formulate their own hypothesis, select an appropriate method (i.e. experiment, survey or secondary research) and design their own experiment or survey. While students are expected to work independently on their projects, adequate support is available to them in the form of lectures and tutorials, course materials and conferencing sessions with tutors. The student responses to degree of support received are reflected in Table 4.

Only 3% of the students felt that the level of support received during the course was not adequate, whereas 97% confirmed that it either exceeded their expectations, met most of their expectations or at least some of their

Aspects of Curiosity	Not at all	A little	Some	Very much	Responses
Scientific thinking	8.3% (9)	18.5% (20)	55.6% (60)	17.6% (19)	108
Strengths in writing	2.8% (3)	11% (12)	48.6% (53)	37.6% (41)	109
Power of language	0.9% (1)	10.9% (12)	39.1% (43)	49.1% (54)	110
	Do not agree	Agree		Strongly agree	Responses
Exploring a topic of interest	18.5% (20)	73.1% (79)		8.3% (9)	108

Table 3. Student Responses to Curiosity

Degree of Support Received	Response %	Response count
Exceeds my expectations	11.8%	13
Meets most of my expectations	61.8%	68
Meets some of my expectations	23.6%	26
Does not meet my expectations	2.7%	3

Table 4. Student Responses to Degree of Support

expectations. Scaffolding, which refers to the support provided by experts to novice learners, is an integral part of the course as it not only speeds up the process of learning but also ensures higher levels of learning (Stone, 1993). The term has the added connotation of being mutual rather than unidirectional and works well among peers as both participants benefit in peer revision, with scaffolding assistance shifting from one peer to another right through the interactions (Lim & Jacobs, 2001). Scaffolding is therefore built into the course schedule in the form of tutor-student conferencing sessions and peer reviews, with tutors and peers providing feedback to students on their assignment drafts.

Questions on the course's success in building student confidence received positive responses for different aspects of the course, ranging from writing, reading and documenting. The findings are presented in Table 5.

These findings are encouraging as they correspond with the objectives formulated by the curriculum planners of the course. The objectives of the course are to teach the basic conventions of scientific writing, rhetorical structures of some scientific genres, characteristic grammatical and linguistic features of these genres and documenting conventions to avoid plagiarism. In their responses, students confirmed that all these objectives had been achieved by the end of the course. Combining the affirmative scores on the rating scale, responses for all the items are between 76% and 96%, with confidence in writing in English being 76%, reading research articles critically 78%, documenting prior research 90% and writing a research report 96%.

Referring to the dimension of control, students have control in shaping the direction of the course. The main objective of the course survey is to obtain students feedback on the course in order to improve the course before it is offered to the next cohort of students. Students were asked to rank the usefulness of different aspects of the course such as content, structure, method and approach to the course. Table 6 shows the findings.

Based on the findings, there is no doubt about the usefulness of many aspects of the course. Not surprisingly, students enjoyed working in project groups as it meant sharing the workload and capitalizing on the strengths of individual members to achieve optimal results. The same applies to project work as students like the independence of choosing their own projects and working on them through the entire semester, progressing from the beginning phases of identifying research topics, conducting experiments or surveys, analyzing the findings to the final phase of confirming or rejecting the hypothesis. With reference to teaching approach, students seem to appreciate the use of model texts and analysis of research articles to get familiar with the conventions of genres that they are required to compose during the course. Although some students acknowledge the usefulness of lectures and peer reviews, they seem to prefer tutorials and tutor conferencing. This is probably due to the informal and hands-on nature of small-sized tutorial classes and due to the faith they have in feedback offered by tutors in comparison to their peers. Student reservations in relation to lectures and peer feedback are similar to findings of other writing courses.

3.2 Responses to Open-ended Questions

The dimension of control also took the form of student comments in response to the open-ended questions in the survey questionnaire. Besides the 18 closed-ended questions, students' views were sought on the course by means of 2 open-ended questions. While Question 19 was posed to discover what students found lacking in the course, Question 20 specifically requested student suggestions on course improvement. Out of the 24

Learning Outcome	Not at all	A little	Some	Very much	Responses
Writing in English	0.9% (1)	22.7% (25)	60.9% (67)	15.5% (17)	110
Writing a research report	0% (0)	3.6% (4)	32.7% (36)	63.6% (70)	110
Reading research articles	3.6% (4)	18.2% (20)	48.2% (53)	30% (33)	110
Documenting prior research	0% (0)	10.1% (11)	54.1% (59)	35.8% (39)	109

