

A THESIS IN THE USE OF COMPUTER ASSISTED LANGUAGE LEARNING  
IN A WHOLE LANGUAGE CONTEXT

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# THE USE OF COMPUTER ASSISTED LANGUAGE LEARNING IN

## A WHOLE LANGUAGE CONTEXT

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### ABSTRACT

How can technology be used to enhance the delivery of whole language and motivate students? The hybrid use of whole-language teaching and technology is considered in the context of a first-year English writing programme for matriculated second language (L2) learners. A review of the literature focuses on learning styles and perceptions of Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL). The notion of using technology as a tool to deliver language learning is introduced, and Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) in a whole language context is also considered. Whole language is introduced and cornerstones identified. Communicative language learning, student-centred learning, authentic assessment and materials, and meaningful and motivating content are explained with examples. Social constructivism and its subcategories are also examined. The methods used to demonstrate the role of technology in delivering whole language involve the presentation of the use of the Moodle Course Management System (CMS), Computer-Assisted Feedback and the weblog as tools to facilitate language learning. Opinions from students are discussed in order to support the use of technological tools in language teaching. Student feedback gleaned from qualitative and quantitative surveys about Moodle revealed that nearly all of the students surveyed enjoyed using Moodle and over three quarters thought that it encouraged them to read or write more. Surveys regarding Computer-Assisted Feedback disclosed that most students preferred typed comments and nearly all believed that they learned something from the interactive websites linked to their errors. In support of the use of the weblog as an alternative means of assessment, almost all of students said that they preferred writing the weblog to the more traditional written journal, and most

believed that it improved their English. The student-centred nature of online interaction was also supported by the comparison of an in-class discussion to an online-discussion using Flanders' Interactional Analysis categories, which demonstrated that over three quarters of a face-to-face class was teacher-led compared with about a tenth of an online class. In the conclusion, the shortcomings of the research methodology are acknowledged, such as unavoidable interviewer bias and variables in the comparisons between classes, and suggestions made for improvements in future research. Technology in education is advocated within a framework that offers choice.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

To recognise their significance for L2 learners, whole language and technology need to be contextualised within the issues faced by a typical writing programme. Similarly, in order to appreciate the potential of technology in education it is important to go beyond theory, out into the world and onto the web. This is not to diminish the role of pedagogy but rather to encourage a dynamic relationship which allows current potentialities and teaching philosophies to work together.

The practical challenges of a typical second language (L2) learners' writing department are presented in order to contextualise the possibilities presented by whole language and technology. Then the literature on pedagogy, L2 language learning, and computer assisted language learning (CALL) is consulted to discuss questions regarding the learning styles of students and how are these met by using CALL. The teaching philosophy of CALL is also investigated to discover if CALL comes bundled with its own distinct pedagogy. The definition of CALL is also explored alongside Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) and alternatives to using proprietary CALL software for teaching languages in a whole language context are introduced. Whole language is identified through a set of cornerstones which help to identify it in application; such as, the roles of communicative language learning, student centred learning, authentic assessment and intrinsic motivation within whole language. Alongside, whole language the parallel track of social constructionism is also introduced. Freely available technology such as weblogs, AutoText in Microsoft Word and Moodle are presented as tools to deliver language teaching within this context.

The hypothesis that a combination of technology and a whole language philosophy builds motivation and thus contributes to language learning is supported with research. A range of fieldwork was employed which utilised tools such as student surveys, hard data and class observations. This fieldwork examined how the use of weblogs, interactive feedback on digital drafts using AutoText, and Moodle could be used to enhance aspects of whole language with support from students'

responses. Finally a comparison between a face-to-face and an online class observation was examined to reveal which one most closely matched the characteristics of whole language teaching.

To conclude, a summary of the results is presented with reference to the use of online technology in whole language. The shortcomings of this research are discussed and recommendations made about how these could be improved upon in future research. The role of technology in teaching and its acceptance by teachers is also considered alongside the issue of choice.

### Context and Challenges

In the Department of Writing Studies (DWS) at the American University of Sharjah (AUS), the students are mostly L2 learners and must have scored at least a 500 in the TOEFL test to enter the university. They are enrolled in a mixture of majors and come from a variety of different countries and cultural backgrounds and speak a range of languages ranging from Arabic and Farsi to Hindi or Russian.

The courses delivered by DWS are COM 001 - Fundamentals of Writing, COM 101 Academic Writing and COM 102 Writing and Reading across the Curriculum. The main course focus ranges, respectively, from: grammar correction, paragraph writing and simple essays in COM 001; to simple readings, essays and response logs in COM 101; to more challenging readings and essay styles plus basic research citation skills in COM 102. The conditions in many writing programmes are less than ideal. In the Department of Writing Studies (DWS) at the American University of Sharjah, we face a number of challenges related to issues such as the amount of time we have available, the class sizes and the differing competencies in each class, the course materials and motivation.

Once in the Department of Writing studies, the students receive less than three hours' writing tuition per week. This limited contact time combined with heavily loaded syllabi and large class sizes of twenty students in each class, tends to restrict the amount of time available for genuine two-way communication between students and teachers in class. Although many teachers try to include communicative activities and opportunities, many classes still tend to be mostly teacher-centred because so much needs to be covered in such a short time. The students write and are partly

assessed on written assignments which are usually process-based essays. Regular feedback is expected and, since each faculty member is usually responsible for about eighty students, providing written feedback on assignments, rather than face-to-face teaching and tutoring, takes up most of the teacher's working life at AUS.

Alongside process-based assignments, more traditional methods of assessment are also employed, such as grammar-based quizzes and examinations consisting of timed essays written under controlled conditions. This is because AUS is quite a conservative institution and there are frequent, often well grounded, concerns about cheating. Grade inflation is another issue which concerns the administration and examinations or quizzes are perceived as effective ways to deflate grades boosted by efforts in the process approach. Most courses use a prescribed textbook, which is normally written for a North American context. Every year the students and faculty complain about the course books and for several years, there have been discussions about putting together more culturally specific and authentic course materials in a course pack. This is yet to happen because of the heavy workload for the faculty and because radical change often meets with resistance. As a compromise, the textbooks are changed fairly frequently and many instructors currently supplement the textbook with their own readings.

Many teachers and students have commented that the course materials are one of the factors leading to poor motivation in the COM classes at AUS. Many of the students at AUS have excellent oral communication skills, but do not see the value of reading or writing in either their L2 or their L1, especially when many of their majors do not require extensive reading or essays. The importance of the composition courses to students also diminishes when considered alongside their already crowded schedules. It is not unusual for students to skip COM classes to cram for frequent quizzes in their major courses. These factors can make teaching a composition course very challenging, and the teachers are constantly in need of new ways to keep the students enthused and on task.

The issues highlighted above are just some of the challenges faced by faculty and students in DWS and many other similar institutions. Are all of these issues inevitable and unavoidable, or can they be addressed through a more progressive pedagogy combined with the innovative use of technology?

## Overview

Chapter one has described the context at the Department of Writing Studies at AUS as it forms the context for this study. Reference is made to the challenges currently faced regarding issues such as time constraints, workloads and materials and the profile of the students. The place of whole language and technology in this context is also previewed.

The second chapter begins by examining learning styles and then looking at the styles of learning and teaching philosophies associated with the use of Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL). Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) is also introduced as a positive development of networked technology.

Chapter three addresses whole language and identifies four cornerstones of: communicative language learning, student-centred learning, authentic assessment / materials and meaningful and motivating content. Social constructivism and its subcategories: constructivism, constructionism, social constructivism, connected and separate, is also considered within this whole language framework.

In chapter four, the hybrid use of whole language and alternatives to traditional CALL tutor software are appraised as a means to enhance the delivery of second language (L2) teaching and student motivation in a whole language context. Three applications: weblogs, Computer-Assisted Feedback (CAF) using Word's AutoText and Moodle are used to demonstrate how whole language teaching might be facilitated with technology.

Chapter five supports some of the claims of the previous chapter using feedback and findings from students and hard data. Student feedback was gleaned from qualitative and quantitative surveys about weblogs, Computer-Assisted Feedback and Moodle. A comparison of an in-class discussion to an online-discussion using Flanders' Interactional Analysis categories (FIAC) was conducted to consider the role of the teacher and students in each context.

The conclusion, chapter six, summarises the main results and discusses them in relation to online technology and whole language. The shortcomings of the research are acknowledged and recommendations made for future research. The reception of online technology by faculty is also considered and an agenda of choice is put forward.

## CHAPTER II

### LEARNING STYLES AND CALL STYLES

#### Learning Styles

How do students learn and how can teachers help to ensure that this happens? According to Reid (1998), students have distinct learning styles which “are internally based characteristics, often not perceived or consciously used by learners, for the intake and comprehension of new information.” Reid explains how learners tend to maintain their own way of learning, “despite the teaching styles and classroom atmospheres they encounter,” although she concedes that “students may, over time, acquire additional styles” (p. xii).

Reid (1998) compiles a range of models used to classify learners, learner’s needs and learning styles. The most significant in this context are the six perceptual learning styles: visual, auditory, tactile, kinaesthetic, group and individual. These are related, respectively, to the eyes, the ears, the hands (touch), the body (physical activity), the group and the individual (p. x). Although Reid warns against treating these classifications or any others as a panacea and stresses that in multilevel, multicultural classes it is inevitable that leaning styles will differ, she does suggest that “becoming aware of learning and teaching styles can better prepare teachers for the multi-cultural classroom” (p. xii).

When considering such a multi-sensory approach, how can the seemingly limiting interfaces of the computer, mainly a keyboard, mouse and monitor, serve to liberate rather than further emasculate the L2 learner? In addition, if different students learn in so many different ways, how can we hope to accommodate the diverse needs of the classroom within the realms of available technology? Reid (1998) states, “Research indicates that highly successful students often have multistyle preferences, and some research suggests that students adapt their learning styles with experimentation and practice” (p. ix).

However, is there a way to go beyond just the highly successful students and reach the rest of the classroom? Furthermore, will students adapt to the demands made by new technology? Can teaching styles be used that reach more of the people, more of the time, and how will technology help or hinder us in this goal? Reid (1998)

also discusses “field independent” and “field dependent” learning styles. The former relates to the learner who prefers to work sequentially and analyse facts, whereas the latter indicates a learner who prefers to learn in context and from interactions with others. Can Computer Assisted Language Learning help teachers to cater for their students’ differing styles?

### CALL Styles

Koebke (1998) suggests, “In the ideal world, Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) software programmes would intuitively adapt themselves to each learner and offer a number of possible interfaces and challenges to match individual learning styles” (p. 46). However, the traditional preconception of CALL is that it favours a typically “field independent” learning style. This is a point supported by Freeman and Freeman (1998) who in 1998 pointed out that “advances in technology have increased [the] tendency toward individual learning” (p. 150).

In the typical traditional CALL scenario, which Freeman and Freeman refer to, the student works alone with a PC and CALL software, such as *Focus on Grammar*, and completes on-screen activities and tests. The computer “structures the learning environment” and acts as a “tutor” (Levy, 1998, p. 86). Chappelle (2003) explains the logic behind the CALL software used in this context: “The concern for developing good CALL tasks is how to design materials that can direct learners’ attention to particular linguistic forms within the input. The suggestions that come from the research on instructed SLA are to mark the forms that learners should attend to in some way or provide for repetition of the forms of interest” (p. 41).

By using CALL software such as *Focus on Grammar* the students can - to some extent - work at their own pace, focus on their own troublesome language forms, get plenty of practice and be rewarded by instant feedback. Such software is very popular with students and teachers and may be helpful in the memorisation of particular grammar points, but how does it help the students to communicate? Freeman and Freeman (1998), stress the importance of meaningful communication when they describe how the language in many traditional, grammar-based language classes is *controlled* by the teacher. Similarly, in the traditional CALL class the computer is just as controlling and offers the students few chances “to invent or construct meaning” (p. 133). Koebke (1999) explains that “a central defining

characteristic of many CALL materials is their reliance on a behaviourist model of instruction, using behaviour modification principles in their design” (p. 232). Many traditional CALL software packages are more concerned with modifying wrong behaviour, in the case of *Focus on Grammar* the use of incorrect forms, than with communication and language use. However, Freeman and Freeman argue that “grammar exercises are taken from someone else’s experience. The drills are intended to teach correct forms of English, but students only acquire the correct forms when they find themselves in situations where they need them” (p. 133).

Skill and drill processes, whether in a textbook or a sophisticated software package, are not truly meaningful or communicative. As students in a typical CALL lab point and click through isolated chunks of language on a PC, how are they learning to communicate? Wearing headphones and a glazed look of ennui or stupefaction, the language learners’ detachment from communicative reality is further emphasized and this sense of alienation is shared by the teacher. What do the teachers do when software becomes the tutor? Do they wander around the class looking listless, become lab technicians, or just give up and go to check their email?

But does CALL solely consist of software tutors like *Focus on Grammar*? Perhaps twenty years ago it did, but since then there have been many changes in both pedagogy and networked technology which have helped to empower the teacher over the virtual computer tutor. CALL has arguably progressed beyond self-directed simple quizzes and point-and-click exercises. This is not to suggest that the humble quiz is outdated or no longer serves any purpose; on the contrary, quiz generators such as Hot Potatoes and Quia are more popular than ever before. However there is now much more choice and flexibility and CALL software is perceived as more of a language teaching tool to be deployed skilfully by the teacher, rather than as a mechanised, self-contained tutor capable of usurping the teacher’s role.

Levy (1998) asserts that CALL is best considered as a tool with the teachers “actively and intrinsically involved in the learning process” (p. 92). This is a view supported by Healey (1999) who argues that “technology alone does not create learning any more than dropping a learner into the middle of a large library does” (p. 136). Warschauer, Shetzer and Meloni (2000) concur when they argue that “just as students won’t learn simply by being brought to a classroom, neither will they learn by being sat down in front of a networked computer” (p. 8). In addition, as Jones



(1986) succinctly suggests in the title of his article on this topic, “It’s not so much the program, more what you do with it.”

Dunkel (1991) points out that “the method itself is a more important factor than the medium itself in making instruction effective” (p. 112). However, as Dodigovic (1999) observes “Research in CALL can both precede and follow software development” (p. 128). To an extent, it seems as if relatively recent advances in technology have reshaped the accompanying pedagogy, or at least allowed it to develop beyond traditional approaches. This view is supported by Levy (1997) who observes that we need to look at what the technology can do “and then consider which model of SLA most closely matches the capabilities of the hardware and software” (p. 54). Felix (1999) illustrates this point when he suggests that using the web to deliver *old school* teaching is almost a waste of resources: “It seems odd to use the web to focus on [traditional teaching content and styles] instead of exploiting the new medium for student-centred, task-based, and collaborative learning in true-to-life... authentic settings” (p. 87).

However, is there a particular type of teaching approach which works most effectively with the use of current technology? There is no easy answer to this question. As Levy (1997) points out, “While the arguments for using SLA research to guide CALL materials development are compelling, there are profound difficulties in proceeding solely from this perspective. There are at least forty theories, models, perspectives, metaphors, hypotheses, and theoretical claims in the SLA literature” (p. 54). The ongoing debates surrounding language teaching methodology, philosophy and terminology are further complicated by the dynamic nature of technology. Keobke (1998) argues, “The interaction between learning styles and CALL materials is unlikely ever to be researched definitely because of the already-mentioned continuous advances in technology and related revisions to pedagogy” (p. 48).

### Computer Mediated Communication

In the 1990’s advances in communications technology led to the development of a new acronym: CMC. Computer-Mediated Communication as it is more formally known is defined by *Wikipedia* (2005) as “any form of communication between two or more individual people who interact and/or influence each other via separate computers.”

Rather than just using computers to disconnect from reality in order to cram for a grammar quizzes, students now have many ways to use computers as a communication tool to make meaningful connections with a wider audience including, but not limited to, peers and teachers. It could be argued that communication is key to language learning. As Healey (1999) suggests, “The point is neither to use technology for its own sake nor to practice skills for their own sake, but to keep the focus on the communicative goal -and to achieve it in a variety of ways” (p. 111).

With communication comes cooperation, as Keobke suggests when he argues that the virtual world of CALL needs to be connected with reality and allow for “collaborative learning” (p. 50). This view is taken a stage further by Debksi and Levy’s (1999) suggestion that “technology may assist us to implement humanistically motivated pedagogy where student skills, modes of thought and motivations are the centre of attention” (p. 8). This is a radical departure from the more mechanised behaviourist approaches of traditional CALL systems, which had more to do with rote memorization of isolated phrases, through repetition and practice, than with critical thinking and meaningful communication in a realistic setting.

CMC mainly focuses on three aspects: synchronicity, persistence, and anonymity (*Wikipedia*). *Synchronicity* concerns the ability to communicate in real-time, so this usually refers to real-time chat involving the keyboard or video-conferencing using webcams and microphones. *Persistence* refers to how long a record of the interaction is available. For example, a discussion forum generally sticks around for longer than a chat session which, unless saved by the software, usually disappears at the end of the chat session. *Anonymity* as the name suggests, is about whether or not the communicators can hide their identities, which may allow them to assume a new alias or take on a new role in cyberspace.

CMC is a branch of CALL that is concerned with how learners communicate using technology. Because of its communicative nature, CMC fits well with the whole language philosophy. Teachers can develop CMC activities that are more communicative, student-centred, authentic, meaningful and more motivating than traditional CALL activities which do not generally foster or require communication between learners. Chung (1999) observes, “Electronic communication differs linguistically from both traditional written and spoken discourse (Chun, 1994; Ferrara,

et al., 1991; Kern, 1995; Murray, 1988; Wang, 1993), and these differences can be exploited for pedagogical advantage” (p. 52). Indeed when students are “chatting” on a computer they are actually writing, and this could provide new learning and assessment opportunities for the language classroom. CMC activities can also be more student-centred because the communication that takes place can be used to ensure that everyone gets an opportunity to bring something to the class. It can help the shy students to find their voice online and, when used in an asynchronous manner, can extend the time students have to communicate. These points are supported by Leahy (1999), who argues:

Computer-mediated communication can become a powerful learning tool... It allows students to interact with their partners beyond traditional restrictions of time (in the case of asynchronous communication) and place. Asynchronous, and to a certain degree synchronous, communication enables students to set their own pace, provides time to comprehend, reflect and to compose several drafts. It also provides the opportunity to check facts and, in the case of SLA [Second Language Acquisition], to analyse and/or copy native speaker style.” (p. 292)

CMC can also help authenticity as Ioannou-Georgiou (1999) notes, “The language used in CMC activities is authentic and communication is authentic in itself without the teacher needing to invent all kinds of imaginary situations. CMC activities usually provide the learner with a purpose, an audience, feedback, choice of language and an info-gap –fundamental characteristics of any communicative activity” (p. 200). Examples of authentic activities might involve students providing helpful comments on each other’s weblogs, as part of a peer review process, or compiling their own list of vocabulary for use by everyone in the class by posting their contributions to an online glossary.

