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B-Learning and the Teaching of Writing in English in an EFL Context

An Action Research Study

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the
degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English Language Teaching and
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CENTRE FOR APPLIED LINGUISTICS

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You gave me my wings, now let me fly.

Abstract

This action research study, which is composed of three cycles, aims at understanding and helping Portuguese students in an EFL context to improve their writing skills in English through a blended-learning (b-learning) writing module, using Moodle. This research contributes towards a better understanding of a research practitioner's perspectives of an action research study. A narrative inquiry approach is used to convey the action research process through the practitioner's eyes. It also contributes to the framework of Communities of Inquiry (CoI).

This thesis looks at b-learning, its affordances and challenges and the function of CoI within a b-learning environment and how the different components of a Community of Inquiry framework, namely Social, Cognitive and Teaching Presences, contribute, influence and enrich the learning and teaching experience. The methodology behind the learning and teaching of writing as well as the theoretical and practical development of the research methods are described within the afore-mentioned framework.

Communities of Inquiry will be seen as emerging from the data, as this research initially was not designed to include them. However, during analysis of the first action research cycle, data began to show evidence of the Community of Inquiry and it thus became part of the research and an integral part of the remaining two cycles. A Community of Inquiry's sustenance relies on students' engagement and interaction with the learning platform and with the people who make up the learning community and this data provides evidence for the framework in this research, which exemplifies and justifies the community of inquiry framework. Data for this thesis has been gathered using a mixed methods approach and thus the sources are varied. Interviews, questionnaires, focus groups, a research diary, class recordings and field notes and online interaction through forums, emails and messages compose the sources of the data for this research.

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List of Abbreviations

AASCU	American Association and State Colleges and Universities
AECT	Association for Educational Communications and Technology
AR	Action Research
ARC(s)	Action Research Cycle(s)
BAAL	British Association for Applied Linguistics
BAWE	British Academic Written English
B-learning	Blended Learning
BLE(s)	Blended Learning Environment(s)
BLIX	Blended Learning Innovation Exchange
BLU	Blended Learning Unit
CALL	Computer Assisted Language Learning
CAR	Collaborative Action Research
CoI	Communities of Inquiry
CRASP	Critical attitude, Research into teaching, Accountability, Self-evaluation, Professionalism
DEAG	Departamento de Estudos Ingleses e Alemaes (English and German Studies Department)
DWP(s)	Disciplinary Writing Profile(s)
EAP	English for Academic Purposes
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
F2F	Face to Face
FG	Focus Group
FTA	Face-Threatening Act/ Activity
HE	Higher Education
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IT	Information Technology
LMS	Learning Management System
NGLC	Next Generation Learning Challenges
OS(s)	Operational System(s)
P2P	Peer to Peer
PhD	Doctor of Philosophy
Ppt(s)	Power Point(s)
QDA	Qualitative Data Analysis
SVI	Schwartz Value Inventory
UMa	University of Madeira
VLE(s)	Virtual Learning Environment(s)
WBS	Warwick Business School
WWII	World War II

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1 Introduction

This thesis addresses two main concepts, namely Blended-Learning (B-learning) and Communities of Inquiry (CoI), within education. The research reported on in this thesis takes place in a Portuguese University, The University of Madeira; the educational focus resides on Writing Skills in English; and the students subjected to this research are students in an EFL context. This thesis is framed as Action Research (AR) and it is approached from a reflective practitioner's perspective. Within an interpretative paradigm, its qualitative nature is explored and the framework of Action Research is differentiated from views about reflective practice. It is in this framework that data collection methods are carried out as the Action Research framework also influences the way the data is viewed and analysed.

This thesis employs a narrative style of representation that is congruent with the step by step development of appropriate methodology. The narrative representation of the research process is designed to bring out the reflexive nature of practitioner research and allows a blend of pedagogy, research and some of the literature that was essential in shaping the research at the time it was being carried out. In order to make the research process clear to the reader, the narrative account enhances the reflective process that the practitioner undergoes whilst simultaneously introducing new aspects of practice, pedagogy and is collecting data and reflecting about the whole process. Not only will this narration make clear which research steps were taken and when and how they were done, but will also expound on the main focuses of pedagogy. Literature and concrete examples obtained through data analysis will be incorporated and framed by the practitioner research.

With the intent of providing an encompassing overview of the major themes developed in this thesis, a general background and brief history of the development of b-learning in

education follows. The world's current educational system finds itself in times of change; times which have been referred to as the 'era of engagement' (Garrison and Vaughan, 2008: p.144), which includes changes in education such as with b-learning and Communities of Inquiry (CoI) (Garrison et. al., 2000; Garrison and Vaughan 2008; Perry and Edwards, 2005; Arbaugh and Hwang, 2006), leading teaching towards a more student-centred learning experience, based on communication and interaction. This thesis is centred on the premise of Action Research (AR) (Dewey, 1929; Lewin, 1946; McTaggart, 1991; Kemmis and McTaggart, 1988; Burns, 1999; Mann, 1999; Edge, 2001) aiding research in a b-learning writing module in English carried out at the University of Madeira.

B-learning has been expanding its importance in many universities and schools over the last few decades and seems to now be at its highpoint of integration in Higher Education (HE) by many internationally renowned universities, for example: The Blended Learning Unit (BLU) in the University of Hertfordshire, 2005; Blended Learning Innovation Exchange (BLIX) at the University of Calgary, 2008; Blended learning @ WBS at University of Warwick, 2010. B-learning is being recognised more and more as a reliable teaching method due to many teachers who are exploring it and sharing their experiences.

B-Learning was heavily influenced by the developing notions of Distance Learning but then moved on a few steps to try to counter-balance some problems that were being encountered. The overall perceptions of Distance Learning were that it consisted of physical distance between the teacher and the learner (Delling, 1966; Keegan, 1986, Holmberg, 1986; Perraton, 1988; Rumble, 1989), that it provides students with a variety of ways to study with guidance and appropriate planning done by teachers or experts (Holmberg, 1977, 1986; Keegan, 1988), and that it resorts to the use of technology to

impart with and communicate knowledge (Peters, 1973, 1993, 2000; Keegan, 1988; Garrison and Shale, 1987). The possibility of sporadic face-to-face meetings was also seen as one of the characteristics of Distance Learning (Keegan, 1988; Rumble, 1989; Moore and Kearsley, 1996).

Distance learning came across an array of problems and Sherry (1996) refers to issues in Distance Learning such as the lack of adequate design of the instruction (Willis, 1992), the necessity of updating courses and providing feedback to students (Hyland, 2001; Hyland and Hyland, 2006), the need for more interactivity between teachers and students online (McNabb, 1994, Garrison and Shale, 1990), lack of student direction and goals (Savery and Duffy, 1995; Saettler, 1990), and the misuse of the best medium of technology to transmit different types of information (Ravitch, 1987). Other challenges faced included providing teachers with adequate skills ‘to integrate new teaching strategies with the technology’ (Sherry, 1996: p.6), and getting teachers to adapt to team work. Students were also having difficulties adapting to different modes of learning and becoming more autonomous learners (Charp, 1994). This was probably due to management issues, be they the teacher-facilitator-student triad, or the distinction between the teacher and site facilitator roles, or even between the different roles that all the team players represent. On a more practical note, the trade-offs were not as positive anymore and that indicated it was time for a change. Thus b-learning was viewed as that alternative.

B-learning was initially viewed as the substitution of traditional face-to-face time in classes with technology based learning. However, these notions gradually became more complex and encompassing as can be seen in the definitions of b-learning that follow. In 2003, Rooney saw b-learning as one of the top10 trends to emerge in the knowledge delivery industry, as HE is sometimes critically perceived to be. At the beginning of this

century, the perceptions of b-learning changed substantially and from notions about the combination of instructional modalities/ methods/ delivery media (Singh and Reed, 2001; Orey, 2002; Picciano and Dziuban, 2007; Bersin et. al., 2003) to defining it as the combination of online/ computer-mediated instruction and face-to-face instruction (Bonk and Graham, 2006). Stubbs (2006) described b-learning as ‘combinations of face-to-face and technology-based learning’ (p.164). B-learning was also viewed as a ‘highly effective means of addressing diverse student needs, expanding access to flexible learning opportunities and improving the quality of education’ (Ross and Gage in Bonk and Graham, 2006: p.155). As more academics and teachers experimented with it, the more complex they realised b-learning was. Higher-order learning (includes critical thinking, deep understanding, internalisation and interpretation, challenging questions, appropriation of ideas, Salmon, 1998; Fabro and Garrison, 1998; Dillenbourg, 1999; Fox and MacKeogh, 2003) began to be addressed, as Palloff and Pratt (2005) explain that interactive and collaborative learning experiences are more compatible with aiming to attain higher-order learning outcomes and thus b-learning is viewed as much more than a combination of means for teaching. Garrison and Vaughan (2008) unravel that b-learning is the ‘thoughtful fusion of face-to-face and online learning experiences’ (p.4) and he goes on to clarify that it includes the ‘rethinking [of] the course design to optimise student engagement’ (p.5). He also focuses on b-learning and recognises:

the strengths of integrating verbal and text based communication and [that it] creates a unique fusion of synchronous and asynchronous, direct and mediated modes of communication in that the proportion of face-to-face and online learning activities may vary considerably (p.6),

and it is these more complex notions of b-learning that many educators need to deal with when redesigning or creating a course using b-learning.

Garrison's contribution to b-learning was particularly useful to me as a researcher because it influenced the shift in direction of my research and modified my initial research questions towards the end of the first ARC. (further developed on page 21) Therefore, it is important to mention that my initial research questions were altered towards the end of ARC1 and where the focus was mainly on b-learning and writing skills. Initially, my research questions were:

- How can b-learning contribute to students developing their writing skills?
- Can a b-learning module be designed and put into practice by a teacher on her own, without the aid of a team of experts?
- Can b-learning help to create a path towards a more successful and engaged learning experience in an EFL context in a Portuguese University?

These research questions then changed towards the end of ARC1 when I was reading up on CoI and realised that the b-learning module that was occurring had many of the characteristics I was reading about. Thus, from here on, the research questions became:

- How can a CoI be sustained in a b-learning writing module with EFL students in a Portuguese EFL context?
- Which characteristics of a CoI and b-learning enable students to have a more engaging and effective learning experience, helping students to develop their writing skills.
- Which criteria are there in this b-learning writing module in a Portuguese EFL context that sustain a CoI, and can be generalised to contribute to the CoI framework?

Through three Action Research Cycles (ARCs), data from students and from myself as the practitioner, has been collected and analysed. The criteria that define CoI have been further explored and justified and in some cases, new contributions have been made. Whilst coding the data, additional criteria were added to Garrison's Cognitive Presence and these are developed in the analysis chapter. Part of this research aims at a data-led description of the framework in order to help validate prior research and bring additional insight to what has already been defined.

This research aims at bringing advantages not only to academia but mainly to the students who can benefit from similar research projects. As most of my students were 1st year undergraduates, they became more prepared for any other courses that used Moodle and were already versatile users of the platform and unafraid to interact with their colleagues and teachers. My experience will also benefit my department in redesigning courses and adapting strategies to incorporate b-learning, as hardly anyone uses technology to enhance their teaching and this is how I can transform this research experience into practical know-how.

One of the students who participated in the cycles clearly states, during a focus group, what I hope this research will be able to achieve. In his words:

I think that creating this idea of b-learning to me was a surprise and a good one. From this we can infer that Portugal is preparing for the future or is at least trying to take new measures in an educational system that is crying out for solutions and inspiration (FG 2).

From the student's comments, we understand that views of a Portuguese traditional educational structure are opposed to a more flexible structure that equally enables learning, however, it seems to appeal to students who are ready for something more innovative that stimulates the learning process and experience.

Now that a general introduction to the thesis content has been provided, an overall view of the structure of the thesis is provided:

Research and Higher Education Context

Particular focus will be given to the educational context of the University of Madeira and HE in Portugal. Contextually, these will be linked to overall European aims to integrate technology in educational systems and how the Bologna process feeds into the writing module aims and context. These contextual environments will lead into theoretical frameworks that will be discussed in the next chapter.

Narrative Accounts of Action Research Cycles

This chapter is written from a practitioner perspective and is a descriptive narration of the ARCs. The teacher practitioner aims to recount the practical aspects that occurred during the teaching and learning process and adds in her reflexions indicating changes that occurred from one ARC to the next.

Each cycle is contextualised and the most important steps and features that shaped the module from the students' and teachers' perspectives are discussed. The development of the CoI in each cycle is presented and explained and so are the problems and challenges that hindered or affected their progress. The next step is to review the literature behind all the frameworks, methods and concepts found in this research.

Literature Review

The literature review chapter will look at different theoretical and conceptual perspectives on b-learning, e-learning and writing theories. On the first topic, special attention is paid to design of b-learning environments, the reason for adapting b-learning and the major interactional perspectives of these learning environments. This focus on b-learning leads into the notions of CoI and an understanding of the different components. Consequently we shall take a look at what the students that compose these CoI are like. Their generation is considered 'milenials' and 'netgenerers' and have unique

characteristics and learning preferences that need to be considered when working with them and designing learning experiences for them.

This shall be followed by a short overview of e-learning and how it has developed within education. In this section, multimodality and 7 types of intelligences (Gardner, 1983) shall be explored with multi-media in mind and the learning techniques that teachers can use to tap into to make the most of the different learning forms whilst using a learning/ teaching platform. Multimodality is essential in the design of various tasks on the writing module.

Multimodality and the importance of interaction will then lead into the importance of writing within education and how it has been taught throughout a series of educational schools and theories. Teaching writing methodology is the focus of this section as writing is the main skill developed by the students in the modules taught in this b-learning project. The writing module is a B-learning and teaching experience as B-learning, and its multimodal nature, is the means used to get to an end, which is better writing skills. In order to get a better understanding and contextualise all this theory, we then take a look at the different research methods that were applied throughout this research.

Methodology

This chapter introduces qualitative research in education, then conceptualises and contextualises action research and the model followed in this research in particular. Collaborative action research is also looked at as it is a part of the ARCs that were carried out for this research. Intervention methodology helps understand the reasons behind the research objectives and how it was structured. This then leads to data collection methodology which includes the theoretical frameworks behind questionnaires, interviews, focus groups, lesson recordings, observation and note taking,

research diaries and finally NVIVO data analysis. Following this detailed methodological account, the actual analysis of the data and a brief discussion is the chapter that follows.

Data Analysis and Discussion.

This chapter analyses the data produced through the forums that students and teacher used as part of the b-learning learning and teaching experience. As well as these forums, data from questionnaires, lesson recordings and observation notes, focus groups, interviews and research diaries are triangulated to validate data from the forums.

Particular attention is paid to online discourse in CoI and the three major components that constitute its essence. Cognitive, teaching and social presence are sustained and validated through online discourse excerpts that are analysed through discourse analysis. This analysis then leads to a discussion of the findings of the data and how these may influence further studies in the area.

Evaluation and Pedagogic Implication

In this section, attention is paid to the pedagogic implications of the findings, both in terms of education in general using b-learning and for the learning and teaching experience that can be offered as part of the educational experience at the University of Madeira.

Future Implications

Various options are explored as possible routes to take when looking at b-learning and CoI in particular, when taking this research into consideration. Areas that lack substantial evidence are pinpointed as potential niches in this area of research. Future projects that take into consideration these ARCs as a platform to build upon and develop other learning and teaching experiences are also mentioned.

2 Brief Account of Research Context, Aims and Questions

In this chapter, an overall account of the research context is provided, yet focus shall be given to the 2nd Action Research Cycle as this is the richest cycle from which examples can be taken. It enables a better understanding of the research context, the aims of the research and the questions that arose and shaped the research and others that were molded as the research took place.

2.1 Overall Research Context

E-learning at the University of Madeira (UMa) has very little history for only recently have we ventured into this area. To understand this context, a brief background to the University of Madeira is provided. It is now 25 years old and has been putting all its efforts into making our institution one that is recognized and valued for its quality in higher education. We currently have almost 3000 students and 250 teachers in its five Centres, namely Arts and Humanities, Exact Sciences and Engineering, Social Sciences, Life Sciences and Health Technologies. The university is situated on the island of Madeira, in its capital city, Funchal. Due to its location, most of our students are local, with the occasional students from mainland Portugal and some ERASMUS students too.

When I began this research, UMa had no educational e-learning platform yet, but many teachers were creating their own personal web pages and using them to overcome this void, but simply as a way to provide lesson materials to students. This action research project was possible because a colleague in the former Maths and Engineering Department (now part of the Exact Sciences and Engineering Centre) , Dr. Eduardo Marques, had ventured to work with Moodle, as it is freeware, and managed to get a server from where their department could work. He took on the responsibility to manage Moodle and kindly offered me some space for my writing modules. This

possibility of using Moodle brought together my personal interest in using multimedia in education and the need my department had to find a way to better students' writing skills in English and, with these two elements, this research began to take shape. I had already begun to explore the possibilities of bringing in Moodle to our department but my sparse knowledge could in no way compare to the know-how of a computer engineer who would manage the platform himself, so his offer was accepted immediately. The formerly known as English and German Studies Department (DEAG, which is now part of the Arts and Humanities Centre) gave its consent for this research to be carried out and seemed rather pleased with the direction the studies were taking. Thus, searching for a possible solution to a practical problem being felt at the time, whilst simultaneously thinking about research commitments, gave way to this research interest.

At this point, it is essential to indicate that three action research cycles were carried out. The first cycle functioned as my pilot study both in terms of teaching strategies with Engineering students and in terms of developing teaching materials on Moodle. Teaching English writing techniques using B-learning was the main objective in this module. Using a medium that was closer to students' interests and everyday experiences had the intent of further stimulating the students to develop more awareness and motivation in the learning process. However teaching them in English, as well as English writing techniques proved to be quite a challenge. The use of Moodle was a challenge as the students were not used to using the internet as a learning tool and students' interaction lay below my expectations. As this cycle shall be explored in 3.2 below, the next section shall focus on the 2nd. Action research cycle as it provided more data that can be explored in this section.

2.2 2nd Action Research Cycle

2.2.1 Context

The 2nd cycle took place in the 2nd Semester at the University of Madeira and was composed of the same class that was part of the 1st cycle and two new classes. The writing module through b-learning was carried out during a month in each of the classes, but working with the classes themselves is actually still ongoing online.

2.2.2 Class A

In order to give a clear picture of this cycle, the three classes shall each be contextualised separately. Class A was the same group as that of the 1st cycle, but due to the large number of students, the class was split into two groups that had lessons on the same day but at different times. Therefore this class had a teaching load of 8 hours per week. It was composed of Civil Engineering, Telecommunications Engineering, Computer Engineering, Mathematics, Accountancy, Management, Biology and Arts students. Altogether, we had 345 students enrolled for the subject of ‘Rhetoric and Communication’ which is a general education course that is part of all 1st year degrees. With this class, I ended up working with them throughout the whole semester. Although the writing module went on for a month, I collaborated with the lecturer in organising the classes, placing the materials online and participating in the lessons for the whole semester.

Due to the previous experience in the 1st cycle, I made it a point of going to the first class of the course so that the students would know exactly what to count on right from the beginning. This time, I had managed to work out exactly how to integrate the writing module in the ‘Rhetoric and Communication’ course. Professor Sílvio Fernandes, Head of the Psychology and Humanities Department, as well as the lecturer of this course, very readily accepted the idea of the writing module in English and we

managed to work easily and blend our teaching methods. After some negotiations, I was given 20% of the course final mark to assess the students during the writing module. This was divided as follows: Assignment 1= 8%; Assignment 2= 8%; Online interaction= 4%. Thus our first lesson consisted of the presentation and discussion of the course syllabus (Appendix 1), a description of how assessment would be carried out (Appendix 1), a description of the writing module and how and why it was being integrated into their course, oral consent from the students to use materials they provided for research as their anonymity was guaranteed, and the students filled out Questionnaire 1 (Appendix 2).

In relation to the questionnaires I had to justify that I required students' names only for course organisation purposes, but that their anonymity was still guaranteed for research purposes as the data would be processed and their questionnaires would only really be seen by me. I needed to know who did not have a computer or access to the internet as that would influence their interaction levels.

I then learnt from these questionnaires that only 9 students, out of the 204 questionnaires filled out, did not actually own a computer. During the whole writing module, this revealed itself as not a very serious issue as these students accessed computers at the university or at family and friends' houses, managing to keep up to date and interact with their classmates.

Class A has students from very diverse areas and English is normally not their forte. From the questionnaires, an average of 8% had less than 3 years of English, whereas about 75% had between 6 and 8 years of English at school. Therefore the language used when preparing the lessons as well as the materials needed to be accessible to all, thus more simple language was often used.

2.2.3 Class B

Class B was composed of first year undergraduates hoping to get a degree in English Language and Business Studies. Their English is considered intermediate/ upper-intermediate level. In the 1st year and due to the Bologna Process, the writing module was introduced into their English Language B2.2 course, this level of English being considered intermediate.

There are 57 students enrolled for this course, 27 of which are male and the rest female. This group already has a certain degree of interest for the language as they are getting a degree that includes English Language Studies, therefore demonstrating to them the greater need to enhance their writing skills was not difficult as most of them agreed that this was one of their major difficulties in mastering the English language. My challenge with these students lay in keeping them motivated for the course and getting them involved with the b-learning side of the cycle.

While working with these students for a month, it was plain to see that they needed constant prompting to interact online. Lessons with Class B were on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 14h00 to 16h00. An average of 25 to 30 students came to the lessons regularly. The face-to-face lessons had to have a quick pace and the activities varied quite often. Once the students realized that the theoretical content of the lesson had been taught, many would leave the class and my aim was to keep them interested until the end of the lesson. Leaving the assignments for the end of the lesson then proved to be a strategy in overcoming this problem. The students soon understood that I would refer to what was to be done during the week online and that included referring to the assignments.

2.2.4 Class C

This class was composed of 38 Education Sciences undergraduates. On the whole, these were my most interested and motivated group as they seem to have more organized working habits.

This class's level of English was considered beginners, as the course name indicates: English A1. However, these students managed to follow the lessons and do the assignments requested. This class also had 4 written assignments to submit. Each assignment was worth 4% of their final assessment as was their online interaction, culminating in 20% of their final mark.

I. General Outlook on B-Learning through Moodle

On Moodle, I left a weekly short message to all students with a summary of what had been taught in the lessons as well as reminders of what was expected of them during that week. With Class A, seeing as the vast majority is more at ease with technology as they are mostly engineering students, we chose to begin the semester by asking them to enrol on Moodle as soon as possible. I thus gave them quick guidelines in the first lessons and we began to place the syllabus and other materials online.

The first week of classes was as can be seen in the following screen shot taken from the platform.

Retórica e Comunicação

MoodleDME > EdG 1 02

Pessoas -

- Participantes
- Actividades -
- Fóruns
- Glossários
- Inquéritos
- Links
- Recursos
- Trabalhos

Procurar nos fóruns - Ir

Pesquisa avançada ?

Administração -

- Activar modo edição
- Configurações
- Atribuir papéis
- Cópia de segurança
- Restaurar
- Importar
- Reiniciar
- Relatórios

Lista de tópicos

Welcome to your B-learning experience in this course. 😊

We will begin by understanding and exploring Moodle. This shall be our daily tool for our assignments and work carried out during this semester.

Enjoy your learning experience!

I look forward to interacting with you. 😊 Join me in the [forums](#) so we can all get to know each other better. Simply choose one that interests you and tell us why.

Take care all,
Jane

- Welcome
- General Rhetoric Glossary
- Programa e Regime de Avaliação
- Programa e Temas

1

- Cinema and Films
- TV Shows
- Sports
- World News

Nome de utilizador: Jane

Próximos
Não há ev.
Ir ao calendário
Novo eve.

Actividades
Actividades Junho 2016 Relatório actividades
Sem novos últimos act.

Mensagens
Sem mensagens...
Utilizadores (nos últ.) Jane S

Menu do curso Adicionar Ver os mais recentes

Figure 1 - Moodle Welcome Message

As can be seen, students were welcomed with a message which guided their understanding of the experience and stimulated their participation on the forums. Language was simple and sentences short. Thorne (2003) points out a few design principles in b-learning, one of which is that a journalistic, conversational style should be used instead of a more academic approach. This is taken into account when writing messages for students or interacting on the forums with them, however given the context of this research, an academic approach is always used when materials for lessons are prepared. Thorne also does state that ‘content should be high quality and interesting’. Thus I believe that this design principle is also abided by, especially as the students refer to the materials as useful and interesting when talking together during the focus groups.

During week 1, students began to slowly interact on the forums and this was how I intended them to get acquainted with the software. At the beginning of each lesson, I made sure that I answered any question they may have had in relation to Moodle. Lehman and Berg (2007) give importance to b-learning being learner-centred and they

reinforced this idea of getting students to develop their writing and gain more confidence in writing in English as well as working on Moodle by using forums that were closely related to their own experiences. It is with Vygotsky's/ Gardner's cognitive constructivist and interactive approach that many of these activities were designed. By gaining expertise in a variety of domains, the students become empowered with knowledge that is more flexible. B-learning also tends to support and stimulate learning through multiple intelligences.

As work proceeded, great care was taken to diversify the activities in a manner that catered to the multiple learning modalities that students have. Having both face-to-face and online learning allows a greater use of the environments to involve students in the learning process. The forums that were added to the VLE had the intent of getting as many students, with different interests, experiences and learning methods, as possible involved in the learning process. The students with greater linguistic intelligence might have been drawn to the forum on Books and Reading, whereas students who are logical-mathematical may have found Computer Games and Assessing Credibility more enticing. Music was another forum which drew many students who are musically gifted or interested. Students shared their own compositions as well as favourite songs and videos online. Those that are more spatially inclined readily discussed Films and even created their own thread of Photography on the Open Forum. Needless to say, everything with interactions appealed to students' interpersonal intelligences and stimulates their intrapersonal intelligence. One of my major concerns throughout the design of the virtual learning is that I have yet to find a way of actually incorporating kinaesthetics, one of the multiple intelligences depicted by Gardner (1983). There is however a forum related to sports, computer games and parties and concerts that are aimed at this learning modality.

If McQuail's Mass Communication Theory is taken into account, his pyramid shows clearly that most communication is done on an intrapersonal level. When dealing with students, all educators know that this is almost certainly the most important process that leads to learning. Students need to take control of their learning and acknowledge it as an experience that enriches them.

McQuail's Mass Communication Theory

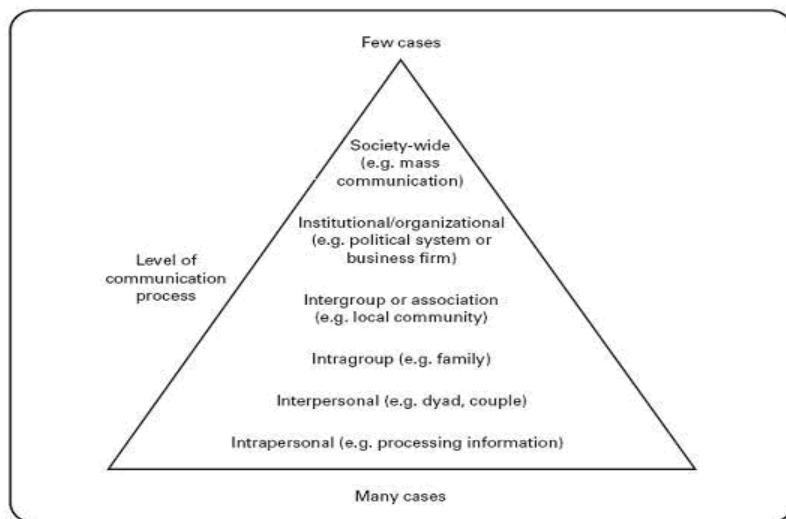


Figure 2 - McQuail's Mass Communication Theory

The Bologna Process that has begun this school year of 2007/ 2008 at UMa, also mentions students' responsibility and acknowledgement for their own learning as a major aim.

'They (Universities) should also commit themselves explicitly to the development of a culture which recognises the importance of quality, and quality assurance, in their work. To achieve this, institutions should develop and implement a strategy for the continuous enhancement of quality. The strategy, policy and procedures should have a formal status and be publicly available. They should also include a role for students and other stakeholders.'¹

¹ In <http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/hogeronderwijs/bologna/about/>

Moodle enabled us to communicate through forums, send each other private messages, explore all materials taught in the face-to-face lesson, reveal other links to additional materials that are available online, request and submit assignments online and inform the whole class of news that they needed to know.