Table 5. Students' Confidence in Learning Outcomes

Criteria	Not at all	A little	Some	Very much	Reponses
Lectures	5.5% (6)	34.5% (38)	41.8% (46)	18.2% (20)	110
Model texts	4.5% (5)	27.3% (46)	41.8% (46)	26.4% (29)	110
Analyzing research articles	3.6% (4)	17.3% (19)	46.4% (51)	32.7% (36)	110
Peer reviewing	8.3% (9)	24.8% (27)	53.2% (58)	13.8% (15)	109
Group work	1.8% (2)	14.7% (16)	41.3% (45)	42.2% (46)	109
Project work	1.8% (2)	10.9% (12)	41.8% (46)	45.5% (50)	110

Table 6. Students' Evaluation of Usefulness of Course

responses received for the former question, 11 were nil responses and out of 30 responses for the latter, 9 were nil responses. In response to Question 19, students indicated that more time needs to be spent on certain aspects of the course, specifically on teaching scientific vocabulary and grammar, different referencing styles, design of surveys and more scientific genres. As for responses to Question 20, most of the suggestions were related to lectures, indicating that lectures were unnecessary and should be combined with tutorials or converted into e-lectures. Other suggestions included improving lectures by making them more dynamic, incorporating more examples and providing lecture handouts in addition to slides. The remaining suggestions were related to assignments, content of the course and approach to teaching such as reducing assignments, increasing practice in grammar and scientific genres, and introducing different approaches for teaching (e.g. role-play). Although it was not possible to eliminate lectures altogether, the curriculum planners took student suggestions into consideration when revising the course for future semesters. The changes implemented will be discussed at the end of this section.

3.3 Student Comments in Reflective Weblogs

The motivational factors of curiosity, challenge, confidence and control are clearly reflected in the students' reflective weblogs on the course. Although there are several examples of these in the student reflections, only one excerpt for each category is presented here:

Curiosity

"I've actually never considered "academic" writing to be a form of art. But after reading the article, I find that it takes skill to be able to draft out a professional-sounding research paper while at the same time trying to keep readers interested. I've been so used to descriptive writing, narratives, feature articles , etc that I wonder whether I will be able to successfully switch to scientific writing. Well, I guess this will be something for me to discover and learn along the way."

Challenge

"Only the second week has passed, but a slew of problems seem to be already looming ahead. Due to the nature of the module, these problems may range from working

relationships within the group to difficulties of the project topic itself. Working together with fellow course mates will prove to be challenging, but I hope it will turn out to be fruitful too. Although Project Work is probably nothing new to all of us, working with different people often delivers unexpected rewards and a whole new experience."

Confidence

"The subsequent sections of the proposal came on naturally as we progressed deeper into our research and discussion. The constant smile of approval from Dr X during our group consultation further assured us that we are on the right track. All we have to do now is to compile the pieces of information together, and to ensure that there is a dash of fluidity, a sprinkle of clarity, half a teaspoon of precision, a cup of concision, 2 parts forthrightness, and a quarter of familiarity. Then we will have hot stuff cooking in our pot!"

Control (Positive)

"Someone please extend a hand to Swales. This gentleman's been such a great help with structuring our work. With his three-move checkmate, it is no wonder how so many people who employ his tactics move readers without fretting over structural details.

Besides learning how to arm ourselves with a boost in form, today's lecture has not left out the essentials of functional writing – the words themselves. In less than an hour, we have been enlightened on the techniques of wordplay: how tweaking a seemingly synonymous verb can lend a surreptitious tone of disagreement and how writing a passive form leads the audience into thinking that we are but conservative Singaporeans."

Control (Negative)

"Also, chronology doesn't seem to be a forte of this course. Though it makes sense to produce a proposal prior to the report, the introduction seems tad off-schedule. The organization of the report (an ingredient of the introduction) is an infallible example of academic clairvoyance. Too bad our crystal balls are a tad too cloudy to foresee the structure of the upcoming sections."

While the survey findings provided a quantitative analysis of the students' evaluation of the course, the student reflections supported these findings through a qualitative

assessment. The survey findings revealed that the majority of the students felt that the course fulfilled their expectations in terms of the dimensions of curiosity, challenge, confidence and control. Similarly, the reflections gave a deeper insight into the students' feelings on specific aspects of the course. Through the survey and reflections, students were able to voice their likes/dislikes, anxieties/elations, and strengths/weaknesses in relation to the course and learn through this process. On the other hand, curriculum planners and tutors were not only able to gain an insight into the students' learning processes but also use student feedback to improve the course and adjust their expectations.