Ioannou-Georgiou (1999) also points out that “CMC has been repeatedly reported to increase learners’ motivation and promote positive attitude development towards language learning. This is especially so if it is used as an integral part of the language programme rather than as an extra add-on activity that students do now and then (Warschauer 1995, 1996b)” (p. 200). This point can be supported by some of the students’ comments later in this thesis in which the students explained how much they

enjoyed using the Moodle course management system because it helped them to communicate, meet deadlines and keep up with the course content.

CMC can also help teachers to meet more of the students' learning needs. Daniels and Brooks (1999) cite Gardner (1993) who espoused the notion that all individuals possess at least seven types of intelligence and that it is the interaction among these culturally-defined intellectual competencies that figure prominently in the person's contribution to a society. CALL, CAI [Computer Aided Instruction], and computer-mediated communication offer promise for extending the range and modalities of learning (Dryden, 1998)." (p. 84)

For example, students who have a more linguistic based intelligence could learn from reading online resources, and logical-learners could work through interactive online puzzles and quizzes. Spatial and audio learners might get the most from the multimedia aspects of online technology, which can combine text with sound, images, animation etc. Interpersonal and intrapersonal learners might benefit more from communicative interaction with their peers in online forums and chat rooms.

There can never be a one-size-fits-all all-the-time model of teaching nor technology: "No single educational methodology unites Web users" and "no one point of view unites all teachers of ESL/EFL" (Buell, 1999, p. 217). However Buell suggests an accommodating *framework* which will: "Give learners experience in the knowledge construction process.... multiple perspectives... realistic contexts... ownership... voice... social experience" (p. 217). The framework which Buell suggests, and which most of the aforementioned theorists have alluded to, seems to derive from a whole language philosophy.

However, is there really such a thing as whole language or is this such a loosely bound bundle of disparate progressive ideas that it falls apart under scrutiny? A review of the literature on this issue seems to suggest that while descriptions many vary in their degree of detail, specificity, and terminology, there are certain characteristics which recur with reassuring frequency.

## CHAPTER III

### WHOLE LANGUAGE

#### Overview

In their description of whole language, Mitchell and Millwood (1999) suggest that there has been a shift from the “transmission of structural rules” and the “objectivist-behaviourist, teacher-centred and product-oriented approaches with high emphasis on drill and practice” to an approach that emphasises “content and whole use of language” (§ 26). Dawson (1999) identified some of the factors which have contributed to the emergence of a whole language philosophy when he traced the parallel genealogy of communicative language teaching. He cites Chomsky’s theory of the Language Acquisition Device (LAD) as a pivotal point because it posits that children have an innate understanding of language which is *triggered* through interaction within the first language.

LAD paved the way for Krashen’s Acquisition-learning hypothesis which stated that second languages can also be *acquired*, like first language, through meaningful application and interaction – rather than through the grammar drills. A strong argument to support this perspective was that adult humans have been acquiring second languages for much longer than we had the meta-language of grammar to describe it. As acquisition theories based on meaningful interaction gained in popularity, teaching based on the behaviourist psychology, such as grammar translation, fell from favour as it was argued that behaviourism had more to do with training than actual learning. Furthermore, according to Dawson (1999), Austin, Searle, van Ek, Halliday, Wilkins (n.d.) put forward a Notional/Functional approach which posited that students are motivated by function not form. This shifted the focus from form to meaningful content within meaningful coherent curricula.

However, whole language is a broad philosophy and there are many interpretations and subdivisions. In order to develop a working definition of whole language for this paper, some specific qualities need to be identified. To this end, the main cornerstones of whole language, or rather the usual focus of whole-language teachers, are identified as communicative language learning, student-centred learning, authentic materials and assessment, and meaningful motivating tasks and content.

The overlapping role of the social constructionist philosophy will also be considered as it is often linked with current developments in communicative technology.

### Communicative Language Learning

Whitmore and Goodman (1996) emphasise the communicative nature of communicative language learning when they argue that “knowledge is constructed by individual learners within the social context of interactions with people and objects in their cultural experiences” (p. 2). Whitmore and Goodman argue that “building a community of learners reminds us to value the affective component of learning in our teaching” (p. 6). According to this view, community is central to learning, and language learning in particular; after all, *communities* rely on *communication* and vice versa. “A major aspect of education is being socialized into a community: joining the literacy club” (Smith 1988, quoted in Whitmore and Goodman, 1996, p. 4). This is a perspective advocated by Vygotsky (1998) who claims that “higher mental functions arise from collective forms of behaviour” (Quoted in Daniels, 2001, p. 35).

Vygotsky’s name is synonymous with the notion of learning through interaction and collaboration, with more capable peers and he is generally cited in opposition to the theories put forward by Piaget, who is often portrayed as advocating a more asocial concept of individual development. However a recent appraisal of Piaget by Daniels (2001, p. 38) refutes this claim and cites the following statement from Piaget himself as support: “Human knowledge is essentially collective and social life constitutes an essential factor in the creation and growth of knowledge, both pre-scientific and scientific (Piaget, 1995, p. 30).” The social interactive nature of learning is also supported by Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger (Johnson, 2003) who believe that “learning is a property that emerges from certain social interactions, and... learning is more a learning *to do* than a learning of things. They further claim that this learning is done in a particular way, which they call ‘legitimate peripheral participation’” (¶ 6).

For the whole language teacher, it is important to regain and retain the interactive *human* nature of language learning rather than isolating language learners from this process with tasks devoid of any real communicative content. Watson and Jenkins (1996) complain that in many classrooms “We [the teachers] have advocated community but have fallen short by providing only congeniality. In truth, when it

comes to the social order of our classrooms, we often find that we are not practicing what we preach” (p. 17). Communicative language learning calls for activities in which authentic information gaps are filled through communicative interactions. For example, projects in which the students interview each other, conduct surveys or even teach a micro-lesson.

### Student-centred Learning

In order for community to develop in the class, the teacher may need to relinquish some control to facilitate a greater role in the lesson for the students. As Dunkel (1991) suggests, in the whole language classroom the teacher is a “facilitator-manager” rather than a “benevolent monarch” (p. 174). This may be particularly challenging for language learners who have been “schooled in a system in their native country where teacher-centred modes of instruction did not invite student participation in assessment” (O’Malley, 1999, p. 43).

Nevertheless, Freeman and Freeman (1998) state that “critical to any lesson plan is the idea of learner-centeredness” (p. 107). They argue that in order to keep students motivated, the classes should be relevant to the students’ own lives and facilitate the inclusion of their own ideas and experiences. “If they are not interested in learning something, their learning is apt to be short-term rote memorization at best” (p. 107). Furthermore, if the students do not believe that what they are doing has any intrinsic immediate value, they may be de-motivated. One of the ways that teachers can help students to find value and enhance motivation is to find ways for students to “take more responsibility for their own learning” (Whitmore and Goodman, 1996, p. 3). By giving the learners autonomy, the teacher is involving the students at a deeper level because the students have a stake in the content of the class. If the students see the content as belonging completely to the teacher, then they may feel detached and dispassionate whereas if they are actively involved in some way, then it is also in their interest that the class be a success. To illustrate, a well prepared group of students giving a presentation on a topic that excites them, such as four wheel driving, involving photos and examples from their own experiences, are more likely to be irritated by the disturbance from late arrivals than if the class were led by the teacher and they were just passive participants.

## Authentic Assessment and Materials

Whole language teachers try to introduce the students to authentic materials and contexts in order to equip them for the real world. Heine and Heine (1996) graphically describe how “teachers are discovering that they can no longer bring themselves to spoon-feed children a junk food diet of over-processed skills and drills stripped of real-world purposes and contexts” (p. 214). As Whitmore and Goodman (1996) argue, language is authentic when it is used to communicate in genuine interaction (p. 3). Therefore in the whole language context, class activities based on real materials such as travel brochures, newspapers, movies and advertisements are commonplace.

Such an approach might serve to marginalise the traditional “Monday-is-chapter-four” textbook-approach, as Gebhard (1996) explains forcefully:

When teachers blindly follow their assigned texts, they are trivializing the experience for the students, and if we teachers accept our role as simply taking students step-by-step through a book, the teacher’s role is marginalized to that of little more than a technician... and the level at which we are engaged in teaching is reduced to a very superficial one. (p. 100)

Levy (1997) also suggests that the quest for authenticity may be to the detriment of textbook sales when he observes that “the learner-centred curriculum, and the increased sensitivity of the teacher to learner needs has led to many teachers making less use of the commercially produced textbook” (p. 106). Felix (1999) believes that technology, and in particular the internet, could help to fill the role once fully occupied by the textbook because it can help to expose the students to situations involving “meaningful interactive tasks in authentic settings, or at least settings that are rich in authentic language and culture.... It allows flexibility in finding meaningful activities, often available at no cost, for different students, and most of all it allows for authenticity” (p. 95).

In addition to authentic resources, the whole language philosophy favours more authentic assessment methods than traditional test and examination-based evaluation. As Myers (2002) confirms, “The most effective way to assess improvement in spontaneous language production is ongoing evaluation” (p. 168). Authentic assessment, also known as alternative assessment, is concerned with



assessing the learning process and language in use. This is in contrast to traditional assessment, such as timed essays or multiple choice quizzes, which generally reflect an unrealistic situation which has little relevance to actual communication situations.

### Meaningful and Motivating Content

Whole language is not just about *what* resources or testing materials are used; it is also about *how* they are employed. Building on the students' own experiences, encouraging them to do something with the information that they are given and working towards tangible outcomes are crucial to teaching and assessment in a whole language context.

Whitmore and Goodman (1996) explain "Whole language teachers base what they do on what they know" (p. 2). More significantly, the students do the same by connecting new information to their own previous experiences and schema. As O'Malley (1996) explains, "A whole language philosophy provides a context for learning. It makes use of students' prior knowledge, experience, and interests and supports active *construction* [my italics] of knowledge. It also provides meaning and purposes for learning and engages students in social interaction" (p. 34). This aspect of whole language is facilitated by its more student-centred approach since "the curriculum starts with learners, *building* [my italics] on who they are, what they know and believe, and where they are going" (Whitmore & Goodman, 1996, p. 4). This constructive aspect of the whole language philosophy of learning has also been referred to as social development theory, constructivism, or social constructionist philosophy.

### Social Constructivism

According to the "Philosophy" page of *Moodle.org* (2005), the social constructionist philosophy is an umbrella term which covers four main concepts: constructivism, constructionism, social constructivism, connected and separate. Constructivism refers to the way that learners "construct new knowledge as they interact with the environment." Constructionism means that "learning is particularly effective when constructing something for others to experience. This can be anything from a spoken sentence to an internet posting." Social constructivism, as the name suggests, adds collaboration by extending the aforementioned ideas to include group

work: individuals in a “social group constructing things for one another.” Connected and separate refers to “the motivations of individuals within a discussion” and considers the interplay between objectivity, subjectivity and empathy.

Although constructivist theories have taken on a variety of forms and assumed a plethora of monikers and sub divisions, Wilhelmsen, Åsmul and Meistad (1998) state that there is a fundamental characteristic which unifies this philosophy and that it can be best understood by looking at what it is not:

While the behaviorists viewed knowledge as nothing more than passive, largely automatic responses to external factors in the environment and the cognitivists viewed knowledge as abstract symbolic representations in the head of individuals, the constructivistic school views knowledge as a constructed entity made by each and every learner through a learning process. Knowledge can thus not be transmitted from one person to the other, it will have to be (re)constructed by each person. (§ 1)

Hausfather (1996) supports this view when he describes how social development theory, coined by Vygotsky, emerged in opposition to traditional teaching methods which were previously “organized around recitation teaching. The teacher disseminates knowledge to be memorized by the students, who in turn recite the information back to the teacher” (p. 7). Rather than regurgitating information, students in a class following social development theory are encouraged to make this content their own by doing something with it and sharing their ideas with others in collaborative ventures. In this way knowledge is actively constructed by the learner through engagement with salient content and purposeful interactions with others.

According to Levy (1998), both Vygotsky and Piaget can be “seen as constructivist because of their emphasis on the ways in which the learner constructs his or her own understanding and makes sense of the surrounding environment” (p. 87). Constructivism is defined in *Wikipedia* (2005), the online encyclopaedia, as “a learning theory which holds that knowledge is not transmitted unchanged from teacher to student, but instead that learning is an active process of recreating knowledge.” This active process is often described as *play*.

Levy (1998) explains how, according to Piaget, “people grow through play and constructive activity” (p. 88). Levy suggests that technology offers great

potential in this area because it can extend, “transform and manipulate the world through simulation” (p. 88). This is why Levy (1998) believes that constructivism “represents the dominant approach in educational multimedia design” (p. 87). Jonassen, Peck, and Wilson (1999) agree, suggesting that the relationship between technology and constructivism is reciprocal and that technology plays a critical role in a constructivist learning environment because it provides the means for “storing, organizing and reformulating the ideas that are contributed by each community member” (p. 118).

So is there a way of storing, organizing and reformulating the students’ ideas using currently available technology? What do Moodle, computer-assisted grading and weblogs actually do and how can they be made freely available to the students and teachers? How is this technology different from existing CALL applications? In what ways does this technology manifest the theorists outlined in this chapter? Does it contribute to the notion that learning is interactive, constructive, social or playful?

## CHAPTER IV

### WHEN CALL IS NOT CALL

#### Overview

Levy (1998) observes that technology other than that specifically designed for language teaching can be used to do just that. He advocates viewing CALL as a tool and observes that “computer tools are in themselves neutral. They are designed to perform certain functions which may or may not lend themselves in some way to language learning” (p. 194). Keobke (1998) agrees when he argues, “Among the best ways learners improve their language skills with computers is through collaborative learning activities (*not provided by CALL software* [my italics]) that implicitly or explicitly encourage discussion” (p. 49). Keobke explains that “any activity in which a learner uses a computer and improves his/her language” (p. 46) should be regarded as CALL. In other words, computer-assisted language learning need not rely solely on proprietary CALL software with a specific design and purpose. This is illustrated throughout this thesis with the use of the weblog, computer-assisted feedback and Moodle which are alternatives to off-the-shelf CALL programmes.

For example, the weblog was not intended to be a teaching or assessment tool. Weblogs originally emerged as a quick way for the weblog writer to communicate to a wider audience via the web and were initially concerned solely with computer issues, such as programming and networking. In fact, “blogging started fairly innocuously around 1993 as a forum for the National Center for Supercomputing Applications (NCSA)” (Ward, 2004, p.1). Weblogs then evolved into online journals and now embrace the full diversity of the web. However, by designing assignments to fit the weblog’s capabilities, teachers can utilise weblogs to provide an excellent computer-assisted language learning tool.

Similarly, computer-assisted feedback using AutoText in Word does not utilise a particular software package specifically designed by Microsoft to provide feedback on student papers. AutoText is intended to provide quick access to frequently typed words and phrases and comes equipped with a ready-made list of pre-prepared responses to match contexts such as business letters and memos, for example, “yours sincerely,” “for your attention,” etc. It does not include teacher

feedback, comments relevant to process-writing instruction or hotlinks to online resources. However, AutoText can easily be adapted to provide all of these things and offer a valuable contribution to the repertoire of tools available in computer-assisted language learning.

Another use of CALL as a tool is Moodle. Unlike the weblog and AutoText, Moodle is a tool specifically designed for teaching purposes. What makes Moodle different, however, is that it is open source. This means that the code it uses, PHP, is a “widely used open-source programming language” (*Wikipedia*) and, more significantly, it is open to the public to modify and develop. Moodle could potentially be changed to suit any context or need by the user him/herself. Furthermore the teachers using Moodle do not need to be PHP experts to adapt Moodle to their needs. Moodle’s public online support network, Moodle.org, features many ready-made add-ons, which teachers can use to build a CMS to fit the specific requirements of their students or programme.

As Keobke (1998) suggests, a broader definition of CALL is needed. This should include *alternative* uses of technology in which technology not necessarily designed for one purpose, such as teaching grammar forms, can be freely modified by teachers to suit authentic contexts. As pointed out in the introduction to this overview, Levy (1998) calls this use of software “a tool”. Keobke states that “CALL is an ill-defined discipline” and argues that “changes and growth necessitate creating as broad a definition as possible” (p. 46). A broader use of diverse technology in CALL could encourage more innovation and variety in teaching. Furthermore it could provide students with access to the most up-to-date resources, rather than waiting for these to be produced and packaged by educational software companies. Innovative uses of technological tools increases flexibility and allows “both teacher and learners to recognize and adapt materials to various learning styles” (Keobke, 1998, p. 46).

## The Weblog

### Overview of The Weblog

Arguably, the most significant development in web-based communication, over the past few years, is the weblog. Like websites, weblogs enable the average web user to publish content online, which can be read by any other web user anywhere in the world. Unlike websites however, webloggers do not need to know how to upload html files to the web, read html code, or even use web design software. Building on the notion of swift publishing based around a simple template, commercial weblog providers, such as *blogger* and *20six*, furnish the subscriber with a (usually) free space online and a range of ready-made weblog templates to choose from. Like subscribing to *Hotmail*, a web user can quickly set up a free weblog account simply by filling in a short registration form. Indeed the slogan of the weblog provider *Crimson Blog* is “A Blog in 60 Seconds!” Using a weblog can be as simple as managing a web-based email account and for this reason, among many others, could soon prove to be an invaluable resource for language learning and language testing.

It offers many unexplored opportunities for whole language teaching and in particular the use of alternative assessment. Reagin (2004) observes, “As the needs of the English Language Learner continue to change and evolve, there are requests from educators, parents, and students for other forms of assessment. Blogging can be one of these styles of alternative assessment.” Indeed, “The weblog provides a genuine audience, is authentically communicative, process driven, peer reviewed, provides a dis-inhibiting context and offers a completely new form with un-chartered creative potential” (Ward, 2003, p. 3).

In order to use the weblog for whole language teaching a weblog assignment was crafted for my COM 101 students that would take the place of their existing response log assignment. The response log assignment was basically a journal activity in which the students were required to write about a number of things, such as a personal response to an in-class reading, gripes about the university, a favourite food, etc., This work would then be rewritten by the students and then everything

handed in at the end for assessment in a portfolio. However, the weblog assignment was designed to

mimic the culture of the blog, while covering a range of L2 composition skills. The content of the blogs was intended to be authentic, so the students were encouraged to write about the things that they felt strongly about. However, I also requested similar types of writing to ensure that multiple assessments of purposes and genres took place and to make the final grading more practical. The tasks consisted of a short biography; a rant and rave section; two reviews of music, books, movies, or restaurants; and a summary and response to a current article in the news. (Ward, 2005, ¶ 3)

### Communicative Language Learning in The Weblog

Weblogs are based on the need to communicate and are therefore an ideal vehicle for communicative language learning. In fact, a perusal of any of the main blog providers will reveal that most bloggers do not blog for money, or grades, but just for the intrinsic motivation of being read by the global internet community. The homepage of *20six* for example features a constantly updated list of the most recently updated privately owned blogs. This means that the most active bloggers are most often seen on the front page so they attract a wider readership. Many of my students have reacted with excitement when they have seen their own or their friend's blog listed on this page.