This platform is relatively simple to use and almost all students easily registered and were able to understand the overall design and interact when they saw fit. In order to ensure that students felt supported at this stage, our first f-t-f lesson in the module explained in detail how they should register. I also showed them what Moodle looked like at different moments and exemplified where they had to go and what to pay more attention to for the lessons to be fruitful. I also gave them my email so they could get in touch with me if they encountered any problems.

The first lessons were slightly different in the classes as the platform has slight variations. In order to see Lesson 1 which was based on the previous group from the 1st Cycle, please see Appendix 3. Lesson 1 for Classes B and C were based on Class A but had a slightly different Moodle layout as this space was given to me as an attempt to create something more substantial for my English and German Studies Department. As these two classes do not belong to the Maths and Engineering Department, I could not introduce courses belonging to other departments onto their Moodle platform. Please see Appendix 4 for intial part of Lesson 1 of Class B and C. The part of the lesson about Moodle has not been added to the appendix as it is a repetition of the previous appendix.

The diverse materials used for the face-to-face lessons can be seen in the Appendices. These were always placed online after the face-to-face lessons. Students were then able to access them whenever they felt the need. Lessons were then supplemented with online activities, links for further insight on the subject and discussions of topics

discussed in the lesson or of students' own choice and interest. The aim was to keep them writing in English so that their confidence developed.

A narrative account of the ARCs follows as a way of introducing a linear account of the research from a practitioner researcher's perspective.

3 Narrative accounts of ARCs

This chapter is written with the objective of describing the ARCs in a manner that helps build up a sequential understanding of how the ARCs took place and providing an insider account of what occurred from the point of view of a researcher and reflective practitioner. I adopt a narrative style for this section, which is different to the tone of the remainder of this thesis but which adapts to the aim of ‘telling a story’. Narrative inquiry was chosen with the objective of helping the reader engage with the ongoing cycles. It also seems to be the most appropriate genre to represent the ‘messy’ nature of this teaching and learning experience and as Mann (2002) explicates, it is a way of ‘striving to articulate what is confused’ (in Johnson and Golombok, 2002: p.198). Narrative inquiry is particularly suitable in this research as it enables me as a teacher and a researcher to fall into a ‘mind-set’ (Dewey, 1933) which assists in the reflection of my practices and permits evaluation of work done and this understanding helps bring about change. For this research and as a way to ‘legitimise knowledge produced out of professional’s lived realities’, this was the genre that supported ‘insider knowledge’ (Johnson and Golombok, 2002: p.3).

This genre helps readers to visualise how the 3 ARCs occurred and enhances perceptions of how students learnt and what they obtained from the modules. To tell the story, I shall draw upon all the data sources as and when they can better exemplify what I am trying to represent, and I will rely mainly on lesson materials, recordings and observation notes as well as excerpts from the researcher’s diary. These excerpts will be found in boxes that look like note-book pages and will show the reflections that were occurring at the time. I am consciously adopting a reflexive style of representation. Also, the narrative will be accompanied by screenshots of the b-learning module,

excerpts taken from students' discussion forums and texts and parts of the power points of the teaching/ learning materials.

After a brief introduction to the understanding of narrative inquiry that underlies this chapter, the narration itself then relates to:

- Pre-ARCs,
- ARC1,
- ARC2,
- ARC3 and
- Post-ARCs.

As Bell, 2002, points out, narrative inquiry needs to include more than just the story. Analysis plays a role in the evolution and description of the narration, which suits this research because there is constant analysis of the teaching and learning experience.

In its fullest sense, narrative inquiry requires going beyond the use of narrative as rhetorical structure, that is, simply telling stories, to an analytic examination of the underlying insights and assumptions that the story illustrates (Bell, 2002: p.208).

In this line of thought, and aiding a better understanding and linearity of the practitioner's research process, the analytic thoughts that occur at different stages of the ARCs are included in this narrative. Some of these can be seen in the diary entries that are included in this section and can also be verified when changes are made to the ARCs in an attempt to overcome some of the difficulties felt. These analytic thoughts add depth to the narration through the reflective process that occurs.

Another view on narrations is that they tend to be seen as socially related discourses. Narratives are seen as 'modes of thought' (Bruner, 1996, p.39) and as 'social and relational' in the sense that they 'represent a socially mediated view of experience'

(Gee, in Johnson and Golombok, 2007, p.5). With the teachers' research movement, Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 1999; Freeman, 1998 and Edge and Richards, 1998, expressed the view that narratives can help to make teacher's experiences more 'legitimate'. Indeed, it proved to be a technique that reflective teachers adopted to bring about change in their classrooms. In this research and during the process of moving from one ARC to another, a great deal of reflection took place and the production of a 'narrative' gives teachers the space to register the reflective process that occurs when teaching and learning in a way which is congruent with a socially mediated perspective on lived experience. Therefore, following this line of thought, it can be claimed that the narration reveals the social interaction that took place between me, as a researcher and a teacher, and the teachers that worked with me, as well as with the students who partook in the research. It is constructed from my viewpoint but makes an effort to include their perspectives too. The teaching and learning experience is revealed as a social act within a particular educational community.

3.1 Pre-ARCs

3.1.1 Writing and English in High Schools

With all of the advantages of b-learning in mind, mostly resulting from my wider reading into ICT, blended and open learning, the planning of the 1st Cycle began with many conversations with teachers. I also met with heads of departments and interviewed teachers from my department and teachers willing to work with me. I also interviewed some high school teachers and also some final year undergraduate students. At this stage of the research, it was important to get an overall perspective of how much writing students are in the habit of doing, be it either in Portuguese or English. These writing habits that students bring from high-school influence the development of their writing skills at university. Independently of discourses or languages used at school,

understanding the assignments that students are requested to do at this level, enlighten the initial research plan and influence the direction of the design of the b-learning module and help explain why we as teachers are confronted with students at university who have such difficulties when asked to write in English.

Only two high school teachers were comfortable enough to allow me to record our conversation. I had to take notes from all the other interviews. It is from the notes taken that the following data is gathered. Three of the teachers interviewed, from three different schools were in the technological areas. Teacher 1 taught Programming in the 11th and 12th Grades; Teacher 2 taught three subjects: Technological Projects and Computer Networks in the 12th Grade and Computer Techniques to the 10th Grade; Teacher 3 also taught three subjects: Electro-technology and Analogical and Digital Systems in the 10th and 12th Grades and Technological Project which runs through the 10th to the 12th Grade. The students, 16 and 20 years of age, are taking part in a Technological Project and have internships as part of their studies and are aiming to become part of the job market after high school

These teachers were all in agreement as to the writing their students did, be it in English or Portuguese: very little. What they write is very technical such as programming which implies very short sentences or simply groups of words as commands in English. Teachers 2 and 3 revealed that their students write project proposals in Portuguese which are never more than a few paragraphs and up to a page long. They say the language used by these students is very elementary and straight to the point. They have very few notions of including an introduction, body and conclusion to their proposals and this has to be pointed out when they hand in their reports at the end of the year, which are very short and normally subdivided into parts with one or two paragraphs to each one. Thus coherence and cohesion play a minor role in this type of writing. It is

more of a list of details that the students came up with whilst carrying out their project. Their findings are summarily listed.

When questioned about how they helped their students develop their writing skills, the teachers confessed they did little as they have to concentrate on the content that has to be taught. T1 mentioned that these students needed models to follow and she created her own models for her students to follow which are basically a long list of words in English for the programming language. These words are simple in linguistic syntactic terms but essential in programming such as ‘case’, ‘length’, width’, ‘next’, ‘and’, ‘then’ and ‘if’. Teachers 2 and 3 deny using models but refer to a few elements they consider criteria. T2 mentions structure and the aims of the work as criteria. T3 refers to overall basic text structure as his only pre-determined criteria.

They all agreed that reports, be they technical, annual or lab reports are written at university level. They believed that it was important for their students to have a basic idea of writing up proposals at high school level. When I asked about summaries, abstracts or reviews, all three teachers agreed that none of these were done in their classes but they considered this type of writing necessary both at the University and later professionally.

T3 said his students needed to write annual reports at the end of their professional practice for school. They also have to pass an exam called PAT (Prova de Aptidao Tecnologica = Technological Aptitude Test) whereby their apprenticeship is assessed. They have a jury that analyses their written report and their oral presentations which students normally choose to do with the aid of power point presentations.

All these teachers expressed how important and undervalued writing is with engineering students. They claimed that these students had deficient writing skills because their teachers were less strict with them in terms of writing, as their area is more practical,

therefore emphasis is given to their practical capabilities and theoretical understanding of technical contents. T3 referred to the need for these students to be able to communicate their ideas through writing. He often received proposals that were very incoherent and to get a clearer idea of what the student actually planned on doing, he had to schedule a meeting to discuss the idea orally with the student.

English, they all agreed, is of absolute importance to these students who access information on the internet (mostly in English). Many technical books are not translated into Portuguese from their original English versions and although the European Union decreed that manuals have to be translated into diverse languages, students still come across technical manuals they have to read in English. The teachers also agreed that students seem to have an aversion to the English language, despite its utility to them. As they have the choice in the 10th Grade between English and French, they mostly choose French as they believe it is an easier language to learn, as it has the same linguistic background and origins as Portuguese.

The three English teachers I interviewed from two high schools had very interesting alternative projects going on for students in the technical/ professional areas with alternative curricula. However, the normal engineering students directed at universities, are subjected to the same government-led programmes as language students. Teacher A teaches English to students in the Humanities and in the Engineering areas that are aiming at higher degrees. Teacher B teaches both the normal English curriculum to Engineering students as well as the so called ‘alternative curriculum’ in Computer Systems Installation and Maintenance. Teacher C teaches the ‘alternative curriculum’ in English for Mechanics and Mechatronics. These courses run from the 10th to the 12th Grades and their students vary between the ages of 17 and 23 years of age.

There is an ‘alternative curriculum’ as two teachers called it, for students who have more difficulties in getting to the end of high school and who have a specific interest in more practical areas. The major aim of these courses in English is to make sure that the students do not drop out of school and less importance seems to be given to the content and the English language as such. In the normal English courses, the engineering students write things like formal and informal letters, e-mails, guided compositions, reviews, leaflets and essays.

The ‘alternative curriculum’, which engineering students are introduced to, has very basic grammar that is always directly linked to the practical content being taught. They take notes, write dialogues, do gap-filling, matching, true/false exercises, describe processes or components, order and complete sentences. All this work is done on a very basic level and all sentences are very short with very directed and limited vocabulary. These students are given models, which are in their text-books, to follow when asked to do a writing task. In the teachers’ opinions, these students only have English because they have to and not because they believe it will be of any particular use to them. The teachers believe English to be extremely useful to these students in the working world as they have to read technical and user manuals that are often in English. They also refer the need to communicate in the global world we live in today. Many of these students may even choose to emigrate and knowing English certainly might help them communicate in most communities they will choose to settle in. The internet is also seen as an important means of communication whereby English is the language that is used as the means of communication.

All this data helped to understand the level of writing the students were used to undertaking when they get to university. It gave me a real perspective of their

knowledge and helped to design a writing module that could scaffold from writing techniques they already knew and build up from there.

3.1.2 Writing at UMa and launching the Writing Module

As I am officially on research leave and cannot actually conduct a class, I had to begin to determine how the b-learning module would be implemented by justifying my research to heads of departments and get their authorisation to work with students. In a meeting with Professor Nuno Nunes, head of the Maths and Engineering department, he readily accepted the challenge and said he felt his students actually needed this sort of initiative as they had no English Language course in their degree. Due to having been a

lecturer at UMa for over 10 years, at this stage, Professor Nunes knew me. He also knew of my work and work ethics and thus trusted me with this project. Incorporating English into one of his department's ongoing courses seen as a potentially interesting venture.

This was partly because, as he expressed to me, in the current job-market, English is to any graduate in Europe. When discussing with him what the aims of the module were and what

steps had to be taken within the institution, he took responsibility for the experience so that I would not have to wait for all the bureaucratic formalities to get through the system. By agreeing to accept whichever decisions were taken by the course lecturer collaborating with me, no further legalities needed to be taken into account. After our meeting, I registered my satisfaction with what had been achieved in my diary (See Figure 3). It shows how I felt a bit overwhelmed that the project had been so easily

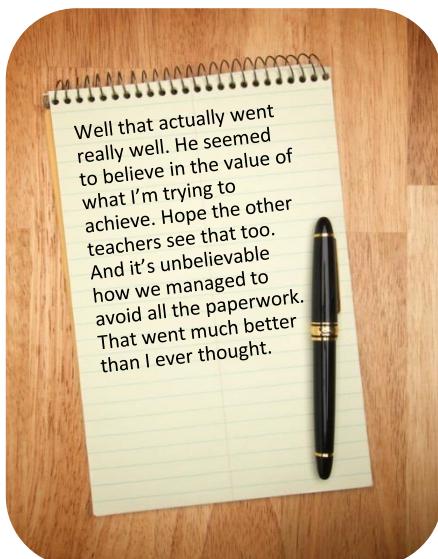


Figure 3 - Diary Entry 11/07/07

understood and supported. I had in fact anticipated many obstacles but was overjoyed at the results of this meeting.

A few people were suggested to collaborate with me on the project and when I went to meet them, and we discussed their course content and how the module might be integrated, we managed to quickly come to consensus on the details. So, contacts were made with Professor Castanheira da Costa for the 1st Cycle and Professor Sílvio Fernandes for the 2nd Cycle. They both liked the idea of integrating b-learning and English writing techniques into their course and in this way I managed to find a class that could be followed from one semester to the next. We agreed on a month for the module and work then began to be more intense with Professor Castanheira da Costa as his course was in the first semester. ‘History of Science and Technology’ is the course he was lecturing.

Gathering data from the interviews with lecturers gave insight into expectations about the module and helped to design the module with parameters that matched the lecturer’s teaching styles and requisites, such as report writing that would be used in many courses in their degree, making this genre an important one to include in the module. Details are explored in the descriptions of the cycles. Before the module began, I also had to take the time to understand how Moodle worked and explore the various possibilities it offered. Online forums gave me different views about how it could be used but it is the hands-on experience that actually counted for me to be able to use the VLE adequately and be able to answer students’ questions when they had queries.

3.2 ARC1

3.2.1 Context

This ARC aimed at developing University of Madeira’s students’ writing skills in English whilst exposing them to a different teaching/ learning method, which they had

not been introduced to yet. These students were presented with Moodle, the learning platform that enabled our classes to be taught through b-learning. This first ARC functioned as an experimental cycle. It served as a basis for my own pilot designs on Moodle and as an opportunity for students to learn how to interact with Moodle.

During this first cycle, the student interaction on-line was a bit of a disappointment for me. It seems students did not fully understand how this module would have been useful to them in the preparation and structuring of essays to hand in for assessment of other courses. This might have led to the limited interaction I observed. Due to the limited student participation, this cycle will be described but will not be as much a focus as it will be in the following cycles. The reflection that often occurs during the preparation and teaching of ARC2 and ARC3 will refer many times back to this cycle as a reference point (in order to try and avoid similar outcomes).

ARC1 was developed within the ongoing subject of ‘The History of Science and Technology’ as an optional part of the module, in the 1st Semester, 2007/2008 (2nd Nov-30th Nov.). Lessons were scheduled on Thursdays and Fridays from 8h30 – 10h30. 267 students were enrolled in the subject and were aware of the introduction of the b-learning module from the start of the school year as it was introduced to them by Professor Castanheira.

Professor Castanheira had already shown me how important he found the writing module was when he defined what he thought about writing in our preliminary interview:

I think it's fundamental. Last year... they were ... I mean their evaluation was based on a report they had to write at the end and this year, it's probably going to be the same thing. Perhaps with something in the middle but essentially it's a written report that they have to hand in so it's very important.'

Later on he further emphasized that he thought:

'they really should understand that writing and explaining their ideas is as important as knowing the science that is behind the things and so on. It's very important.'

Having understood what Professor Castanheira needed his students to learn, we looked at the writing module to ensure our objectives were in unison. Then we looked at the b-learning component of the module and it was plain to see that interaction became the key to all the defined aims. My main challenge was to get the students on-board with the project and ensure that they interacted online. This would ensure they practiced their writing in English and, in turn, learnt how to develop their writing skills and become more confident users of the English language. The versatility and importance of interaction online was constantly in my mind when designing activities online to get the students involved. As Moore (1989) elucidates, interaction takes place on a number of planes, namely, teacher-learner; learner-learner and learner-content. Wagner's perspective (in Bonk, 2006) that 'the perceived quality of a learning experience is directly proportional to and positively correlated with the degree to which that experience is seen as interactive' (p.45) also drove my intent to make the module as interactive as possible to ensure learning.

After verifying that Wagner (1999) perspective is that interaction becomes a strategy for obtaining a specific learning outcome and that interaction aims at participation, communication, feedback, elaboration, learner control and self-regulation, motivation, negotiation, team building, discovery, exploration and clarification (in Bonk, 2006: p.47), the underlying impact of interaction online became the pivotal focus of my b-learning writing module in ARC1. Interaction is obviously a way of participating in the learning experience as the students communicate with each other and with teachers/moderators/experts. It is then the teacher's role, as moderator (Salmon, 2004), to ensure

that students get feedback (van der Kleij et. al., 2012; Hyland and Hyland, 2006) so that effective learning takes place. As reinforcement and feedback occur, so does retention of information (Hyland, 1998). This in turn, leads to higher levels of student motivation. Whilst designing the module and working on a daily basis, I, as a teacher, worked towards the goal of motivating the students to enjoy what they were learning and this influenced how materials and assignments were chosen and designed. Relying on my experience as a teacher, I knew that these students needed contexts that they could identify with to make their learning processes easier. Thus the materials and tasks needed to either report to their own past personal experiences or the students needed to clearly see how the assignments would be useful to them in practice, both academically and professionally. Thus, with the course directives, writing module outline and b-learning prerogatives in sight, this ARC1 was designed and ready to be carried out.

Initial plans had been that I would attend the first class in the term to introduce myself and the module. However that had to be altered as changes were occurring in CELTE that were affecting my PhD. Both my supervisors were leaving the university and I needed to come to the UK to work out what to do and meet possible new supervisors. Due to these circumstances, the induction was carried out by the lecturer of the course as I was unable to attend. This turned out to work to my disadvantage as students saw me as an intruder in their subject. The students did not look kindly upon the extra dimension added to their course perhaps partly because they were not given a full perspective of the advantages of participating in this b-learning writing module.

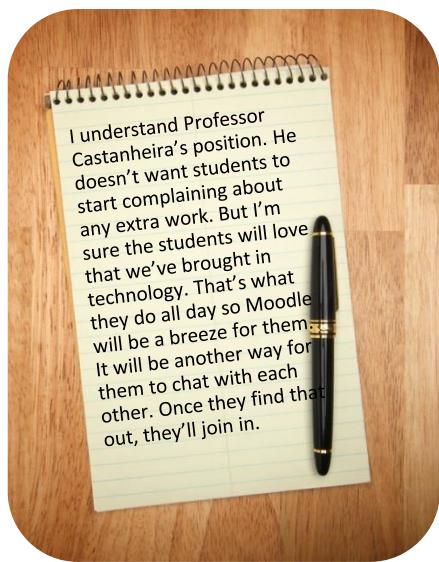


Figure 4 - Diary Entry 05/11/07

I hardly blame anyone, because as circumstances would have had it, the person with the in-depth understanding of the project and who had the most drive and personal interest in the success of this project was me, and I was unable to be there from the beginning to pass on some of my enthusiasm about the project. From my diary entry on the 05/11/07 (Figure 4), I now look back and can

see that I was worried about the way the writing module had been introduced. I was however hopeful that the b-learning component of the module would be, in itself, a motive for students to want to participate. Professor Castanheira had informed the students that this module was not obligatory and this is where the conflict of interests began.

The next period of time to write about was the time that I began teaching the writing module. In our first lesson, the students and I got to know each other in class and the research was revealed to the students.

They were asked if they agreed to their texts and other interactions being used as data for the analysis and they all agreed. Questionnaires were distributed, filled out and handed back to me. Some students asked questions about vocabulary that they did not understand and I explained in English. I heard a few nervous giggles but experience told me this was the initial stage. ‘Students soon get used to speaking and writing in English and the lessons will run smoother’, I thought Figure 5 is the entry to my PhD/AR diary after one of the lessons taught. Doubts had begun looming within the first few lessons

as to why I was encountering so much resistance to the module. At this particular lesson, students had actually questioned whether the module was obligatory, to which I

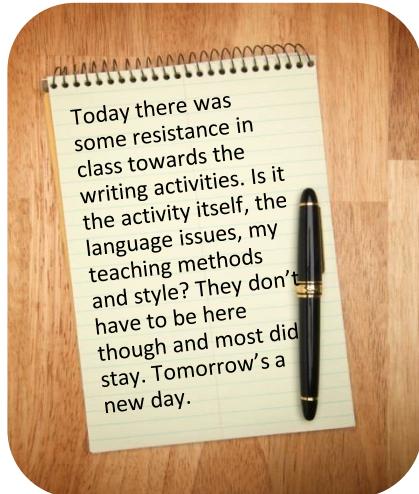


Figure 5 - Diary Entry 09/11/07

had to respond 'no' as this was what they had been told at the beginning of the module. To my response, and to my dismay, a few of the students got up and left the room. As a teacher and reflective researcher, my brain was going through all the options for this reaction.

Besides questioning my teaching methods, choice of materials and activities, observation and reflection, two AR steps, were also occurring in order to make any changes deemed necessary at this stage or for the following ARC.

3.2.2 Writing Module

The objectives of the writing module were defined after preliminary meetings with the lecturer of the subject. Views were expressed about difficulties certain students revealed when writing and Prof. Castanheira had kindly given me a few copies of students' past essays to read and pinpoint problem areas to work on. Prof. Castanheira had expressed the need for the Maths and Engineering students to have more in-depth knowledge of the English Language as they need it for research purposes and for the professional job market later. We also focused on which writing formats and techniques the students would benefit from and would enable them to take more care and get higher grades when writing up reports and essays for assessment.

The b-learning writing module began, within the course of ‘History of Science and Technology’, on the 2nd November and was ongoing until the 30th November. However I continued to work with the students online until the end of term in February, as there were groups of students who were writing their final course essay in English and they requested we work on their writing until they handed in the assignment. Their request pleased me a great deal as it revealed that they were enjoying our work together and saw advantages in continuing to work with me. Figure 6 has an extract taken from my diary where I mention these students’ request. These were however a minority (10 students altogether) when considering how many students were in the class. It was composed of 267 students who were enrolled online.

The writing module began about a month and a half into the semester and the lecturer opted for me to teach it on my own. He went into this lesson to present me to his students after his initial presentation of the module in the first lesson when he had clarified that the module was optional but an important part of the subject, despite not being assessed. The choice to make this module optional was put forward by the course’s lecturer and I saw no reason to oppose his idea. The lecturer needed no added pressures from unhappy students at that particular time in his academic career, as changes were about to occur in the roles he occupied in the university. I, as an aspiring researcher, was under the gullible illusion that this b-learning module would capture all the eager minds in class and they would all participate. This was something new and

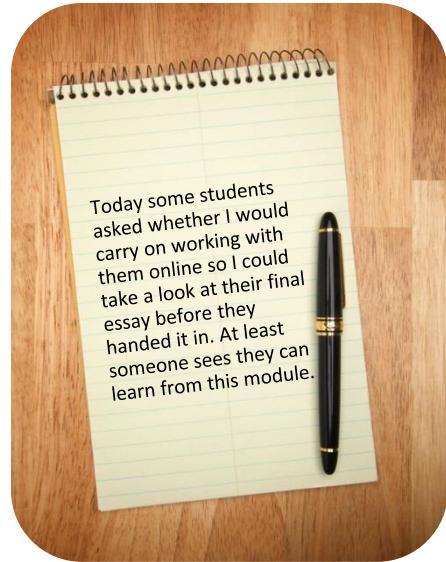


Figure 6 - Diary Entry 29/11/07

exciting and all the students would get on-board. The crash back to reality was quick and harsh. Once, I began to speak in English, I saw eyes rolling and a lot of disengagement occurring. I later realized that my role and the module had not been as well described as I had hoped and the consequences of my absence at the beginning of term was a very important lesson for me to learn. The module occurred over the period of a month with face-to-face classes and online sessions too. My writing module was taught in class and then placed on Moodle and the theoretical information on the history of science and technology was placed online and questions were presented there too.

This module was designed in such a way that students came to face-to-face lessons on Thursdays and had all the materials online and were required to do their self-study on Fridays using Moodle. On Thursdays we dealt with the content related to the writing module and then on Friday they had access to ‘History of Science and Technology’ content matter in pdf files and then were requested to do an activity related to the course and to writing in English. In this way, we found that the students could have access to the materials their lecturer would have used if teaching them normally, but had the added advantage of being able to learn about the course matter and learn some writing techniques too. They thus had the chance to link both and put their writing techniques to practice.

The first lesson focused on students’ perceptions of texts and how they were able to recognize texts by just looking at their formats. We began our discussion on differences between spoken and written language and some linguistic history of both. The texts the students were introduced to were models of different genres such as letters, blogs and biographies. Examples taken from the lesson can be found beneath:

Genres

934 West Dayton Street
Madison, Wisconsin 53715
October 30, 1997

Mr. Jeffrey Peterson
Manager, Electrical Systems, Midwestern Region
2275 Half Day Road
Suite 300
Bannockburn, IL 60015

Mr. Jeffrey Peterson:

Thank you for the interview at the University of Wisconsin-Madison on Thursday October 30, 1997. I particularly appreciate the time you took to explain the differences between Electrical Systems and other companies. Our discussion strengthened my desire to pursue a career with Electrical Systems.

At your request, I have enclosed my senior design project, which includes a design, cost breakdown, and complete thermodynamic analysis of a plutonium-core reactor. I believe that this project is a good representation of not only what I have learned in my Engineering Physics curriculum, but also what I can produce for Electrical Systems.

Thank you for your consideration, and please feel free to contact me with any further questions. I look forward to the prospect of working with you.

Sincerely, Roger Bloom
Roger Bloom

In: <http://www.writing.eng.vt.edu/workbooks/sampleletter.html>

4

Formal Letter

Figure 7 - Lesson ppt on Genres1

October 04, 2007
first impression of Britain

Frankly, it is a bit of surprise to find that Britain is not strange for me. When I was in the kitchen of my dorm, hearing the girls' chatting, I found the content of the conversations were just similar to what I usually chat with friends or classmates in mainland China and Taiwan: such as what novels we are reading, boyfriend, daily trifles, etc. It seems that everything is becoming the same in the world.

I was very lucky that one of my best friend's father had a close British friend, so I could spend time in a British house on my first arrival day. He is really nice. Though we had informed him to pick us up at 5 pm and we then met him around 8pm, he still helped us carry the heavy baggages with smile on his face. Moreover, he tried to speak slower, introducing us some British culture and customs. When we arrived at his house, he made us simple British meal and told us what and how British people usually ate. Before going to sleep, we had a cup of tea and watch T.V. He also gave us a brief introduction of British T.V. programs and how British people mostly thought of it. In the next morning, we met his parents and his mother told us what British people usually eat for breakfast and what kinds of jams; I also tried typical English tea that morning and I thought it was just great~!

He was always smiling, and he drove us to Warwick and made sure that we could live well by ourselves. Before leaving for Warwick, his mother bought us some chocolates and water for our shore trip to the university. I was so lucky to meet them! They are so kind!

Name Surname

I'm so pleased that you had such a great introduction to Britain – it really is lucky to have British friends to take care of you in your first few hours here. I think you will be glad that you wrote down your impressions here too, as I'm sure many of your ideas will change and it will be interesting for you to look back and see what you used to think. However perhaps you have summed up some of the differences between UK and China quite well – maybe the people there are more reserved and less talkative than the British? I am not sure about their culture and history, although that could be changing. Your observations would be good questions to raise with your British Cultural Studies lecturers!