3.4 Course Improvements

As the course survey is administered every semester and the reflective weblogs are an established aspect of the course, the curriculum planners have had a rich source of data for course improvements. Some of the improvements over the last few semesters include the use of authentic research papers for deconstruction tasks in the tutorials. These papers serve the dual purpose of functioning as model texts for novice student writers as well as for promoting critical reading habits among the students. In addition, one of the assignments has been replaced by a critique of a scholarly paper, serving as a follow-up of the deconstruction task in tutorials as well as adding to the repertoire of scientific genres taught in the course. Another improvement took the form of introducing lectures on topics other than on the rhetorical and grammatical structures of scientific genres. New lecture topics include face-to-face lectures on argumentation in scientific writing and meta-discourse of scientific writing as well as pre-recorded online lectures on ethics and plagiarism, visual aids and scientific language. Student workload has also been reduced from writing weblog reflections every week to three times in the semester and then to once at the end of the semester. As for peer-editing, a more structured approach is adopted by providing students specific guidelines for editing papers written by their peers and in some cases, demonstrating peer-reviewing techniques to students through in-class activities. Improvements to the course are ongoing and the course is fine-tuned every semester to keep abreast with student expectations as well as with latest research in the area of academic writing.

Conclusion

The findings of this research enhance our understanding of the role of affective and social factors in the learning process of students in a project-based writing course. They also provide us with constructive feedback on how we as curriculum planners and tutors can improve the course in terms of the curriculum (teaching materials and assignments), structure of the course (lectures & tutorials) and teaching (approach, methodology and practices). The findings of this study highlight the unseen forces underlying student practice in writing. The affective and social factors when known and shared become powerful tools in strengthening student and teacher practices leading to concrete improvements in learning and teaching. Awareness of these hidden factors is the key to ensure that students and teachers become better writers and instructors.

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Appendix

Name: HW102 Feedback Survey – 2009/10 Sem I

Instructions:

This survey takes approximately 10 minutes to complete.

Please complete the survey and give us your suggestions for improving HW102. This will enable us to better cater your needs in the area of project work management.

Should you have any questions regarding the survey, please forward your enquiries to eUreka support service at bb-help@ntu.edu.sg.

Multiple attempts: Not allowed. This survey can only be taken once.

Force Completion: This survey can be saved and resumed later.

Question Completion Status:

Question 1

Rate this statement 'HW102 helps me gain confidence in writing in English'.

☐ Not at all   ☐ A little   ☐ Some   ☐ Very much

Question 2

Rate this statement 'HW102 helps me learn how to write a research paper'.

☐ Not at all   ☐ A little   ☐ Some   ☐ Very much

Question 3

Rate this statement 'HW102 helps me understand how important writing is to a scientist'.

☐ Not at all   ☐ A little   ☐ Some   ☐ Very much

Question 4

Rate this statement 'HW102 helps me learn how to read research articles more effectively and critically'.

☐ Not at all   ☐ A little   ☐ Some   ☐ Very much

Question 5

Rate this statement 'HW102 helps me develop better scientific thinking'.

☐ Not at all   ☐ A little   ☐ Some   ☐ Very much

Question 6

Rate this statement 'HW102 helps me appreciate the power of language'.

☐ Not at all   ☐A little   ☐Some   ☐Very much

Question 7

Rate this statement 'HW102 helps me understand the importance of ethics in science'.

☐ Not at all   ☐A little   ☐Some   ☐Very much

Question 8

Rate this statement 'HW102 helps me learn how to document prior research and avoid plagiarism'.

☐ Not at all   ☐A little   ☐Some   ☐Very much

Question 9

Rate this statement 'HW102 helps me understand my strengths in writing and the areas in which I need to improve'.

☐ Not at all   ☐A little   ☐Some   ☐Very much

Question 10

Rate the usefulness of lectures in the teaching of HW102.

☐ Not at all   ☐A little   ☐Some   ☐Very much

Question 11

Rate the usefulness of model texts as used in the teaching of HW102.

☐ Not at all   ☐A little   ☐Some   ☐Very much

Question 12

Rate the usefulness of 'Tutorial task – analyzing examples of research articles' as used in the teaching of HW102.

☐ Not at all   ☐A little   ☐Some   ☐Very much

Question 13

Rate the usefulness of 'Tutorial task – peer reviewing of written work' as used in the teaching of HW102.

☐ Not at all   ☐A little   ☐Some   ☐Very much

Question 14

Rate the usefulness of Working in a group in HW102.

☐ Not at all   ☐A little   ☐Some   ☐Very much

Question 15

Rate the usefulness of project work in HW102.

☐ Not at all   ☐A little   ☐Some   ☐Very much

Question 16

The level of difficulty of writing tasks in HW102 is set:

☐Too high   ☐Just right   ☐Low   ☐Too low

Question 17

The degree of support I received during the course to help develop my writing skills:

☐ Exceeds my expectations

☐ Meets most of my expectations

☐ Meets some of my expectations

☐ Does not meet my expectations

Question 18

Indicate your agreement with this statement "HW102 has provided me with an opportunity to explore in depth a topic which interests me."

☐ Strongly agree   ☐Agree   ☐Do not agree

Question 19

What would you have liked to learn from HW102 but was not offered in the course?

Question 20

What are your ideas and suggestions for improving HW102?

Note: Questions 21 to 34 are not included as they were meant for feedback on Eureka, the project management system.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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