Weblogs can also be used to communicate and network automatically with other blogs. One of the most exciting features on *20six* is the *Subscribe* feature, which is derived from a code called RSS, known as Rich Site Summary (Richardson, 2004). RSS could allow the teacher's weblog to receive an instant summary whenever a student writes anything new on his/her own weblog. This update is also time-stamped which enables the teacher's weblog to automatically monitor the students' homework and ability to meet deadlines. For the student this means that not only is the rest of the world watching but the teacher is getting updates.

Another invaluable attribute for communicative language learning, which is offered by many blogs is the *Comments* feature that enables the audience of the weblog to respond to the author by email, or even to write directly and instantly onto the author's weblog. This feature also allows the readers to award points, known as

“sweeties.” This could prove to be a useful peer assessment tool, especially when used between different classes. More importantly, it represents genuine communication through the blogging medium. In an earlier study, I noted that one respondent supported the notion of using the weblog for peer review, suggesting that the weblog is a good place to “take experience from” his friends’ writing (Ward, 2004, p. 12).

Some students in my class even received comments from other unknown bloggers in different parts of the world. As a result, they started e-pal relationships, in English, based on common interests expressed in their blogs. As Opp-Beckman (1999) says of online networking activities, such “asynchronous exchanges can be a great way to share information and socialize with native speakers or other ESOL students” (p. 90).

*20six* also allows weblog users to post instantly to their weblog through email or a mobile phone’s SMS. This has spawned a new genre of weblog called the moblog (short for mobile phone weblog), which is especially popular with groups. Weblogs could also be used for collaborative learning since groups of students can all share and post to the same blog or edit each other’s work, as in a Wiki<sup>1</sup>.

### Student-Centred Learning in The Weblog

The blog, by its nature, is student centred because a student’s blog reflects elements of his or her personality and creativity to some extent. This aspect can be enhanced by weblog assignments which allow the students the freedom to write about anything within the restraints of the tasks. Weblog assignments might also provide students with the freedom to embellish their weblogs with pictures or multi-media and to write extra (ungraded) entries.

Many students who use weblogs soon develop a sense of ownership of what they have produced. I have observed this from the amount of care my students spent adorning their blogs with pictures and bright colours and how upset they got if their changes did not turn out to look as cool as they had expected. Furthermore, as the research in this thesis has illustrated, the vast majority were happy to share their weblogs with friends outside of class and family members. Many students admitted

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<sup>1</sup> A wiki is “a website that allows users to add content, as on an Internet forum, but also allows anyone to edit the content” (*Wikipedia*, 2005).



that they took more care over what was posted online compared to the more traditional assignments because they knew that anyone could read their weblog.

Besides providing a genuine audience, the web also provided the students with a genuine information gap. Rather than just completing tasks for me, the students needed to use English in a meaningful way to blog to their online international audience. In fact, a couple of my students confided that they had become so star struck by blogging that they were worried they were not spending enough time studying for their major. Indeed according to an article in the *New York Times*, blogging can become addictive: “Blogging is a pastime for many, even a livelihood for a few. For some, it becomes an obsession. Such bloggers often feel compelled to write several times daily and feel anxious if they don't keep up. As they spend more time hunkered over their computers, they neglect family, friends and jobs” (Hafner, 2003, ¶ 3).

#### Authentic Assessment and Materials in The Weblog

“Just as the computer has brought about many new possibilities in other aspects of life, it might also bring about new ways of conducting assessment in the language learning classroom” (Chao, 1999, p. 243). What Chao predicted in 1999 has perhaps been partially realised by the potential of the weblog as a means of language teaching and assessment. The weblog is “basically the writing portfolio digitally remastered” (Ward, 2005, ¶ 8). When Laurier described the successful portfolio in the year 2000, it read like a prediction of a weblog assignment. He explains that the portfolio is “a collection of works that demonstrate student competence” and explains how “the works to be included... are selected by the learner, under the guidance of the teacher who must provide the learner with criteria for the selection” (p. 96). The most significant connection between the weblog assignment and the portfolio is when Laurier observes that the portfolio is “a dynamic object that changes over time and may be examined by various persons” (p. 96).

In my weblog assignment, grammar and spelling mistakes were tolerated until the end of the semester when students printed off their “final” weblog and the comments they had posted on other’s and submitted these in a portfolio for assessment. In accordance with alternative assessment, the writing on these blogs was put together through multiple drafts as the students rewrote their original

compositions by logging in and editing previous entries throughout the semester. Unlike the course essays where rhetorical modes such as compare and contrast are assessed, the writing in the weblogs came from a more organic approach. The students were also invited to grade each other's work, during in-class peer review activities, using the grading rubric on the assignment. This made the scoring of the assignment more transparent to the students.

For the assignment, the content of the weblogs was intended to be authentic. Students were encouraged to write about the things that they felt strongly about. However, the assignment requested similar types of writing (rant, reviews, news summary etc.) from all students to ensure that multiple assessments of purposes and genres took place and to make the goal of each writing sample easier to assess. These loose restraints also helped to control the risk of receiving recycled assignments from previous classes.

For the weblog to be considered as a portfolio it is important that the students write about their own personal experience with the assignment and reflect on that experience. As Santos (1997) observes in his description of the paper-based portfolio, "Without reflection, the portfolio remains "a folder of all my papers" (p. 10). This type of self-assessment could help the student to appreciate what has been achieved, which increases motivation. Therefore, to reflect on this assignment, the students were required to write a preface for their weblog portfolios that included an introduction to their work and some reflection on their drafts, opinions about their semester spent in the blogosphere and a consideration of what language skills (if any) they thought they may have improved.

### Meaningful and Motivating Content in The Weblog

It is important for students to feel genuine ownership of the things they produce and for this to happen the teacher should do his or her best not to interfere. Thomas (2000) explains, "Students build their own knowledge by active learning, interacting with the environment as suggested by the constructivist approach, working independently or collaborating in teams, while the teacher directs and guides, and they make a real product " (quoted in Frank & Barzilla, 2004, p. 42). By posting their writing on a public weblog, it was hoped that my students would be encouraged to

have more pride in what they produced. I also hoped that this creative endeavour would motivate them to write more and, more importantly, encourage them to go back and rewrite what they had already written in order to improve it. Indeed, most of the students did rewrite what they had originally posted before the final deadline.

The weblog was each student's personal property and responsibility, and for this reason, only the weblog owner had pass-worded permission to administer his or her own weblog. This autonomy was productive because a number of students continued to proudly "inhabit" their weblogs long after the course had finished. In fact there are certain weblog features that could prove to be of particular value in motivating the students to furnish their online home. For instance, *20six* allows its weblog users to embellish their writing with uploaded photographs and even multimedia files (such as audio and video clips) for no charge. Illustrated weblogs in an L2 class could provide the students with an opportunity to show off skills other than just their L2 language use, and to express themselves in creative ways using photographs, music, animations etc.

The weblog gives students an opportunity to show what they can do, so it seems to be an appropriate tool for alternative assessment. In fact, weblog assignments can be designed that meet most of the cornerstones of assessment (Coombe, 2004): validity, reliability, usefulness, practicality, positive washback, authenticity and transparency. As Felix (1999) predicts in pre-weblog 1999:

with the advent of the Web, activities no longer have to be simulated or artificially contextualized but can be excitingly authentic. The real world of the target language can now be brought into the students' experience with the creation of meaningful tasks tailored to their interests and capabilities at different levels of interactivity. (p. 89)

## Computer Assisted Feedback

### Overview of CAF

Ehsani and Knodt (1998) argue that even despite the current emphasis on communication, “Mastering linguistic form remains an important component of L2 instruction” (p. 55). In an effort to improve my written responses to the students’ linguistic forms and essay structure, Computer-Assisted Feedback (CAF) was piloted in my COM 102 classes at AUS during Fall Semester 2004 and Spring 2005. The acronym CAF is one that I developed for a presentation on this topic<sup>2</sup> and have used throughout this thesis for convenience. It refers to the process of providing feedback on digital drafts of students’ work using Microsoft Word’s *Comment* boxes and *AutoText* features.

In order to utilize this feedback tool, the students first uploaded their work to an online drop-box, provided by the Moodle course management system (CMS), as digital drafts (i.e., MS Word documents). These documents were then downloaded by me. Then I would send them back to the students with feedback on the main errors in the form of comment boxes which appeared in the margins alongside the students’ original text. In addition to typing these comments in full, I also had the option of choosing from a dropdown menu of pre-prepared feedback through a feature called *AutoText* in Word. *AutoText* allows the MS<sup>3</sup> Word user to put together a dropdown menu of frequently typed phrases which can quickly be selected and dropped into a document. These comments were all presented as questions to try and provoke a response. Answers were not given [Appendix D]. Krucli (2004), in “Making Assessment Matter: Using The Computer to Create Interactive Feedback,” ingeniously proposes that web links could be added to Auto-text feedback. He describes a system which involves “hyperlinks to online, interactive practice exercises that can be completed by the student and turned in as part of the revision process” (pp. 48-49). Thus, in 2005, my existing Computer-Assisted Feedback was upgraded to

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<sup>2</sup>*Computer-Assisted Feedback: Use CAFe to Grade Writing*. TESOL Arabia (March 9-11, 2005), Dubai, UAE.

<sup>3</sup> Microsoft Word Processor

also include hotlinks to sites where the student could practice working with each error by completing online activities and quizzes.

According to my research results, the CAF experiment was popular with the students in both semesters. Such error correction endeavours could also prove to be effective. Chappelle (2003) points out:

highlighting relative clauses in written text for ESL learners helped them acquire the forms; the learners also had access to explanations of the relative clauses. In view of the fact that computer mark-up languages offer sophisticated tools for marking up text, audio and video (Mills, 2000), the specific conditions and tasks that can work with the highlighting of target linguistic forms are worthy of further investigation (p. 42).

This is an opinion shared by Ehsani and Knodt (1998) who, back in 1998, called for “mechanisms capable of focusing the learner on areas that need remedial practice” (1998, p. 45). But how can using digital drafts, comments boxes and hot-links to grammar exercises contribute to whole language instruction?

### Communicative Language Learning in CAF

From my own experience, I have found that CAF can help the teacher to communicate more directly and more methodically with the students. Because CAF uses the web to receive and send the students’ work, the teacher has a direct line to each individual student. CAF also ensures that the students are more likely to receive their feedback when they are in a situation where they can do something about it, such as sitting at their computer, as illustrated by some of the students’ comments in the feedback.

One of the problems with providing feedback by hand is that the students do not always understand their teacher’s handwriting; a point supported by the students’ comments in my research on this topic. It was also hoped that this mode of feedback would be more communicative, in that it would be more legible than previous handwritten methods. Using the computer to provide feedback presents the students with a much more readable draft with a clear computerized font, straight lines, boxes and links.

A further advantage of using CAF is that the whole process, from writing through to assessment, was digitized from paper to word processor. Although

debatable and unproven in this paper, according to Dunkel (1991), “The findings of a number of research studies have lent support to the supposition that the quality of students’ writing is affected in positive ways by the use of word processing” (p. 170).

Another issue with paper-based assignments is that the students would often lose their work. However, with CAF this situation was addressed by using digital drop-boxes, drafts and ready-made feedback because both the teacher and the student would have a copy of the students’ essays complete with feedback. Plus the original essay would still be stored in the Moodle dropbox as further back-up.

The pre-prepared responses were intended to cut down on the amount of time spent grading general errors allowing me more time to focus on each students’ specific problems. Once the system was set up with the most frequent errors, I found that it did help to reduce the time spent writing the same comments over and over again. It also made the feedback process quicker and more systematic since the dropdown menu of errors provided a handy checklist for each essay. By assisting with frequent errors and helping to maintain a consistent perspective for each paper, CAF helped me to concentrate on how I could respond to the paper positively and holistically at the end.

In order to distinguish between my comments and those selected from the dropdown menu, the pre-prepared responses were identified by a word or phrase in capital letters at the beginning of each comment followed by a URL. For example:

FRAGMENT?

[http://webster.comnet.edu/grammar/quizzes/fragment\\_fixing.htm](http://webster.comnet.edu/grammar/quizzes/fragment_fixing.htm)

THESIS STATEMENT - Clear topic, opinion and plan of development?

[http://www.mhhe.com/socscience/english/langan/langan\\_5\\_cws/graphics/langan5ecwswr/ch03/p1exd.htm](http://www.mhhe.com/socscience/english/langan/langan_5_cws/graphics/langan5ecwswr/ch03/p1exd.htm) [Appendix D]

Some of the teacher’s own comments might also feature a URL, but they would not start with capital letters.

As inferred previously, at the end of each essay the teacher also wrote some specific feedback addressed to the student. It was hoped that this would help to make the feedback process seem more personal, supportive and encouraging rather than just directing the students to web sites. In fact, this grading tool was intended to provide me with more opportunities to communicate more effectively with the author of the

essay. By automating the most repetitive part of the process, which dealt with common errors, I could provide more specific and comprehensive feedback overall.

### Student-Centred Learning in CAF

CAF can build an easily accessible archive of students' work, which is accessible by both the teacher and the student. This authentic collection of each student's writing can help the student and the teacher to put together a profile of the student's writing over time. By reflecting on this as a unique collection of errors, each student can focus extra attention on the forms which he or she finds consistently most problematic, rather than working through pages of unrelated grammar exercises. As Suskie (2000) observes, "Equitable assessment means that students are assessed using methods and procedures most appropriate to them" (¶ 4). Using the hotlinks it was hoped that students would be more motivated by the grammar exercises because specific grammar activities were physically linked directly to their own specific errors in the essays. These specific points were intended to provide each student with his or her own plan of improvement rather than directing him or her to an endless textbook list of other people's errors. In addition, if students contribute error categories for the teacher's pre-prepared feedback responses, it could help them to feel more involved in the assessment process.

### Authentic Assessment and Materials in CAF

As suggested in the previous point, the digital nature of CAF makes it an ideal way to create paperless archives of authentic student material. Anonymous excerpts from these digital drafts could be adapted for use in authentic in-house materials based on student writing. Rather than just using the readings and model essays in many of the textbooks, student contributions might better reflect more of the concerns of the target culture and some of their strengths and challenges in the L2 writing process. In fact, these home-grown student drafts could be used to demonstrate the steps of the writing process approach more authentically than the textbook examples.

CAF also contributes to authentic assessment because digital archives can help to facilitate the assessment and tracking of a student's writing progress over time. Furthermore, process writing can be encouraged by providing digital feedback which, according to my own research (see Figure 6, p. 55), may be more likely to encourage

the students to respond and engage in the revision process. In addition, by using digital drafting it is easier for the students to practice writing through re-writing, and building on previous points. As a result, it is less labour-intensive and monotonous than completely re-writing a whole paper essay over and over again.

### Meaningful and Motivating Content in CAF

As O'Malley (1996) observes, "When students become actively involved in self-assessment they become more responsible for the direction their learning takes" (p. 38). Using CAF to provide clickable links to pertinent grammar, punctuation, or composition exercises on the web, not only provided the students with more information, it also made the whole process of receiving feedback a much more interactive and hopefully more fun and motivating experience.

More comprehensive feedback helps the students to learn more from their mistakes and to build on them. Rather than just circling the errors or providing the answer, the teacher who uses CAF is encouraging the students to engage with the feedback and revision process by completing online interactive quizzes and activities linked directly to their errors.



## Moodle

### Overview of Moodle

Moodle is a relatively small software program that runs on a server and is accessed over the internet like a website. It can be hosted at no cost on a university server or by a private internet service provider for whatever it costs to rent the webspace (usually around 40 US dollars per year). Moodle is a course management system (CMS), which is specifically designed to facilitate the social constructionist philosophy mode of teaching (d'Entremont, 2004, p. 21; *Moodle.org*, 2005; *Wikipedia*, 2005). A CMS is a type of interactive online resource, and like social constructionism, has a number of bewildering alter egos. A CMS might also be referred to as a Content Management System, a Learning Management System (LMS), a Learning Support System (LSS), a Managed Learning Environment (MLE), or a Virtual Learning Environments (VLE). According to *Wikipedia* (2005), “the terms ‘virtual learning environment’ or ‘managed learning environment’ are favored in the United Kingdom and many other European countries, while ‘course management system’ is more prevalent in the United States.” For convenience, the single term CMS will be used throughout this thesis.

Such systems were initially developed to provide e-learning (electronic learning) through distance learning, but the CMS is now more often used to enhance the weekly class content of face-to-face courses. This combination of on-line and face-to-face teaching is known as a hybrid in some circles and as e-learning re-defined in others. As Howell, Williams, and Lindsay, (2004) observe, “As universities digitally enhance more courses, the distinction between distance and local education is becoming blurred. Digitally enhanced courses provide students in traditional classrooms with more opportunities for independent study” (§ 54).

Moodle is an *open source* CMS which means that the code and thus the software is free for the user to modify, improve and share. Besides Moodle, there are a range of other open source CMS's available on the web, such as Sakai, Magnolia, OpenCMS and ATutor. There are also a number of long established proprietary CMS's, which include systems like Blackboard, Desire2Learn and WebCT. A system such as Blackboard, for example, offers most of the features contained in Moodle, but

bundles this with telephone support and charges a yearly subscription fee. More significantly, the code of proprietary software is not open source and is therefore not available for users to modify. Subscribers to proprietary software have to wait for the developers to add new features and components and can usually expect to pay extra for these add-ons and upgrades. There is a subtle difference between proprietary software and commercial software. The tag “commercial” suggests that money is being made, but this does not have to mean that the software is proprietary; i.e., the code is secret and patented. For example, there are commercial adaptations of Moodle which make money but these remain open source, which means that they can be modified.

In his journal from 1997 (<http://www.answers.com/topic/moodle>), the creator of Moodle, Martin Dougiamas, brainstormed constructivism as “building on knowledge” and “a lens for examining educational practices” (§ 15). He went on to demonstrate his faith in the social constructionist philosophy of sharing and collaboration by allowing his software to develop in this manner. He provided his system to the public for free on the internet and it is now the world’s most popular alternative to traditional proprietary course management systems. As pointed out in *Wikipedia’s* definition of Moodle, Martin Dougiamas’s PhD studies explored “The use of Open Source software to support a social constructionist epistemology of teaching and learning within Internet-based communities of reflective inquiry, and this research has strongly influenced some of the design of Moodle, providing pedagogical aspects missing from other commercial e-learning platforms” (*Wikipedia*, 2005).

Moodle features constant upgrades and improvements as Moodle users continue to send in new additions and suggestions to improve the features, code and usability. An example of this collaboration was demonstrated by Mark Stevens at AUS who wrote to *Moodle.org* about the Thursday-Friday weekend in the Gulf. Less than a day after his initial posting, Jon Papaioannou (a lead developer) replied with code that could be added to Moodle to get the matching weekend. The feature was made part of Moodle 1.5dev on 17 December 2004 (<http://moodle.org/mod/forum/discuss.php?d=12170>).