In: http://blogs.warwick.ac.uk/linbying/entry/first_impression_of/

7

Blog

Figure 8 - Lesson ppt on Genres2

They looked at a formal and an informal letter, a resumé, a blog and an online biography. From this point, we were able to distinguish between formal and informal writing and some linguistic and format differences between the two.

For their online assignment, they were requested to read a text and summarise it for the following week. The text is Crystal's 'Speaking of Writing and Writing of Speaking'² which shows them some differences in discourse but is also a good example of how a text can be structured when putting forward different points of view. I then asked them to read the power point presentation related to their course content (Arabs and Science) and choose someone mentioned in the history of science during that period and write up that person's biography. These assignments were done by a few students. They were handed in to me through Moodle or to my University email account. I corrected their work using Track Changes and sent it back to them using their email accounts. This had to be done in this way as the version of Moodle we were using did not allow teachers to upload a corrected version of the student's text so that only he/ she had access to it. We therefore resorted to everyone's university emails.

Figure 9 reflects my thoughts and frustrations when dealing with Moodle. I had expected an online learning platform to have

a way of uploading students' work to one place so all students could access their corrected work. However, this version of Moodle would not allow any of this. The engineer who is responsible for running Moodle and its maintenance also worked on this for a while but we both came to the conclusion that this version of Moodle still had this component to be developed and decided to come up with an alternative solution: I would have to send each student their

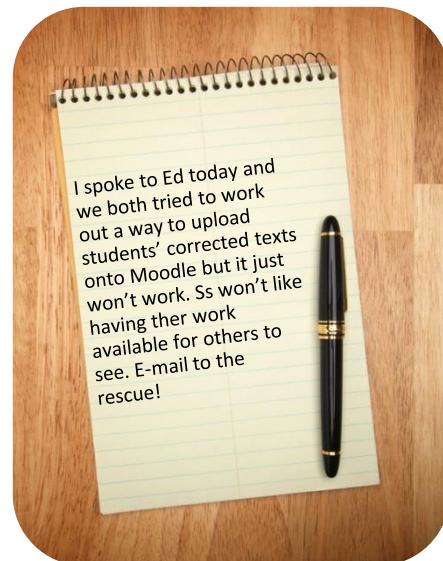


Figure 9 - Diary Entry 13/11/07

² <http://www.pearsonlongman.com/professionaldevelopment/downloads/articles/dictionaries/Speaking-of-writing-and-writing-of-speaking-Crystal.pdf>

corrected text to their email as this was the only way of ensuring that only the author of the work had access to their work and that no other student would be able to see it without their consent.

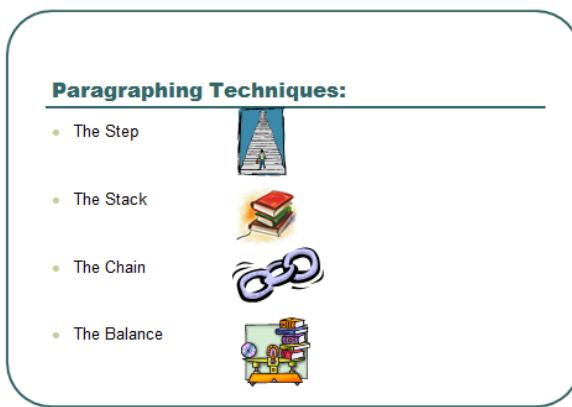


Figure 10 - Lesson ppt on Paragraphing Techniques

Lesson two paid particular attention to paragraph writing techniques and the internal structure of the paragraphs themselves. The paragraphing techniques suggested by Nash (1980) and later further refined by Goatly (2000) were easy to explain and were

understood by the students despite some of their language difficulties. The step, stack, chain and balance are simple notions that can be demonstrated using diagrams and pictures that help students understand their structure. When asked to do the exercises of identifying the techniques used in paragraphs and texts, the students managed to identify the different types and justify why they thought this was the adequate choice for that particular type of text. From here, we were able to go into reflective writing and summarizing. Students were given texts and asked to use one or more of the paragraphing techniques to write up a summary and then reflect about what they chose and how it worked and write a reflective paragraph under their summary. Most students were able to reflect on their choice however there were still a few who didn't quite manage to come to terms with the metacognitive process and still others who chose not to do the task at all.

Once the students had a better grasp of how paragraphs are structured, we were able to go into essay writing in the third lesson, which is much closer to what they are expected to hand in for their final assessment at the end of the term. From the process of essay

writing to the structuring of each part and the formatting of the work to be handed in, students in class showed more attention and interest. It seemed they had an overall notion of how to go about writing their essays but found that pinpointing things such as outlines, abstracts, indexes and bibliography to be quite useful. Note of this was registered in my diary (Figure 12) and notes were also taken from comments students made at the end of the lesson.

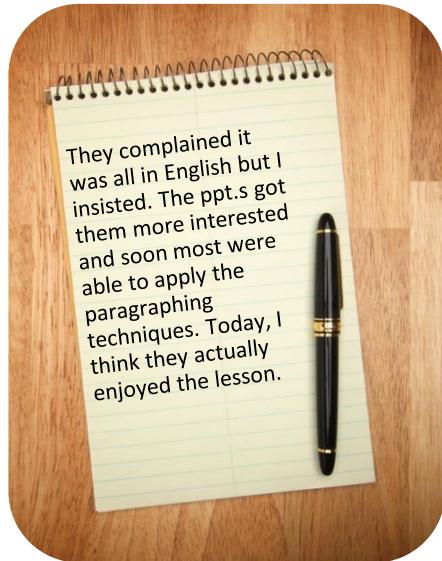


Figure 11 - Diary Entry 15/11/07

different and showed interest in the activities and assignments.

The fourth and final face-to-face lesson was about different types of report writing, namely the structuring of factorial explanations, analytic discussions, lab reports and design proposals. In alternation with these face-to-face lessons, work was ongoing online on Moodle. The forums were stimulated and moderated by me and were picking up gradually. Students were getting to know each other better through this asynchronous

A particular student had expressed that he had enjoyed the lesson as he felt he needed reminding of the essentials of essay writing. These kinds of comments (Figure 11 and Figure 12) come up a few times in my diary as the students would normally start the lesson complaining but towards the end of the lesson, their attitudes were slightly

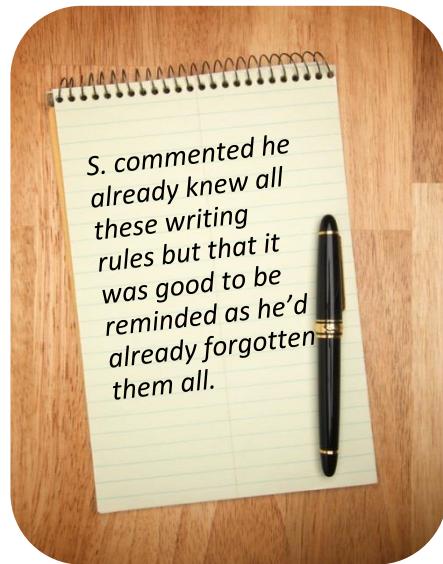


Figure 12 - Diary Entry 22/11/07

online interaction and it was clear to see in class who was interacting online as these students began to sit further forward in the classroom when we had our face-to-face lessons and would stay in a little later at the end to talk to me about certain issues discussed online.

I had a very hard time actually grasping that so many students were not in the least bit curious to get involved with something new. Although I knew that our students will do nothing unless they have to, I somehow, deep down, believed that b-learning would trigger their curiosity and I would be able to get them involved. Looking at the statistics on Moodle, I realise that many students were in fact stimulated to go see what was happening in the module online but they were not sufficiently motivated to do any of the activities or assignments. I believe this was due to their not getting anything back directly or immediately, in the form of a mark for their efforts that would be reflected in the course mark. During one of the conversations we used to have at the end of the lessons, one of my students confessed that he was sorry to not have written anything on the forums, but he felt shy. As happens in many online environments, I had many more passive participants than active ones, as can be seen in the graph below obtained from Moodle. It shows quite a big difference between views and posts. On a monthly basis, both the views and posts had their peak towards the end of November, with a total of 8232 views and 306 contributions.

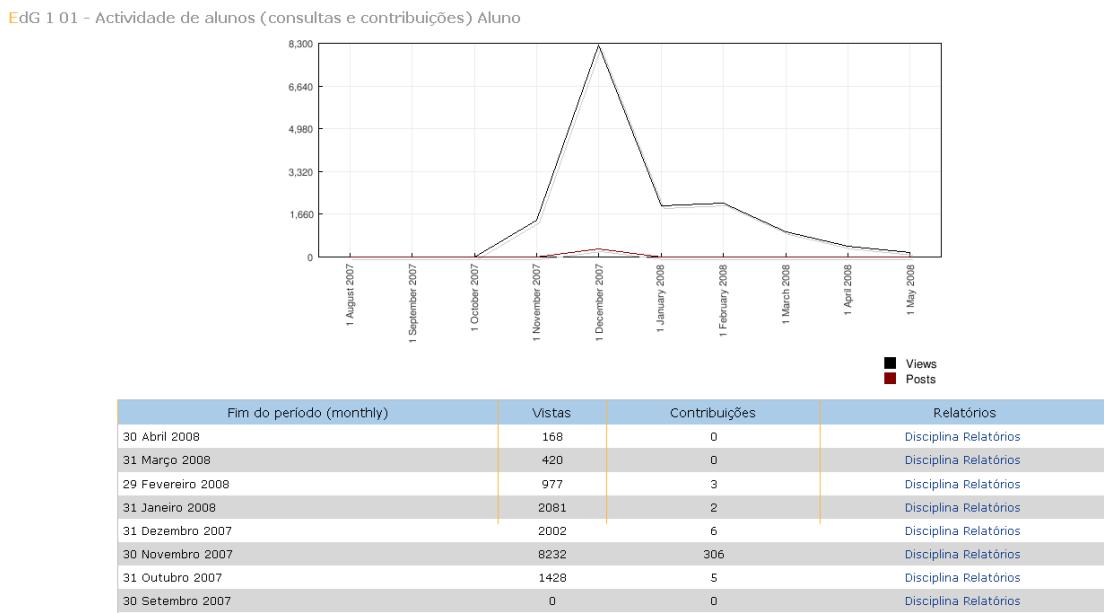


Figure 13 - Moodle Statistics

I also noticed that the few students that did come to classes and interacted online seemed to enjoy themselves and claimed to have learnt things that helped them. In the focus group, one of students stated that '*The module had good and bad parts. It was good to use English as there aren't many opportunities to use English.*' Another student agreed:

English is important in our area as many documents are in English.

(...) Writing in English is more difficult so Moodle is good as it helps us to read and write.

The students that were in this focus group were chosen due to their participation in the online forums and so could report on their b-learning experience. One of the students commented on how he considered it difficult to manage his time and manage the amount of information on Moodle. He was interested in partaking but manifested that he did not manage to because he had not managed to see there was a task online and so he missed the deadline. The students interviewed also said that most students simply did not come to classes due to pure laziness or because the work required from them in the module was all done in English. What the students that participated in the focus group said was that students did not interact online as it was in English and the students did

not want to put in that extra effort and it also took up a bit more of their time. At this point, I had to come to terms with how students viewed the module. Their extra work needed to be compensated with some sort of a reward, especially if the next ARC was to have more student participation.

3.2.3 Collaborative Teaching

For this first ARC, the collaboration was done mostly beforehand and after the module had finished. As Prof Castanheira was interviewed by me at the initial stage of the AR, he was aware of what I aimed to do and why and also passed on his thoughts and considerations about how we could achieve better writing skills with the students. He was very easily brought into the AR frame of mind and kindly gave me time of his subject to integrate my module. This was extremely useful due to his position in the university and how this influenced other people's perceptions of my AR. Prof. Castanheira had been the Rector of the university and is one of the senior members in the Maths and Engineering Department. Having someone of his calibre supporting me made it easier to obtain access to Moodle, as the administrator of Moodle is also part of the same department.

However, I have to also emphasise that despite his openness to trying out Moodle, his very busy schedule and possible unease with new platforms hindered his interaction with the students online. It took a few attempts to get him to actually come up with a few questions about his subject matter to place on the Moodle discussion forums. With me writing on his computer, we put up his questions, to which 3 students answered. He unfortunately did not get back to them and no other students participated on that forum, despite my efforts to get everyone on-board.

After the writing module was completed, some students requested that I continue to work with them on their final writing assignment for History of Science and

Technology and Prof. Castanheira was very in favour of it. He felt that it was a good initiative and would stimulate those students who made the choice to submit their essays in English, alternatively to normally handing in the work in Portuguese, and requested that I continue to aid them as before. Therefore, I remained in touch and worked with some students for another two months and reviewed various stages of their essays before they submitted them for final assessment. These students had more chances to rewrite their work and become more aware of coherence and cohesion (Swain, 1981, 1993, Taboada, 2004) in writing.

For me this ARC was not successful, mostly due to insufficient collaboration between Prof. Castanheira and me, and also due to the voluntary nature of the module. It was also due to the lack of motivation on behalf of our students. As to the first factor, Prof. Castanheira is a very busy man and despite being very easy to approach, I did not want to overload him with my ARC. There is in reality quite a huge hierarchical gap between us and that strongly influences the way in which I approached him about particular concerns that I was having about how the module was being run. He had shown himself to be extremely open to new ideas and was giving me the liberty to do what I thought was best with his students on his time, therefore I felt I needed to find solutions without giving him any extra work in aiding me to solve his students' attitudes towards the module. I did express my concern when students came to the face-to-face lesson, saw me and asked for Prof. Castanheira. On realizing that I would be teaching that lesson, they simply turned around and left the classroom. This happened twice with the same student and Prof. Castanheira seemed concerned but realized that he had made the choice to make the module optional and therefore could now do nothing about this. Figure 14 shows an excerpt taken from my diary on the day that this incident happened.

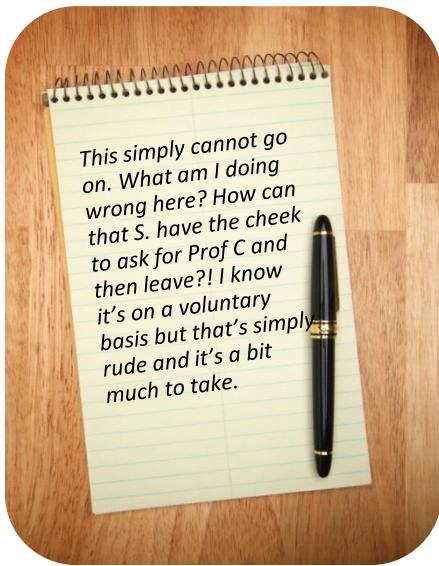


Figure 14 - Diary Entry 15/11/07

To my dismay, nothing I did or said seemed to make a difference with the students that disliked English and they saw the module as a waste of time.

In retrospect, had I been more in touch with Prof. Castanheira in terms of having him in class with me, he may have had more power to influence his students' opinions. I also saw how essential my presence in the first lesson was to work on student expectations and delimit the aims and objectives of the writing module, whilst linking it in with the coursework and assessed work the students need to do. These issues informed my response and changes in the intervention in the next ARC.

3.2.4 Community of Inquiry

This class was quite difficult to get the students on board and develop a community of inquiry. Given that the ARC had not been created with the intent of creating a community of inquiry, it was very interesting to look at this cycle in retrospect and realize that somehow a community had already begun to develop with the students that were engaging in the b-learning perspective of the module. However, I shall devote more space to how communities of inquiry developed in the next ARCs, where it was more relevant, as there are not many examples to draw from during this first cycle.

3.3 ARC2

3.3.1 Context

ARC2 was developed in the 2nd Semester, 2007/8 within the course of 'Rhetoric and Communication', within a class of 300 students. These students were from a variety of courses, namely Maths, Biology, Physics, Economy, Engineering and Arts and

Multimedia. The class was split into two classes due to the sheer number of students that classrooms can cater for. The lessons took place in one of the largest amphitheatres at the university with a capacity for 200 students. An important fact was that many of the students in this module had also participated in ARC1 and extra effort was needed on my behalf to get them more involved and understand the aims and objectives of the writing module so they would participate and not discourage all the other students.

3.3.2 Writing Module

The initial part of the module had to be restructured as I had realized how wrong the module could go if the introduction to it was not clear. This was my major concern, and I took particular care to pass this on to the course lecturer so he could support me in getting the students on-board. Thus, the first lesson was an introduction to ‘Rhetoric and Communication’ which included the writing module in the course syllabus. Assessment was also very clearly defined. This included how the blended part of the course would also be assessed and what they had to do in order to get each part of their mark. (See course syllabus in Appendix 1). We made sure that students understood very clearly what was expected of them and gave them the opportunity to bring in any changes that both parties saw as feasible to the syllabus. All the deadlines were defined whilst explaining how the two components of the course built up to their final assessment.

The research was carefully vindicated to these students and their permission requested to use their texts, their opinions from lessons recorded and data from the questionnaires. They all agreed to the use of this data and were curious about the research and why and how it was being carried out. After having responded to their queries, Prof. Silvio and I proceeded to justify how important it was for this module to be integrated into their course. It seemed they began to see why this was being done and how they could actually benefit from this experience. The students were then introduced to Moodle in

their very first lesson, as I had previously gathered from focus groups and class observation that many students had not participated in ARC1 due to lack of knowledge as to how Moodle worked. Despite having questioned ARC1 students about their Moodle knowledge and if they had successfully registered during the previous semester, none of the students openly communicated their inability to logon before. In ARC 1, as the students were given the option to participate or not, I only discovered at the end of ARC1 through the focus groups that some students hadn't managed to register and that was the reason why some had not participated online. This time, I was not prepared to accept that as an excuse for the failure of yet another ARC and for the students' inability to participate in this learning experience. Therefore, Moodle and the course registration were clearly illustrated step by step, with Moodle screenshots on ppts. Additionally, I also unraveled all the various functions of Moodle that would be used throughout the module. These included examples of the logon page, chats, forums, news, how to access class content and assignments.

Lesson two gave way to the continuation of the content that had been taught in the previous writing module, in ARC1, as some students had already partaken in the previous module or had access to all the materials and assignments previously taught. Thus we began the lesson with Argumentative techniques and writing. This lesson gave the students a notion of different types of arguments and required that they were able to identify premises in different arguments. They also had to develop their own premises, when given a situation and had to justify the validity of it. As an aid to argumentative thinking, McQuail's 'communication processes' was introduced to them, both in Portuguese and English. The aim was to give them the vocabulary in English and enhance the collaboration going on in the subject, so relevance of everything taught was enhanced. From the excerpt taken from my diary (Figure 15), it is clear that this lesson

left me feeling a lot more optimistic about the possible outcomes of this module. Students were more participative and showed they were enjoying the work.

Lesson three brought in the Aristotelic Rhetoric as another aid to the students' thoughts on argumentative writing. We continued to focus on communication and argumentation by doing exercises on identifying types of arguments that

were already constructed and by adding arguments to texts that needed validity. In terms of language engagement, students were given sentence connectors to use depending on the type of argument they were constructing and asked to use them as a means to make their premises as clear as possible.

Lesson four focused on the Fallacies of Logic by Shapiro. Students were guided into understanding how misleading language can sometimes be. Grasping fallacies does need students to possess higher English language skills and despite their difficulties, students enjoyed their exercises and were very active in discussing the arguments. At this point, they were introduced to media communication.

This led to communication models and advertising on diverse media in lesson five. This lesson gave the students a broad perspective of the evolution of advertising as analysis of adverts was taking place. We looked at diverse examples that portrayed the times the advert was made whilst looking at cultural and societal factors. Logos, Ethos and Pathos were introduced as a means to add to the students' understanding and facilitate their exploration when they were analysing the adverts.

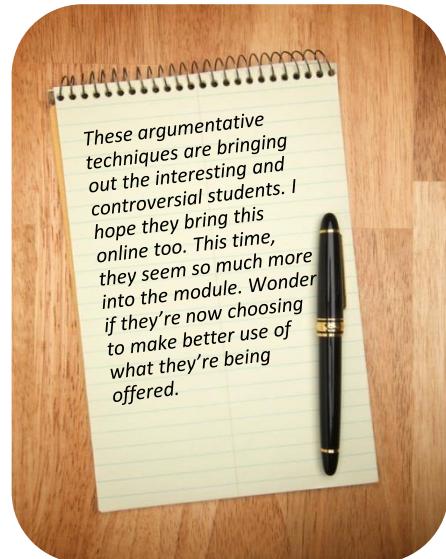


Figure 15 - Diary Entry 22/02/08

The last lesson in this writing module gave continuation to the analysis of adverts with particular emphasis on giving the students a deeper perspective of online advertising. Persuasion as an advertising technique was looked into. Critical analysis of adverts was the aim of this lesson and their knowledge of stylistic devices was put to good use during this lesson. When focusing on online advertising, we questioned the differences between traditional advertising and that done on diverse media. We looked at models of different ads and various advertising techniques used online with the objective of getting their target audience engaged and interacting with their ads. As a final attempt at drawing in on collaborative work, we helped students realize what they had to work on for their class presentations. All this was also done in English. I helped Prof. Silvio to get his students prepared for their presentations and we also gave the students knowledge of English terms for the diverse steps of the preparation for presentations for final assessment. Online researching skills were a major part of their development allowing me to draw in more aspects of the blended part of their learning process.

3.3.3 Collaborative Teaching

As previously mentioned, a few things needed to be changed in ARC2 in order to overcome some of the problems encountered in ARC1. The other major difference in this course was how Prof. Silvio and I interacted in all the lessons. We both went to all the lessons and taught both our contents alternately in each lesson. This brought about collaboration on a regular basis and not only was this going on behind the scenes but the students were also confronted with a ‘united front’.

Our collaboration began with an interview to gather Prof. Silvio’s perceptions of writing, as I had done with other lecturers too. We then had a meeting whereby we discussed in general terms, the content of his course and my intentions with the blended-learning writing module. Having come to the conclusion that he would indeed

like to participate in this ARC, we began planning our lessons in much more detail. We had to have meetings at least twice a week to prepare the slides for each lesson and avidly discussed how to link the two contents that we were aiming to get across to the students. We needed to ensure that students did not get caught in situations of misunderstanding course core content due to the switching of languages from Portuguese to English or vice versa and that we safeguarded through meticulous lesson plans. This however was not an impediment to our constant interaction throughout the lessons and maintaining his use of Portuguese and mine of English. At those moments however, more care was taken to ensure all notions were clearly put across to students by asking them if everything had been understood and if they were following us. In an interview a student shared his view on the matter.

Jane: Yes of course. As to that, how did you feel having lessons that were in 2 languages... 2 different codes... as sometimes we switched from one to the other.

Student: I think it was better.

Yes it was

It was like falling asleep and then awakening.

This student seems to be trying to explain how easy it is for students to drift in class. The concentration spans of students within these age-groups (18 to 41 years old) in class can last up to 20 minutes, however the codes were switched in class at smaller intervals to keep the momentum and keep students' interest and focus. I obviously wondered which language may have been causing the student to fall asleep and, in this particular case, he put across that English was the fresh air that stimulated him.

In relation to collaboration online, nothing was ever placed online without Prof. Silvio and I discussing it beforehand. However, the person to place content, assignments and activities online was me. During our meetings, Prof. Silvio would try to get to grips

with how Moodle worked and we would open the site in his office and go through the diverse elements that had been placed online. Towards the end of the term, I had to come to Warwick and Prof. Silvio found he needed to place some news on Moodle for his course and, to my surprise, he actually accessed the page and put up the news, with the help of our Moodle administrator. This showed me that he had begun to appreciate the immediacy of Moodle as a tool to contact students.

These events were inevitably part of my reflections in my diary (See Figure 16), as it

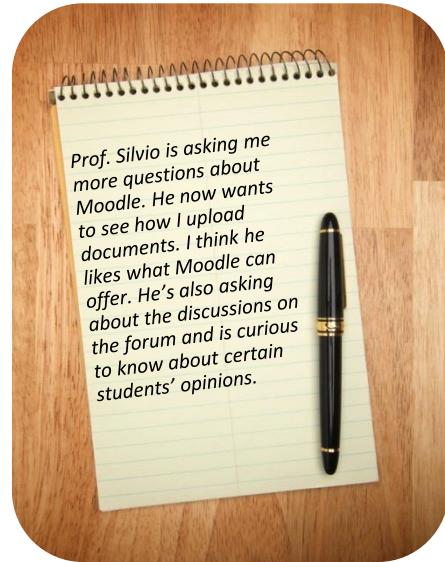


Figure 16 - Diary Entry 17/06/08

was very rewarding to see how a teacher who considers himself quite computer illiterate was changing his views about the use of computers and b-learning for teaching. This collaboration ran smoothly due to our ease in adapting to each other's teaching styles and methods. Our meetings flew by because we felt that we could both learn from each other; I could learn from Professor Silvio's years of teaching experience and knowledge and he could learn some English and how b-learning worked on Moodle.

When the time came to put up marks, he requested that I place them on Moodle instead of putting them up on the departmental placards in the university corridors as was usually done. In conversation, he admitted to seeing many advantages of b-learning, yet he still thinks that there must be more to the teaching method and that this will not be the only way forward in education. There was still some resistance to technology but his gradual acceptance of it as a teaching tool was obvious. In the following semesters, I realized that he continued to work with Moodle for his other courses, as he was

requesting help from the Moodle administrator to create a space for his courses and put up his content over the next years. Despite this not being blended learning as such, his initiative, to me, is an enormous step forward and an accomplishment in our efforts to collaborate.

3.3.4 Communities of Inquiry

In this ARC, communities of inquiry took shape, despite it not being one of my explicit objectives or making any efforts for one to form. Only after the ARCs did I realize that CoI had been taking shape and its components are looked into in detail in the analysis chapter. This section shall simply provide a brief overview of the development of this community from a grounded perspective (Corbin and Strauss, 1990; Glaser, 2002).

Before actually beginning to place content online, I launched an ice-breaker on Moodle as a way for the students to develop the habit of going online and start getting used to looking through and interacting on Moodle. It was also a means for the students to get to know each other slightly better. This activity got a very good response and I later realized that this activity was the initial creation of a CoI. Social presence had begun to develop. Students in the focus groups referred to this activity as interesting and essential to their subsequent online interaction.

With the objective of getting students to develop their confidence in writing in English, online forums with themes that were closer to students' experiences were launched. This, I later realised, is when cognitive presence began to be worked on. At first, only a few forums were launched so students did not feel overwhelmed with too many posts. Soon after however, I had students who took the initiative of requesting to open up threads on issues they thought would be interesting. The CoI was being solidified throughout their interaction in these forums. Students began to lose their inhibitions to post messages on the forums in English and soon we had a large number of students

participating on a daily basis. Yet another accomplishment had been made when compared to ARC1, much to my personal and professional satisfaction.

By placing the lesson contents online as well as various assignments and activities, students were accessing Moodle with greater regularity and with different objectives, every time they went online. The interaction that occurred online between students or between students and the lecturer occurred a lot more often than if they had only had traditional lessons. Teaching presence was an effective and constant one at this stage online. These asynchronous interactions took place through forums, messages and emails.

In this way, and without being conscious of the terms or concepts at that time, a CoI had been created and all its components were developed without any intended manipulation of the interactions to create a CoI. As a teacher and moderator, my aims were clear; these students needed help to overcome some problems when writing in English and b-learning was the key to motivate them to acquire knowledge and develop their skills and take more responsibility for their learning experience.

3.4 ARC3

3.4.1 Context

This cycle was composed of two classes. One was English A1 and the other was English B2.2. These classes had different levels of English and thus the content being taught in the writing module was altered according to students' needs and skills. In this section, we shall look at English A1 first and then the B2.2 course.

English A1 had 25 students enrolled in it and they belonged to the degree of Primary School Teachers and they belonged to the Department of Education. The level of English to be expected from this class is beginners, yet the class actually has a mixture

of students with very different levels of competence in English, varying from 9 years to 1 year of English at school.

English B2.2 had 20 students enrolled and these students were getting a degree in English and Business Studies, from the department that I work for: The English and German Studies Department. Their English level is considered intermediate.

3.4.2 Writing Module

The previous two cycles enabled me to narrow down on what actually worked for the classes and this ARC was much simpler to prepare. There was some repetition of materials and tasks and where necessary, adaptation to the students' needs and interests. For example, the argumentative writing techniques were linked to the English B2.2 set reading, which was The Day of the Triffids and this then became their 4th writing assignment.