However, more importantly for language teachers, it is not just the manner in which Moodle was created that reflects social constructivism at work, but also the

features that it provides for teachers and learners. As d'Entremont (2004) observes, "Moodle is packed with modules that implement the theory of constructivist learning" (p. 21) The features are constantly evolving, so whatever is listed here will probably already be outdated as this thesis goes to print; however, Everett (2002) provides an overview of the core attributes of a typical CMS, which is a good place to start:

- mapping of the curriculum into course topics that can be assessed and recorded
- tracking of student activity and achievement within the curriculum presented online
- support of online learning, including access to learning resources, assessment and guidance
- online tutor support
- peer group support
- general communications, including email, group discussion and web access;
- links to other systems, both in-house and externally (Everett, 2002, ¶ 1).

Basically Moodle emulates online most of the things that a teacher already does in the real world; such as, providing a drop-box for assignments, encouraging journal entries, giving announcements, distributing resources, conducting surveys, assigning and grading quizzes, facilitating peer review workshops, displaying grades and checking participation and progress. Most importantly, Moodle provides the students with their own space to collaborate with peers, discuss issues, chat informally and express themselves beyond the classroom and their L2.

Pountney, Parr, and Whittaker (2001) observe that sound principles such as social constructionism can "help ensure that networked learning is employed in an appropriate, thoughtful and effective manner" (¶ 33). However, does Moodle have a monopoly on social constructivism? It should be pointed out that Moodle is not the only CMS capable of delivering such services. As Schulte-Mecklenbeck (n.d.) observes, "A virtual learning environment is a set of teaching and learning tools designed to enhance a student's learning experience by including computers and the Internet in the learning process" (¶ 2). This definition of a VLE, or CMS, is broad enough to accommodate more than one type of system or approach.

Moodle is the focus of this thesis because it applies to my own context and experience, but differing applications can be used for similar purposes. For instance in their research, which is entitled “Communal Constructivism and Networked Learning: Reflections on a Case Study,” Pountney, Parr and Whittaker (2001) were actually referring to Blackboard! They concede that although “Blackboard is not a constructivist environment per se: it is perfectly possible to build a teacher-led, delivery-based, transmission-of-knowledge model within Blackboard.”


It seems that the system is secondary to the pedagogy used providing it has the flexibility to accommodate a flexible pedagogy. So, how does Moodle fit into a broader whole language philosophy?

### Communicative Language Learning in Moodle

Moodle strengthens communicative language learning by facilitating more communication between students and students, students and teachers and even between busy faculty. Features such as the asynchronous *Forums* and synchronous *Chat*, in particular, help to provide a sense of community and encourage a use of the L2, which in my own classes has often gone well beyond the minimal word limit of required assignments. The *Events* calendar which provides automated updates of the latest deadlines and activities and the email based *Announcements* and *News* features also help to keep the channels of communication constantly open as students receive constant emailed updates about their peers', and their teacher's, activity on Moodle. Furthermore this feature, along with a number of others, may encourage some of the students to take more care about what they write because they know that it will be read not just by the teacher, but by everyone in the class. Moodle facilitates communicative language learning, and as Buell stated in 1999, this is important for education: “Learning comes about through interaction and negotiation; it is enhanced via authentic language use, tasks and audiences; it demands opportunities for exposure and production; and from the teacher's perspective, it often centers on providing proper time and feedback to support the development of learner autonomy” (p. 217).

The Moodle community is further enhanced by the *Profiles* feature which allows the participants to express themselves with a photograph and biography. This

photo appears as an icon which is visible with their nickname on the Moodle site whenever the participant is online. This gives each participant a real presence online and provides the site with a lively and welcoming buzz. When students go to the Moodle site they can see a long list of the participants currently working online and (in version 1.5) they can communicate with this person in real-time by simply clicking on their picture. In this manner, Moodle creates a real L2 community in which students can immerse themselves.

In her article “Group Dynamics and the Online Professor,” King (1999) observed that unlike face-to-face communications which employ a range of non-verbal signals, “computer-mediated communication strips these important emotional cues from the conversation, leaving only the typed words on a computer screen” (p. 243). However, Moodle’s Emoticons, such as , help go some way to address this deficiency in the text-based environment. The students communicating in Moodle are no longer restricted to communicating in their L2, but can draw from a lexicon of “smileys” to express themselves. Each smiley has a one word description of its function such as “thoughtful,” “shocked,” “cool,” “shy,” “angry.” Of course there is also the danger that smileys like words and gestures, might sometimes be misconstrued. Furthermore, in the same way that a face-to-face smile does not always communicate happiness or agreement, a happy smiley may sometimes be used ironically to communicate different emotions. However, they do add significant colour to written language and have proved particularly popular with my L2 students.

The “smileys” add a sense of play, which helps to build a non-threatening atmosphere more conducive to language learning. My own students make frequent use of emoticons in their online communications and a few have informally commented that they like the smileys which I use to illustrate my instructions. Emoticons have proved especially useful in the forums when my students have provided opinions or made comments on each other’s views and used smileys as an additional modal to help defuse potentially inflammatory statements. As illustrated by *Can*<sup>4</sup> who added the following disclaimer to the end of his opinion about the Iraq war, “i just wrote watever came into my mind and i believed in. if im wrong please

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<sup>4</sup> The name has been changed from the original, but the original language has been used.

correct me and let us hear ur openion about this 😊” The use of Emoticons is another example of how Moodle can assist in building a sense of community on-line which helps to enhance communicative language learning.

As Dunkel predicted in 1991, “Rather than isolating students and promoting asocial behaviour, as many have feared, there is a growing body of evidence that computer use can promote new ways of working together, productive peer teaching, as well as high quality social and academic task-based interaction, and that these kinds of interaction are related to higher levels of interest, motivation, and achievement” (p. 65). In my experience, Moodle seems to build community in the class, and even between classes, as students first get to know each other from chatting online, which provides them with an ice-breaker for the real world.

### Student-Centred Learning in Moodle

Moodle supports student-centred learning both by its student-friendly design and by allowing students ample opportunities to contribute to the course content through features such as *Chat*, *News* forums, peer review *Workshops* and *Wikis* [actual titles of Moodle features identified by italics]. The latter two are also strong examples of how Moodle supports collaborative learning.

Robb (2004) explains how the layout of Moodle compares with two well known proprietary systems: “One essential difference between Moodle and WebCT or Blackboard is that all course elements are presented in a "flat view" ;e.g., there are no "Chinese boxes" with content inside folders at various levels.” Moodle is topic-oriented and designed as a what-you-see-is-what-you-get (WYSIWYG) system. This means that the content is all there on the class page, either organised around topics or weeks. This view is sometimes not very pretty but it is very straightforward and easy to navigate. Moodle often looks like a 15-week plan from a course syllabus except the activities and resources are dynamic and interactive.

In its definition of Moodle, *Wikipedia* (2005) suggests that Moodle’s layout is an unusual quality which differs from most existing CMS’s but supports current developments in software: “Most e-learning platforms are organized around tools: ALL the contents here, ALL the quizzes there, ALL the forums in another place.... Moodle's approach is much more related to the modern concept of Learning Objects.”

In fact Moodle's name is an acronym of its modular nature, Modular Object-Oriented Dynamic Learning Environment (Moodle.org), which basically means that the whole program fits like Lego bricks, which facilitates flexibility and accommodates limitless appendages as new modules become available.

As "Campus Source" (2005) observes, Moodle promotes collaboration activities and critical reflection within a group. The peer review *Workshop* module, for example, facilitates the whole peer review process online while concealing the identities of the writers and peer reviewers. To take part, the student uploads his/her anonymous essay to Moodle and then downloads another anonymous assignment written by a peer and provides feedback on this using an online form. Once the feedback process is completed the essays are returned to their rightful owners complete with peer input.

Another typical example of a function which promotes collaboration is the *Glossary*, which allows students to enter their own definitions of words and phrases and enables the students to help each other to learn new vocabulary. For example, once a definition has been entered, whenever these words or phrases occur in any part of the class Moodle, they will have a hotlink which leads directly to the definition contributed by student or teacher. Another example of how Moodle facilitates student-centred collaborative learning is its *Wiki* feature. A wiki is "a website that allows users to add content, as on an Internet forum, but also allows anyone to edit the content" (*Wikipedia*, 2005). Wikis facilitate public writing and can allow the students to generate the content of the lesson, brainstorm as a class, compose tag-stories, write group essays, share resources, edit each other's grammar errors, etc. There seems to be great potential for wikis in writing classes.

*Wikis* and peer review *Workshops* are good examples of whole language teaching which allow the students to take responsibility for their own learning and develop through active participation and interaction with classmates. In addition, Chapelle (2003) observes how online forums can also contribute to the student-centred approach when she suggests that "Negotiation of meaning can be seen in these interactions among a teacher and learners during an exchange in an ESL class where learners were participating in a discussion on a local area network" (p. 57).

Another feature which helps to empower the student is the *Choice* feature which allows the students to cast anonymous ballots and then view the results of the

vote. This can be used for many different purposes such as allowing the class to democratically decide on the date of the next quiz, or to engage students in a reading by getting them to vote for their favourite character. In its definition of Moodle, *Wikipedia* (2005) explains how such uses of Moodle may affect the role of the teacher and lead to a more student-centred educational environment:

One's task as a "teacher" can change from being "the source of knowledge" to being an influencer and role model of class culture, connecting with students in a personal way that addresses their own learning needs, and moderating discussions and activities in a way that collectively leads students towards the (sometimes negotiated) learning goals of the class. (*Wikipedia*, 2005)

### Authentic Assessment and Materials in Moodle

Moodle also facilitates the use of authentic assessment and materials in its activities and its resources. For example, the aforementioned *Choice* feature, the online *Journal* the *Activity Reports* and the uploaded *Resources* can all be used to create a more authentic environment, which provides new opportunities for alternative assessment.

For example, at AUS the students frequently complain about the grades they receive for their assignment. Even when detailed rubrics and explanations are employed, some students still remain dubious about the teacher's decision. Therefore I used one of the tools available in Moodle to devise a solution. I asked the students who were not happy with their grades if they would like the whole class to "double-grade" their anonymous paper. The paper was then posted online and the rest of the class voted anonymously for the grades that they thought it deserved. Surprisingly, I have found that anonymous classmates are ruthless graders and this process has always resulted in a lower grade than the one the student received from me. Although this is hardly an alternative assessment, in the same sense as portfolio assessment, it does contain attributes of alternative assessment, since it contributes to transparency and helps the students to feel like they can play a part in the assessment process.

For a portfolio-type assessment which involves extensive writing, the *Journal* feature could be employed. The *Journal* is a very simple feature which allows the students to write directly into Moodle and receive feedback from the teacher at the



same location. Each *Journal* can be set up as a weekly event, which only opens between certain dates -to encourage speedy responses- or can be left open indefinitely. Once completed the students can scroll through all of their journals together and choose their favourite writing to re-write and re-submit for assessment in a portfolio. Process writing can also be encouraged through use of the previously mentioned peer review *Workshop* or by providing online *Assignment* dropboxes where students can upload multiple drafts of their work in process for teacher feedback.

One of the main concerns of authentic assessment is to evaluate the students' progress throughout the language learning process and in a multitude of settings, rather than just from a limited set of timed tasks. The *Activity Reports* can provide the teacher, and even the student, with a complete breakdown of everything that happened in Moodle. The student's every move is monitored and can be viewed according to assignment tasks, dates times etc. and displayed as data or in a graph. When class takes place in a CMS, it is possible to document every facet of participation and thus provide evaluation based on a much broader range of criteria.

In addition to authentic assessment, Moodle can also accommodate more *authentic* materials as *Resources* for the students to download. One of the first reasons that many teachers start to use a CMS is to distribute class materials and reading materials. Using a CMS as a repository for course materials can allow teachers to distribute a wealth of authentic resources which may prove to be more appropriate and culturally specific resources than those readily available in print. These resources are also not restricted to documents to be printed off and could also include multimedia: presentations, audio/visual clips, student essays, or hotlinks to authentic material on the web.

### Meaningful and Motivating Content in Moodle

As illustrated by Moodle's foundations in constructivism, one of the most significant attributes of the whole language philosophy is the use of meaningful content and activities. Using Moodle basically extends the time that the student spends "in class," yet from my own experience, many students seem keen to "attend" and have reported that Moodling is fun. These students apparently want to perform tasks in their L2 because they are set in an enjoyable framework and do not seem *like*

*work*. This is because Moodle is intended to be *playful* and bring variety to the students' learning activities. Dougiamas (2004) describes how he selected the name Moodle because in addition to being an acronym for its Modular format, it is "also a verb that describes the process of lazily meandering through something, doing things as it occurs to you to do them, *an enjoyable tinkering that often leads to insight and creativity* [my italics]" (§ 2).

Used creatively, many of the features in Moodle can prove to be intrinsically motivating. The authentic audience of peers provided by Moodle activities such as *Chat*, *Forums* and *Wikis* can be attention-grabbing for many students. For example, when a student shares her/his review of a local restaurant in an optional discussion *Forum*, s/he is not doing this because it is graded but because s/he enjoys expressing her/his opinions online and contributing a voice to the class and the Moodle community means something to her/him. Similarly other students have been known to post their own creative endeavours online, such as poetry and short stories, not because they had to, but because they wanted to. Such "dis-inhibition," where the student feels less inhibited in an online environment is surprisingly common. Felix (1999) suggests, "Higher motivation and a better attitude towards learning have been reported in web-based teaching (Atkinson, 1998), which seems to reflect general findings in CALL, where positive affective factors have been consistently reported" (p. 94)

However, beyond the hype, how would the students respond to the use of online technology? Did they see it as an extra burden, an improvement, a liberation from familiar routines, or a gimmick? Did the students appear to find it to be communicative, student-centered, authentic, or motivating? These issues will be addressed in the next section which brings together research findings from a number of surveys, an overview of CMS use at AUS, and a comparison between an online class and a face-to-face class.

## CHAPTER V

### RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

In an attempt to support some of the claims made in the previous chapters that online technology in teaching can enhance communication, student-centered activity, authenticity and motivation, a number of methods were employed. The results from a variety of surveys given to students are considered, and an online class and a face-to-face class were observed and compared. For convenience and parallelism, the results are divided according to the subject areas of the previous chapter respectively: weblogs, CAF and Moodle. After these applications, is a comparison between an online and a face-to-face class.

#### Weblog Findings

##### Weblog Methodology

At the end of each course, but before they had received their final grades for the weblog portfolio, my COM 101 students were given a survey to assess the effectiveness of the weblog assignment. One hundred and forty seven students were surveyed over four semesters (Fall 2003, Spring 2004, Summer 2004, Fall 2004) . The survey [Appendix A] was a ten question paper survey consisting of six simple “yes,” “not sure,” or “no” responses and four short answers.

##### Weblog Results and Analysis

Figure 1 (p. 44) collates the first part of this survey. From these results it is possible to deduce the following points:

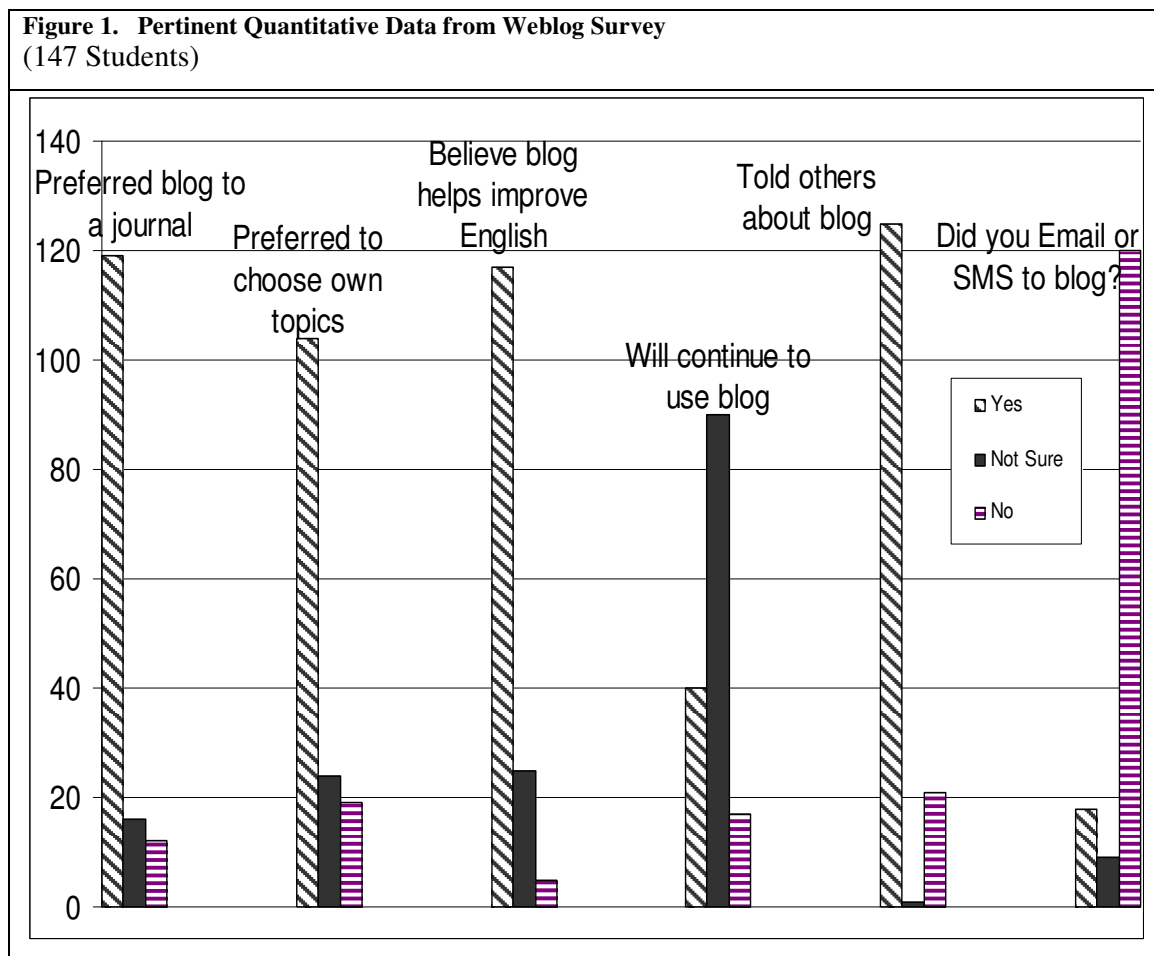
- Ninety-one percent said they preferred writing the weblog to the more traditional written journal
- Generally more students would rather have chosen their own topics (71%)
- Eighty percent of students believed that the weblog can improve English
- The majority said that they were unsure if they would continue their blogs (61%)
- Eighty-five percent of the students told somebody else about the weblog.

This survey replicates one which I originally conducted with 40 students in Fall 2003 and the following conclusions from this survey are just as applicable now as they were then:

These findings appear to confirm that most of the students enjoyed the assignment, believed that it was helping the improvement of their English and that it assisted them in producing good work. I would deduce the latter point from the number of students that publicised their weblogs to family and friends (37 out of 40), which might suggest some level of pride (or lack of shame!) in what they had created. (Ward, 2004, p.11)

Most of these results would seem to support my earlier suggestions about the motivational power of the blog. However it is worth noting that the majority of students said that they were unsure if they would continue to blog after the course ended. If blogging is intrinsically motivating, why do so few continue to blog when it is no longer graded? Over the past four semesters I have observed that most students abandon their blog once it is no longer needed for assessment; however, three or four students are still regular bloggers and claim to have met many new friends, and used a lot of English, through this *meaningful* and *motivating* experience.

The students were also asked to respond to one short answer question, “Apart from this course, what else do you think you could use a weblog for?” Most responses featured friends and family. Many of the students from other countries recognised that the weblog could fill an *authentic* communication information gap by allowing them to stay in touch with their loved ones back home. In an earlier study, conducted after only one semester of using blogs in class, I noted the students’ “recognition of the weblog as a forum for creative expression: One student mentioned that it could be an online diary or a place to post her pictures, drawings and paintings, while another mentioned that it could be a place to establish his writing on the web” (Ward, 2004, p. 12).



The responses to, “Who did you tell about your weblog?” were mostly family and friends; however, a few also mentioned previous English teachers. *Gisela* unwittingly demonstrated that some students may spend more time perfecting their writing for the weblog when she complained about “The idea of [the weblog] being perfect because people will have access to it.” Another student shared this concern when she complained that she did not like, “Having other students grade it in some way using sweets” (*Hala*<sup>5</sup>). In contrast, a few students mentioned how much they liked people to read what they write, such as *Isra* who enthused, “You can express whatever you like or hate on a weblog and everyone can see it” and *Jalal* who “Liked the fact it was on the net for anyone to read.”

<sup>5</sup>All students’ names and sometimes genders have been changed to protect anonymity. Italics have been used to indicate that a pseudonym has been used.

The students' attitudes towards having an audience would be a fascinating area for future research. In fact a few of the respondents actually complained because they did not feel like they had an audience. For example, *Karawan* remarked, "There is no reaction in what we wrote, students do not write comments." This is in contrast with *Lineth* who enthused how, "I have received many comments from another people that helped me to have communication between other people around the world." Or *Mehdi* who claimed, "I tried my best to do this assignment very good, not only because it is for grades, but also it will show my writing to people around the world." <sup>6</sup>Daniels and Brooks (1999) refer to this sense of a global classroom when they observe, "Adding computer-mediated communication activities can give the students a sense of belonging they begin to know and communicate with classmates both inside and outside of class" (p. 84).

When asked, "What did you like the most about the weblog assignment?" issues such as communication, collaborative learning and process writing were popular areas for the responses. For example, *Nabil* said, "I can connect in my friends' weblogs, so we can discuss issues." *Ola* thought that blogging could "improve our ability when we see other's work" *Priya* pointed out, "I was able to take the time I needed and come up with ideas and great thought. I was able to go back and edit some mistakes made." Similarly *Rana* unwittingly vindicated the process approach of extensive writing when she complained, "I had to do the work 3 times, 1st do it, 2nd post it, 3rd polish it. *Sanjeev* brought in the effect of audience on composition when he complained, "I have to write really good topics cause everyone will read my work" (Ward, 2004, p.13).

Other students, such as *Tahani*, said they enjoyed the weblog because it "didn't feel like writing essay." The students also appeared to have enjoyed the fact that the blog is more than just writing. *Uppatt* pointed out how he "likes the fact that we design the weblog could be creative and make it attractive." *Veronica* demonstrated one of the goals of social constructivism when she proudly announced, "I was happy when I finished. That because I have a collection of articles that I wrote my self." *Wael* adds the social dimension to constructivism when he points out that the weblog can help to build community among classmates, "It helps us improve our

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<sup>6</sup> For authenticity, the respondents' original grammar and spelling is used throughout the thesis.

English and read the things our classmates wrote.” *Yusuf* supports the whole language content-based approach, which suggests that language is acquired through engagement with meaningful content, when he observes, “It’s a very good learning technique you could learn about new stuff and improve your English.”

Another survey will be conducted with my COM 101 students in Spring 2005 semester, but it won’t appear in this study as, to be consistent with previous research, it will take place at the end of their weblog assignment in week 14. Nevertheless, after five semesters of using weblogs with my COM 101 students, and four of consistently positive feedback, I have little doubt that assignments can be designed utilising the weblog which satisfy all of the requirements of whole language.

## Computer-Assisted Feedback Findings

### CAF Methodology

In order to assess whether the Computer-Assisted Feedback experience was a success, surveys were conducted of my COM 102 students online using Moodle. The first utilised the *Choice* feature and the second employed a *Questionnaire*. As mentioned in the Moodle methodology section, I decided to use Moodle to conduct the survey, not only because it would automatically collect and collate the results, but also because I thought it would prove more engaging than a traditional paper survey.

The CAF research consisted of nine questions. Eight were multiple choice “tick-the-box” responses, and one required a short answer of at least two sentences. In the Fall 2004 semester, the students’ responses were not known to each other; however, it was later discovered that this data was available for the administrator. This is another reason why I chose to use *Questionnaire* for Spring 2005. The survey was designed to find out about the students’ opinion of feedback generally, Computer-Assisted Feedback in particular and the Moodle CMS which helped to facilitate the Computer-Assisted Feedback process. As mentioned in the Moodle methodology, there were two surveys of two different groups of students. The students in both semesters had been exposed to both handwritten and computer – assisted feedback. The latter was generally provided on handwritten essays that the students had produced in class and CAF was applied to their homework essays, which were submitted online.

The first survey took place in week 15 of Fall 2004 and received 32 responses, and the second in week eight of Spring 2005 [Appendix B] received 37. A third short survey of three questions was conducted in week ten of Spring 2005 [Appendix C] and received 30 responses. The short survey was intended to find out more about attitudes towards the hotlinks provided in the second semester of using CAF.

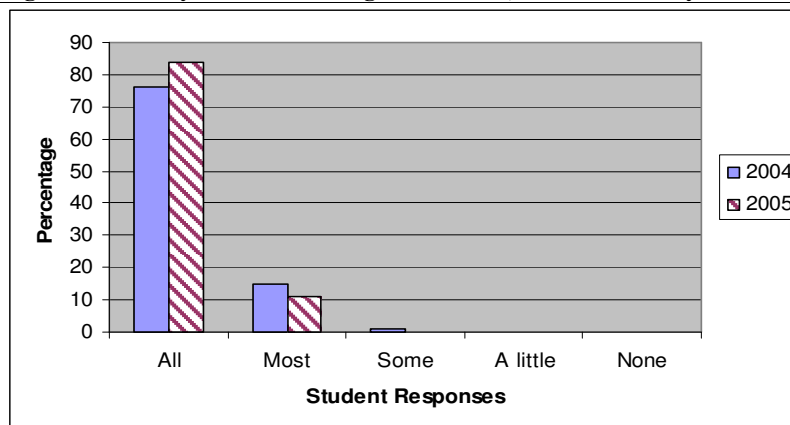
### CAF Results and Analysis

It should be noted that the students from Fall 2004 did not have interactive web links on their feedback. Therefore comparing Fall 2004 to Spring 2005 is essentially comparing CAF *without web links* to CAF *with interactive* web links.



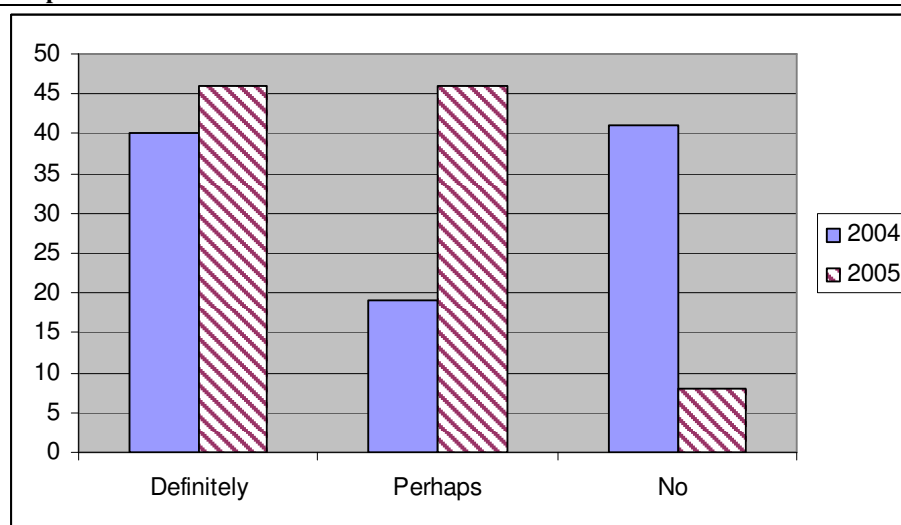
Furthermore, the students in 2004 never received hotlinks and the students in 2005 never received any feedback without hotlinks.

**Figure 2. When you receive a rough draft back, how much of my feedback do you read?**



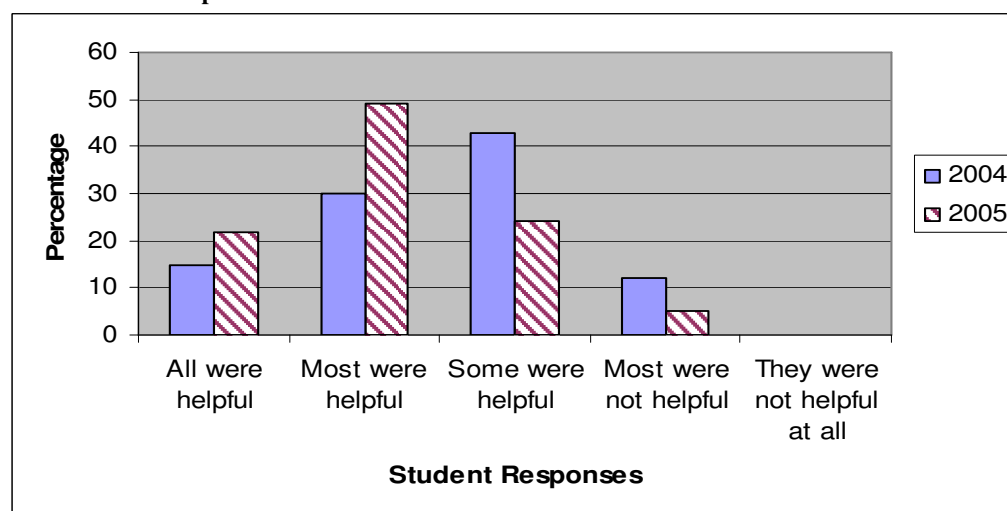
According to the data, did the students who received hotlinks appear to find the feedback more readable than those that only received explanations? The results in Figure two would seem to suggest that students were motivated to read their teacher's Computer-Assisted Feedback in both semesters, with or without web links. In addition, according to Figure 3 (p. 49), in Spring 2005 the number of students who said that they would *not* respond to more of my comments when they are typed on a computer rather than handwritten fell dramatically since Fall 2004. This may suggest that the students in 2005 found the web-linked interactive feedback more engaging and motivating, or it could just mean that the students in 2004 were more honest.

**Figure 3. Do you think you respond to more of my comments when they are typed on a computer rather than handwritten?**



So what did the students think of the pre-prepared Auto-Text responses? It should be noted that at no point during this feedback process were the answers provided, but rather questions or exercises were presented to direct the students to the solution. However, did they embrace these as an enhancement of my brief symbols and scribble or reject them as mindless rubber stamping? How did the introduction of the interactive web links affect these results? Did the hot-links communicative enough?

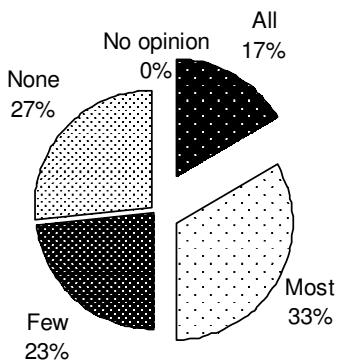
**Figure 4. Some of the feedback on the computer used ready-made questions stored in Word, such as: "THESIS STATEMENT: Clear topic, opinion and plan of development?" Do you think that these were helpful?**



Reassuringly, according to the data in Figure 4 (p. 49), no student stated that the ready-made responses were not helpful at all. Also 45% thought that “All” or “Most” of the feedback was helpful in 2004 compared with 71% in 2005. At the other end of the scale, more Fall 2004 students found that “Most were *not* helpful” (12%) compared with five percent in 2005. This increase in positive responses and decrease in negative responses might suggest that the pre-prepared responses were viewed more favourably since the introduction of interactive web links. However, it is worth remembering that two different groups were compared and this variable made it difficult to draw any firm conclusion from this data. If, as the results suggested, more students found interactive ready-made responses more helpful than before, it would seem that they must have followed the web links and learned something by completing these online activities. Surprisingly, however, this was not the case

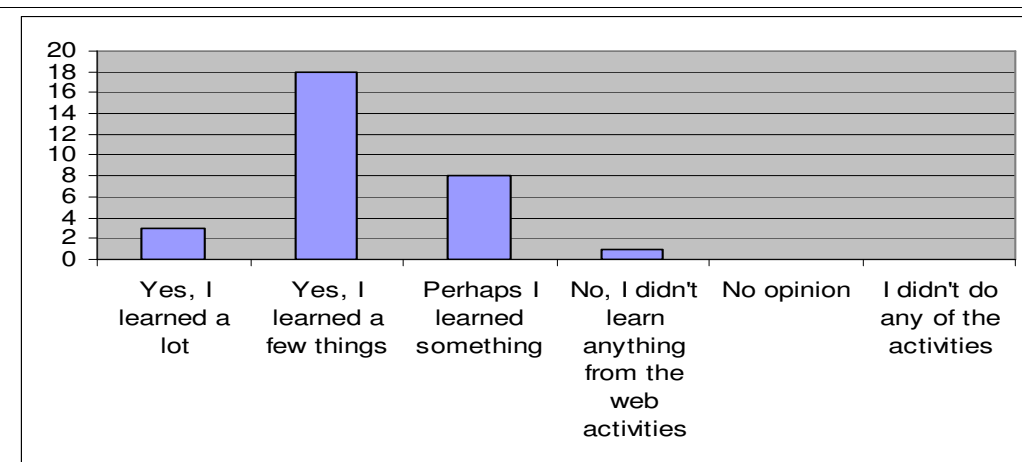
The response to the question in Figure 5 was much more sobering than the previous results, as half of the students actually admitted that they followed none or few of the web-links. Furthermore, eight out of 30 (21%) of the students confessed that they never followed the web links provided on their drafts. Perhaps they did not complete the hot-linked exercises because they did not really recognise the value of the feedback, see how it related to their needs or think they had time to complete extra work online. A good question to ask the students in further studies would be why they did not follow the web links.

**Figure 5. When you received your computer feedback from me, how many of the web links did you follow?**



**Figure 6. Do you think that you learned anything by completing the web-based activities linked to my feedback?**

Actual number of respondents shown



However, in Figure 6, when asked if they thought that they had learned anything from the web-based activities, 21 students (70%) said that they had learned a lot or a few things and eight (27%) thought that they had learned at least “Something.” Only one (3%) thought nothing had been learned from the weblinks. This would appear to be more encouraging than the data in Figure 5. Unfortunately, I think that this question is problematic because of the terminology, which may have been unclear. Most students (60%) selected “Yes, I learned a few things,” but I know from my experience teaching composition to this student profile that some have difficulties distinguishing between the positive “a few” and the negative “few.” Did some select this choice because they thought that they had *not* learned much from the links? There could have been some confusion, especially since “Few” is used in both positive and negative context in the same survey (see Figures 5 and 6). However, since in Figure 6 “A few things” was positioned in second place from the top in the hierarchy of positive choices, I think that most students knew how they were voting. Nevertheless, I concede that this data was inconclusive because of this oversight in the wording of my survey.

Despite these shortcomings, the data in Figure 3 (p. 49), Figure 4 (p. 49), and possibly Figure 6 do suggest that interactive online feedback was more motivating for these students. However, the students must already be motivated enough to follow the links. *Omar* expressed this point more effectively:

I was afraid of the Computer-Assisted Feedback before. At the beginning, I always thought that hand-written feedback was more accurate. But then whatever's been commented on using the computer is most likely the same as what would be commented on if the assignments were graded by hand. In my view, I think that the essay is the same therefore the comments would be the same. Also, there's always the office hours to see you and actually discuss the mistakes and feedback...The students must make some kind of effort.

This quotation illustrates that central to the success of any feedback process is the engagement of the student. To this end, the comments given in response to the final question were all encouraging. For example, the combined feedback from both surveys represented by the following abridged quotations, suggests that CAF, with or without web links, *motivated* the students to respond by encouraging them to pay more attention to feedback and to act upon it:

Continue using Computer-Assisted Feedback because students will care more about the feedback 😊. (*Punjav*)

It is much easier to edit my draft i don't have to look on paper and edit my draft on a PC i thought it was a very smat idea to do this. (*Qassem*)

I can correct my mistakes by looking at the feedback and correcting my mistakes while i am typing on the computer. (*Reem*)

Ease of use was also a factor here. As *Punjav*, *Qassem* and *Reem* appeared to suggest, it was much easier to answer the questions suggested by the feedback if they appeared directly on the active Word document that the student was working on. The student did not need to read from the paper and then transfer this information to the draft essay in the PC because the comments were already built into the draft and ready for action. The comments boxes in the margin automatically trace a clear line to the error which is also highlighted when the comment is clicked. Obviously highlighting can be done with paper drafts too, but it is difficult to keep it as clear and legible.

One of the most significant findings was that computer assisted feedback helped to ensure that the teacher's comments were understood by cutting down on misunderstandings or de-motivation caused by illegible handwriting. Student

Sanjeev pointed out, “We can read and understand the comments while if it was hand written we can't read some teachers hand writing.” Student *Tariq* supports this view of CAF by stating “The teacher's comments are very clear and comprehensive.” *Usama* agrees, “I find it more helpful because everything is neat and underlined with out any cross or scrambling.”

The students suggested that not only would they rather receive feedback when seated at their desk but that they preferred to send their assignments directly from there also. This can be illustrated by the following four abridged comments:

Since it allows us to respond at our convenience more or less. It prevents a lot of confusion. I often forget bringing assignments to class or even printing them out so this is quite helpful. (*Vasantha*)

It is a faster way to get the feed back then in class. (*Wala*)

Feedback through computer is much better in terms of access and collecting graded work back. (*Xiaobo*)

I think its of the students advantage. Instead of handing over the draft during class time; we had more time to polish the draft later in the day before finally submitting it in wardle. (*Yasemin*).