Both these classes had an initial session where they were introduced to Moodle and they began to interact online before we even began the writing module so as to get them motivated to use Moodle. This was done right at the beginning of the term, when they were introduced to the subject syllabus, to their lecturer and to the module and myself. The integrated module and language course was explained and they were given all the assessment guidelines, assignment deadlines and pre-requisites for accessing Moodle. The writing module was introduced about half-way through the term so we were already interacting online for about a month before content was introduced to them.

Their interaction online was slow initially but most students participated actively and interacted with interest online. With these students, the forums were narrowed down to the ones that had had more participation in the previous ARCs. This decision was made because the classes were smaller and it was also an attempt to deepen knowledge in a few areas rather than have a broad spectrum of issues. The forums opened included the

successful initial game where the students introduced themselves to each other but included a lie in their descriptions that had to be spotted by their classmates. The other forums were entitled Books, Current Issues, Hobbies and Open Forum. The Open Forum was the one that got most interaction and the issues that students chose to discuss included Travelling, Friendship, Racism and Discrimination, Business, Obesity and Anorexia and Life at UMa.

The English A1 F2F lessons began with an introduction to spoken and written language and we looked at the aims of both, their differences and similarities. We then looked at various genres, whereby these were introduced through models of texts. Students were required to identify the texts simply by looking at their form at first and then identifying the details in the forms that make them different. This class then went onto summaries and descriptions. They had an online task which was to describe an image of Vladimir Putin, who at the time was on the news quite often, so the students would be familiar with this public figure. The description was of an elementary level and some vocabulary of people description had been run through in class. Links to sites that helped with descriptions had also been placed on Moodle for them to access if need be.

The next lesson paid more attention to paragraph writing and the structure of an essay in general. We looked at paragraphing techniques and students were requested to identify various techniques in model texts. Their online assignment was related to their obligatory class reading: the short story ‘Embroidery’. Students were asked to summarise the short story, identify the paragraphing techniques of various paragraphs. Report writing was also looked into and this was part of their assessed writing for this module. At the end of their report, students were asked to write a reflective paragraph about what paragraphing techniques they used and why.

The next lesson led the class into essay writing, the whole process of how to go about researching for essay writing and its structure and format. The students then went onto outlining, abstract writing and compiling bibliographic references. Finally this class was given a brief introduction to argumentative writing and sentence connectors.

English B2.2 was given more intensive and complex assignments as their skills in English were of a higher level. However, this class was not as hardworking and as motivated as the previous class. This class also began by looking at the origins of writing and explored spoken and written language. Writing genres were presented to them and they were required to identify the different genres from the format. This class also had a larger array of models. Their online assignment was to write up a letter of application for a job. The job advert was provided on Moodle and their work was later uploaded for me to mark. This class also had an optional task to do which was a summary.

The next lesson focused on paragraphing techniques and the initial exercises were the same as all the other classes. After looking at texts taken from ‘Time’ magazine and

identifying and justifying the paragraphing techniques, they were given the task of summarizing another ‘Time’ article. At this point, they were also requested to do some reflective writing about their summary. The students were requested to define which paragraphing techniques they used and to justify why they chose that option.

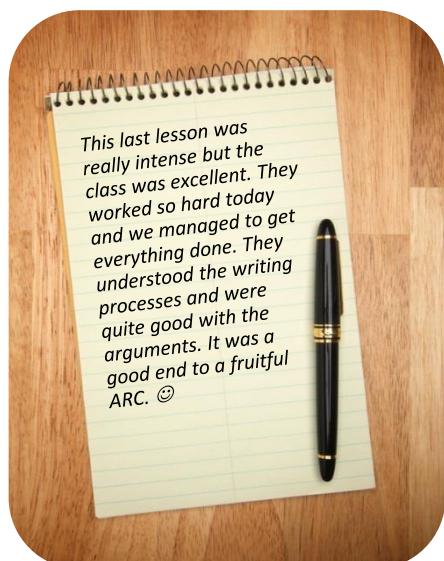


Figure 17 - Diary Entry 03/07/08

This class’s last lesson was quite an intense one as I wanted to cover everything that had been done by other classes but introduce

some new elements too. My diary entry (Figure 17) indicates how thrilled I was at getting through so much work in one lesson. We began with essay writing, its process, format and structure. This was followed by broad notions about academic writing and then looked at abstracts in more detail. We looked at the importance and structure of indexes and bibliographies. Argumentative writing then followed and we analysed various texts using different types of arguments and how they were structured. Students then were given sentence connectors to help them when they were building arguments into their various assignments.

3.4.3 Collaborative teaching

Professora Dominique Castanheira da Costa was very accessible and easy to work with. I had interviewed her at the very beginning of my research in order to identify what she thought were the major problems in writing. Therefore, hers was one of the interviews that helped shape my ARCs. She had been part of my whole study since the beginning and she was keen to allow me into her modules. Meetings were held before her courses began and she said I could integrate my module into both the language courses that she was teaching. This gave me a broader public with different levels of English with which to work.

Our meetings took place for us to work on the division of our lessons and how the marks would be subdivided with my writing module. The percentages used in ARC2 had worked well and the students had found it fair and so the same ones were adopted for this ARC.

Prof. Dominique had preferred to intersperse her lessons with mine. Therefore I only saw these students once a week despite them having 2 hour long English lessons twice per week. This worked fine for both of us and for the students too as this managed to

keep them motivated with something different in each lesson. Our fear was that they may get contents confused due to the changes but they were fine with it and followed both her classes and mine too.

As to what refers to online collaboration, I unfortunately could not get Prof. Dominique to interact or participate on Moodle at all. Although I think she realized the potential of using Moodle, she is simply not particularly interested in computers and this was made very clear to me at the beginning.

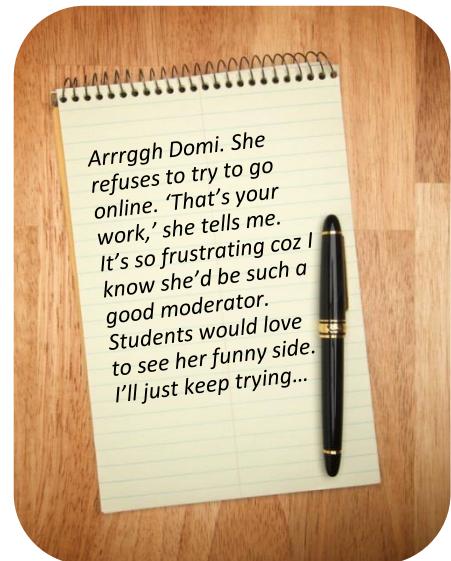


Figure 18 - Diary Entry 23 / 06/2008

3.5 Post-ARCs

This section will bring together some of the opinions from all the ARCs expressed by students about their experience during the ongoing ARCs. After each ARC, interviews and focus groups were held with the students in order to reassert their opinions about the b-learning writing module. Some field notes and diary entrances will also be discussed.

The most valuable sources of information on the students' opinions about the module came from the focus groups and a questionnaire that was distributed at the end of the module. The focus groups were more effective than the individual interviews as the students drew opinions out of each other, as different ideas were triggered. The students were very helpful and I think they felt intrigued by the idea of being part of my research.

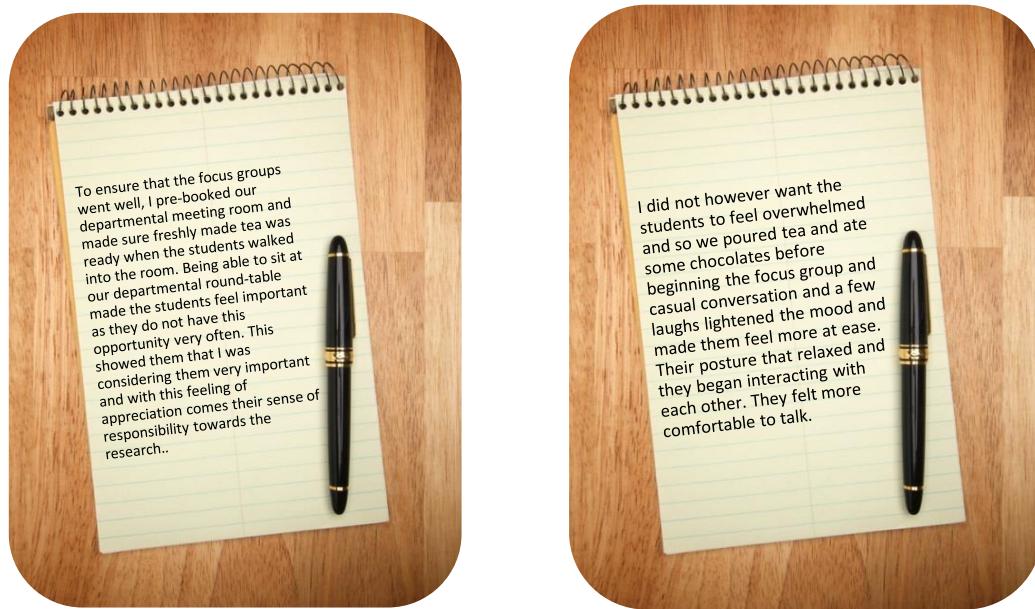


Figure 19 - Diary Entry 13/ 03/2008

Opinions that were repeated throughout the focus groups and interviews were linked to what they liked or disliked about Moodle and how they related to the writing module. “*We felt flooded by all the emails from Moodle.*” was one of the comments that was most made. At the beginning students received an email every time someone wrote on a forum and as we had several ongoing forums running simultaneously, the emails did in fact flood our inboxes. Some students unchecked the email notifications but it seems most did not.

Another recurrent comment was related to the tasks, which they found easy and they liked the use of track changes in the corrections of their assignments. They understood the corrections and were able to identify their own mistakes. Students reported on the ice-breaker on Moodle: “*We had a lot of fun with the initial ice-breaking activity, when we had to describe ourselves and also tell a lie*”. They claimed that they got to know each other a little bit better and that it was a nice way to start talking to each other online. The students were able to see how informal tasks enabled them to ease into practicing language skills. They mentioned how writing in English was useful as they

otherwise would never have this practice. They also explained that they understood how this experience was enriching yet did not try to motivate their colleagues who did not participate. This seemed to be a cultural issue. Nobody wants to meddle with their colleague's choices and although those that participated could see the advantages in doing so, they felt they shouldn't try to coerce colleagues into Moodle.

From the focus groups, I understood that it took students a while to get used to Moodle and that it wasn't as user-friendly as they would have liked it to be. There were aspects on Moodle that overwhelmed them with information. The emails were one particular aspect that almost everyone mentioned as negative and they felt that it became very time consuming. It also became clear that they hadn't participated in ARC1 because:

it wasn't obligatory and partly because I didn't find any interest in doing it. But this semester, as it was obligatory, I had to go see it but then I began to go with interest.

From this quotation, what began as an obligation then was done with interest. Another reason for lack of participation was laziness. The students mentioned that some colleagues just couldn't be bothered to try Moodle. Sadly, I think they were right but it was still a surprise to hear them be so honest about it. Yet it was encouraging to notice that once the students started engaging, they developed genuine interest in being a part of the learning experience and contributed to its development.

The students demonstrated that being able to contact and interact with their teachers was another aspect that made this an enriching experience. Asynchronous interaction was valued as a positive component of b-learning:

Yeah I think so. I think that if we could ummm... speak and have a chat with the teacher and the other colleagues about all the subjects, it's very good for us because sometimes we have some ... mmm... questions and we don't have time to come to the lessons. I think it's a good way.

From this excerpt, the role of the expert is seen as very helpful. Moodle is viewed as an alternative to F2F lessons and as a means of catching up on course content. Interaction with colleagues was also seen as useful. This can be seen in the last questionnaire, when the students answered the question: ‘Which part of the module did you find most useful?’ Some of the responses were:

- It’s the forum, we can all socialise.
- The forums because it was a space where we could meet other colleagues that attended this module.

Other responded to this question with the content or the language in mind:

- Bibliography because I had trouble memorising the order of the information we’re supposed to write.
- English because it is the most common language in science.
- Organisation because it helps me in the future organisation of my work.
- The essay structure because it is important for all the essays we’ll have to do during our course.

All participants in the focus groups reacted positively about having developed their English language skills and that the module helped them with their writing skills too. In relation to the language, one student shared his perspective:

I can tell you that just because we spend about 10 minutes daily, which many times I spent more than that ... to read the answers that we had or that were launched on the forums... just because it was in English although sometimes we were able to see that it was badly written... it helped a lot. It was like spending an afternoon watching a film without subtitles.

As a practitioner researcher, gathering data that validates my impression that a learning experience has been enriching is positive. It was an indication that the right route is being followed. Nevertheless, and as anyone who endears to be a better professional knows, there is always room for improvement. These ARCs opened the way to the

introduction of b-learning into my language classrooms and the reflective process has reinforced my teaching methodologies as I continue exploring this field and finding ways to enrich the students' learning experience.

4 Literature Review

In this chapter, the literature on academic descriptions and depictions of my research themes are broached. It is subdivided into sections on b-learning, e-learning and writing. When exploring b-learning, its components, design and the main reasons for its implementation are discussed. B-learning is explored prior to the Communities of Inquiry (CoI) in this chapter as this research initially focused on B-learning and only at a later stage did CoI begin to play a role in the research project. B-learning was the platform for CoI to develop. CoI, interaction and netgenerers are viewed within the b-learning framework and how they contribute to the development of enriching learning and teaching practices is discussed. The importance of multimodality and how diverse intelligences can be embraced through the different media that are currently available is discussed when looking into the favourable aspects of b-learning. The challenges of b-learning are similarly discussed the next section in this chapter is on writing. It expands notions about teaching writing methodologies and writing models, such as process writing and genre approach, which provide the framework for the writing module and how it was designed.

As an introduction to this chapter, an overview of the impact technology has played on education and how it has been perceived by scholars over the past few years is provided. Technology in education has brought about role changes of all its participants, both inside and outside the classrooms. Teachers have become seen more as facilitators and lessons became student-centred, especially as education began to also take place outside the classroom when aided by technology and all the gadgets that allow the educational process to be extended beyond the classroom walls. Instructional Technology has been defined by The Association for Educational Communications and Technology (AECT) as:

the theory and practice of design, development, utilisation, management and evaluation of processes and resources for learning³

but is considered far too inclusive by Garrison and Anderson (2003). He considers this view very general as the definition does not give the reader a clear perception of the role technology plays in education. Thus a more exclusive definition is adopted by this author:

those tools used in formal education practice to disseminate, illustrate, communicate, or immerse learners and teachers in activities purposively designed to induce learning (p.34).

Alongside this notion of technology in education, the understanding of E-learning was also evolving. E-Learning has been defined as

the delivery of learning / training using electronically based approaches – mainly through the internet, intranet, extranet or web. The terms m-learning/ m-training are emerging with the ‘m’ denoting ‘mobile’ for wireless technology using mobile telephones (Sloman, 2001: p.5).

This view is currently slightly outdated due to the constant development and dissemination of technology and m-learning seems to be taking technology and education down a new route with PDAs, iPads, iPods, iPhones, Smartphones, Kindles, the ever so popular podcasts, RSS (Really Simple Syndication) and Apps.

The current perceptions of how technology influences education has been explored by Salmon (2003) who cites Hung and Wong (2000) to illustrate how recent research has shown that what is important is the promotion of ‘robust and usable knowledge through engaging learners in authentic tasks and situations’ (p.4). This notion seems particularly simple but essential to keep in mind when teaching online. Salmon’s persistence on the importance of designing and creating e-tivities is pivotal to the effectiveness of learning,

³ In http://aect.site-ym.com/?page=computer_impact&hhSearchTerms=%22the+theory+and+practice+of+design%22

due to interest and motivation, lies on how the tasks are designed. She also focuses on the difficulties of effectiveness due to costs, time and overall know-how. Salmon gives very practical examples of implemented courses that are taken into account when designing my module.

About 15 years ago, Smalley was already making reference to various elements that he considered essential in CALL (Computer Assisted Language Learning): word-processing, desktop publishing, databases, electronic mail and games. Nowadays our concern has shifted to learning communities, the roles of facilitators/ moderators, collaborative learning, social and cognitive presence of learners and teachers. Looking at the following authors, we realise how the experts have altered their views of the learning environment as experience has been gathered in the field. Garrison and Anderson (2003), Garrison et. al. (2004), Garrison and Cleveland-Innes (2005), Garrison and Vaughan (2008), who focuses on b-learning, is a great advocate for learning communities, demystifying how shifts in perspective and role changes of all the participants in the learning process influence the development from e-learning to b-learning. Focus on the different activities that learning can benefit from, with the use of computers, and how roles shift in the learning process are Salmon's (2000, 2002, 2004) focus. Scrimshaw (1993, 2004), McCormick and Scrimshaw (2001) reveals his developing understanding of the role of collaboration amongst learners working with computers as well as how teachers shift from leaders to facilitators as our understanding for computer mediated learning becomes more acute. Notions such as cooperative and team learning are discussed by Slavin (1980, 1988, 1996) and Calverly in Seale (2003) refers to other very important points such as e-learning: interoperability and reusability. Learner autonomy is referred to by Beatty (2003) as another element of growing interest. As can be seen from this brief section, there are a few elements that have been

highlighted as integral parts of b-learning and that triggered the interest in it. Thus, the transition to CoI can now be viewed under a critical light of development from E-learning to B-learning.

4.1 B-learning

B-learning is at the core of this thesis as the aim is to use it to improve pedagogy with EFL students in the University of Madeira. To understand all these sections, it is fundamental to understand b-learning and the development it has been undergoing in the last decades. Therefore this section compares various definitions of b-learning that have changed and evolved over the years. The definitions culminate with current views of those using and studying b-learning to teach. Focus is given to b-learning affordances and the importance of design. Interaction is an equally crucial element of b-learning that is explored with the intent of facilitating the understanding of CoI, which is the section that follows within this chapter.

Blended Learning is currently a controversial term, as some authors refer to this notion as something innovative and others claim that there is absolutely nothing new to it. One thing cannot be denied: the term has been coming up much more lately due to the importance education has been giving to computer mediated teaching and learning. Many universities and companies are resorting to b-learning to launch new courses or research centres, such as BLU at the University of Hertfordshire. In the USA, the Next Generation Learning Challenges (NGLC) offered a grant to The American Association and State Colleges and Universities (AASCU) to develop blended learning, namely to develop strategies for blended course design and delivery⁴ and Griffith University has developed a Good Practice Guide for Blended Learning due to being a part of Innovative Research Universities in Australia.

⁴ From the Red Balloon Project in <http://aascuredballoonproject.wordpress.com/2011/04/07/aascu-ucf-receive-grant-for-blended-learning-implementation/>

B-learning is seen as ‘combinations of face-to-face and technology based learning’ (Stubbs et. al., 2006: p.163). This is one of the most simplistic views of what is currently commonly understood when the term is used as it reduces b-learning to two of its most obvious components without considering any of its more complex characteristics. Sharma (2007) also sees b-learning as a combination between ‘face-to-face classroom components with an appropriate use of technology’ (p.7). This seems to be quite a subjective point of view, as appropriacy can be understood differently by people depending upon their computer literacy. Some of the definitions and explanations or understandings of b-learning that arise are contested but have helped define blended learning and its evolution through time. The following definitions are an agglomeration of terms that the authors below used and are grouped according to their similarities in choice of lexis when describing b-learning. They demonstrate an evolution from a more simplistic view of “a+b=b-learning” to a more encompassing and detailed perspective. B-learning was initially seen, and is referred to by Graham, Allen and Ure (2003), as “‘combining instructional modalities (or delivery media)’ (Bersin and Associates, 2003; Orey, 2002; Singh and Reed, 2001; Thomson, 2002) and ‘combining instructional methods’ (Driscoll, 2002; House, 2002; Rosett, 2002).’ Simultaneously, some researchers were looking at b-learning as a combination of traditional methods and technological aids: “‘combining online and face-to-face instruction’ (Reay, 2001; Rooney, 2003; Sands, 2002; Ward and La Branche, 2003; Young, 2002); ‘combinations of face-to-face and technology-based learning’ (Stubbs et. al., 2006, p.163) and ‘combining face-to-face instruction with computer mediated instruction’ (in Bonk and Graham, 2006: p.4-5). Jones et. al. (2007) clarified that although, at times, b-learning was seen as the link between traditional classroom learning and teaching and e-learning, it then was viewed more as a combination of a

diversity of approaches. Lately the importance of the design of the teaching and learning experience has been more focused on and b-learning is seen as ‘the thoughtful fusion of face-to-face and online learning experiences’ (Garrison and Vaughan, 2008: p.5). Emphasis is then given to the design process in b-learning as it demands consideration of the ‘properties and possibilities’ (p.6) of face-to-face and online environments given that together they ‘go beyond the capabilities of each separately’ (p.6). Reynolds and Greiner (2006) defines the integration of b-learning as meaning:

From traditionally on-site classes with limited blending material to the blending of online resources into on-site classes and finally the blending of on-site activities (field experiences) into online instruction (in Bonk and Graham, 2006: p.216).

Vignare (2007) also stressed the value of redesign when he defined b-learning as ‘the integration of online with face-to-face teaching in a planned, pedagogical, valuable manner’ (in Picciano and Dziuban, 2007: p.38). These last few perspectives of b-learning are more in unison with those of this research as a great deal of thought was put into the redesigning of the module so students would be able to interact with each other whilst engaging with the English language and the content of their course simultaneously, adding a dimension of CLIL to the research.

From the definitions above one can see how b-learning is seen through different perspectives. Initially seen simply as a combination of methods, of technology and traditional classes and then later, b-learning is seen as the redesigning of contents so as to achieve effective learning. Teachers apply many methods during their classes and this can also be interpreted as blended learning by some. In the last definitions listed above however, the perspective changes slightly. Masie (in Bonk and Graham, 2006) expounds that towards the end of the 1990s,

the training field popularized the term blended-learning to refer to the mixture of e-learning and classroom learning. Many people started to use it as a way of addressing what they perceived to be the structural weaknesses of e-learning at that time, mainly in its limited ability to foster interaction, context and remediation (p.22).

Masie saw b-learning as a means to an end that would overcome problems with e-learning. Despite years of existence and various attempts to get participants to engage more in e-learning, there were still elements that needed addressing. The lack of human interaction was a strong hindrance to the development of e-learning and thus its structural weakness was focused on. Many teachers using technology were conscious of the need to tap into engagement to enhance students' critical thinking (Palloff and Pratt, 2005; Garrison and Vaughan, 2008; Wilson, 2008). However not all teachers or academics see things through this perspective, as can be seen in the example that follows.

During a workshop in 2007 with David Little, at the University of Warwick, I heard him say that nothing that is said about b-learning should be believed. When questioned by me, he manifested his irritation at the literature that is being written now about b-learning and how people are trying to pass it on as something new and innovative. He questioned whether students didn't always have class work and homework to do, insinuating the blended aspect of teaching methods to be present here. He clearly was of the opinion that teachers do blend methods in class and students always have worked with many sources and had different modalities of learning. He plainly believes that this term brings nothing new to the educational realm.

Nonetheless, interest in b-learning seems to have been developing and such simplistic views are now not considered due to more research being done on it. Ginns (2006) explains how b-learning came about: 'In the last 10 years (...) universities have

perceived a growing need to incorporate information and communication technologies into their offerings' (p.55). Sir Howard Newby, chief executive of the HEFCE claimed that:

In hindsight it was clear that online learning on its own was not as popular as predicted and there had been a number of e-learning failures in the U.S.. What students wanted was 'blended' learning where online materials were backed up by conventional teaching (2004; in Connolly, et. al., 2006: p.142).

With the pressing need to add more communication amongst participants to e-learning, b-learning became to take form. Young (2002) claims that b-learning is 'the single greatest unrecognised trend in HE today' (p.33). Chen and Jones (2007) reveal through their research that students' learning outcomes are very similar, be it through b-learning or traditional classes, however students who were part of the b-learning course reported feeling they had improved their analytical skills, whilst the traditional class claimed the instructions were clearer. Rovai and Jordan (2004) saw the benefits of blended courses because they claimed that these created more a sense of community than the previously used teaching methods including the traditional face-to-face and the fully online courses. This research focuses on adding to this awareness that b-learning makes use of the best elements of various methods, and as such, is essential in the creation of a CoI. This in turn is another focal point of this research as it is through the CoI that the learning and teaching experience can be enriched. Ross et. al. (2006) define why they view b-learning to be an effective learning and teaching method. They say it:

[...] serves diverse student populations [as] it incorporates varied instructional modes and supports multiple means of expression, and appeals to different learning styles (p.158).

These different learning styles are influenced by the generation of students we have in our classrooms: the NetGeners (Tapscott, 1998), and it is also interesting to, at this point, take into account Gardner's (1983, 2006) 7 Intelligences whilst understanding some of the Netgener's characteristics and learning patterns. Firstly, the NetGeners will be looked at to understand whether the students we now teach are different to previous generations and how, and then Gardner's theory is viewed in relation to b-learning and the variation of learning styles that students have.

NetGeners are those born between 1977 and 1997 (Tapscott, 1998: p.97) and have been brought up with the internet. These people have a series of characteristics that the exposure to the internet has brought about. Barnes et. al. (2007) enumerate a few that include being 'very education oriented' due to their early yearning for successful careers because they are very 'goal oriented'; and they 'tend toward independence and autonomy in their learning styles' due to being very used to multitasking. They are accustomed to coming across large quantities of information online and have thus become 'assertive seekers of information' and can easily become bored with traditional learning methods. 'Immediacy' is yet another of their preferences in learning and in this way, learning that includes interactivity with messaging and games for example, work in their favour as they provide immediate feedback. With the Net Geners' social networking skills they think about networks in a different manner and question their uses in education whilst fostering their critical thinking. Understanding these skills and how teachers can tap into them have helped in the shaping of b-learning activities, such as creating wikis, webquests, using blogs and creating communities using forums, chats and messaging. In this study, working on Moodle enabled us to use some of the above mentioned skills that students have and guide them towards a more education oriented use of the internet. As a teacher, one can never agglomerate all students into the same

group and recognising their differences in learning styles and individuality can only enhance the teaching and learning process. Thus, the multiple intelligence theory helps shape activities and tasks for various students and stimulates the diversity of materials and the means used to divulge information within education.

Gardner (1983) foregrounds the importance of learners having individual preferences of learning according to the diverse intelligences that humans possess and that some are defined by the intelligences that are most enhanced in each person. Gardner divides these intelligences into Logical-Mathematical Intelligence, Linguistic Intelligence, Spatial Intelligence, Musical Intelligence, Bodily-Kinaesthetic Intelligence and the Personal Intelligences which include Intrapersonal and Interpersonal Intelligence. (Gardner, 2006: pp.8-17) Despite each one being independent, Gardner construes that they operate complementarily with one another, certifying that learning is enhanced. The more varied the means a teacher uses to present content, the more different intelligences will be stimulated. This will guarantee that a wider range of students will learn because their type of intelligence has been catered for and students will be able to consolidate knowledge as different intelligences were aroused on the same subject matter, enhancing the acquisition of knowledge. Gardner (2006) states:

Understanding is far more likely to be achieved if the student encounters the material in a variety of guises and contexts. And the best way to bring this about is to draw on all of the intelligences that are relevant to that topic in as many legitimate ways as possible (p.60).

Due to the multimodal nature of b-learning, one of the affordances of b-learning that will be referenced a little later on in this section and that is explored again further on page 80, b-learning is particularly appropriate for the dissemination of content in different formats. B-learning can help to reach out towards these different intelligences as it is easier to make an array of activities available online and students can then

choose those they feel attracts them more. It becomes more manageable to provide students with an array of materials online, on a single topic, such as videos, links to educational sites or games and pictures than it is to bring this all into class and use them all in a lesson. Not only do we not have the time in class to use so much material, but it can become boring to insist on the same thing in different ways. Online, students can choose whichever material is of most interest to them, thus enhancing learning through choice and responsibility and most certainly appealing to students' own motivations.