Leki (1990, p. 6) claims, “Feedback can help students to improve their writing skills if it is the right type of feedback, *received at the right time* and understood by the students” [italics added]. As demonstrated by the above comments regarding legibility and convenience, these requirements can be fulfilled by this use of CAF.

In addition, it could be argued that feedback provided by the same medium is a more *authentic*, integrated, part of the editing process. This point is illustrated by *Fatima* who observed that “its easier for us to correct our mistake directly since the feedback is next to the wrong sentence.” The students mentioned that taking away the physical presence of the essay and providing paperless feedback is a good thing for a number of reasons including forgetfulness, prudence, or environment awareness:

In this way i wont lose my draft ( my main problem) (*Zeina*).

It saves our print account especially after it became limited (*Annie*).

I think we are not wasting paper when we are hadning and correcting it by computer (*Balvinder*).”

Paperless feedback is also advantageous for the teacher because it helps to prevent the situation when paper copies of student drafts are returned with teacher comments and then accidentally lost or left on the classroom floor. This can be frustrating for the teacher considering the amount of time spent producing these comments. It is also unproductive because a discarded paper does not allow the student to learn from his/her accumulated errors, which means that they are more likely to be repeated. However, if the draft is digital then both the teacher and student have a copy, which provides some backup. However, one student actually preferred the old fashioned way of simply handing in an essay rather than uploading it to a dropbox. "I think that you *\*should\** continue using it, but don't completely depend on it! I prefer handing-in essays in-class and not on moodle, its easier and far more simpler than uploading the essays (not that I find any problems)" (*Choppala*).

This is the first time a student has ever told me that he or she preferred to print out and hand in an essay; however, I did have one student give me an additional paper copy of an already uploaded essay because she thought that I "might like a paper copy" -although this could have been the same student.

Another criticism came from a student who explained that although he likes the Computer-Assisted Feedback with web links, it is still too general: "Your feedback should be more "specific", as in try to make it sound more like hand-written feedback, include more help from you rather than just giving us a site which helps us - the site thing is a great idea, I like it and would like you to continue using it" (*Dhafer*). Another student voiced the same concern about the detail provided by the CAF responses, suggesting that he would like the teacher to rely less on ready-made responses, "using it is good, easier for both student and teacher. but more details could be sent on mistakes, instead of the ready-made questions" (*Esfahan*). A sensible compromise was suggested by *Engy* who said, "I think you should keep using it but I also think if you used both Computer-Assisted Feedback and hand written feedback it would be helpful."

Six years ago, Dawson (1999) predicted, "Future, more intelligent CALL grammar teaching programmes will be able to produce customised learning paths/revision packages, based on the analysis of a student's performance in a given set of exercises" (p. 101). CAF is not the intelligent CALL tutor software for which

Dawson hoped. However it can be used to provide “customised learning paths.” Unfortunately CAF still relies on a great deal of hard work and difficult decisions from the teacher. However, as *Engy’s* comment suggests, there appears to be a need for a synthesis of computerised certitude and clarity with teacher interpretation and encouragement.

This is only the second semester of using CAF and despite its initial shortcomings, I think that the majority of the students found this type of feedback to be a general improvement on existing methods because it was more student centred since the web-links to interactive sites provided the students with a convenient way to start working on troublesome grammar points immediately. However, as demonstrated by Figure 5 (p. 50) , the students did not always choose to follow this plan.

CAF was intended to be more interactive and more motivating because it provoked engagement through the opportunity for activity. It was also more convenient, because it was easy to read and arrived on their desktop. It would seem to make more sense to provide feedback to students via the computer since this is now the most common writing instrument for longer compositions. However, to appeal to a wider range of learning needs and retain authenticity there needs to be a balance between computer-assisted and pen-and-paper assisted feedback.

Furthermore, the students need more than impersonal hotlinks on their papers if they are to be motivated to write more. I have tried to use computer feedback to speed up the process of providing formulaic responses, so that more attention could be devoted to more specific concerns. From the feedback I would conclude that this project was partly successful and that more attention needs to be paid to what goes into the concluding specific remarks rather than highlighting every grammar error. It is imperative that the teacher add something personal to each paper to provide meaningful encouragement and support on the students’ writing, or if not, how is this communicative language?



## Moodle Findings

### Moodle Methodology

Research into the use of Moodle involved student surveys that were conducted and collated online. The surveys were conducted using Moodle, since the students were already using this system and it was familiar to them and took place over two semesters, Fall 2004 and Spring 2005. In Fall, the research was conducted in week 15, at the end of the semester, whereas, in Spring, it had to be brought forward to week eight to accommodate the thesis deadline. The first survey involved 33 respondents and the second 37. All of the participants were students enrolled in COM 102. In Fall 2004, Moodle was used primarily for the *Assignment* dropbox and discussion *Forums*, *Journal* activities and *News* announcements [described in chapter 4]. The *Glossary* was also tested. In Spring 2005, Moodle was used mainly for the same purposes but the *Glossary* was dropped, more use was made of *News* announcements and new components such as peer review *Workshops*, *Wikis* and *Questionnaires* were introduced [These features are described in chapter 4].

In Fall 2004 there were six questions about Moodle, then called Wardle because it was hosted on a private server with this name, and in Spring 2005, there were ten Moodle-related questions [Appendix B]. This is because the Moodle survey initially developed from research into Computer-Assisted Feedback. In this case I asked about Moodle because it was used to facilitate the assignment submission process used in CAF. For the second survey, as I became more interested in the students' motivation and the whole language philosophy, I was interested in what the students thought of this CMS and how they viewed it in comparison to the Blackboard system which was about to be instituted across the whole university.

In Fall 2004 the surveys were conducted using the *Choice* feature, which meant that the respondents had to answer one question at a time but would receive a copy of the anonymous results each time. In Spring 2005, the *Questionnaire* feature was used which displayed all of the questions together in a more traditional survey format. The latter was chosen because unlike *Choice*, *Questionnaire* is quicker to complete and can be set so that the respondent remains anonymous, even to the

administrator, an option not available in *Choice*. The *Questionnaire* does not provide the students with the results.

The disadvantage of anonymity is that it is not possible to contact students to ask them to elaborate on confusing or incomplete answers or provide support. However, anonymity was preferred in this case, so that the students could be as brutally honest as they would like to be and therefore provide a more truthful picture of their Moodle experience. In all student surveys, I encouraged the students to participate in the survey by suggesting that it might help to improve their participation grade at the end of the semester when I look at how many activities each student has completed in Moodle. The Moodle CMS and Survey Monkey regulated who could respond to the survey by automatically allocating one survey opportunity for each participant's login. This would not stop a student from using a friend's login to complete an extra survey, but I think that it was unlikely anyone would want to take on an extra survey. If they had gone to this much trouble, I would hope that they would have something very interesting to say!

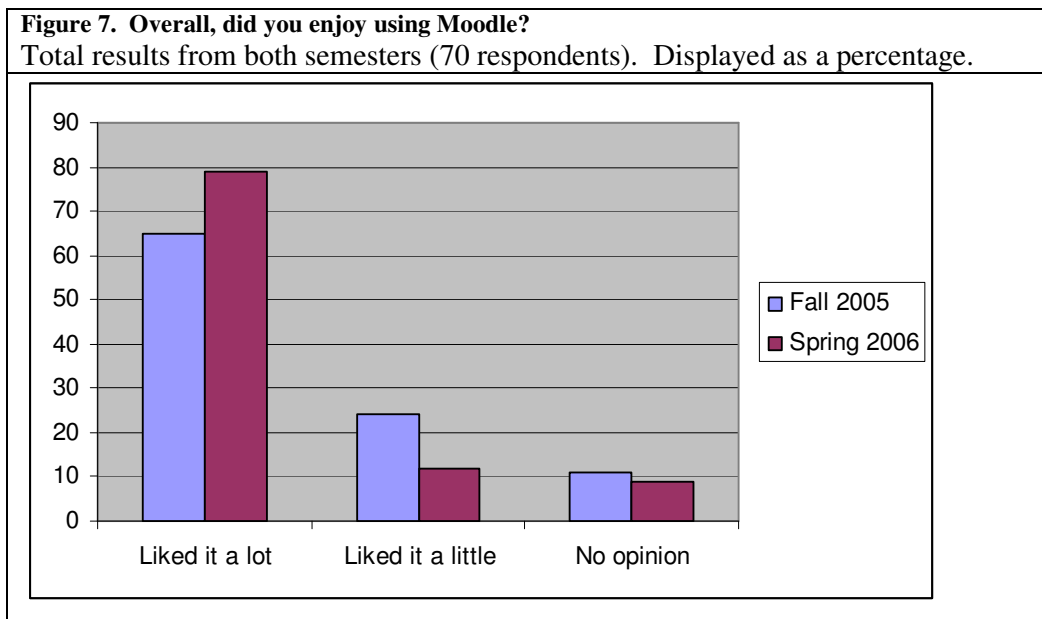
The speed of completion, anonymity or a combination of both may have resulted in more responses on the second survey than the former—even though the surveys were available to the same number of students (forty) both semesters, for the same amount of time (one week). The questions included multiple choice and open-ended responses.

The main shortcoming of these results was probably interviewer bias. The students knew how enthusiastic I was about Moodle and how important it was to the course. Despite their anonymity, this might have lead some respondents to feel that if they were critical of Moodle then they were being indirectly critical of me. However, it is also worth considering that this is not generally an issue for this particular student profile, as many faculty can attest from the often brutally frank end-of-year student evaluations.

### Moodle Results and Analysis

The student responses discussed in this thesis deal with the aforementioned concerns of whole language and social constructivism. The question, “Overall, did you enjoy using Moodle?” (Figure 7, p.58) was asked in order to consider the issue of motivation. I used the rather loaded word “enjoy” because I am interested in whether

or not the students thought that Moodling was like play. The logical deduction was that if something is regarded as enjoyable, one is more inclined to want to do it again. Nobody said that they did not enjoy Moodle in either semester, which is why these results are not displayed and the vast majority (79%) selected “Liked it a lot.”



The results in Figure 7 are displayed as a percentage, so that the two semesters, with an uneven number of responses (33 to 37), could also be compared. It is interesting to note that more students selected “Like it a lot” in Spring 2005 than in Fall 2004. I think that this is because the site was a lot more active during that semester and contained pages, such as “Fun Stuff,” linked to non-school related games, activities and discussion *Forums* for chatty issues such as, “Where is the best pizza in Dubai?” These communicative activities were intended to attract the students to the site and to help them to get to know each other. I also hoped that fun activities and pictures might help the students to associate Moodle with play and communication rather than just work, resources, assignments and deadlines.

However, it is also worth noting that the discussion *Forum*, which was voted the favourite feature of 2004, slumped to fourth place in the 2005 semester. This may have been because of the timing of the survey. The Fall 2004 survey took place in week 15, after the students had spent many weeks getting to know each other in the Forum, whereas the Spring 2005 research took place in week eight before many of the best discussions had really got going. The favourite feature in Spring 2005 was the

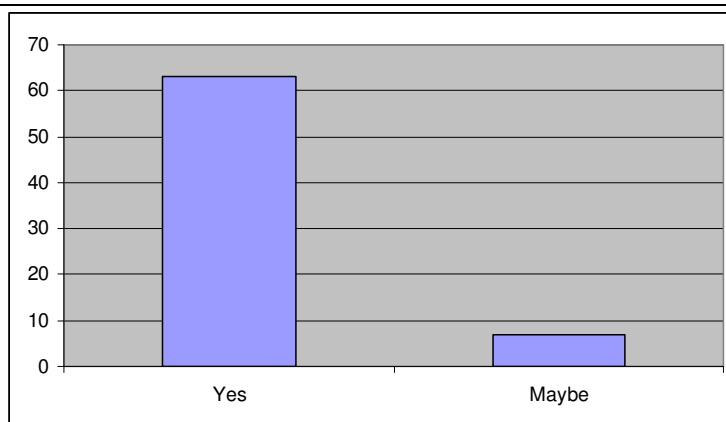
online *Assignment* dropbox, and this could have been because it is part of the Computer-Assisted Feedback process, which was also more popular the second semester.

The least popular feature last semester was the *Glossary*. I think that this was because of technical issues and because it was not integrated very effectively into my course. Many students complained that their posts were never linked to anything and did not see the point in what they were doing. Both of these issues were a result of my own shortcomings, rather than any technical glitches, as I was still learning how to set up the *Glossary* and not sure about how to integrate it into the reading journal assignment. I did not use the *Glossary* in Spring 2005 because I wanted to ensure that it was integrated into an activity or assignments that would enable the students to experience the value and benefit of this application; otherwise, I felt they might just regard it as pointless busywork. As Dunkel (1991) observes, computer-based activities need to be integrated into the content of the class: “It is inappropriate to conclude that the computer per se affects the social environment of the classroom. The critical factors that influence interaction centered around academic activities are the ways that tasks are defined and organized by the teacher and how they are construed by the students” (p. 66).

The least popular Moodle activity in the Spring 2005 semester was the *Workshop* and I think that this was for similar reasons. There were bugs (technical glitches) in the version of *Workshop* which we were currently using and so a couple of students did not get feedback on their essays or lost the comments that they tried to post. The next time I use this feature I will need to demonstrate how to use a workaround which avoids the bugs, but hopefully by then a bug-free version will be available.

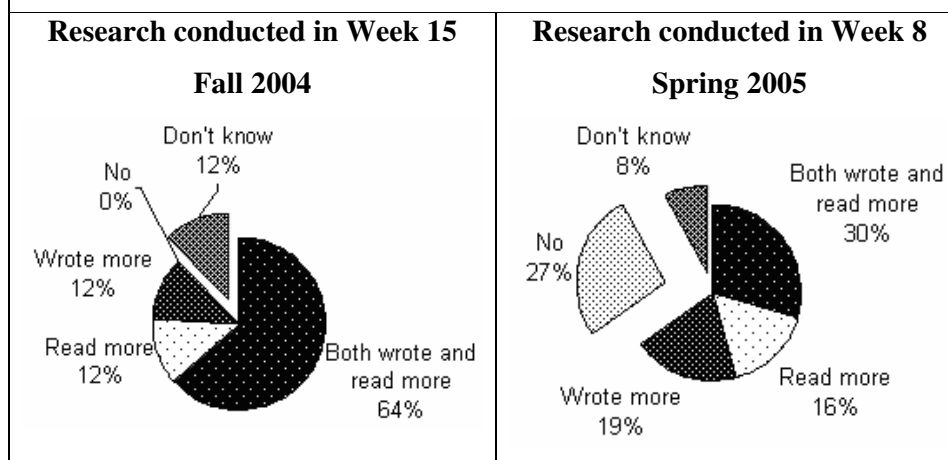
Despite these minor flaws, the majority of students stated that Moodle was useful for the course in both semesters. The column chart in Figure 8 (p. 60) is combined from both semesters since they were virtually identical. Also, in both semesters, not one student said that they did not think that Moodle was useful, which is why “No” is not displayed.

**Figure 8. Do you think that the Moodle site has been useful for this course?**  
Total results from both semesters. Actual number of 70 respondents displayed.



However, not all students thought that they read or wrote more in English because of Moodle. According to the two pie charts in Figure 9, 27% thought that they did *not* read or write more. However, it should be noted that all of these “No” responses were from the Spring 2005 research conducted in week eight. Nobody said “No” in the research conducted at the end of the course in Fall 2004. This is most likely because the respondents in week eight had not completed as many Moodle-based activities as those in week 15.

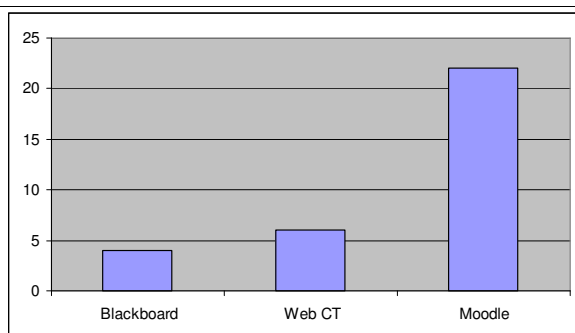
**Figure 9. Do you think that you read or wrote more in English because of Moodle?**  
Results displayed as percentage.



In order to ascertain if the type of CMS used might also play a part in the students' motivation, I asked those who had used Blackboard or WebCT, which system they preferred. 32 of the 37 respondents claimed that they had used another system, and out of these 32, 68% preferred Moodle compared to 19% who favoured

Web CT and 13% who voted for Blackboard (Figure 10). One of the reasons why Moodle was such a popular choice could have been because this question forced the students into selecting one preference and some undecided respondents might have then chosen Moodle simply because it is the system they used in this class – and because it housed the questionnaire. Another reason could have been because my students associate Moodle with my course and they were just being polite. However they knew that their responses would be anonymous. Also, perhaps they were evaluating the effort I had put into the Moodle course to make it engaging for them, rather than the CMS itself. Nevertheless, according to the quantitative data, Moodle is more popular with students than the other two systems. This can be further demonstrated by the qualitative feedback.

**Figure 10. If you have used Blackboard or Web CT before, which system do you prefer?**  
Actual amount of 32 respondents displayed.



In the qualitative feedback, out of 37 comments there was only one negative remark about the Moodle CMS. This was from *Ahmed* who stated, “I prefer Web CT because it had no hitches that needs<sup>7</sup> mentioning. I also prefer it because it is very user friendly.” The “hitches” which *Ahmed* refers to was most likely the peer review *Workshop* which was mentioned earlier. This indicates the importance of consistently smooth functionality in a CMS. However, the other 36 comments either praised Moodle or denigrated the other most popular CMS at AUS.

*Bashir* provided a succinct introductory summary of most of the plaudits when he enthused, “Moodle is very impressive and usually makes work easier.” *Chaimaa* illustrated the communicative nature of Moodle when she pointed out that “overall what moodle does best is help classmates interact with each other online.” This is a

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point reiterated by *Deena* who observed that “Moodle enhanced our ability to communicate with you Mr.Jason, and I think you should continue to use it.”

*Ebrahim* demonstrated the motivational power of Moodle and its ability to facilitate student-centred learning and the idea that learning should be fun when he confided, “Firstly you should definitely continue to use moodle, because it actually makes a student's life a lot easier, secondly I loved moodle, it's a lot of fun, plus user friendly, and another thing (this is sort of a secret), moodle is the reason why I submitted all my essays on time, coz of the constant reminders.” *Faisal* appeared to be praising Moodle's *Announcement*, *Calendar* and *Journal* features when he opined, “I think that moodle is the best way for submitting H.W and being away of forgetting it . also it keeps and save our time as a student . more over it encourage us to use computer and practise the language a lot.. so I think it's gonna be useful for us”. *Ghasan* pointed out how using this CMS made homework easier to actually do at home: “Moodle is very good! It actually allows us to get the assignments and docs at home. Just add reminders for homework, we do receive reminders for exams and the like, just please add the same thing to homework!” In their appraisal of computer-mediated communication Daniels and Brooks (1999) explained, “A traditional classroom can be enhanced by allowing student interaction to extend 24 hours a day via an on-line learning community” (p. 89). With Moodle running on the server there is always a class in session. This can be confirmed by a perusal of the Moodle logs which revealed that some students had been working on Moodle at various times of day.

The students use of Moodle confirms Daniels and Brooks (1999) observation that “On-line learning communities brought about by computer-mediated communication can enhance the individual's capacity to meet goals for motivated learners and may be helpful in encouraging unmotivated language learners through variety and teacher monitoring of effective feedback (Wilhelm, 1998). They are particularly effective if integrated into a full range of activities” (p. 86). This point is supported by *Hadeel* who noted the comprehensive nature of Moodle's features and communicative student-centred approach when she pointed out that Moodle, “is more detailed. there is a greater relationship between the teacher and the student..the student feels as if he is drawn more attention on rather than blackboard..there is basically

greater interaction between the two.” *Ismail* was more specific about this shortcoming of Blackboard when he evocatively complained that “blackboard is very dead .. theres hardly any activity on it. none of my professors updates it. The only thing they have put on there is the lecture notes. On the other hand, moodle has got much more to it than just that. we have so much other stuff than just work. it is also updated regularly. Jason ur doing a great job!”. This quote also demonstrated the earlier concern (related to figure 10, p. 61) that the students probably were not evaluating Moodle, but how it was used.

Moodle’s apparent *joie de vivre* when compared to Blackboard might also be because Moodle displays a live feed of all the Moodle users currently online, which as mentioned previously, creates a lively buzz on the site. I can relate to this as a teacher because whenever I go to the site and see a long list of Moodle users online, some of whom I recognise as my own students and colleagues, it makes me feel as though I have been missing out on something and I am keen to reconnect and join the party. This perspective and those of my students who described Moodle as “fun” would appear to support the notion of play as work. Indeed this would be an interesting area for future research.

Apart from frigidity, another criticism of Blackboard was that it is difficult to navigate. *Jameela* said that “moodle is easier to use, even though for the first time. everything can be seen once you log in, unlike blackboard.” *Kareem* bemoaned how “I donty understand anything from blackboard. Its very confusing to use, and I get lost just to get one simple information my teacher asked me to look up.” *Leila* agreed that Moodle “was easier to access, more fun to view assignments, just more open, more useful and more organized.” *Mohammad* concurred that Moodle is easier to use and fun and complained that Blackboard does not help him/her to keep up-to-date with the course: “I think moodle is better that blackboard, coz its way more user friendly, plus u get constant reminders in ur email inbox, so u dont have to check moodle again and again, unlike blackboard, plus moodle is alot more fun, all those participant pictures, and discussion forums, and journals, and voting..i love MOODLE:).” The point regarding the reminders is also not just about Moodle, but about how it is used. The same type of reminder feature is also available to teachers using Blackboard, although it does not contain emoticons.



Indeed most of the students that I spoke with informally claimed that they also “love” Moodle because they thought that it was generally easier to use and more fun. However, does this fun factor make Moodle better than the other systems or are there other variables here? *Nawar* sensibly pointed out that the software itself does not guarantee student satisfaction: “Moodle is good and yes u should keep using it. i think the problem is not with the site it is with the teacher. my friend in another class hates moodle cuz her teacher does not make it seem interesting as X does :-).”

This key point, that the problem was not necessarily with Blackboard but with their professors’ use of it, was already alluded to in some of the previous comments from *Ismail* and *Mohammad*. It should be noted that Blackboard also has the facility to allow the students to chat informally with each other in discussion groups or to host fun material alongside the dry resources and threatening assignments. It depends on whether or not the teacher wants to use the software in this way. It is also interesting to note that despite the previous suggestions that Moodle helps to build a sense of student community, none of the respondents mentioned their peers’ contributions to Moodle, just the teacher and the features.

An impartial comparison between Moodle and Blackboard using the same courses and preferably the same instructor is needed at AUS. *Duzer* and *Munoz* (2005) conducted just such a research project at Humboldt State University in California entitled “Blackboard vs. Moodle: A Comparison of Satisfaction with Online Teaching and Learning Tools” (Figure 11, p. 65). In this study, the exact same course was taught using two different CMS’s. The 35 students involved were randomly distributed into either Blackboard or Moodle. In summary the results revealed that students thought Moodle enhanced instruction more, preferred Moodle and would rather have another course on Moodle than on Blackboard.

<b>Figure 11. Blackboard vs. Moodle: A comparison of satisfaction with online teaching and learning tools</b> by Duzer and Munoz (2005).	
Did Blackboard/Moodle enhance instruction?	
Blackboard:	Moodle:
0% strongly agree	7.1% strongly agree
23.1% somewhat agree	21.4% somewhat agree
23.1% neutral	28.6% neutral
23.1% somewhat disagree	28.6% somewhat disagree
30.8% strongly disagree	14.3% strongly disagree
Which do you prefer, Moodle or Blackboard?	
No preference – 42.9%   Moodle – 35.7%   Blackboard – 21.4%	
Would like another (Blackboard/Moodle) course	
Blackboard:	Moodle:
46.2% strongly or somewhat agree	57.2% strongly or somewhat agree
30.8% neutral	21.4% neutral
23.1% somewhat or strongly disagree	21.4% somewhat or strongly disagree

## Class Observations Findings

### Class Observation Methodology

The purpose of this observation was to compare the interactions of a face-to-face class to those of an online class. Flander's Interaction Analysis Categories (FIAC) were used to observe and record the exchanges in both classes. The Interaction Analysis Categories (Hopkins, 2002, p. 97) are ten areas which are used to systematically observe the types of vocal interactions that take place in the classroom. Flander's Interaction Analysis covers seven categories of teacher-talk and two of student-talk. The seven categories of teacher-talk could be simplified as the following: 1. Accepts feeling, 2. Praises or encourages, 3. Accepts or uses ideas of students, 4. Asks questions, 5. Lectures, 6. Gives directions, and 7. Criticises or asserts authority. The student-talk was divided into two categories: 8. Student talk-response, which is elicited by the teacher and 9. Student talk-initiative, which describes exchanges begun by the students without prompting from the teacher. Category 10. Silence, is a rather ambiguous term as it could refer to either silent study or temporary confusion.

The online class was a group of 15 mature post-graduate students studying ELT 553: Technology in the Curriculum as part of the MA TESOL programme at AUS. In a real classroom, this group was typically well-motivated, hard-working and lively with all of the students eager to participate. I was also one of the students. The online lesson involved the entire group at the same time and took place in the *Virtual Lecture Hall* of the *Blackboard* CMS, which is a real-time online chat forum. The objective of the lesson was to explore the issues raised in the weekly readings through discussion and response to questions posted by the teacher. Permission was given by the professor for me to monitor the lesson, but she did not know what I was looking at during the class. The online class was observed for its full duration, exactly an hour, from four till five. The numerous exchanges that took place before and after the official class-time were excluded to ensure that off-topic "social" responses and irrelevant material did not affect the results. To keep the interaction as authentic as possible, the students were not informed about the observation until afterwards.

The face-to-face class was a group of 15 teenage intermediate L2 language learners in an IEP level 4 Grammar class at AUS. The students appeared to be confident and energetic and were not afraid to speak out or ask questions. This lesson was observed for a full class period of 50 minutes 9:00-9:50 and involved the explanation, demonstration and practice of a number of challenging grammar points, such as when to use “make” or “does”, and the different ways of using “like” as a verb, noun or adjective. The teacher of the class was not informed that the observer was examining interaction until after he had finished the lesson.

The online class was observed by using a transcript of the class. Every utterance in the transcript was given a code according to the FIAC categories, and the occurrence of each of these categories was tallied and added to a spreadsheet. The same process took place during the observation of the face-to-face class, except because this observation took place in real-time, the class was observed at intervals. This entailed using a table containing the ten categories [Appendix E] and placing a new mark next to the relevant category, either at 30-second intervals, or after every new utterance or change of direction (for example a new question from a student).

There are several shortcomings of this particular research. The most significant variable is the level and focus of each of the groups. It was not it really very realistic to compare a class of teenage IEP students in a grammar class to adult post-graduate students. Surely the former expected to receive the information they needed from the teacher, while the latter were keen to demonstrate what they had learned from the homework reading. In order for this research to have been more accurate, and therefore more useful, it would have helped if the same course and the same teacher could have been observed, using FIAC, teaching a similar content in a face-to-face and online context.

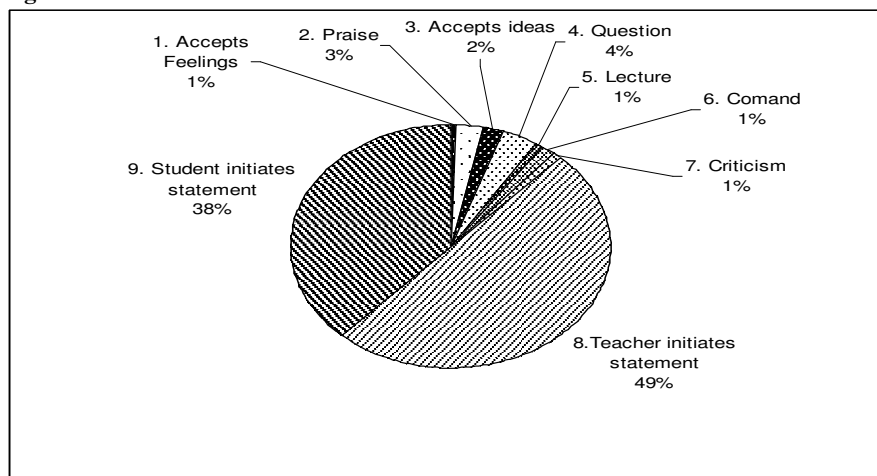
There are also numerous difficulties with FIAC; for example, how scientific are categories which rely so heavily on interpretation and is teacher-talk valid out of context? How is it possible to identify criticism? For example, if an observer is unfamiliar with the class and the teacher’s style, he might easily misinterpret the intentions behind the utterances in class. Also, to record teacher talk in such a quantitative way is to take it out of context. When presented in such a fashion these utterances are not really valid examples of strings of communication in the classroom,

but rather are dislocated sound-bytes in a research vacuum. Nevertheless, despite these misgivings about the comparison, FIAC or the ethos behind it, one positive result of this research is that this tool of observation seems to work equally well in both face-to-face and online contexts.

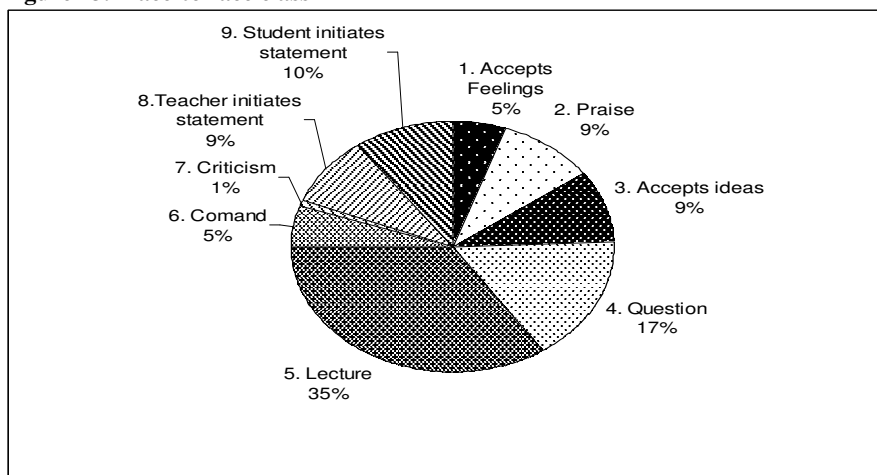
### Class Observation Results and Analysis

According to my interpretations of FIAC, and the interactions in each class, the following charts (Figure 12 and 13) show how the categories of teacher-talk and student-talk were distributed throughout the lesson:

**Figure 12. Online Class**



**Figure 13. Face-to-face class**



In the online class (Figure 12), and according to my interpretation, the teacher “accepted feelings” for five percent of the time. Examples of this behaviour included

thanking the students for their contributions and participation. Similarly, in the face-to-face class (Figure 13), the teacher also accepted feelings for five percent of the time. For example, there were a couple of typos on the students' handout, which the teacher responded to sympathetically.

Praise or encouragement accounted for 23% of the teacher talk for the entire online-class (Figure 12). For instance, the teacher spent time greeting every student and making all feel welcome in the virtual classroom. She used the adjectives "good," "very good," "excellent" and "yes" (x2) and the whole class was congratulated with the statement, "You seem to understand the readings well." The teacher in the face-to-face class used praise for 9% of the class (Figure 13), such as, when he said, "Great" in response to some of the students' correct answers.

The teacher in the online class accepted or used the ideas of students for 15% of her teacher-talk (Figure 12). Thus she allowed the students some freedom to dictate the flow of the lesson, such as when the class started talking about the practicality of discussing ideas in a large group. When this happened, the teacher focused attention on a democratic solution with the question, "How would you like to be divided into smaller groups next time"? In the face-to-face class the teacher accepted the students' ideas for 9% of the class (Figure 13). For instance, the students had questions about grammar forms that were not currently being discussed and the teacher digressed from his plan in order to respond to these new ideas with clarification.

The largest chunk of teacher talk in the online class was questioning at 31% (Figure 12). In fact, questions appear to direct the progress of the lesson. There are attempts to plug a genuine information gap, such as "When you click on the first file, does it open?" and also pre-prepared display questions such as, "What aspects is the author concerned with?" In the face-to-face class, questions (16%) accounted for the second most numerous type of teacher talk (Figure 13). The teacher asked a lot of questions to the whole of the class in order to keep them engaged with the grammar points under discussion.

Lecturing, comprised of facts and opinions, accounted for 7% of the online lesson (Figure 12). Facts were given through informative questions, like: "Would you

say that Boling and Soon put the software somewhere on the continuum line between the tool and tutor?" Opinions appeared in phrases such as, "I like that *Basil*." In the face-to-face class, lecturing accounted for the largest chunk, 35%, of the whole lesson (Figure 13). The majority of these utterances appeared to be grammatical facts, such as "Like is a verb," but opinions such as "I think that you won't generally hear it said like that" were also given.

In the online class, the teacher-talk provided directions for 11% of the lesson (Figure 12). It is worth noting that these directions were actually posed as questions, such as "Ok, can you try and click on the "Instructions for the common meeting." The directional intention of this question could suggest that it was no accident that the question mark had been omitted here. The face-to-face class received commands for five percent of the class (Figure 13) as the teacher initiated grammar practice activities, for example, "complete the exercise on page...."

The teacher criticized or justified her authority for 8% of the online class (Figure 12). For example, when the discussion began to digress into the topic of netiquette, the teacher reasserted her control by asking, "All right, did anyone check out the Quia activity?" In the face-to-face class, the teacher asserted his authority at one point, for 1% of the class (Figure 13), when a number of students competed to answer the questions and he told one student to let another answer.

In the online class, the combined student-talk accounted for 83% of the total discussion (Figure 12). This was divided into two categories: student talk-response, which was elicited by the teacher and student talk-initiative, which described exchanges begun by the students without prompting from the teacher. In the face-to-face class the combined student talk equalled 19% of the class time (Figure 13). Ten percent of this total was initiated by the students, usually asking questions about grammar points and nine percent was initiated by the teacher's questions.

The most notable finding from these results was that during the online *virtual* class the teacher's own contributions accounted for 13% of the class, whereas in the *real* class, the teacher's own contributions accounted for 81% of the total class time. Does this suggest that the virtual is more student-centred than the real? The students in the online class appeared to have more responsibility in the lesson online rather

than the one in class. They provided most of the input and used the most language as the teacher stepped back, and prompted and facilitated, rather than lecturing.

Although far from perfect, this research provides some insight when considering the position of the teacher as a communicator and a motivator. It also reveals that online teaching demands the same subtle classroom-management skills as face-to-face teaching and indicates how the students can learn as much from each other's constructive contributions as they do from their teacher.

When the teacher-talk in the online class (13%) is compared to the amount in the face-to-face class (81%), the findings are so extreme that even with all of the shortcomings and variables it seems to suggest that online learning may be set up for a more student-centred approach. In their reflections on delivering an online course, Anderson and Middleton (2002) observe how traditional roles change in an online context:

In addition to challenging our abilities, the course also challenged our convictions about communication and knowledge, in particular the belief that instructors were the primary sources of information who needed to have all the answers.... Online instruction moves the instructor from presenting knowledge to requesting the production of knowledge. (¶ 5)

This argument does not just apply to real-time chat exchanges, such as the one examined here, but also to asynchronous exchanges such as discussion forums or wiki activities where the students generate the content and learn through collaboration with their peers as the teacher facilitates. More research needs to be conducted on the Student-centred nature of online learning because it seems like the students have a far greater role to play in this context.



## CHAPTER VI

### CONCLUSION

#### Research Summary and Critique

Dodigovic (1998) observes, “Once a CALL development project has been started, the identification of research questions necessarily raises the need for adjustments in the project. What may have originally seemed to be one project may well become three or more projects” (p. 35). Indeed the road to discovering how the weblog, CAF and Moodle could deliver whole language was a long and winding one. My research in this area is far from complete and not without its limitations; however, it has uncovered some important findings on which to base future studies. In order to address the question, “How can technology be used to enhance the delivery of whole language and motivate students?” the data from my research is briefly summarised and critiqued below, with reference to a whole language philosophy of whole language.

#### The Weblog

When asked if they would prefer writing the weblog to the more traditional written journal, 91% of the 147 respondents said that they preferred the weblog. This could suggest that the weblog was more authentic and intrinsically motivating than a traditional journal. In support of a more student-centred approach to learning, 71% of the students said they preferred to choose their own blogging topics, which confirms that most of these students would rather have autonomy in learning. Asked if they believe that the weblog can improve English, 80% of the students said, “yes,” which shows that the students may have thought there was value in what they were doing and may have been motivated by this fact. Eighty percent of the students told somebody else about the weblog, which may suggest that the weblog filled a genuine information gap because the students used this assignment as a way to communicate their interests and identity to an online audience.

To discover more about the students’ attitudes to weblogs, more attention needs to be paid to the students’ attitudes towards a global audience. In my initial findings, this was not an issue, but some of the comments in later surveys have led me

to believe that the students were more ambivalent about sharing their work with the global community than first thought. Specific survey questions will be developed to explore perceptions of audience in future studies.

## CAF

Of the students surveyed, 93% of students claimed that they read all or most of the feedback provided via the computer and 86% of students said that they preferred typed comments. This may support the argument that Computer-Assisted Feedback was more communicative for the students since the students were more eager to engage with typed comments than handwriting. When asked about ready-made responses with hotlinks to interactive websites, 71% of students thought that were all or mostly helpful, but only 50% of students said they followed all or most of the hot links. However, 97% of the students thought that they had learned something from the interactive hotlinks attached to their errors. Although the overall data is inconclusive, this latter preference for comments linked to activities may support the whole language argument that error correction, like the whole language philosophy, should be constructive and interactive. The students' feedback also suggests that CAF was clearer because it was typed and more extensive because it was linked to online guides and activities.