Following the drive to make lessons more learner centred, Gardner's 7 intelligences are considered in this thesis and were considered when structuring the writing module as b-learning is indeed a useful method to imbed various educational sources that appeal to different learning styles. Making reference to Jochems, van Merriënboer and Koper (2004), Ginns (2006) agrees that variety helps define and structure b-learning,

[...] there is a need for a “variety of coherent measures at the pedagogical, organizational and technical levels for the successful implementation of e-learning in combination with more conventional methods” (Jochem et. al. 2004: p.5). The issue of coherence in evaluating the success of blended learning is especially germane, as the overall goal of a blended learning experience is to provide a mix of both on-line and face-to-face experiences which support each other in achieving desired learning outcomes (p.55).

This variety requires a balance of the most positive features of both face-to-face and b-learning methods. Using a variety of resources for content being taught enables students with different intelligences to learn by using whichever source appeals more to them. Learning through variety resorts to the situative view of learning (Lave and Wenger, 1991), which acknowledges that learning can be achieved by situating it in physical and social contexts, which ‘are distributed across individuals, other persons and tools’ (Putnam and Borko, 2000: p.5). Thus, creating real life contexts online and in classrooms adds to the successful acquisition of knowledge. In order to overcome the

niche mentioned above, namely the necessity for a ‘variety of coherent measures’, Ginns presents a study that aimed at evaluating how e-learning supported their face-to-face learning experience of undergraduates in Veterinary Sciences at a University in Australia. He concludes that:

it indicates that student focused methods of teaching evaluation are possible in the relatively new teaching context of blended learning. [...] The quality of on-line teaching, resources, workload, and student interaction are associated with the quality of students’ approaches to study and learning outcomes (p.63).

He claims that one inevitably influences the other and both require great input on behalf of the teacher yet if students cannot be motivated to learn and change their study habits to more autonomous ones then the online part of b-learning may not be successful.

Evaluating and analysing learning and teaching environments are valuable to better understand how b-learning contributes to the educational system. The following authors all contributed to an overall perception of b-learning because they each focused on a different element of this method. Collis (1996), Collis and Moonen (2001) looked into the pedagogical concepts of re-engineering courses. The conversational framework, presented by Laurillard (1993, 2002) added in-depth perspectives into dialogue and reflection in media supported education. Mayes (2001) and Mayes and Fowler (1999) added a conceptualisation framework to educational analysis when looking at course resources, where emphasis is placed on dialogue within the development of the learner and different levels of understanding that the student needs to go through. Oliver (2001) also looked at learning resources and tasks and how they supported design frameworks. The learning design framework focused on pedagogy and how it was linked to the educational setting by Goodyear (1999) and Steeples et. al. (2002). Collis (1996) had previously focused on student contributions to learning and how flexibility contributed

to the re-engineering of pedagogy and this study led to an appreciation of flexibility in b-learning, which Nunan (1996) and McLendon and Albion (2000) referred to as the process that contributed to the changes in new learning and teaching practices. Ross and Gage (in Bonk and Graham, 2006) share the opinion that:

B-learning has become a highly effective means of addressing diverse students' needs, expanding access to flexible learning opportunities and improving the quality of education (p.155).

Many researchers see flexibility as a very positive b-learning characteristic, yet it also triggers less desirable consequences for some teachers. Greater flexibility implies greater teacher facilitation and moderation. However, more teacher presence is seen to produce better student grades:

If teachers want students to get the most out of learning on-line in blended contexts, then teaching strategies that clarify the value of moderation of student postings, and the value of interaction between students online, are likely to improve both the students' grade and their grades (Ginns, 2006: p.63).

The value of student interaction is gradually seen as indispensable to all b-learning courses and is one of its most important affordances. Affordances are seen as the relationship that exists between users and tools (Salomon, 1990). Carter, Westbrook & Thompkins (1999) explain that for an affordance to be accepted, the user needs to be familiar with similar tools and the tool ought to be within the zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978) of the user. Wijekumar et. al. (2006) claim 'computer affordances play a large role in learning outcomes' (p.195). Hofmann (in Bonk and Graham, 2006) expounds the notion further:

Blending technologies that take advantage of learning styles, learner convenience, and the best practices of instructional design enable course

developers to create programmes that engage learner and maximise learning retention (p.29).

These last few authors help frame this research in terms of its contribution relating to interaction and appealing to variety in the learning and teaching experience. By analysing my students' interactions on the forums as a means to enhance their writing in English, these interactions add more depth to understanding how student interaction plays into their successful learning experiences, when adequately guided by teachers' moderation and facilitation.

Sharma (2007) proposes reasons for the use of b-learning in language classrooms. Computer mediated communication between students, or groups of students, is seen as essential. Flexibility of time and space both for the teacher and the learner are also of major importance. The obvious easy access to materials is an advantage as is learner autonomy to access what is needed and when it is needed. Information is easily updated and is more likely to be current. In this research, texts read in current magazines and newspapers were often used as models for students to understand how texts are structured and written.

There are some very clear examples of how authentic materials can be gathered and used to support b-learning and the traditional text-book. Sharma (2007), MacDonald (2006), Lamy (2007), Conole (2008), Garrison and Vaughan(2008), Stoltenkamp (2011) are some of the researchers who mention websites, normal office documents, images, audio files such as Mp3, videos, blogs, emails, newsletters, discussion boards, chats, forums, RSS feeds, wikis, polls, quizzes, games, voip, audio-conferences, vodcasts and podcasts as possible tools to use in b-learning. For this research, forums, emails, blogs, message boards and some links to videos and magazine or newspaper articles were used.

Managing and being proficient when using these tools can prove to be time-saving as the teachers can use the same platform and simply update the content, incorporate other tools, and even recycle materials and exercises easily. Materials are easily handled online both by the teacher who must upload them for the students who can download materials and repeat exercises the number of times deemed necessary and for the students who can choose which resources they want to simply view or download (Osguthorpe and Graham, 2003; Ross and Gage, 2006; MacDonald, 2006; Maguire and Zhang, working paper; Falconer and Littlejohn, 2007; George-Walker and Keeffe, 2010; So and Bonk, 2010; Tao et. al., 2011). The fact that students can practice and study outside the classroom, enables greater responsibility for the learning process. The effective development of the habit may ultimately lead to more responsibility. Grabinger (in Squires et. al., 2000) is of the opinion that students need to manage their own time as well as resources. In this way, they estimate the time it takes them to do the tasks and activities, organise their resources and set out the procedures, thus making them more responsible and autonomous in their learning process.

Kumaravadivelu (1994) includes learner autonomy as his 8th of his 10 Macrostrategies for second / foreign language teaching. ‘It involves helping learners learn how to learn, equipping them with the means to self-direct their own learning [...]’ (p.39). Kumaravadivelu (2001) also refers to the autonomous learner as the postmethod learner, which is particularly interesting to me as I also view academic and social autonomy as interdependent enabling ‘their learning potential’ (p.546), leading to ‘the essence of the postmethod learner: liberatory autonomy’ (p.547). This is indeed of vital importance to all learners and this module shall be designed so as to enable students to control their own acquisition of knowledge and be responsible for when, how and what they learn.

Besides autonomous learning, immediate feedback also motivates and facilitates the learning process as the information retained is immediate and very explicit. Nicol et. al. provide '7 Principles for Good Feedback Practice' (2004, in MacDonald, 2006: p.126) which expound on what good performance is, develop self-assessment, deliver high-quality information to students, encourage teacher and peer dialogue and encourage positive motivational beliefs. These notions give a clearer idea of what feedback is and how it helps with the learning process. Students who get used to working on exercises that give them instant feedback easily develop learner autonomy (Dornyei and Ushioda, 2009) as they take it upon themselves to explore the exercises and become more independent learners.

Dam (2000) discussed teachers' role in promoting autonomy as creating a learning environment in which students are provided abundant opportunities to reflect on their learning process and become more consciously involved. Little (2007) has suggested that once students learn to take control over their own learning, this learning experience is transferable, and thus, students become more independent, lifelong learners. In the field of motivation, Dornyei and Ushioda (2009) discuss motivation within the language learning contexts, for individual's motivation may change consistently and is usually greatly shaped by the social activities people participate in. In b-learning contexts, not only teachers' immediate feedback can help motivate students, peer dialogue and the sense of belonging to this community could also be motivation factors.

Autonomy is seen by Little (1999, in Lopez-Varela and Sanz, 2007: p.211) as a capability that 'depends upon but also develops and expands students capacity to detachment, critical reflection, decision-making and independent action.' B-learning seems to fulfil these characteristics of autonomy, due to changes in traditional notions such as classes becoming student-centred and more constructivist, and thus can be seen

as an aid to further students' autonomy. Lopez-Varela and Sanz (2007) found through her study in the b-learning course she put into practice that students' tasks and contents were more organised as they felt more guided in a step-to-step process. She also mentions the development of their cooperative abilities as well as making decisions to transfer knowledge. These all aid in enhancing autonomy.

Autonomy is equally enhanced by exposing students to varied learning formats and resources as can be seen in this next study. Macdonald (2008) explains how the experience of b-learning helps develop independent learners. Reference is made to students being exposed to more choices in terms of web resources, and therefore there is a need for their study to be more self-directed and reflective. Developing independence and self-direction is an objective of blended-learning, as can be seen in the analysis chapter of this thesis. The data sheds light on issues such as authenticity and criticality. Boyer and Kelly (2005) describe self-direction and its shift from individual thinking to collective thinking:

While self-direction has been considered a function of independent learning, the blending of self-direction with the aforementioned theories merges the concept of the individual with the collective, providing certain strategies and techniques that can be used for instructional practice. Traveling from an individual self-direction toward a concept of social, self-direction provides all of the value of active, constructed cognition as well as shared vision, language, and objectives (p.4).

This can be seen when looking at CoI, as each individual has their own agenda, yet the community, as a whole, has a common objective in certain learning and teaching contexts. In this research, the common aim is to get good grades in the modules and improve their writing in English.

In order to obtain their learning objectives, students need to pay attention to writing as most forms of online interaction is done through written text. The importance of written interaction is of the essence to this thesis as with it, students developed their writing skills in English. Online interaction and written discourse are crucial to students who search for information online. Not only do students need to write texts online but in their lives as students they more often than not need to read written online discourse to obtain information that sustains their learning process.

E-investigators, as Macdonald calls students working on the web, need to become involved in identifying relevant sources. Snavely and Cooper (1997) referred to learners having to recognise their need for information and thus address their problem issues. The students then need to find and evaluate the information they find. Once they have found the diverse sources, it needs to be organised and used effectively. Macdonald makes the point that these learners have to develop a critical approach to the resources. This is of particular interest as it is clearly a new skill that learners need to develop to become effective researchers and writers. It seems that students are used to navigating online yet they usually do it for entertainment and not for educational purposes.

4.1.1 Reasons for Using Blended-Learning

This section looks at b-learning affordances and the advantages that many educators and researchers have found when using or analysing b-learning. After providing a more general outlook for the use of b-learning, this chapter is sub-divided into Design and Interaction because these two factors on their own are of major importance to the development of b-learning in education and are pivotal points in this study and how CoI are created and successfully contribute to the teaching and learning experience.

The major benefits of b-learning are often seen as being: '(1) more effective pedagogy, (2) increased convenience and access, and (3) increased cost effectiveness' (Graham et.

al., 2011: p.253). These benefits and others are discussed in detail in this section, yet particular emphasis is given to design and interaction as they feed into this research more directly and these are discussed separately after reviewing all the other affordances.

An important perspective on the need for b-learning is that it improves pedagogy, as Bonk and Graham (2006) define. It enables an increase in active learning strategies (focus on *learning by doing*), as well as peer-to-peer learning strategies and is extremely focused on learner-centred strategies (Rovai, 2004; Bonk et. al., 2006; Gearge-Walker and Keeffe, 2010; Tesar and Siebar, 2010; Levy et. al., 2011; Frantz et.al, 2011). Bonk and Graham also refer to how b-learning increases access to knowledge and adds spatial and time flexibility:

blending is used to provide a balance between flexible learning options and the high-touch human interactive experience (p.9).

In this light, b-learning is viewed by this author as cost-effective (Singh, 2001, 2003; Kerres, 2003; Thorne, 2003; Garrison and Kanuka, 2004; Bersin, 2004; Bonk and Graham, 2006; Kim and Kee, 2010; Borup et. al., 2011, Verliefde et. al., 2011) and as an enhancer of social interaction (Dillenbourg, 2002; Osguthorpe, 2003; Bonk, et. al., 2006; Garrison and Vaughan, 2008; So and Brush, 2008; Wang, 2010; McCarthy, 2010; Shea et. al., 2010; Borup et. al., 2011). It is cost-effective in the long-run in relation to course material as it can be re-used or re-processed and once the equipment and software are acquired, it may be functional for a few years. Ease of revision is also seen as one of the favourable characteristics of b-learning. It is however pertinent to refer to the costs in relation to the time a teacher/ moderator spends online. The set-up time for these courses and the time that the teacher spends online monitoring activities and maintaining interactivity are substantial and cannot be disregarded. These online hours

are long and the teacher also needs to prepare materials for both the online platform and for the face-to-face classes. All these working hours, especially for newcomers are many gruelling hours of work that would need to be paid for. From this perspective, b-learning may not be as cost-effective as it seems at first. Nevertheless, other surplus values such as variety, flexibility and a sense of community are still pertinent to b-learning.

On the other hand, Hofmann (in Bonk et. al., 2006) puts forward the argument that b-learning makes economic sense as trainers/ teachers and workers/ students do not need to be moved around physically from one room to another, making the whole teaching and learning process more effective (p.28). She shares a more job-oriented perspective and puts forward the argument that b-learning makes sense due to the geographically dispersed work environments in which staff levels are constantly changed. From my point of view, this opinion is also valid in terms of university settings as b-learning can enable students who live in various parts of the country/world to have easier access to class materials and also become more cost-effective as they may work from home and need not live or travel over to the university so often. Hofmann (in Bonk et. al., 2006) believes:

blending technologies that take advantage of learning styles, learner convenience, and the best practices of instructional design enable course developers to create programs that engage learners and maximize learning retention (p.29).

In the following study, variety and flexibility maintain their importance in b-learning but the focus is on context and learning objectives. Masie (2002) reports that b-learning offers many opportunities in a time when the need for multiple perspectives on content is very high, but the importance of context must also not be overshadowed. Ensuring that context is not overshadowed by content can be done through value-sorting,

whereby content and context are defined as high-value, medium-value and no-value. The high-value stuff is the content and context that must be remembered, and the no-value is all that is superfluous. Masie claims the prime driver in b-learning is the need to reduce and target learning objectives. As learning is longitudinal and accomplished over time, b-learning allows the learners to accomplish tasks at their own rhythm. B-learning also maintains the social aspect of learning as well as the tacit and unstructured nature of learning possesses, according to Masie. Social and cognitive presence shall be explored further in this chapter when looking at CoI.

Engagement and CoI add to the elements that were previously mentioned as essential to the efficiency of b-learning. Other studies suggest that students' engagement and successful learning outcomes are increased for students in blended-learning environments (Burgon and Williams, 2003; Garrison, 2004; Boyle, 2003 in Bonk and Graham, 2006, Ginns and Ellis, 2007; Garrison and Vaughan, 2008, Shea and Bidjerano, 2010). Rovai and Jordan (2004) found that blended courses produced a stronger sense of community among students than traditional or fully on-line courses. This sense of community also enables students to have better learning outcomes as they seem to participate actively in discussion forums with more ease than they participate orally in traditional classes (Garrison and Vaughan, 2008), which is particularly important in this thesis too, given the stimulus that the forums in the b-learning course managed to attain in getting students to write in English.

As different approaches are taken when engaging with b-learning, teachers can learn from being aware of them and their outcomes. Therefore, a few examples of approaches that helped design this study's modules are explained and they reveal many of the benefits for using b-learning. Lewis and Orton (2006) demonstrate how IBM engages in b-learning. IBM uses the Four-Tier Learning Approach:

- Tier 1: provides information and just-in-time on-line performance support
- Tier 2: interactive on-line learning
- Tier 3: online collaboration
- Tier 4: learning labs and face-to-face human interaction (in Bonk and Graham, 2006: pp.61-63)

This approach is applicable at HE level as an effective method that has been tried and tested by this company. It makes sense that a b-learning course be structured in this way as most teaching methods also follow pedagogic steps essential to the organisation of a lesson (eg: presentation, practice and production) and the above-mentioned structure abides by the overall organisation of teaching pedagogies. This approach is extremely interesting and it influenced the design of my b-learning writing module as can be seen in the narrative description of the ARCs.

Overall reasons for the use of b-learning according to Ross and Gage (in Bonk and Graham, 2006) and Jones and Lau, 2010, are that it enables expanding access to HE as there is a larger percentage of the population that now is able to get a higher education. They also believe it helps improve quality of the courses and degrees, as it helps serve diverse student populations with different learning styles. It also reduces time to graduation which in turn helps save money, both for the universities and the students. At the present day and age, b-learning addresses students' desires for technology in education. The current generation getting to the universities is quite computer-savvy and technology is a part of their everyday lives. For teachers, b-learning also offers greater insight into students' studying habits and enables teachers to keep track of students' progress. So, for all these reasons, these two authors are very much in favour of b-learning at universities.

By suggesting different types of b-learning, Ross and Gage present their idea of how they can be varied. Web-supplemented/ Technology-enhanced courses add online components to classes and enable a more efficient handling of administrative aspects. This also facilitates more online instructional activities. Hybrid/ Reduced Face-time Courses are when labs are conducted online and where one or more days of classes are eliminated or substituted by online coursework. The third type that they suggest is Blended Programmes/ Degrees. This last type includes blended, face-to-face and some fully online courses. According to Ross and Gage, Hybrid Courses seem to be the most innovative path but also the most difficult one. This thesis sheds light on the technology-enhanced aspect of b-learning as that is the approach that was adopted for the writing course.

Ross and Gage make an interesting claim:

In the long-run, almost all courses offered in higher education will be blended. Given today's growth trends in the use of course management systems, it is almost a certainty that b-learning will become the new traditional model of course delivery in 10 years (in Bonk and Graham, 2006: p.167).

Most universities are in fact trying to integrate technology into their educational systems. Some universities around the world already have a lot of experience in e-learning and are easily sliding over to b-learning whereas many other universities have still not managed to equip the university with the means or their lecturers with the knowledge to carry out such projects. Some current examples are: The DialogPLUS project was a collaboration between Pennsylvania State University, the University of Leeds, UCSB, and the University of Southampton, 2003; The Blended Learning Unit (BLU) in the University of Hertfordshire, 2005; Blended Learning Innovation Exchange (BLIX) at the University of Calgary, 2008; Expanding Blended Learning Through

Tools and Campus Programs at The American Association and State Colleges and Universities (AASCU) and the University of Central Florida (UCF), 2011; Blended learning @ WBS at University of Warwick, 2010. In this research the design of and the interaction on the b-learning writing module is seen as its main affordances and are thus now reviewed in detail.

I. Design

The prominence of design in b-learning implies great attention is paid to the overall aims and intentions behind the learning experience (Carman, 2002; Ausburn, 2004; Bennett et. al., 2011). Falconer and Littlejohn (2007) point out why design for learning has increased its importance in education. The increased size and diversity of the student body is the first reason. The fact that education is now increasingly run with a managerial approach, where education is evaluated against values such as expenditures, efficiency and outcomes that are quantifiable is the next factor. Lastly these authors refer to new technologies as the last factor. Technology is more effective in providing students with a personalised learning experience and has stimulated questioning of traditional ideas and purposes of education as well as how knowledge is perceived (p.41). These factors are indeed applicable to the educational settings of most universities, including the University of Madeira.

In the ARCs in this b-learning research, integrating both face-to-face as well as online teaching/ learning implies an attempt to combine the best that both offer. The greatest advantage in designing a b-learning course, from my point of view lies in the flexibility that b-learning offers. Flexibility is seen in terms of time management, content access, learning choices and reusability of online learning resources that are shared. Ausburn (2004) says:

Design can be accomplished by combination of the flexibility of customised course and materials with RLOs and new systems of digital assessment management (p.335).

Design has played a huge role in ensuring that teachers can access Reusable Learning Objects (RLOs) and has stimulated the creation of SCORMs (Shareable Courseware Object Reference Models), which prove to be very useful to all teachers designing b-learning courses and help define major learning objectives. An example of a RLO in Critical Thinking can be found at the RLO-CETL webpage⁵ which includes an interactive page with a text and a video of people role-playing. Reading and listening skills are required to do this task which then helps students develop their critical thinking. This page can be integrated onto various VLEs and used as needed. With the added bonus of saving teacher's time to plan and design an activity, it also motivates students to interact with the text in order to learn a skill.

At UMa one of our overall aims is to motivate our students more and make them conscientious learners. Stimulating their autonomous working skills aims at overcoming the lack of interest and has the objective of making students realise that they are responsible for what they learn. However, b-learning also incorporates collaborative aspects of learning. This too is stimulated in the ARCs, ensuring that students realise that they too play a role in contributing to the creation of their writing module and are a part of the processes and the reasons for these learning / teaching choices.

Not only do the students' interests play a role in design, but teachers' and institutions' needs and conditions determine how a project is designed. Collaborative work opens doors and defines and helps the AR take shape. Collaboration needs to occur not only amongst lecturers but also within departments for AR to be successful. In order to be

⁵ http://intralibrary.rlo-cetl.ac.uk:8080/intralibrary/open_virtual_file_path/i171n20105t/critical_thinking.html

able to pilot or explore a cycle, the cooperation of all parts involved becomes of essence.

After an exploratory phase of redesigning content, planning and organising the course itself becomes a mandatory step. The materials created need to be adapted to whichever method is being used. Lessons need to be scheduled and placed on the calendar as well as all the assessment modes and deadlines. My writing modules were taught for a month each and the dates for all the face-to-face classes as well as the deadlines were clearly stipulated in our first lesson. Carman (2002) provides a very useful design plan for b-learning courses. He renders that the design must contemplate live events, self-paced learning, collaboration, assessment and performance support materials. In terms of the live events, Keller (1987) refers to attention, relevance, confidence and satisfaction as the essential elements to consider. In terms of Self-paced Learning, Merrill (2002) refers to the use of RLOs and Clark (2002) explains how Multimedia Design Theory can enhance learning through integrating graphs with texts as they help to refine each other, thus certifying more chances of learning occurring as two senses are stimulated. Clark adds that explanatory graphs and audio also improve learning partly because of their multimodal representation. In terms of collaboration, Carmen refers to peer to peer and peer to mentor interaction, yet my research shows that other types of collaboration occur, such as teacher/ mentor/ expert to class and student to class and these are discussed in the analysis chapter.

In this thesis, CoI are essential elements for b-learning and Garrison and Vaughan remind researchers of the need to adapt to the strengths and weaknesses of the medium. Careful design enhances the structure of CoI and allows its components to develop and enhances the learning and teaching experience. Designing CoI implies creating social presence, teaching presence and cognitive presence. Social presence contributes to the

sense of being part of a community with a common goal. Teaching presence relates to all the roles that a teacher plays and the pedagogical responsibilities that is entailed in being a teacher/ moderator/ expert in the field. The last presence: cognitive presence, explores knowledge acquisition. These presences are fully investigated in the section on CoI. All presences are created by opening very safe and comfortable channels of communication whereby each student feels ease in revealing and sharing their identities, thoughts and opinions. Once again, very active and collaborative effects need to be felt between tutor/ teacher/ moderator and the students. However, collaboration needs to strike a balance which can be negotiated amongst all participants.

‘Negotiating expectations’ (Garrison and Vaughan, 2008: p.89) has proven to be more effective when done face-to-face. Students are more trusting when they can see facial expressions and negotiating helps develop relationships in this way. Thus, designing an environment that offers enough freedom and security for students to be able to negotiate and develop relationships delimits expectations and ensures trustworthiness that leads to climate setting, reducing anxiety and stimulating engagement in critical discourse. It also helps ‘focus students on the purposeful nature of the community’ (Garrison and Vaughan, 2008: p.89). This purposeful nature of the b-learning community often lies within the confines of acquiring the knowledge of the course content and this too needs to be carefully designed and inlayed in the b-learning learning and teaching experience.

Course content needs to be carefully chosen and structured so as to allow collaboration to stimulate discourse. Garrison and Vaughan call our attention to the importance of creating small groups and generating opportunities for discussion to ‘set the stage for subsequent team-based collaborative projects’ (p.91) as these stimulate co-construction. Not only does attention need to be paid to content but also to work overloads as working online already on its own can create a lot of overhead from all the hyperlinked

content that exists. Thus, a constructivist perspective in designing opportunities for engaging and interacting with content aids the learning process. Time also needs to be given to the students to reflect on tasks assigned as well as to consider the objectives of tasks. ‘Activities should be designed that encourage students to move from awareness to knowledge construction and finally to application’ (p.92). These steps help consolidate knowledge, particularly with our current students who have developed different skills and expectations due to being born in a time when computers are second nature to them.

Windham (2005) points out that Netgenerers have developed skills that previous generations did not have. They neither distinguish the real from the virtual in a similar way nor do they have an innate preference for the technological, as may be thought. Netgenerers reveal that the ‘professor must be an active participant and facilitator’ (p.52). Thus the teacher’s role needs to be carefully thought out or rethought and the selection of media to be used and integrated into the VLE ought to provide clear learning goals that Netgenerers can identify and follow. Garrison and Vaughan also agree that ‘For cohesion to be sustained, discourse and collaborative activities must be facilitated to ensure that participants engage productively with each other’ (p.93).

Within the design of a b-learning intervention, direct instruction, assessment and interaction play important roles for the creation and sustaining a community of inquiry (See p. 100 for a description of CoI). Thus, when designing a b-learning environment, many items need to be taken into account when pre-planning, planning, developing, implementing and evaluating, as Lehman and Berg (2007) remind us.

II. Interaction

The interaction that occurs online is often seen as crucial for the success or not of an online learning platform and the whole learning and teaching experience. Views on interaction are built on a social constructivist epistemology (Vygotsky, 1978) and focus

on collaboration as its essence for knowledge acquisition through collaboration. According to Woods and Baker (2004), 'Interaction is at the heart of the online learning experience' (p.2). Interaction can occur between the learners themselves, between the teacher and a student or all of the students, between an expert and a learner and between the learner and the content. The more interactive a learning experience is, the more senses it will stimulate and the greater chance the learners have of acquiring knowledge triggered by the content that they have been exposed to.

Interaction among course participants helps them apply and integrate newly gained knowledge in the course of engaging in group activity. Donnelly (2010) understands and values studies that shed light on the importance of interaction:

There seems to be much evidence in the literature that as Internet-based teaching and learning have proliferated, researchers, theoreticians and pedagogues have recognised that an educationally-viable environment requires students to interact with content and with each other (p.351).

Although Donnelly refers to interaction with content as the essence of a thriving learning environment, it is also important to remember that interaction occurs on other levels too, such as student-expert and student-student. Curtis and Lawson's (2001) study show that task activities, chats, mutual clarifications, and other monitoring attitudes are successful ways to instigate collaborative learning in an asynchronous online educational environment. Wang (2010) enhances interaction as engaging in a group activity that helps students to 'apply and integrate newly gained knowledge' (p.832).

Wagner supports Wang's position and refers to the importance of interaction:

The perceived quality of a learning experience is directly proportional to and positively correlated with the degree to which that experience is seen as interactive (in Bonk, 2007: p.45).

She further makes the point that:

If technology-mediated learning designs are to have any significant impact on current and future pedagogical practices, then learning design and development decisions need to maximise the benefit of interaction (*ibid.*).

Thus, with the benefits of interaction in the forefront of educational priorities when designing a course, the teaching and learning experience becomes much more learner-centred and richer in the dimensions it yields. In b-learning, interaction is essentially understood as the movement that occurs between user and interface, yet these definitions that follow shed more light on and give further dimension to interaction. In b-learning, when one understands how interaction can determine and influence learning, then it adds to the effectiveness of designing a course. The tendency towards maximising interaction that occurs online led other researchers to define different types of interaction. Therefore, besides asynchronous and synchronous interaction (Bates, 1995), Moore (1993) and Moore and Kearsly (1996) refer to three types of interaction, known as Interaction as Transaction: teacher and learner, learner and learner and learner and content. Saba and Shearer (1994) built upon this idea and they validated the relationship between dialogue and structure, or as Hillman et. al. (1994) calls it, learner-interface. Jung (2001) supports Moore's theory but also adds a further element. Jung considers infrastructure, dialogue, learner collaboration and learner autonomy essential to interaction. Adding to the different perceptions of interactions, Jung (2001) then defines interactions as Academic interaction, Collaborative interaction and Interpersonal or Social interaction. Wagner (1994, 1997) and Wagner (1999) viewed interactions as outcomes. They claimed that 'Interaction became a strategy for achieving specific learning or performance outcomes' (in Bonk and Graham, 2006: p.46). Interaction as experience is put forward by Gilmour (2003).