The research on Computer-Assisted Feedback still leaves many questions unanswered about how the students felt about the interactive hotlinks and feedback in general. Did they really believe that interactive grammar exercises linked to their errors helped them to engage with the assessment process, or did they see these exercises as meaningless busywork, or an excuse for the teacher to avoid giving them the right answer? Most students said that they learned something from the interactive feedback, so why did so many students not bother following the web-links? More insight into these issues needs to be pursued through more open ended survey questions.

## Moodle

According to the research, 90% of the students said that they enjoyed using Moodle and thought it was useful for the course. In addition, 72% of these students said they enjoyed it "a lot." According to the social constructivist model, learning

should be enjoyable, and enjoyment was a factor supported by both the quantitative and qualitative data produced by these surveys. Whole language also posits that language learning should be intrinsically motivating rather than just based on coercion and memorization, and according to the research, 77% of the students thought that they read or wrote more because of Moodle. Whole language should also be student-centered and accommodate the students' needs and the research states that 68% of students who had used other CMS's, preferred to use Moodle.

To further substantiate my findings on Moodle, more research is needed and this should include a representative sample of the whole university rather than just my own Moodling students. Furthermore an objective comparison at AUS between identical courses on different CMS's could also provide some useful data.

### Online Class

Using Flander's Interactional Analysis to measure teacher talk, it was discovered that 81% of a face-to-face class is teacher-led compared with 13% in an online class. Although the comparison would have been more effective if more similar class profiles were compared, the marked difference in this data implies that the online environment was more student-centred and this conclusion can be supported by Chung (1999), citing Warschauer (1996), who observes that in an online class more of the participants are likely to participate since the contributions are not so unevenly distributed: "An experimental study comparing small-group ESL discussion online to face-to-face, found that the online groups were twice as balanced, principally because the silent students increased their participation online. These data suggest important results for the possibilities of promoting collaborative learning in the classroom" (p. 55).

A more careful and detailed comparison between the interactions in an online class and a face-to-face class shows great potential. Despite its limitations, Flander's Interactional Analysis Categories (FIAC) has proven to be a useful way of documenting exchanges in both the virtual and the real language classroom. If considerably more comparisons of this nature were to take place (between similar EFL classes) and the results collated in order to establish more representative correlations, then I believe this research tool could help to support the need for e-

learning in hybrid contexts to complement and support face-to-face interaction in the classroom.

### Closing Remarks

I have argued that through technology, the students can be provided with more communicative, student centred, authentic and motivating activities in a bigger world than the classroom. This is an environment in which the students and faculty have space to construct meaning and develop communication skills. Furthermore, in 1999, Daniels and Brooks predicted that “On-line communication using the computer terminal will become the most popular means of communication and information exchange by the time today’s learners enter the working world” (p. 87). Therefore by utilizing technology in our language teaching, it could also be argued that we are also providing students with authentic experience in the use of the communicative world. In order to provide some substance to this rhetoric, three potential models of whole language teaching were discussed. These included the application of the weblog as an effective means of alternative assessment, the interactive potential of grading in Computer-Assisted Feedback, and the possibilities offered by the creative use of Moodle.

I am convinced that the weblog can be used for authentic assessment within a whole language framework. However, in response to an essay promoting weblogs in education by Wrede (2003), Downes (2004) raises a valid concern about just how communicative, student-centred, authentic or motivating a weblog can really be when it is created purely for an assignment: “Blogs make it a lot easier for those students who would write and to write publicly to do so. And blogging helps such students find each other. But for those students who find writing a chore, blogging is a chore. Those students who wouldn't write a journal, or a news article, or a letter, won't write a blog” (¶ 3).

To an extent, I would agree that blogging appeals the most to those who like to write and feel like they have something to say. However, I think that the advantages of the weblog, such as audience, comments and multimedia aspects, make this medium more appealing and less of a “chore” than traditional methods of writing. So far, my research would seem to support this conclusion. Furthermore, to illustrate the dynamic communicative aspect of blogging, it is worth noting that Downes’

observations about Wrede's article, which Downes posted on his own weblog, were later commented on by Wrede. I concur with Wrede's response that "Right now anything that fosters richer interaction, more transparency and flow of information at a high rate is better than anything we have" (Downes, 2004, ¶ 3).

The role of weblogs in facilitating a whole language philosophy through alternative assessment is relatively clear. Less transparent is the role of Computer-Assisted Feedback (CAF). It could be argued that Computer-Assisted Feedback has no place in *communicative* whole language teaching because ultimately it involves providing the students with *non-communicative* links to grammar exercises. They may be online and interactive, but they are still basically fragmented skill-and-drill exercises, which could be seen as anathema to the communicative objectives of whole language. As Chao (1999) argues "language is no longer language if it is not maintained and treated as a whole" (p. 249).

However, Dawson (1999) defends providing grammar feedback in an L2 whole language context by claiming that it will not taint communicative language teaching: "The consideration of CALL-based self-access materials as part of the diet of more advanced level MFL [Modern Foreign Languages] curricula could be seen not to make any significant change to the communicative structure and objectives of CLT [Communicative Language Teaching]" (p. 103). Furthermore, I would argue that in error correction, links to interactive grammar sites are more motivating than providing no feedback and demand more critical engagement from the student than simply providing them with the correct answers. In this respect, it could be concluded that CAF has a part to play in the whole language philosophy.

Throughout the thesis, I have argued that one of the most significant uses of online technology to facilitate a whole language approach is the use of the Moodle CMS. Unlike the weblog or CAF, which are fairly specific in their purposes, Moodle is a dynamic ever-growing collection of applications, which offers creative potential for those attempting to utilise a more whole-language based philosophy. From my own brief experience and research, I prefer Moodle because, by its open source nature, it is more flexible and more in tune with the social constructivist framework. It is also more popular and communicative.

Because marketing and commerce are not involved, Moodle does not have the same lag between innovation and actual application. For example, faculty using

Moodle are free to innovate with the latest advances in networked technology, such as wikis, workshops and instant messaging. They will not need to wait and hope that their proprietary CMS will catch up with what is already available online, for free, and then keep their fingers crossed that their institution will be prepared to pay for these extras. Tom Robb (2004) agrees, confiding that he switched from proprietary systems because, “I no longer had to wait for my institution to install a workable CMS; I could just go out and do it myself” (¶ 30).

A system such as Blackboard has many excellent features and there is no reason why it cannot be creatively used to deliver whole language teaching and a constructivist philosophy. However, Moodle makes the job much easier because it has so many student-friendly features, which Blackboard does not yet have, such as: public student profiles with photos, emoticons, a live gallery of users currently online and instant messaging. These features help to motivate the students to use the CMS and by using it, they are communicating with their peers and getting extra exposure to the course content 24/7.

However, many of the features currently available in Moodle are now also being made available in proprietary CMS's and can be used to deliver whole language based teaching. This was demonstrated in this thesis by the observation of the student-centred MA TESOL postgraduate class which utilised the Blackboard CMC's *Lecture Hall* real-time chat feature, and by Pountney, Parr, and Whittaker's (2001) experiment with Blackboard, in which they found that this proprietary system could also be used to provide learning based on social constructivism.

Indeed, the teacher should be free to use whichever CMS best facilitates the needs of their own pedagogy, students and courses. As the student comments in my research demonstrated, the teacher plays the key role in the success of whichever system is selected. Therefore, if faculty are forced to use a certain type of technology this may negatively affect how they use it. For technology to be accepted by the faculty it needs to be presented as an opportunity rather than as a threat. Therefore faculty should not be coerced into using technology for its own sake.

Choice and flexibility is one of the most important factors in whole language, both for the students and the faculty. Many teachers have found other innovative ways of achieving whole language goals without using technology. Indeed, publications and conferences are crammed with exciting ways to deliver whole

language teaching which do not require a plug socket, let alone a network connection. In addition, even though all of the applications described are very user-friendly, technology is rarely without glitches and some faculty may not have the patience to address such issues.

In conclusion, the best way to promote the use of online technology in a whole language philosophy is not through coercion, but through demonstration and explication. This is the purpose of this thesis, which has presented ways to accommodate a range of learning styles and a whole language philosophy with the flexible and innovative use of online technology to serve the purposes of both students and faculty. The pace of new technological developments means that educators often face many bewildering decisions. The best approach to deal with such dilemmas is flexibility in both the methodology and the technology used, and to use a framework of fundamental but progressive principles to guide, rather than hamper, progress in this uncharted terrain.

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## APPENDICES

## Appendix A. Weblog Survey

SECTION 101/			
		Tick the appropriate box	
Weblogging Survey	Yes	Not sure	No
1. Have you ever made your own <b>webpage</b> before?			
2. Did you <b>prefer writing the weblog to writing a regular journal</b> ?			
3. Would you have preferred to <b>choose your own topics</b> ?			
4. Do you think that using a weblog can help you to <b>improve your English</b> ?			
5. Do you think that you will <b>continue to use</b> your weblog after this course has ended?			
		Write a short response	
6. Apart from this course, <b>what else</b> do you think you could use a weblog for?			
7. Have you told <b>anyone else</b> about your weblog?	Who? Did you get anyone else blogging?		
8. What was the most <b>memorable</b> thing that you read on the other students' weblogs?			
9. What did you <b>like</b> the most about the weblog assignment?			
10. What did you <b>dislike</b> the most about the weblog assignment?			
11. What <b>other topics</b> might be good to write about on the weblog?			
12. <b>How could I improve</b> this assignment?			



## Appendix B. Computer-Assisted Feedback and Moodle Survey

1. When you receive a rough draft back from me, how much of my feedback do you read?

- All
- Most
- Some
- A little
- None

2. Would you prefer your teacher to continue to give feedback using the computer?

- Yes
- No

3. Do you prefer typed or handwritten feedback?

- Typed
- Handwritten

4. Do you think that you respond to more of my comments when they are typed on a computer rather than handwritten?

- I do
- Maybe
- No

5. Would you like other teachers to provide feedback using the computer?

- Yes
- Some
- No

6. Do you think you respond to more of my comments when they are typed rather than handwritten?

- I respond to more comments when they are typed
- Perhaps I respond to more comments when they are typed
- No. I don't respond to more comments because they are typed.

7. Some of the feedback on the computer used ready-made questions stored in Word, such as: "THESIS STATEMENT: Clear topic, opinion and plan of development?" Do you think that these were helpful?

- All were helpful
- Most were helpful
- Some were helpful
- Most were not helpful
- They were not helpful at all

8. Do any of your other teachers provide feedback using the computer?

- Many
- Some
- Not many
- None

9. Do you prefer to submit your work online through Moodle or to hand it in during the class?

- Prefer Moodle
- Don't mind
- Prefer class

10. Do you think that the Moodle site has been useful for this course?

- Yes
- Maybe
- No

11. What was your overall impression of Computer-Assisted Feedback, and could you make any recommendations on how I could improve this feedback? Do you think I should continue to use it?

12. How many of my comments do you try and respond to in your final draft?

- All
- Most
- Some
- A few
- None

13. Overall, did you enjoy using Moodle?

- Liked it a lot
- Liked it a little
- No opinion
- Disliked it a little
- Disliked it a lot

14. What was your favourite feature in Moodle?

- Dropbox for assignments
- Discussion forum
- Journals
- Resources (documents for collection, such as reading questions)
- Announcements
- Wiki
- Choices (voting)
- Peer Review

15. What was your least favourite feature in Moodle?

- Dropbox for assignments
- Discussion forum
- Journals
- Resources (documents for collection, such as reading questions)
- Announcements
- Wiki
- Choices (voting)
- Peer Review

16. Have you ever used Web CT or Blackboard before?

- No
- Blackboard
- Web Ct
- Both

17. If you have used Blackboard or Web CT before, which one of the following three Systems do you prefer?

- I have not used Blackboard or Web CT
- Blackboard
- Web CT
- Moodle

18. Do you think that you read or wrote more in English because of Moodle?

- Both wrote and read more
- Read more
- Wrote more
- No
- Don't know

19. What was your overall impression of Moodle, and could you make any recommendations on how I could improve this site? Do you think I should continue to use it?

20. If you claimed that you preferred Moodle to Blackboard or Web CT, why? If you did not, you should leave this question blank.

### Appendix C. CAF Follow-up Survey

When you received your computer feedback from me, how many of the web links did you follow?

- All
- Most
- Some
- Few
- None
- No Opinion

Do you think that the web based activities linked to my feedback were useful?

- All
- Most
- Some
- A few
- Not useful
- No opinion

Do you think that you learned anything by completing the web-based activities linked to my feedback?

- Yes, I learned a lot
- Yes, I learned a few things
- Perhaps I learned something
- No, I didn't learn anything from the web activities
- No opinion
- I didn't do any of the activities

## Appendix D. Sample AutoText from CAF Research

ADJECTIVE or ADVERB? <http://a4esl.org/q/h/lb/adjadv2.html>

APOSTROPHE? [http://webster.commnet.edu/grammar/quizzes/apostrophe\\_quiz2.htm](http://webster.commnet.edu/grammar/quizzes/apostrophe_quiz2.htm)

ARTICLE 'a', 'an' or 'the' needed? <http://a4esl.org/q/h/vm/fampeople.html>

CAPITAL? <http://webster.commnet.edu/grammar/quizzes/niu/niu13.htm>

COMMA? [http://webster.commnet.edu/grammar/quizzes/commas\\_fillin.htm](http://webster.commnet.edu/grammar/quizzes/commas_fillin.htm)

COHERENT? <http://nersp.nerdc.ufl.edu/~eli/teachers/activities/tes12/rw/acad/quiz4.htm>

CONCLUSION - Adequate and thoughtful?  
[http://www.mhhe.com/socscience/english/langan/langan\\_5\\_cws/graphics/langan5ecswr/ch04/p1exj.htm](http://www.mhhe.com/socscience/english/langan/langan_5_cws/graphics/langan5ecswr/ch04/p1exj.htm)

FRAGMENT? [http://webster.commnet.edu/grammar/quizzes/fragment\\_fixing.htm](http://webster.commnet.edu/grammar/quizzes/fragment_fixing.htm)

INTRODUCTION - Engaging and with sufficient background?  
[http://www.mhhe.com/socscience/english/langan/langan\\_5\\_cws/graphics/langan5ecswr/ch04/p1exi.htm](http://www.mhhe.com/socscience/english/langan/langan_5_cws/graphics/langan5ecswr/ch04/p1exi.htm)

MISPLACED MODIFIER Does this really say what you think it does?  
[http://webster.commnet.edu/cgi-shl/quiz.pl/modifier\\_quiz.htm](http://webster.commnet.edu/cgi-shl/quiz.pl/modifier_quiz.htm)

PLAGIARISM?  
[http://www.esc.edu/esconline/across\\_esc/library.nsf/wholeshortlinks2/Plagiarism+Quiz?opendocument](http://www.esc.edu/esconline/across_esc/library.nsf/wholeshortlinks2/Plagiarism+Quiz?opendocument)

PLURAL or SINGULAR? <http://a4esl.org/q/h/vf004-bp.html>

POSSESSIVE? [http://webster.commnet.edu/cgi-shl/par\\_numberless\\_quiz.pl/plurals\\_quiz.htm](http://webster.commnet.edu/cgi-shl/par_numberless_quiz.pl/plurals_quiz.htm)

PREPOSITION? [http://webster.commnet.edu/grammar/quizzes/preposition\\_quiz1.htm](http://webster.commnet.edu/grammar/quizzes/preposition_quiz1.htm)

PRONOUN AGREEMENT? [http://webster.commnet.edu/grammar/quizzes/agreement\\_quiz.htm](http://webster.commnet.edu/grammar/quizzes/agreement_quiz.htm)

PRONOUN? [http://webster.commnet.edu/cgi-shl/quiz.pl/pronoun\\_quiz.htm](http://webster.commnet.edu/cgi-shl/quiz.pl/pronoun_quiz.htm)

PUNCTUATION needed? [http://webster.commnet.edu/grammar/quizzes/punct\\_fillin.htm](http://webster.commnet.edu/grammar/quizzes/punct_fillin.htm)

RUNON or COMMA SPLICE? [http://webster.commnet.edu/grammar/quizzes/runons\\_quiz.htm](http://webster.commnet.edu/grammar/quizzes/runons_quiz.htm)

SPECIFIC?  
[http://www.mhhe.com/socscience/english/langan/langan\\_5\\_cws/graphics/langan5ecswr/ch03/p1exg.htm](http://www.mhhe.com/socscience/english/langan/langan_5_cws/graphics/langan5ecswr/ch03/p1exg.htm)

SPELLING?  
[http://www.mhhe.com/socscience/english/langan/langan\\_5\\_cws/graphics/langan5ecswr/ch41/p4exq.htm](http://www.mhhe.com/socscience/english/langan/langan_5_cws/graphics/langan5ecswr/ch41/p4exq.htm)

SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT? [http://webster.commnet.edu/cgi-shl/quiz.pl/sv\\_agr\\_quiz.htm](http://webster.commnet.edu/cgi-shl/quiz.pl/sv_agr_quiz.htm)

SYNTAX – Correct word order? <http://a4esl.org/q/j/dt/mc-misplaced.html>

TENSE - Correct verb form/s? [http://webster.commnet.edu/cgi-shl/quiz.pl/consistency\\_quiz.htm](http://webster.commnet.edu/cgi-shl/quiz.pl/consistency_quiz.htm)

THESIS STATEMENT - Clear topic, opinion and plan of development?  
[http://www.mhhe.com/socscience/english/langan/langan\\_5\\_cws/graphics/langan5ecswr/ch03/p1exd.htm](http://www.mhhe.com/socscience/english/langan/langan_5_cws/graphics/langan5ecswr/ch03/p1exd.htm)

TOPIC SENTENCE- Clear and comprehensive?  
<http://www.uottawa.ca/academic/arts/writcent/hypergrammar/partopic.html>

TRANSITION - Effective linking word or sentence?  
<http://webster.commnet.edu/grammar/transitions.htm>

UNCLEAR-Can you rewrite this to make it clearer? <http://a4esl.org/q/j/ck/wo-01.html>

UNIFIED?  
[http://www.mhhe.com/socscience/english/langan/langan\\_5\\_cws/graphics/langan5ecswr/ch06/ie6.htm](http://www.mhhe.com/socscience/english/langan/langan_5_cws/graphics/langan5ecswr/ch06/ie6.htm)

VOCABULARY - Correct word / phrase? <http://dictionary.cambridge.org/>

WORD FORM – Wrong word or form?  
[http://www.mhhe.com/socscience/english/langan/langan\\_5\\_cws/graphics/langan5ecswr/ch42/p4exr.htm](http://www.mhhe.com/socscience/english/langan/langan_5_cws/graphics/langan5ecswr/ch42/p4exr.htm)



## VITA

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