According to Wagner (2006), learners interact for the following purposes:



Figure 20 - Interactional Purposes

When students participate, this means that they are engaging with each other, which in turn is an act of communication. By sharing information and opinions, the learners also get feedback, which is essential to the learning process. From the behaviourist perspective, feedback provides reinforcement, and from a cognitive perspective, feedback provides information about correctness of a response and thus long-term retention of correct information is allowed. These are seen as an integral part of interaction, which ensures learning takes place.

A similar perspective related to interaction is provided regarding Communities of Inquiry (CoI) by Garrison and Vaughan (2008). They explain that ‘the framework is grounded in a critical, collaborative learning community consistent with the ideals of higher education’ (p.9). The social nature, including interaction, collaboration and discourse, within education are clearly recognised by these authors as valuable to the construction of knowledge.

An important form of interaction is through small group conferences which can also serve to assess activities (Macdonald, 2008). These conferences act as a forum which

may be linked to an assignment and aim at encouraging students to discuss work, leading to collaboration and more interaction amongst them. The teacher acts as a tutor making sure everyone participates and makes follow-ups on important points brought up. Plenary conferences are seen as just as important as running commentaries to support confident students. ‘It provides a platform for students to make sense of course material and to practice writing’ (p.69). Queries and help also fall into the category of plenary conferences as they enable informal learning and socialising through interaction.

In planning, Lehman and Berg remind us to ask about students’ expectations as a means to cater to their needs. This will make them feel part of the process and make them more responsible for what is being taught throughout the course. Learning is more effective when a student feels responsibility. Lehman and Berg helped to define how the writing modules in this research were planned, as students’ expectations, experiences and knowledge were built into the course. By handing over responsibility to the students who interacted, they also helped to shape what themes were discussed in class and what areas of knowledge they learnt about in English. This is discussed further in the narrative description of the ARCs and the analysis.

Interaction also helps shape students’ studying and learning methods. Ridley et. al. (1992) refers to conscious control of learning as the students change learning behaviours and strategies. Metacognitive skills (Von Wright, 1992) are amplified when taking initiative and managing their own learning experience. Cognitive and organisational skills enable and support learners, yet as Simpson (2013) expresses, this does all depend upon the students’ past experiences and the extent to which they are used to working independently. This is one of my personal challenges in this research as Portuguese students reveal few personal academic goals and working habits. Guidance

is of essence throughout this b-learning cycle to ensure that these students begin to develop a sense of self-awareness as well as develop their critical thinking through interaction.

Guidance and support should be provided in b-learning since the very beginning and the interaction between students and teacher define how much the students feel supported and guided. Students need to know and feel that they are being accompanied by their teachers. Lehman and Berg (2007) refer to a welcome letter, which gives the students a chance to understand the teaching/ learning process and what is expected of them. This initial interactional function delimits the course aims and opens the lines of communication and interaction. Well established guidelines are fundamental and should be clearly defined. Lehman and Berg suggest rules about times, class attendance, completing assignments, meeting deadlines and being respectful online. Shea and Bidjerano (2010) sum up the notion of interaction:

In this conception, online environments support knowledge construction through social interaction and negotiation of meaning largely through asynchronous communication (p.1722).

As referred to previously, the CoI framework (Garrison, Anderson, & Archer, 2000, 2001) depends on these notions of interactivity to flourish with effective engagement. This shall be developed in the section dedicated to CoI in this chapter.

4.1.2 B-learning Challenges

Needless to say, b-learning also creates some problems. Certain problematic aspects can be seen through Rosett, Douglas and Frazee's (2003) study where they depicted, from their students' responses to questionnaires, 5 negative aspects and 5 positive aspects in b-learning:

Negative Aspects of B-Learning	Positive Aspects of B-Learning
technical problems (29%)	flexibility (89%)
isolation (20%)	opportunities to interact with peers (17%)
lack of support (16%)	access to wide resources (11%)
lack of student interaction (14%)	effective mode of learning (7%)
absence of face-to-face opportunities (14%)	opportunities to interact with tutors (6%)

Figure 21 - B-learning Challenges and Advantages ⁶

This study helps us consider elements that can be avoided and helps us to plan and design courses in a manner that can evade such problems. . Although this table will later be explored in the Discussion chapter, it is important to see what key literature tells us about the b-learning problems. Not all teachers have technical aid at hand every time a student has an issue with a platform or software/ hardware and this can indeed prove to be a challenge. This can be due to lack of awareness of the needs of a b-learning team, or the result of all the tight budgeting that is occurring in most universities and therefore there simply are not any computer technicians to take on the role of b-learning technical support. Another problem pointed out is isolation, which can be perceived under various perspectives: the teacher's isolation when preparing her classes and the hours spent online to efficiently manage the course or the students' isolation due to working online. Isolation can be tackled through carefully planned and monitored interaction and if this problem can be detected at an early stage, more face-to-face classes can help overcome this issue in the case of the students. In terms of the teacher's isolation, this can only be partially solved as the time that teachers need to invest online to ensure the course runs smoothly is always isolating work. The only part that can be overcome is if teachers work cooperatively when designing the course. Lack of support is the next problem and this occurs when teachers try to break ground in different areas or use different

⁶ Adapted from Rossett, Douglas and Frazee's (2003) questionnaire results on B-learning (p.185)

techniques. Change brings out resistance from those that are contently working with what they already know and finding teachers who will willingly collaborate can be a challenge. The extra work implied to implement a b-learning course is often not looked kindly on, because it can be difficult to see beyond that first investment and see the advantages in the long-run. Graham et. al. (2005) share the opinion that ‘instructors and trainers typically incur an increase in the time they spend interacting with learners in BLEs’ (p.257). After carrying out studies, Hartman et. al. came to the conclusion that in HE ‘adding an online component to a F2F course put increased time demands and stress on the faculty developing and delivering the blended course (1999, in Graham et. al., 2005: p.257).

Besides personal time issues, often the institution puts up a fight to make changes as it often implies extra costs which are never wanted. Teachers can therefore find it very difficult to find support when investing in b-learning, especially initially. Hartman has the opinion that ‘faculty may hesitate to try blended approaches because they are not sure that they have departmental support or that it fits into the culture of the department or greater institution’ (in Graham et. al., 2005: p.257) and this insecurity may be a reason for resistance. An additional obstacle put forward is the culture of the institution and Graham et. al. explain:

‘Currently, the culture in both higher educational institutions and corporations allows for student dropouts and don’t necessarily require the learners to have the discipline to finish an online course. If BLEs are to be highly successful, the culture of these organizations, as it relates to persistence, must change’ (Graham et. al., 2005: p.257).

Not only the institutions’ culture needs to be changed but students’ attitudes towards education also need to be altered. Lack of student interaction can also be very cumbersome to solve. This happens when students perceive b-learning to have an extra

component of work and it is at times not easy for them to clearly see what they can obtain or learn from interaction. If a class does not get on-board, motivating them to participate is very demanding on the lecturer and at times, managing those that do interact online can be as time-consuming as trying to get all the others involved. Interaction is an essential element to b-learning, as Donnelly (2010) demonstrates: ‘the perceived quality of a learning experience is directly proportional to and positively correlated with the degree to which that experience is seen as interactive’ (p.352), thus interaction correlates directly with quality control in HE and is a major concern of any teacher teaching through b-learning. The last element that is referred to as a problem is the lack of opportunity to meet face-to-face and in b-learning these encounters are essential in creating a learning community. By meeting up, the teacher and the students develop another level of rapport. Getting to know people face-to-face and being allowed the time to discuss things that are happening online is essential to the development of the course and the relationship amongst classmates and students and teacher.

Graham et. al. (2005), also recognises some challenges in blending, such as defining the right balance of the blend, and size of the class. Not only is the ‘magical’ balance of the diverse teaching methods and aids hard to attain, but finding the adequate sequencing of each and establishing a relationship between them all in a way that benefits most students’ acquisition of knowledge is not a simple task. Each class does have its own chemistry and activities that work with one class may not work with another, as any teacher has experienced. Thus finding an adequate equilibrium between classwork and online interaction may be a tentative try at first until the teacher gets a better perception of what will benefit a particular class best.

Hoffman claims b-learning is yet to be completely successful due to the lack of technology that can support a wide variety of designs and delivery methods. There is

also a need for experts who can create content, yet experts tend to be knowledgeable only in their area and finding a team that can actually function well is sometimes quite complicated. Most organisations have budgets supporting design of programmes but teachers also need support in order to obtain training in these areas.

Some challenges related to b-learning are also put forward by Bonk and Graham (2006) such as the role of live interaction, which still has not been completely understood, explored and mastered by the experts. The role of learner choice and self-regulation is another challenge as the learner is not always the best judge as he/ she may not know which choice to make and may be disorganised and thus have a hard time in regulating his/ her work. Lack of models for support and training is yet another issue that is being dealt with. There is also an issue with finding a balance between innovation and production as everything is still being experimented on. One cannot forget a very important issue that is cultural adaptation, as many cultures are known to be more resistant to innovation and technology than others. And, of course, one cannot forget the digital divide that exists in many countries as many underdeveloped or developing countries do not have the means to invest in technology and thus their population is nowadays considered computer illiterate. Luckily Madeira's students are almost all owners of their own computers by the time they get to university and thus this is not really a problem we have to deal with.

Despite wide access to technology, care must be taken so that technology does not become the focus of any course. Other aspects such as the students' learning styles and all the sources that are presented to them add dimension to teaching through b-learning. One must always keep in mind that it is simply equipment that helps to get knowledge across to students efficiently with different methods and sources of learning/ teaching. Gardner's intelligence theory is acutely linked to the b-learning method as it becomes

very learner centred and the teaching objective lies in appealing to different intelligences in order for variety to play its part in breaking down the learning components and reinforcing that learning actually takes place. When designing activities and looking for sources, these 7 intelligences: logical-mathematical, linguistic, spatial, musical, bodily-kinaesthetic, interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligence, influence the choices teachers make when setting up a b-learning course. This brings us to design and its importance in b-learning.

4.2 Communities of Inquiry

Arising from Garrison's need to further understand and guide research and online learning as well as former notions of collaborative learning (Palloff and Pratt, 2001), the notion of CoI was developed in 2000. CoI supports connection and collaboration between learners as it is an environment that, when established, gives students a supportive learning platform within which to exchange ideas with peers. It also 'creates a learning environment that integrates social, cognitive and teaching elements in a way that will precipitate and sustain critical reflection and discourse (Garrison and Vaughan, 2008: p.8),

which also are congruent with the aims and frameworks of HE.

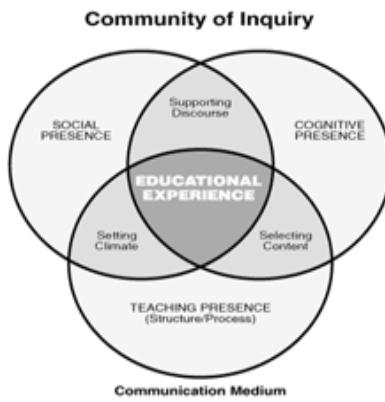


Figure 22 - CoI Framework⁷

⁷ Garrison, D. R., Anderson, T., & Archer, W. (2000). Critical inquiry in a text-based environment: Computer conferencing in higher education. *The Internet and Higher Education*, 2(2-3), 87-105

The conceptual foundation of CoI illustrated above, includes three key concepts: Social Presence, Teaching Presence and Cognitive Presence. These enable a ‘design of deep and meaningful educational experiences’ (Garrison and Vaughan, 2008: p.9). Lipman (1991) states ‘that members (in a CoI) question one another, demand reasons for beliefs, and point out consequences of each other’s ideas, thus creating a self-judging community when adequate levels of social, cognitive, and teacher presence are evident’ (Garrison and Cleveland-Innes 2005: p.6).

Social presence is the ability of learners to project their personal characteristics into the CoI, thereby presenting themselves as ‘real people’ (Rourke et. al., 2001). In this context, the notion of identity also plays a role for each learner. Benwell and Stokoe’s (2002) perception of identity and face issues are considered in this thesis when analysing the data.

The above mentioned authors provide an explanation for students’ lack of motivation within their immediate educational environments when relating to their identity and social presence:

managing talk about academic issues is one way that the participants can perform their identities as students. (...) By delaying knowledge displays and constructing a playful context within which to discuss such information, a framework is created that facilitates students’ engagement with the task whilst preserving these ambivalent identities. So although students might be engaged in the business of ‘doing education’, this cannot be separated from other functions of social interaction (p.446).

Teaching presence is defined as the design, facilitation, and direction of cognitive and social processes for the purpose of realizing personally meaningful and educational worthwhile learning outcomes (Rourke et. al., 2001). Despite the notion that this is exclusively the teacher’s role, we shall see how students also step in and fulfil this role

when they become ‘experts’ in certain contexts. There is a certain element of role switching in accordance with the different levels of knowledge that participants have at certain stages in the learning and teaching process. There is also an element of evaluation that teaching presence imposes.

‘Cognitive presence is the extent to which the participants in any particular configuration of a community of inquiry are able to construct meaning through sustained communication’ (Garrison et. al., 2001: p.5). These notions shall be fully developed in the following sections, seeing as their fundamental roles in CoI need to be fully understood for the communities to be effectively created, nurtured and developed.

Cognitive presence plays a key role in this thesis and is one of the main components of the data analysis chapter, especially related to constructivism. However, cognitive presence is only one of the presences in CoI and Social and Teaching presence are just as important in students’ learning experiences.

I. Social Presence

This shall be the first element discussed as it is essential to the development of the other two presences in CoI. Although social presence is not directly linked to the acquisition of knowledge in CoI, in its absence, CoI will be non-existent. Social presence is a concept that has long been discussed in relation to communicative behaviour. Mehrabian (1969) referred to immediacy and defined it as ‘those communication behaviours that enhance closeness to and non-verbal interaction with another’ (p.203). Short, Williams and Christie (1976) introduced the terms ‘social presence’, defining it as ‘the salience of the other in a mediated communication and the consequent salience of their inter-personal interactions’ (p.65).

Rourke et. al. (2001) develops Garrison’s categories in order to understand social presence. Garrison provides researchers with behavioural indices: emotional expression,

open communication and group cohesion. Rourke (2000) refers to the above-mentioned elements as affective responses, interactive responses and cohesive responses accordingly. Rourke et. al. further define affective responses as ‘emotion, feelings and mood’ (2001: p.8), which are evidenced in the use of emoticons, humour and self-disclosure. Interactive responses can be seen through simple replies to messages, as well as quotes from other people’s messages. Reinforcement is pinpointed by social interaction theorists, such as Mead, Cooley and Stark, as an essential contribution to cognitive learning. Rourke et. al. also characterise cohesive responses as being made up of ‘phatics and salutations, vocatives and addressing the group as ‘we’, ‘our’ or ‘us’’ (2001: p.10). This means that attempts are made to create a bond between the users by using words that are inclusive. Everyone is considered when ‘we’ or ‘us’ are used and this increases the likelihood that interactants will feel that they belong to this community.

A sense of belonging to a community enhances empathic relationships among members which, in turn, fortify the links and exchange of information and, in this way, effective learning can take place.

Instructional media such as computer conferencing engender high levels of student-student and student-teacher interaction; therefore, they can support models of teaching and learning that are highly interactive and consonant with the communicative ideals of university education (Rourke, et. al. 2001: p.51).

Social relationships foster a sense of belonging, which enable communication to occur with greater ease. This gives students a sense of security to express opinions and develop their own points of view. Eggins and Slade (1997) construe how ‘disagreement and critical evaluation are more characteristic of those who share strong bonds, rather than of new and transient acquaintances’ (in Rourke, et. al. 2001: p.11). Garrison and

Vaughan (2008) explain that a ‘community is established when students are encouraged to project themselves personally and academically’: (p.20). Creating an atmosphere of trust not only ensures students can express themselves in a risk-free manner but also ensures tolerance towards other classmates. As Garrison and Vaughan (2008) make clear, ‘open communication establishes a CoI but social cohesion sustains it’ (*ibid.*).

With so many different forms of instigating interaction, ensuring that the right options are made, include planning and efficiently designing the courses. Lehman and Berg (2007) give particular emphasis to how interaction is planned. Focus is given to students’ profiles and personal experiences, likes and dislikes. In this way students are given a space to get to know each other on another level. The students begin to interact on a social level and begin to get to know each other in another environment. They discover similarities or new characteristics that will draw them into discussions and exchange of information. Garrison and Vaughan (2008) refer to this interpersonal interaction as ‘an important means of connecting with others and creating trust’ (p.20). This interaction is seen as Social Presence in CoI and students’ interactions are the core reason for the development of this Presence defined by Garrison and Vaughan.

The development of personal relations owes a lot to class dynamics as well as to the teacher’s efforts to draw in students’ participation and initial presentations. It is essential that the teacher makes plain academic goals so everyone has a clear idea of where they are going so they immediately learn to commit to the aims and thus all gain a sense of community and cohesion as their goals are all the same. This not only brings about a sense of personal growth but also ‘responsibility and commitment to the CoI’ (*ibid.*).

II. Teaching Presence

At this stage in educational theory, the teacher is no longer the central and focal point of a learning environment, yet the role of a teacher still remains fundamental in all the different teaching and learning theories. There has been a shift from teacher-centred learning environments to one that is more students-centred due to the influence of constructivist theories.

A variety of methods have arisen over the last decade or so that take into consideration students' behavioural attitudes towards their learning experience (Mayer, 2004). Such methods are listed by Baeten et. al. (2010: p.245) and include collaborative/cooperative learning (Slavin, 1980, 1988, 1995; Zimmerman, 1999; Dillenbourg, 1999; McInnerney and Roberts, 2004), open-ended learning (Hannafin et al., 1994, 1997; Land, 2000), project-based learning (Land, 2000; Keegan and Turner, 2001; Scarbrough et. al., 2004), powerful learning environments (De Corte, 1990), problem-based learning (Savery and Duffy, 1995; Savin-Baden, 2001; Savin-Baden and Major, 2004; Dochy, Segers, Van den Bossche, & Gijbels, 2003), student-activating teaching methods (Struyven et al., 2006), minimal guidance approach (Kirschner, Sweller, & Clark, 2006), discovery learning (Van Joolingen, 1999; Mayer, 2004), and case-based learning (Kolodner and Guzdial, 2000; Ellis, Marcus, & Taylor, 2005). All these methods provide various options for relationships to develop between the learner/ teacher/ content. Some imply more interaction amongst the students themselves (collaborative learning), others less guided by the teacher (open-ended learning) and some methods give students real situations and leave them to come to a solution (problem-based learning). Each one however has the aim of making the most of students' own drive to learn which, in turn, alters the roles teachers play in each of these methods. Garrison, Anderson and Archer (2000) explicitly discuss the role of teachers in modern-day HE:

it is the teacher's responsibility to precipitate and facilitate learning that has purpose and is focused on essential concepts and worthwhile goals (p.48).

In b-learning and in CoI specifically, teachers take on the roles of course designers of the course and learning environment, of facilitators of communication and the learning experience, certifying that everyone has the necessary competences to participate, and of experts in the field of the course being taught. As Garrison and Vaughan point out:

Teaching presence is essential to provide structure, facilitation and direction for the cohesion, balance and progression of the inquiry process (2008: p.24).

Perry and Edwards (2005) state that 'exemplary online teachers create a community of inquiry that is comprised of a strong social, cognitive and teaching presence' (in Garrison and Vaughan, 2008: p.25). Teachers are thus responsible for the whole structure and the diverse elements that make up CoI and students have expectations too in relation to competent design of the learning experience. Garrison and Vaughan have come to the conclusion, after years of experience, that students expect a strong teaching presence (p.25).

In relation to the characteristics of the teaching presence provided by Garrison and Vaughan (2008) and Garrison et. al. (2010), namely 'design and administration, facilitating discourse, and direct instruction', these terms have evolved into different terms depending on the perspectives of the researchers dealing with them. Berge (1995) referred to them as 'Managerial, Social, Pedagogical' and added 'Technical', whereas Paulsen and Feldman (1995) designated the characteristics as 'Organisational, Social and Intellectual'. Anderson et. al. (2001) opted for 'Instructional Design and Organisation, Facilitating discourse and Direct Instruction'. This shows that despite the perspectives and attempts to alter the denominations, most researchers agree with the meaning behind these 3 major characteristics of 'teaching presence'.

Choosing, organising and preparing the course content implies many hours of research including well thought out objectives that aim at effective learning outcomes. According to Coppola et. al. (2001), “the ability to create, maintain, and control space (whatever we call it - virtual, nonplace, network) links us to notions of power and necessarily to issues of authority, dominance, submission, rebellion, and cooperation” (in Anderson et. al., 2001: p.5). These help define the roles of both teachers and students, emphasising the power relations that the teachers also need to think about and then try to maintain. However the roles taken on by teachers and students are not always unchanging as my data will show. There are times when roles are swapped between teachers and students and other moments when roles show their dynamism by their asymmetry. The learning and teaching context and the engagement with content determines changes in power, depending on the participants that feel they possess knowledge that can make them take on the role of ‘expert’ at a particular moment of interaction.

In terms of design and organisation, Anderson et. al. (2001) divide this component of Teacher presence into 5 particular tasks:

- Setting Curriculum
- Designing Methods
- Establishing Time Parameters
- Utilising Medium Effectively and
- Establishing Netiquette

In order for the component of design and organisation to be responsibly carried out, the teacher needs to focus on redesigning materials and activities and readapting them to the medium being used. The negotiation of time lines for projects also is of the essence if an online/ b-learning experience is to be set up and actually succeed in learning outcomes for the students. These time lines enable students to feel ‘in synch’ with the rest of the

class and thus help to create a unified group with common goals, thus fulfilling the ultimate aims of CoI. Anderson et. al. also account for the importance teacher presence has when students are involved in the course and the work it involves.

We concur with Laurillard, Stratfold, Lukin, Plowman and Taylor that the teacher's task is to create a narrative path through the mediated instruction and activity set such that students are aware of the explicit and implicit learning goals and activities in which they participate. Macro-level comments about course process and content are thus an important motivation and orientation component of this category of teaching presence (2001: p.6).

Facilitating Discourse is seen by Anderson et. al. to be an intricate part of Teaching Presence as the teacher needs to find a balance whilst moderating to motivate and guide students in their interactions. Under the understanding that the teacher has to be an active member of the social community, this role indicates an intricate need to be constantly interacting with the students on forums and guiding the learning experience towards the intended goals. Garrison and Vaughan also make reference to the importance of the 'facilitation of discourse' as he sees its goal is 'to enhance and sustain social presence that will provide the environment for collaborative and cohesive discourse' (2008: p.38). Providing feedback is one the most important ways for the teacher to facilitate discourse. It not only shows the teacher's interest and presence but also provides essential guidelines towards the 'focus on the shared purpose of the learning experience' (Garrison and Vaughan, 2008: p.39). These authors do not hide that they believe that 'as CoI moves to more challenging cognitive activities, facilitation becomes increasingly important to ensure that students' contributions are acknowledged and constructive' (2008: p.41).

Anderson et al. (2001) explain how their notion of facilitating discourse is actually very closely linked to direct instruction as it occurs to 'stimulate the social process' (p.7).

Thus, their coding of facilitating discourse indicators cover a wide array: ‘Identifying areas of agreement/disagreement; Seeking to reach consensus/understanding; Encouraging, acknowledging, or reinforcing student contributions; Setting climate for learning; Drawing in participants, prompting discussion and assess the efficacy of the process’ (*ibid.*).

The third element related to Teaching Presence is Direct Instruction. This is seen as pedagogic and educational leadership, whereby the content is structured and/or scaffolded. However, direct instruction is done in such a way that students still feel the freedom to choose what they want to learn and how they want to do it. Vaughan and Garrison (2005) give major emphasis to the need for ‘strong leadership to ensure that discussions stay ‘on task and on track’’ (Garrison, 2008: p.43). Yet they appeal to a balance of teacher’s direct intervention as they believe that in excess, it ‘will most assuredly reduce discourse and collaboration’ (*ibid.*).

Teachers need to show knowledge of the content being taught and Anderson et. al. (2001) also emphasise how the teacher’s enthusiasm and in-depth knowledge can help stimulate students’ interest. Garrison and Vaughan remind us that the purpose of direct instruction is to maintain ‘purpose and cohesion’ as these ‘provide the motivation for participants to want to belong to a community’ (2008: p.44). Vygotsky’s notion of scaffolding enhances the teacher’s role of higher hierarchy as an expert in terms of knowledge. Teachers can thus offer support to enable students to scaffold their knowledge acquisition.

Finding a balance when giving direct instructions can be quite delicate. As these communities need freedom of choice, it can be easy to slip from student-centred practices to teacher-centred practices if the teacher’s role become domineering. Seeing as so much is required of the teacher to keep this learning experience geared towards the

learning aims, it can be quite difficult to obtain the desired balance. Salmon (2000) refers to ‘e-moderators’ as facilitators and moderators that do not need to be experts in the subject matter, but need to be able to communicate on the same level as the participants about the issues being discussed. However, Anderson et. al. (2001) disagree with this perspective.

This subject matter expert is expected to provide direct instruction by interjecting comments, referring students to information resources, and organizing activities that allow the students to construct the content in their own minds and personal contexts (p.9).

When looking at direct instruction, assessment and feedback are elements that are part and parcel of the educational experience. Garrison and Vaughan (2008) point out how important it is to ‘ensure assessment is congruent with the intended learning outcomes’ (p.46). As the assessment process is essential to any learning experience, as we know it today, students value the teachers’ role and expect useful feedback from them, as Anderson et. al. point out. Assessment online might include papers, essays, portfolios, projects, reports, practice tests and self-assessment tests. Feedback includes corrections, explanations, teacher’s summaries, points of view, links and resources for further information.

Anderson et. al. (2001) summarise the above with coding for direct instruction:

- present content/questions,
- focus the discussion on specific issues,
- summarize the discussion,
- confirm understanding through assessment and explanatory feedback,
- diagnose misconceptions,
- inject knowledge from diverse sources, e.g., textbook, articles, internet, personal experiences (includes pointers to resources),
- responding to technical concerns (p.10).

Together with the two above-mentioned presences in CoI, learning is not complete without Cognitive Presence.

III. Cognitive Presence

Rovai (2002), Shea, Li and Pickett (2006) and Garrison and Vaughan (2008) make clear that the principle of cognitive presence in CoI is a ‘plan for critical reflection, discourse and tasks that will support systematic inquiry’ (Garrison and Vaughan, 2008: p.36). They interpret this element as: ‘Cognitive presence maps the cyclical inquiry pattern of learning from experience through reflection and conceptualisation to action and onto further experience’ (p.21). From the above, notions ‘defined as the exploration, construction, resolution and confirmation of understanding through collaboration and reflection in a community of inquiry’ (Garrison and Arbaugh, 2007: p.5) enable students to develop cognitively. The notion of metacognition is fundamental to the understanding of cognitive presence as this provides students with the necessary tools and skills to reflect upon their own learning experience.

The concept of metacognition relies on the Private Inquiry model as can be viewed in the figure below.

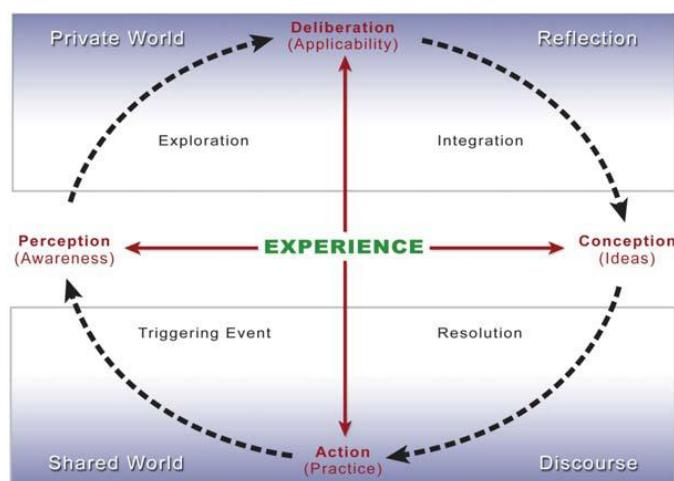


Figure 23 - Private Inquiry Model⁸

⁸ Adapted from Garrison & Archer, 2000

The private inquiry model follows 4 stages, according to Garrison and Archer (2000).

- Triggering Event = issue/ problem is identified
- Exploration of problem = gathering and refinement of relevant information
- Reconciliation = solutions are hypothesised and debated
- Preferred solution is applied.

Learning by using metacognition implies realising how learning is occurring and being aware of the different stages of the process. According to this model, metacognition begins with the Triggering event, when a problem or an issue is identified. Once the focal point is identified, Exploration of the problem takes place. Here the learner gathers all relevant information that adds to his/ her understanding of the issue at hand. Once all the different facets of the problem have been explored, Integration/ Reconciliation occurs whereby the learner tries to hypothesise various solutions to the problem. Resolution is the fourth and last stage of this model and it is when the learner applies the best solution found. This process leads the learner to appreciate how the learning process has occurred whilst exploring all the sides of the matter using his/ her critical thinking. (Garrison also focuses on this at a later stage.)

According to a presentation at the 13th Annual Sloan-C Conference made by Arbaugh, Cleveland-Innes, Diaz, Garrison, Ice, Richardson, Shea and Swan (2007), the theoretical basis of the private inquiry model and cognitive presence goes back to Dewey (1933) and his notion of ‘reflective thinking’, Freire’s (1970) ‘Transitioning to an authentic, problem-posing, post-modernist paradigm’, and Green’s (1971) perceptions of knowledge as: ‘learners discovering the truth; examination of facts related to the truth; assimilation of the aforementioned through collaborative review’. Whereas this thought initially focused on reflective thinking, the model then took shape through a step forward towards problem posing. Later the influence came from the idea of a

'curriculum grounded in richness, recursion, relations and rigor' (Doll, 1993) and that 'Learners achieve resolution through iteration and conversation' (Doll, Fleener, Trueit & St. Julien, 2005). By talking to others, sharing ideas and simply saying things out loud help develop a process of reorganisation of information leading to an easier restructuring of the problem to get to the solution. The perspectives presented have been analysed and interpreted by researchers (Arbaugh et. al., 2007) who are dedicated to b-learning thus this literature helps fundament their theories and practitioners' work carried out using b-learning.

Garrison et. al. (2004) justify that 'it is the process of critical thinking that is of particular importance in terms of asynchronous text-based communications technology, such as computer conferencing' (p.6). If learners use their capacity to critically look at their own learning process, this enhances their chances to understand how they learn more efficiently and are able to identify actions that may hinder the learning process. Heckmann and Annabi (2005) also found written communication to be cognitively rich. They think it provides opportunities for students to express their thoughts which they might be unable to do in face-to-face environments. The fact that 'asynchronous text-based environments' actually reduce 'student cognitive load and the need to rely on memory to process large numbers of facts and ideas' (Garrison and Vaughan, 2008: p.23), seems to simplify the cognitive process, although this is actually quite difficult to effectively prove. It also aids students who are writing in L2 and have some time to process the language structure and thus be able to put their ideas across more clearly.

It seems that objectives are essential to the whole framework, whether they be learning objectives or aims relating to engagement online. All three presences depend upon clearly and well defined objectives and designs. Palloff and Pratt, 2005 confirm the above notion of success resting on the creation and sustaining of a CoI as it can enhance

student satisfaction and engagement with the community. The sense of community is confirmed as the direct contingent for student satisfaction and effective learning (Rovai, 2002; Ertmer and Stepich, 2004; Shea, 2006; Shea, Li and Picket, 2006; Liu et. al., 2007; Arbaugh, 2008; Akyol and Garrison, 2008; Akyol et. al., 2009; Garrison et. al., 2010; Shea and Bidjerano, 2010; Akyol and Garrison, 2011).

4.3 Writing

The development of writing skills is one of the crucial aspects of this innovation and action research process. B-learning is used as a way to stimulate students to write more and lose their fear of writing in English. The b-learning writing module was designed as it is commonplace at most universities to have to write many reports, essays or sometimes exams in English and work placements nowadays require writing in English as a prerequisite when candidates apply for a job. This chapter gives an overview of writing theories which in some way influenced the design of my writing module. The next section looks into teaching writing methods and these too were considered and adapted to better fit the students' writing needs in the different ARCs.

Teaching writing is a challenge for us as English teachers. It is difficult to get undergraduates to understand the steps that must be taken in order to achieve cohesion and coherence in their texts. They are notions that are very complicated and are not easily grasped. On arrival from high school our students need to take a rather big step to adjust to the academic requirements. Our department has some difficulty in overcoming the way students think due to the communicative approach adopted in schools. What is most important at high school level is that students are able to communicate and are taught to strive for grammatically correct use of the English language and the layout or organization of their texts is sometimes overlooked, it seems. This is perceived by

members of staff as a difficulty which we need to overcome. Written communication needs to be achieved with some rigor, coherence and linguistic accuracy. (Later in the thesis, various stake-holder views which support and exemplify this point of view are gathered from the trial interviews carried out with lecturers in the English and German Studies Department at the University of Madeira.)

Heyda (in Ganobscik-Williams, 2006) presents a historic view of writing methodologies and guides us into understanding the shifts that have occurred in the discipline of writing throughout the last fifty years. Knowledge about this study and the history of tried and tested models are essential for teachers who want a broad perspective of what has been done and what can be done. In the 60s and 70s, the course they designed and put into practice of First Year Writing was responsible for ‘weeding out freshman undesirables.’ (Heyda, 2006, in Ganobscik-Williams, 2006: p.154) Later, but still in the 70s, the ‘think first – then write’ (idem.) model came up. This model included constructing a thesis, developing support, organising ideas and writing up a draft. However, in the 80s, attention shifted towards the ‘write to learn pedagogies’ (idem.: p.156). This model drew up a multi-stage writing process that included: group work, pre-writing, drafts, composing, revising and re-writing. With this shift, process activities became the focus. The 90s brought about the post-process composition theories. Writing was seen as a public art and as a social project. Focus shifted to the teacher-student collaboration and dialogue where the student was given the chance to break down his/her thoughts due to the interaction that was being stimulated.

There are different perspectives on writing that help design the b-learning writing course in this thesis and one of the major influences comes from the approaches that are mentioned in this chapter. The ‘Process Approach’ as presented by Grabe and Kaplan (1996) brings major changes to the understanding of writing. Some experts in the area

actually view it as a paradigm shift, from the ‘Rhetorical approach’. The ‘Process Approach’ encourages

- self-discovery and authorial voice
- meaningful topics (of interest to the writer)
- plan writing; goal oriented; contextualized activity
- pre-writing tasks; goal oriented activity; drafting with feedback
- peer / group / teacher feedback through conferencing or through formative evaluation
- free writing, journal writing to generate writing and develop written expression
- content information and personal expression as more important than final product and grammatical and linguistic use
- writing as recursive rather than linear as a process
- students’ awareness of the writing process and of notions such as audience, voice, plans (p.87).

This approach has been written on by many teachers and researchers but, viewing writing simply as a solitary action, based upon individualistic ideas is not the only practice that is used in the writing processes. It also ignores context. Hyland (2002: p.29) has pointed these issues out and explained that the basic views of the process approach can be enriched.

Process writing has different approaches such as the ‘expressive approach’ (Macrorie, 1970; Bereiter and Scardamalia, 1993); the ‘cognitive approach’ (Calkins and Harwayne, 1991; Graves, 1983; Kroll, 1978; Moffett, 1968); the ‘Flower and Hayes writing process model’ (Flower and Hayes, 1981); the ‘social context approach’ (Cooper, 1986; Faigley, 1985; Flower, 1989, 1994). Flower and Hayes (1981) present a model that can be easily followed by the non-language students, such as the engineering students, as it is very systematic, easily adapting to the logical manner in which

engineering students normally think. Flower and Hayes also help solidify my beliefs of how writing can benefit from the b-learning modules integrated in the writing course. These two authors asserted, as quoted by Grabe and Kaplan (1996), that the writing process is ‘interactive, intermingling and potentially simultaneous’ (p.91). Computer mediated communication enables the interaction that is previously mentioned, thus writing can greatly benefit from online mediation. Below is a scheme of Flower and Haye’s writing process model.

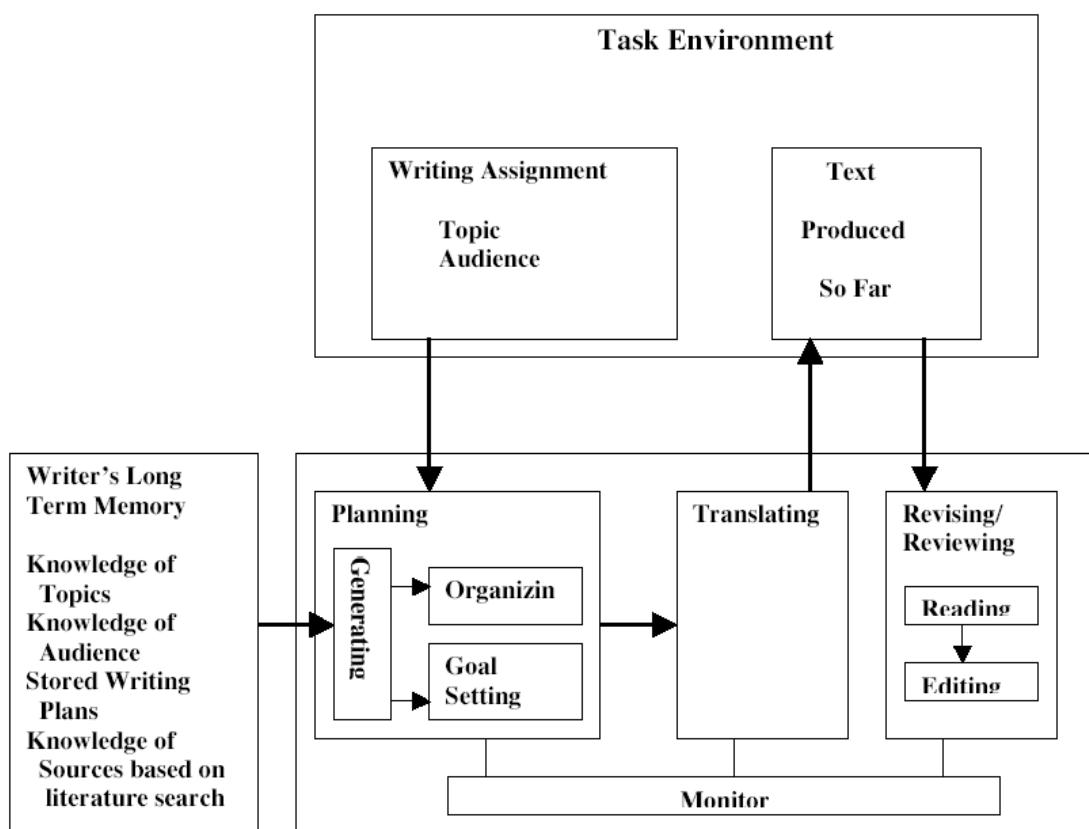


Figure 24 - Flower and Haye's writing process model⁹

When considering this model, the writing assignment is task oriented and has a very logical and sequential order of work. Exact Science students identify with this way of working on computers and by indicating that they will need to keep their topic and audience in mind when planning and writing their assignment and that the planning

⁹ In Flower, L. and J. Hayes (1981), A Cognitive Process Theory of Writing, College Composition and Communication, JSTOR, 32/4, p. 370

includes researching, note-taking, resorting to their previous knowledge whilst setting their goals clearly, these students find the steps simple to follow. Revising and editing their texts is another habit that can be formed and, in this way, the model enables a concise design of the assignment within the module following simple research and computer skills they already possess and build upon that to create better writing skills.

Hyland (2002) further enlightens how Flower and Hayes' model helped to promote a 'science consciousness' and Hyland proceeds to explicate that their model presented us with

a computer model typical of theorising in cognitive psychology and Artificial Intelligence, with memory, Central Processing Unit, problem solving programs and flow-charts (p.25).

This model is based upon computer architecture and reveals characteristics that are identifiable to these students and seen as appropriate to work with engineering students. Yet, this approach on its own is at times insufficient to help students with greater writing difficulties. Thus, in this writing course, the process approach was liaised with others such as the genre approach.

The genre approach is also of great use to the students who have problems identifying different forms of writing. It helps students who are more visual learners to see and recognise certain written texts from looking at models of the type of text it is. Hyland explains that

genre pedagogy is underpinned by the belief that learning is best accomplished through explicit awareness of language rather than through experiment and exploration (p.22).

Through this approach, students are able to recognise texts easily and understand their, function, audience and structure among other elements. Without resorting to the focus on 'prestige genres' that is sometimes taken with this approach, real texts for students to

model their work on helped organise lessons keeping real contexts in mind. The corpus gathered for the BAWE project at the University of Warwick provided further know-how in terms of the moves certain students adopted when writing different types of texts.

In an attempt to obtain a more explicit understanding of what type of writing engineering students need to do, Grabe and Kaplan (1996) help to illustrate steps taken and moves adopted. Writing for professional purposes includes technical writing. Grabe and Kaplan manifest that departments want their students to become familiar with format and genre norms in order to write for use in instructions, letters, manuals, memos, business reports, guidelines for the use of material and letters (p.148). They later also make reference to forms, internal reports, progress reports and project proposals. So, basically, students are taught to write texts that fall into standard formats. If students understand the overall structure, aim and audience of the text but are also empowered with a variation in lexis and have solid syntactic knowledge, the outcome will be more creative and adjusted to each particular case when writing a text.

The writing module is aimed at classes made up of Engineering undergraduates mostly and studies on these students helped to plan ARC1 and ARC2. Hyland (2002) points out that engineers are a focus of professional communication, also known as ESP training courses, due to the importance English is gaining in their field. He claims English has become ‘the accepted medium for cross-linguistic interactions’ (p.71). He refers to manuals, technical reports, memos, proposals and a variety of business report genres as some of the texts that are written in this field. These types of texts are the same as those Grabe and Kaplan mention. Hyland does not however mention what writing techniques are used with engineering professionals. Reports and proposals were looked at in ARC1

and ARC2. With these students especially, technology influences their approach towards writing and is considered in the design of the module.

New technologies inevitably played a role in changing the writing process. Hyland believes it altered the editing, proofreading and formatting process. Hyland explains that technology reduces linguistic diversity and emphasises the Roman alphabet and fears of the reduction of linguistic diversity arise. Major concerns arise from youngsters chatting online and how they communicate through simplified versions of spelling and through emoticons, yet they seem to be able to differentiate one register from another and thus this fear seems to be without reason (Crystal, 2008).

Many have tried to understand how technology has influenced the learning process. Ross (2006) gives a very detailed description of a study that shows how writing is undergoing a transformation due to technological developments. This is due to the forcefulness of e-communication, which diminishes formality of texts even in business correspondence. Ross refers to the speed of communication being accelerated nowadays due to technology and refers that ‘writing at speed is important’. Nevertheless, the importance of thinking through and organising texts especially when they are job-related is still highly valued. The value of conciseness is also stressed by Ross, especially in emails, text messages and chats. Writing things fully is however not overlooked by Ross who refers to the popularity of blogs and how these tend to use a more traditional register, avoiding abbreviations and what Ross calls ‘web-writing’ and ‘sensational spelling’.

The b-learning module concentrated on writing and understanding how other teachers have dealt with the changes in writing habits, due to technology laden environments that our students live in help define the structure of the module. Cheater (2006) sheds some light on ‘the intricate realities of computer-related word formation.’ She expresses the

potential difficulties in ‘teaching’ electronic and computing engineers’ English, difficulties that go beyond those of English for mathematics or medicine, because computing is moving so fast (p.18).

She reveals how challenging teaching certain circles of vocabulary can be. ‘E-English’ prefers multifunctional verbs, nouns, adjectives and develops binary opposites formed by affixes. Acronyms are also very important for students. Another characteristic of e-English is anthropomorphosis (e.g. mouse). Cheater concludes by saying:

To me, one thing is clear. E-English is not a perhaps amusing ‘dialect’. The internet is the future of virtually all forms of communication, written and verbal. If it renders the pre-electronic rules of English redundant, non-hackers will be able to do little about that, except (willingly or unwillingly) learn a new language (p.27).

Reflecting on these challenges that awaited me it seemed a few surprises lay ahead in the course of my ARCs with the variety of students in different courses that would be in the writing modules. Perhaps a few more words would be added onto Cheater’s list of e-English words. When looking at students’ written discourse on a forum related to online games, this aspect of very specific language choice and use is explored.

Another very interesting perspective on technology and writing is presented by Kress (2000, 2003, 2005, 2010), Kress and Leeuwen (2001), Bezemer and Kress (2008). This author sees how texts have been altered by the era that we are living in and considers:

the processes of making texts and reading texts are both are processes of design; and both are in important sense inversions of the social and semiotic arrangements of the era of the dominance of the constellation of writing and book. It has now been overtaken by the new constellation of image and screen (Kress, 2004: p.118).

Kress presents us with ‘Multimodality’ which is particularly stimulating when researching writing and multimedia and reflecting on how this theory benefits it. Technology, in particular, is very multimodal as it draws upon diverse sources to

express ideas or information. Multimodality has been criticised for not being exact, for being simply another branch of linguistics trying to read meaning into everything, as Kress points out. This is a process that all new approaches undergo but, through time, and if they are indeed valid theories, they do eventually find their position and leave their mark in the area of study. This approach can be useful to researchers looking into e-/b-learning and thus Kress's views are of interest to me and my particular study.

Hyland expresses the point that:

while these multimodal aspects of writing are important, word processing and desktop publishing programs do not fully exploit the computer as a technology for writing (p.74).

Thus, it is important to look into how multimodal aspects can be further exploited with the use of technology so we can better understand the true potential of computers in writing.

4.3.1 Teaching Writing Methodology

This section shall provide an overall view of studies undertaken to understand the problems with teaching and learning writing. Johns (2003) claims that:

there is no tradition of freshman composition, and thus the European models for writing instruction, if they exist within an institution at all, are quite varied (p196).

Thus, acquiring data from first year students can become a valuable contribution to getting a better perception of the methods and steps made during the writing process. Through this b-learning module, a slither of insight into the writing process of first year students is also provided. The following sections report studies on teaching writing that have been carried out and how they helped shape the way my writing module for this research was designed.

Whilst designing my writing module, reading Young and Avery's (in Ganobscik-Williams, 2006) Speak-Write project was very helpful and it also played a part in reaffirming how important it is for students to perceive writing, that was taught within a particular course and applied to that subject, as a skill that could be applied to other courses throughout their degree. After being exposed to this study, it reinforced my explanations in my lessons at the beginning of each writing assignment to ensure students understood why we were looking at a particular genre or how they would be using reports, for instance, in other courses throughout their degree. Young and Avery's Speak-Write project was developed with the 'concept of embedding writing instruction into the curriculum' (p.89). The team believed that teaching writing is more effective and perceived as more relevant when conducted within a subject-specific environment rather than through separate skills models, which threaten to be overly generic (p.88). Thus, the structure of this project was spread over two semesters and included: Grammar and Language Awareness, Stylistic Analysis and Writing and Re-Writing, Oral presentation Skills and Effective Seminar Participation and Effective Essay Writing. This project was particularly successful as it was also selected and replicated at the English Department at the University of Derby. Ganobscik-Williams (2006) gives details of this initiative in the chapter: 'Building an Academic Writing Programme from within a Discipline.' It helps us as teachers to learn from others who have tried out similar projects to our own and who share their findings. It enables us to consider factors that we may not have thought out clearly or help shape our initial ideas leading to a better planned project.

The hurdles crossed and issues that were taken into consideration for my writing module from the Speak-Write project are: the excessive time for one-to-one tutoring and the lack of inclusiveness of the writing programme and how to find ways to record the

success of the writing programme. These problems are common in many universities and one of my thoughts whilst reading them was that they can be overcome with the use of b-learning tools that are put into practice in the ARCs in this research. The teacher and individual students can find alternative ways to engage and discuss students' challenges, such as through messages or chats. Online tools can be very attractive aids to overcome problems that are bound by time and space in the classroom. The next example considers technology and how it can trigger creativity in writing and this was also used in the b-learning module.

Ivanic and Lea (2006) unravel in "New Contexts, New Challenges: the Teaching of Writing in UK Higher Education" (Ganobscik-Williams, 2006) how the changes in HE policies influenced views on the quality of educational institutions and writing specifically. The change in the number of students admitted to universities brought about shifts in the way students were taught and consequently to the learning outcomes too. A major change came about in the 1980s when there was an expansion in HE in the UK. The target of having 50% of 18 to 30 year olds in the higher educational system by the year 2010 has led to alterations in institutional internal structures as well as in curricular organisation. Mass HE and combined studies are said to have led teachers to have less time for their students and the teachers are believed to have lowered their level of expectations in relation to students' previous body of knowledge. The two above mentioned authors of this chapter attribute great responsibility to the internationalisation of UK universities and to ICT for the alterations of discourses and literacies (Lea and Street, 1998). In this way, the development of writing support is an 'institutional issue and a response to specific concerns at a particular time, thus it is always a political act' (Clark and Ivanic, 1997, in Ganobscik-Williams, 2006: p.14).

Catt and Gregory in Ganobscik-Williams (2006), consider why writing is difficult when taking into account the intrinsic and extrinsic features of writing and by reporting students' opinions and experiences. Understanding students' perspectives helped in redesigning the writing module in the ARCs as data from the interviews and focus groups also added to these perspectives and thus enabled to restructure the cycles. Writing is viewed as a powerful means of communication that transcends time and space. It is however difficult in terms of organisational structure, sentence structure and spelling, which, when not efficiently mastered, can distract one from the writer's meaning. Lea and Street (1998) indicate that knowledge is transferred into writing practices, making learning part of the process. This is the intrinsic importance of writing. Torrance et. al. (1999) links the extrinsic importance of writing to the characteristic of 'graduateness' (in Ganobscik-Williams, 2006 p.189), whereby those who can write have some educational support and status. Students list views on the writing process and it becomes clear that detailed criteria for tasks, tutorial help at the draft stage, early and swift detailed feedback and general overall guidance help with effective teaching of writing. Particular care ought to be taken when setting writing assignments. The criteria should be detailed and well delineated so as to ensure successful performance. Students learn from simulating the roles of teachers or examiners by examining and discussing texts because this helps them understand patterns for spelling, organisation, punctuation, cohesion as well as find qualities against agreed criteria. Feedback can be given by tutors or peers but it is essential that it be swift, purposeful and that discussions are perpetrated, so the writer may have the chance to clearly put forward the meaning he/ she was trying to convey. Despite all efforts, the National Literacy Strategy continues to believe that writing is still weak. All the above mentioned criteria are essential to guide students in writing texts, yet some

authors consider that working from angles from within the texts help students gather more insight into their own writing and helps them understand and overcome problems they have when writing texts.

Looking at the content that students include in their texts is seen as a method to help students write better. Lillis (2006), and Lea and Street (1998) consider skills, socialisation and academic literacies as approaches to student writing in HE. Ivanic (1999) includes creative self-expression and socialisation in this process of writing. Edwards and Mercer (1987) explain how cued elicitation helps to model written texts. They also define that reconstructive paragraphing enables the teacher to understand what the student means in opposition to what the student has actually written. This enhances more accurate corrections in terms of content. Feedback is seen to have an important role. Lillis enhances the importance of talkback as a means of involving the student-writers in their own educational progress. The dialogues that are part of feedback can be described as tutor-directive dialogue, collaborative dialogue and talkback facilitating dialogue. The first makes language visible and is an attempt at talking the student-writer into essayist literary practice. The second aims at filling in the student's text with his/ her real initial intentions. The last draws upon the tutor guidance stimulating student explanations and drawing further information.

The focus on content, socialisation skills in student writing, self-expression and talkback in feedback, mentioned in the previous paragraph, have been included in the design of the writing tasks on Moodle in this research as a means of facilitating learning to write and giving students control of their own writing. Understanding how these afore mentioned elements in the literature are linked to e-/b-learning courses in writing, are an aid to other professionals who need assistance to guide the socialisation process on a forum or stimulate quieter students to express themselves online. The teacher's role

as a motivator and facilitator of knowledge is duly enhanced at all stages of the writing process. Having the knowledge passed on from other teacher's and researcher's experience in writing modules, guided me into the processes adopted in designing the writing assignments and how feedback could be given to the students with the use of track-changes on their academic writing assignments, sending students online messages to make clear intended meanings that could have been misunderstood and by their colleagues giving more extensive feedback on their written assignments with the addition of digital comments as a means of offering them various sources of feedback.

Murray, in Ganobscik-Williams (2006), puts forward an array of questions which she herself leaves unanswered. She claims that the University of Strathdale pays particular attention to free-writing, structuring and visualising. This aspect is considered to the extent that it can be used to trigger more creativity at the planning stage of writing. This research included free-writing and visualisation into the writing module as a way to stimulate students' individuality and resorting to Vygotsky's notion of scaffolding, where students can visualise prior knowledge and write freely about it, especially at the beginning of the exploration of a theme and when they were communicating and engaging on the forums on Moodle. This perspective reminds us of the importance of creativity, yet it does not always have a place when writing more formal types of texts. It is great to use when writing in forums as a means to stimulate students' confidence in communicating through writing, however some specific skills also need to be addressed for students' confidence in overcoming their writing challenges.

The University of Wollongong adapted a 'transformative model' (Skillen, in Ganobscik-Williams, 2006), whereby it is assumed that each student needs to acquire generic and specific writing skills. This model reinstates the importance of contextualisation of assignments and how b-learning courses should be designed with

this in mind. For example, Biology and Physics students need to understand that the report writing structure they are learning in a writing course will be used very often when they carry out experiments in other courses throughout their degree. By following Systemic Functional Linguistics, the teacher ensures that writing instructions are contextualised. In this way, students become more aware of linguistic devices which are considered characteristic to Academic Writing. This ensures recognition, control and better use of them. These devices include: Modality (levels of certainty of claims); Nominalisation (increasing levels of density in sentences by turning verbs into noun constructions); Thematic Development (construction of cohesive and logical texts); Passive Voice and Thematic Development (diversion of reader's attention to what was done). Academic Writing is seen to have evolved in learning centres from 'remedial' to 'integrated' and 'transforming' models of instruction. The model is based on the framework proposed by Kolb (1984) who reports on the importance of scaffolding around exposure to the information, as well as feedback on the written work, and consequently, time to reflect on what has been discussed. These notions of scaffolding have a reflexive relationship with some b-learning principles, which also focus on the integration of the content to be taught and this model aids in explaining and defining how b-learning courses need to be designed. Poskitt (2002) agrees with the aforementioned and argues that learners need to see an example of what they are to achieve. Exemplars enable students to learn faster. These exemplars have similarities to the models used in the genre approach which was used in this research.

The Transformative Model mentioned above involved collaborative work between writing teachers, learning developers in the learning centre and staff of all levels. This work was essential in the development of curricula that not only taught explicit subject matter but also presented skills in the study of that subject. There was a revision of

assessment leading to the inclusion of formative and summative assessment so as to maximise learning opportunities in skills and content. The value of the model was based upon the partnership being involved in Academic Writing with disciplinary discourse. As the main concern became how learning was to be achieved, the lessons became student-centred and the teacher became a teacher of skills and knowledge: a collaborator in learning. Needless to say, this element of student-teacher collaboration is essential in b-learning and in CoI in particular and this study helped to integrate the content of the courses into the writing module that was introduced due to this research.

Curry (in Ganobscik–Williams, 2006) points out that learning needs to be done by careful choice of content. She comes to this conclusion through an ethnographic study where she sat in for a whole semester in the course of Basic Writing 3 at Monroe Community College. This course had 18 English language learners from Russia, Korea, Japan, Sierra Leone, Laos, Dominican Republic, Taiwan and the United Arab Emirates. Their ages varied between 18 and ‘retirees’ (age not mentioned). These students met for their writing course twice a week for a period of 15 weeks. During this time, Curry gathered data through observation, audiotapes, student questionnaires, interviews, writing samples, institutional documents and the course textbook.

Curry observed a 75% dropout in this course and she believed that the teacher was partly responsible for this. She claims that there was an inadequate choice of topics which were not helpful in introducing academic writing to the students. There was too much focus on grammar and this was isolated from context. Lea and Street (1998) classify this as the ‘skills model’, also known to automate skills. Curry did not agree with the teacher’s focus on paragraphs instead of the whole text and criticised the lack of feedback on students’ writing. She thus proposed better and more effective teacher training and support, student-based curriculum development, a shift of linguistic

accuracy to a final focus of editing instead. This example reminded me to concentrate on the whole writing assignment when giving students feedback, despite also wanting to work on paragraphing techniques with them. This benefited my students in the sense that we could focus on the particular writing techniques without disregarding the whole writing task. B-learning gives teachers the possibility of giving students the choice to work on skills if need be yet also gives the teacher and students the possibility to sidetrack what is less problematic for particular students and simply focus on the writing task at hand. Curry incites feedback as a means of aiding students with their writing and exploring this area of her research also proved insightful as peer feedback is a valuable aid in teaching.

Devet, Orr, Blythman and Bishop (in Ganobscik–Williams, 2006) are drawn towards the importance of peer influence. In the US peer feedback is seen to be very helpful as it is cheaper for the university, enabling them to provide a larger supply of workers to help the students. It creates an easy atmosphere as peers are less intimidating than teachers. The peers act as an audience, enabling students to re-examine their perspectives and grow as writers and thinkers. This process makes peer credibility very powerful, forceful and effective.

In the UK, the lack of peer support seems to be due to the specialised curricula that are part of the university tradition. This enforces the presence of very skilled people to offer student support. In my ARCs in Portugal, students act as peer-reviewers and co-constructors of each other's texts.

In terms of practical aids for tasks and the planning of lessons, I use Tribble (2006) to help determine teaching methods as well as choice of materials and it also played a role in shaping part of the course design. From Tribble, the process approach, the use of genres, and his different perspectives of teaching writing in different areas of study,

namely, language teaching, business and academic settings, guided some of my lesson plans and enabled me to vary the writing activities in accordance with the students I had. The task given to my students on genres (in Narrative Accounts of ARCs) was inspired on Tribble's examples on pp.25-28. Grabe and Kaplan offer some insights into the process approach and teaching writing at beginning and intermediate levels. These notions added to my mindfulness of the different types of students I had in each class and their different levels of language awareness. However, Hyland offers more practical examples to draw from and his theoretical framework on teaching writing and the approaches to the writing process enabled me to have a more in-depth understanding of the best methods to apply with my students. Hyland's section on the impact of new technologies on writing (pp.73-79) were of the essence at an initial stage of the designing of the module as it gave me great motivation and self-belief that b-earning could indeed assist students develop their writing skills. Issues such as multimodality, hypertexts and online discourse communities prompted the route the writing module began to take. Examples of exercises that were part of the writing module can be read in the chapter 'Narrative Accounts of the ARCs'. Leki (2001) also gives concrete reports on studies carried out which proved very useful in shaping my line of thought when making lesson plans and when putting together the module. Belcher (1995) gathers many different points of view that offer insight into the pedagogy of teaching writing. All these different theories and teaching methodologies have fed into the design of my writing module at different stages. Each was useful for different writing tasks and the various stages that each task required.

5 Methodology

5.1 Research Methodology

Methodology is determined by researchers' aims but also determines what type of data researchers collect and then analyse. This chapter shall contextualise how the research was carried out and the different steps it entailed. It falls under qualitative research and is carried out through action research cycles. As it is an interventionist methodology, attention shall be paid to how the intervention was carried out and what effects it has on teaching writing skills and on the research design itself. Focus is then given to data collection methods that include a wide variety of ways of getting meaningful and valid data to allow an efficient analysis.

This particular action research project includes a variety of areas defined by Holly and Whitehead (1986). These include enhancing teaching methods, learning strategies, evaluative procedures and attitudes and values. All are linked to each other and enable the cycles to be carried out and have an effect on diverse angles of the research as a whole. This particular focus on action research falls within qualitative research, but cross-validation shall also be carried out using quantitative data.

Cohen and Manion (1985) define that action research (AR) is situational, which is the case of this particular research. Problems that have been identified in my teaching context, at the University of Madeira are looked at and solutions are applied tentatively. These authors refer to the collaborative characteristic of AR which is also reflected in this research as collaboration occurs with a lecturer in the Maths department, another from the Social Sciences Department and lastly, with a lecturer from the English and German Studies Department. These lecturers saw the need for students to be exposed to English and have the opportunity to better their writing skills.

This chapter explores how qualitative research, action research, intervention methodology and the data collection methods are viewed and how they helped to shape this research.

5.2 Qualitative Research

This intervention, as previously mentioned, falls into qualitative analysis as its aim is to develop a deeper understanding for a social situation. To be more specific, the interpretative paradigm (Denzin and Lincoln, 1995, 2000, 2005; Cohen et. al., 2003, 2007) and social constructivist traditions (Piaget, 1971; Jonassen et. al., 1999; Beck and Kosnick, 2006) help define the ARCs that were carried out. These ARCs are interpretative in the sense that they are carried out to understand students' reality in the classroom and aim to help them overcome challenges they face. The research follows a social constructivist tradition within education due to its aim to address problems that when solved can contribute to building a better situation for the students that follow. Knowledge is acquired through action and grounded in experience and b-learning leads to collaboration and cooperation to construct a better learning and teaching environment for those in the educational system. In order to clearly delimit this research as qualitative, it also occurs within natural settings. All the above mentioned notions shall be explored and defined further on in this section.

If research is perceived when someone 'sets out to discover something directly about the world' [...] 'with the intention of eventually making claims on the basis of the evidence gathered' (Richards, 2003: p.3), then finding out how b-learning can help Portuguese students studying diverse areas develop their writing skills in English, is part of that discovery process. Qualitative research implies the researcher being involved(Richards: p.8), and this study shows that it is person-centred, on students and teachers in the courses where the writing module is introduced, and the research has a

transformative potential, which is brought about by b-learning. From these premises, this research can be classified as qualitative seeing as the b-learning writing module has been designed by me in the hope that it can support changes in teaching practices in the department where I lecture and make the university aware of the potential of b-learning.

Qualitative research, as seen by Nunan (1992), is relative and subjective. Both qualitative and quantitative research methods are used in this research, as are mixed methods and thus triangulation of the data is needed (Bryman, 1988, 1998, 2003, 2006).

Mixed methods and triangulation are seen as:

the traditional view that quantitative and qualitative research might be combined to triangulate findings in order that they may be mutually corroborated (Bryman, 2006: p.105).

By using statistics as well as other facts (structural features), which are seen as quantitative, they shall help support the qualitative research. Qualitative research is mostly appropriate for the larger scope of this research as it shall be person-centred. Edge (1998) refers to three major fields that are identified within qualitative research, also known as paradigms: (Post) Positivism, Constructivism and Critical Theory. Constructivism clearly defines the design of ARCs and places this research under this paradigm. Richards states: ‘reality is socially constructed’ and ‘the focus of research should be an understanding of this construction and the multiple perspectives it implies’. Richards’ perspective captures the essence of this research and makes clear that the end-product is not the only objective, but there is an intention to ensure that the teaching/learning process and relationship that is aided through b-learning is understood and described so that others can also resort to this research as a model to guide their own research.

5.3 Action Research

Within the qualitative theory and constructivist paradigm, action research is the process adopted to carry out this research and gather data that will shed light on the effects b-learning has on a HE b-learning English writing module. AR has provided a platform for this research to obtain data that led to CoI. In this section, attention shall be paid to the structure of action research cycles and to diverse academic perspectives of how it should be carried out and how it has developed as an accepted research methodology.

AR was initially approached by Dewey (1916) when he looked at knowledge as insufficient on its own as a ‘process of registration or representation’ (Vanderstraeten and Biesta, 2001). Dewey believed there was a need for intervention as he saw the value in linking knowledge to action. AR was then first conceptualised in the Gestalt movement, in 1947 by Lewin (1946) and then other researchers built onto their initial viewpoints. Lewin sought a way to work in the social sciences at a time when WWII (World War II) was causing many social problems, with the aim of gathering scientists and academics to work together to understand and improve practical problems. Kolb (1984) and Carr and Kemmis (1986) considered a few steps essential to carry out AR. These included: planning, acting, observing and reflecting. Zuber-Skerritt (1992) realises the importance of action research and amongst many practical examples of the tradition, the author explains how it is understood. The CRASP model put forward by Zuber-Skerritt does not differ tremendously from Kemmis’ ‘Action Research Circle’. Following Kemmis and McTaggart’s ‘Action Research Circle’, there are stages that these authors consider:

1. Initiation
2. Preliminary Investigation
3. Hypothesis
4. Intervention

-
5. Evaluation
 6. Dissemination
 7. Follow-up

The Zuber-Skerritt ARCs Model is seen as rather more simplistic than all the steps they provide and that have been mentioned above.

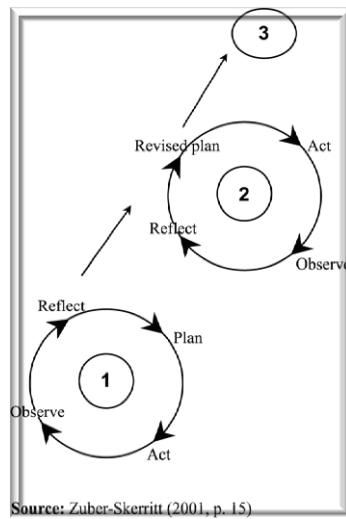


Figure 25 - Action Research Cycles

CRASP stands for: ‘Critical attitude, Research into teaching, Accountability, Self-evaluation, Professionalism’ (p.3). It is however, a few pages later described as standing for:

Critical collaborative enquiry by
 Reflective practitioners being
 Accountable and making the results of their enquiry public
 Self-evaluating their practice and engaged in
 Participative problem-solving and continuing professional development
 (p.15).

Both explanations for the acronym are self-explanatory, and although both explanations do not differ greatly, the CRASP model is not clearly defined. Although the words for each letter are not the same in both descriptions, the essence behind the overall meaning

of the model remains the same. The practical element of AR was adopted by other researchers and although the definitions acquired nuances that reflected AR in different areas of knowledge, its core remained that of finding solutions to real problems.

Cohen et. al. (2000, 2003, 2007) describes action research as being situational and collaborative. This means that the researcher is concerned with identifying and solving a problem in a particular situation and in order to do this, collaborative work is essential. Burns (1999) offers a collaborative perspective on action research that clearly embraces this research. She elucidates that:

collaborative action research (CAR) processes strengthen the opportunities for the results on practice to be fed back into the educational systems in more substantial and critical ways (p.13).

Her views on qualitative approaches to research help build on professional development with descriptions, interpretations and clarifications of social contexts. By describing CAR as evaluative and reflective as well as participatory, my intervention is clearly embedded within this perspective.

Burns does however have a more holistic and flexible approach to ARCs that is more adaptable to my educational context, enabling me to alter some of the previously mentioned strict steps according to my needs, yet maintaining validity in the intervention. Interestingly, Mann (1999) demonstrates how ‘action research is a way to engage with classroom teaching and bring more of it to a conscious level; a way to uncover what has become invisible’. He also stresses that ‘becoming a researcher does not mean that one stops being a teacher’ and this is indeed what needed to happen if this research was to provide any useful data and add to changes that could occur in teaching methods by using b-learning at the University of Madeira.

Dick (2006) looks at AR after 2004 and points out the work of Reason and Bradbury (2001), Gray (2004) and Cooke and Cox (2005) as particularly important in the way that

AR is viewed as ‘real world research’ (p.440). McNiff and Whitehead (2005) and Whitehead and McNiff (2006) provide very useful and practical guidance and advice from their own personal research and direct it at teachers, knowingly addressing problem issues in AR and providing possible solutions. Elden and Chischolm (1993) focus on AR as a means to innovate in a systems’ capacity to adjust, which is easily adapted to education systems in need of change. In education, AR was seen to ‘accept that research questions should emerge from a teacher’s own immediate concerns and problems’ (Crookes, 1993: p.130).

This is how the ARC is viewed:

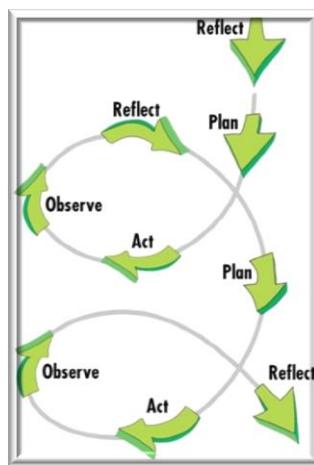


Figure 26 - Action Research Cycle¹⁰

When considering many of the theories above, whilst using the flexibility that AR now purveys, initiation took place when students’ difficulties in writing was discussed by lecturers in our department and university. We understood that we all were facing the same problem. After taking a post graduate course in ‘Multi-media in Education’ a few questions arose from that experience. Could b-learning help in effectively enabling our students to develop their writing skills? Trial interviews with a few lecturers and students from our department were held, as were meetings with lecturers from other

¹⁰ in <http://celt.ust.hk/teaching-resources/action-research>

departments in our university. A hypothesis, of whether b-learning can help students become more motivated to develop their writing skills became the focus. Interviews and questionnaires provided data to be evaluated. Dissemination and follow-ups from the ARC1 to ARC2 and from both these to ARC3 were carried out and, hopefully, the results are substantial and valid and other lecturers, universities and/or institutions will be interested in my work and results, and there may be other opportunities for further follow-up.

5.3.1 Action Research and its Drawbacks

The major drawback presented by authors such as Cohen and Manion (1985) is that AR lacks scientific rigor. Beatty (2003) sees AR as a process that includes planning, acting and reflecting yet Foster (1972) criticises AR for not creating enough action or for not creating sufficient research. The main issue in the research field is how it is viewed as a lesser science due to the different perspectives that action researchers have of the process itself.

Although most authors are in agreement about the cycles needed for action research to take place, Nunan (1992) puts forward problems researchers encounter when carrying out action-based research. He refers to lack of time, lack of expertise, difficulty in identifying subjects, problems in negotiating access to research sites, issues of confidentiality, ethical questions relating to collecting data, problems flowing from growth of projects after initiation, sensitivity reporting negative findings and the preparation of a written report of the research (p.219). Dickens and Watkins (1999) refer to the difficulty of working and researching in real-time situations, which causes problems to evolve very quickly and thus researchers find themselves unable to provide the most adequate solutions to these problems. They either abandon the research at the

diagnosis stage or when they implement the first solution they are able to find, even if that one only partially resolves the issue at hand.

Probably in unison with the above mentioned problems, action researchers felt the need to avoid such a rigid AR procedure. Nunan also refers to the flexible nature of AR as it needs to respond according to emerging issues as they cause impact on societies. Thus Ebbutt (1985) and Elliott (1991) voice criticism of Kemmis and McTaggart's model. With the appearance of more complex models, Ebbutt expresses his beliefs in a series of successive cycles that enable interaction and feedback between them.

Burns (1999) refers to drawbacks as constraints rather than problems. Lack of time and resources as well as lack of research skills are mentioned as major constraints. In relation to the research, she also refers to lack of support to do the research due to institutional organisational features such as beliefs about teachers' roles, disapproval of heads of institutions, colleagues or students and even difficulties in obtaining consent. She also mentions mastering language of research as one of the constraints. Anxiety also plays a major role in hindering research as it may affect research skills or teaching practices. Together with all the above mentioned issues, when a researcher is confronted with scepticism as to the usefulness of the work underway and needs to write up a report, this can inevitably also cause a great amount of anxiety. One also needs to consider all the time and schedule constraints that are inherent to any type of educational research. I can identify with quite a few of these constraints such as difficulties in explaining the importance of research to the students who were not used to having their teachers carrying out research whilst teaching and anxiety in mastering all the research skills required to carry out the ARCs and write it up.

As practitioner/ researcher, one is also confronted with some ethical concerns such as considering whether students are better off knowing about the research and their

participation in it as they may react negatively knowing that they are being analysed for research purposes. I considered it essential that all students understood what the cycles entailed and gave them liberty to partake or not in the study. Burns mentions responsibility, confidentiality and negotiation as key principles in ethics. Mann (1999) reflects on practical issues such as lack of time, adequate skill and adequate support to carry out ARCs. All these were taken into account at different moments within the cycles as professional integrity encompasses that the three above-mentioned elements be transmitted to the subjects. Looking at the viability and interest of the research is also an ethical matter therefore, it seems essential that objectives and methods be clearly stated (Avison et. al., 1999).

McNiff (1988, in Burns, 1999) also states that:

AR must be seen as flexible and different combinations of researchers in different situations will need to make their own interpretations of what are appropriate processes for the circumstances of the research (Burns, 1999: p.35).

Within logical boundaries, this flexibility gives room for researchers to adapt to the communities within which they are working and allows more room for further analysis.

Avison et. al. criticise flexibility as they believe:

[there] is still a lack of detailed guidelines for novice researchers and practitioners to understand and engage in action research studies in terms of design, process, presentation, and criteria for evaluation (p.96).

There are yet other models that offer a wider range of steps such as that suggested by Burns (1999, 2005). She lists: exploring, identifying, planning, collecting data, analysing/ reflecting; hypothesising/ speculating, intervening, observing, reporting, writing and presenting. When looking at my own ARCs, it followed most of these processes mentioned, mostly in an interrelated manner. As a practitioner researcher, there are times when observation is occurring in a classroom whilst simultaneously

gathering data and writing down impressions or reflections to add to the data being collected. Burns (2005) describes AR as ‘explicitly interventionist’ and with a ‘subjective approach’ (p.60) as it is situated where the problem is found and where the participants can be accessed. She also refers to its interventionist characteristics as it aims to change issues that are practical impediments within an educational system. The data collected through systematic procedures is used to analyse, understand, modify and improve practices. Therefore, taking into account my own working habits and institutional structure, this model was easily adopted, adapted and put into practice.

5.4 Collaborative Action Research

Collaborative AR is seen as a great opportunity to redirect research back into the education system. In this case in particular, a mostly qualitative approach is done as understanding how teaching/ learning can be done through b-learning cannot actually be quantified. Burns (1999) defines that the ‘qualitative approach offers descriptions, interpretations and clarifications’, (p.22) and in order to do this, one needs a variety of data collection methods. These may include class observation, interviews, focus groups, questionnaires, surveys and diaries and they all involve interpretative analysis, which Nunan (1992) also considers essential to any ARC.

Collaborative Action Research (CAR) involves more than one teacher, which was my case in particular. Seeing as I am on PhD research leave, my cycles could not be carried out in a class of my own as that is legally not possible. I therefore had to find teachers that were willing to work with me and believed that this research would also benefit their course and students. Due to pragmatic issues, the choice to work in this way was made and it worked out for the best. Cooperative development grew among teaching colleagues with the aim of adding to our personal satisfaction and self-development,

elements that Edge (1992) characterises as part of his description of cooperative development.

Nunan further discloses that in order to obtain reliability and validity of the research, one ought to ‘triangulate’, meaning test data and findings against each other. It seems to me that collaborative development can enable a more accurate triangulation as there is greater input of a variety of reflective thought and critical analysis. This can be seen as the participatory aspect of AR as it seems to stimulate collaborative investigation. Hill and Kerber (1967, in Burns, 1999) state their beliefs that AR ‘functions best when it is cooperative’ (Burns, 1999: p.31). Needless to say, we all also experience the lack of cooperation on behalf of those that embark on the AR with us. The levels of interest and motivation vary and keeping everyone involved is quite a challenge.

5.5 Intervention Methodology

In order to clearly depict the nature of the research methodology, this section describes where the intervention took place giving a general picture of the University of Madeira and the students that were part of the ARCs. Within ARCs of a b-learning writing module, I use Moodle, which is an “Open source” Learning Management System (LMS) software to support the online element of the module and teach a component of face-to-face (f-to-f) lessons within courses at the University of Madeira. The cycles are carried out with 1st Year undergraduate students from diverse areas.

5.5.1 Background, Motivation and Opportunity

The University of Madeira (UMa) is a Portuguese university located on the island of Madeira. It is the only university on the island. All other universities are on the mainland or on another island: the Azores. The University of Madeira is suffering from natural consequences caused by island isolation and lately from the radical budget cuts

that all Portuguese universities are going through and is seeing the number of students' applications dwindling year by year.

At the moment, we, the lecturers at the University of Madeira, have come to realize that students are deeply unmotivated in the HE experience. The students seem to apply to the university either because this is what their parents have planned for them or because they have no other route to take, as the unemployment rate is rather high in Portugal at the moment. According to Eurostat, in January 2007, Portugal had an unemployment rate of 7,6%, which is slightly above the average rate in Europe which lay at 7,5% .

Students have told me they are only at the university because their parents feel it is best for them. Previously, during a conversation with 3rd-year undergraduates, the vast majority admitted they did not know what they would do after getting a degree. Most lecturers are perplexed and talk about the high degree of apathy they see in their classes. It is actually a fact that the students that get into HE are a very small portion of the young population. Eurostat's statistics show that 49% of people between the ages of 15 and 24 have managed to complete upper secondary education. The European average is 77,4% and the UK has an average of 78,2%. This shows how far below the average Portugal lies. The level drops even further to 26,5% when looking at the age groups of 25 to 65 compared to the European level of 79,3%.

As there are not many promising job prospects for both people with and without HE degrees, our students do not have a strong reason or incentive to work diligently. This leads to very weak overall marks in most departments and this triggers a high level of drop outs in the 2nd and 3rd year undergraduates. Not all departments keep attendance registers but my own registers from last year show this pattern.

It is in the hope that different initiatives may help contradict these disappointing patterns that my module has been designed.

Hopefully it will motivate students who yearn for something different in our traditional educational system to partake and learn from the project. For the students who find coming to classes difficult or simply boring, the on-line modules are a good opportunity for them to try out how fruitful learning from home may be. (Research Diary)

With the Bologna Treaty, all degrees have basic courses that are the same for all undergraduates and aim at giving students a broader perspective and solid background knowledge of diverse areas within their field. This is the main objective of ‘General Education’ which follows the Harvard model. ARC1 and ARC2 are embedded within two of these courses: ‘History of Science and Technology’ and ‘Rhetoric and Communication’. ARC3 is within two language courses lectured by the Department of English and German Studies (DEAG = Departamento de Estudos Anglísticos e Germanísticos): ‘English A1’ and ‘English B2.2’. (See Appendix 1 and 5 for course syllabi)

5.5.2 Preliminary Qualification and Access

The intervention shall be described during its initial stages. This section considers how the interviews carried out with teachers from different areas and different language teaching levels actually helped shape the intervention. Interviews that helped gain my access to students and courses are also referred to in this section.

All students are required to have access to computers. In the case of the students at the University of Madeira, most of them will already have their own computers, but if they do not, they are able to access computer labs at the university at any time. It is also useful that all towns and villages now have free access points which anyone can use. The European Committee ensured through ‘E-Europe 2005’, now ‘i2010’, that Portugal also developed in ICT especially through the ‘E-Inclusion’ measures.

Besides the use of Moodle, each student will already have a university email account which will be used, especially at an initial stage to get the e-learning module working. The course thus takes on a wider didactic spectrum as, in conversation with lecturers of the Maths department, it was understood that some teachers use Moodle but only as a means of putting materials at the disposal of students. Therefore by using this platform with 1st-year undergraduates, they will get used to accessing information this way. Although the other lecturers do not interact online in any way with the students, the platform is used as a supporting system to place course materials for students to access.

5.5.3 Preparing and Planning

After having certified that I had access to the students and to their teachers and courses, time to prepare and plan the ARCs came. This section describes steps taken to ensure the modules were planned and that the teachers collaborating with me on the project understood where my objectives lay and that I did not take their students in a direction that they did not consider important to their course.

In order to prepare the cycles, meetings were held with high school English and Engineering teachers, University department heads and then with teachers who showed interest in being involved in and helping with the AR cycles. I also interviewed teachers in my own department to further understand what they thought was the reason for our students' problems with writing in English and students' perspectives were sought out amongst final year English and Business Studies students. Meetings with the lecturer who is responsible for the technical maintenance of Moodle in the Maths department were also held so we could define what was possible to do with what we had available.

(See Appendix 6 for an example of an interview transcription)

The BAWE project interviews carried out at the University of Warwick and Oxford Brookes University gave me a perspective of how these interviews could be carried out

and what types of questions could be made. Besides the interviews themselves, looking at the data analysis of the students' writing was very useful when preparing the writing module, especially the Disciplinary Writing Profiles (DWPs) of Engineering, English and History.

Teaching writing methodology also fed into planning the whole module. Process writing, post-process writing, the genre approach and model approach provided a mixture of possibilities that could be pondered and mixed into the right equation for our UMa students. Flower and Haye's writing process model offered an excellent mode of presenting a very organised and logical writing process that was later adopted to help teach Engineering students about how they may structure their writing. (See Appendix 7 for examples of materials used in the lessons)

The online affordances listed by Ariew (1987: p.178) were taken into account whilst designing the activities included in the ARCs. These include interaction, immediate feedback, error analysis, self-correction and privacy, reinforcement, individualised instruction, flexibility and animation. Stephenson (2001) refers to

- easy access and interrogation of high volumes of learning resources selected by the instructor
- ease of access to other material
- ease of access to experts
- various modes of interaction
- interaction in various time dimensions: synchronous and asynchronous
- access to a range of personal support: email, peer group discussions
- ease of navigation within materials: sources and persons in and out of the institution

-
- logging / tracking of activities for personal records, sharing or assessment
 - multiple levels of engagement to different depths of understanding, different volumes of data, difficulty of learning activities, according to individual capacity or interest
 - feedback loops
 - links to other media
 - choice of learning styles
 - global connectivity and collaboration opportunities
 - flexibility of access from different locations (p.23-24).

These affordances were not all met by this research, however, attention was paid to providing learning resources that were easily accessible and that offered different modes of interaction, including themes that were of personal interest to the students, so that the students with different learning styles were all accommodated for. The students were able to access the teachers easily through asynchronous communication and could also interact through these mediums with their classmates for peer group interactions. Moodle provided the participants with an easily navigational learning platform which enabled them to gather knowledge and which also made it easy for the teacher and researcher to track their activity on the platform as it keeps records of the logged in participants.

Some drawbacks (Mason and Weller, 2000, in Banks et. al., 2002) were also discussed with the lecturers I was collaborating with. Greater attention was paid to how time-consuming b-learning can be to both learner and tutor, the resistance of students and, I

later found out, of lecturers too, and the need for experience and understanding for the dynamics of on-line interaction.

Exploration of Moodle also needed to be done and thus, I began organising the site into a weekly scheme and adding in some personal information to build up a profile that students would be able to access when they registered. Trying to understand how materials were uploaded and exactly what types of files could be uploaded took a few days, but it was important that I got a feel for the platform before actually talking to the lecturers about how we could organise the work on the VLE. (See Appendix 8 for Moodle examples)

Professor Castanheira, the lecturer of the ‘History of Science and Technology’ course, explained what he thought about writing in our preliminary interview:

‘I think it’s fundamental. Last year... they were ... I mean their evaluation was based on a report they had to write at the end and this year, it’s probably going to be the same thing. Perhaps with something in the middle but essentially it’s a written report that they have to hand in so it’s very important.’

Later on he further emphasized that he thought

‘they really should understand that writing and explaining their ideas is as important as knowing the science that is behind the things and so on. It’s very important.’

5.5.4 Implementation

After a few months of preparations, and many meetings with the teachers collaborating with me, the implementation of the b-learning writing course was possible. In the following section, further description of how this implementation of the writing module within the different courses is addressed. Attention is paid to Moodle in the first few lessons, the writing materials, students’ online interactions and assignments throughout the module.

Part of the processes of doing AR is implementation. After identifying a problem and formulating some ideas, collecting some data and analysing it to help plan the AR, implementation or intervention takes place. In this case, it meant the implementation of the b-learning writing module into the courses.

This involved teaching the writing module in each course over the period of a month. Face-to-face lessons were given and the lesson plans were discussed previously with the lecturer of each course. Together with these face-to-face lessons, tutoring had to be done online to keep students writing and interacting. Weekly summaries of the week's work were posted. Keeping the e-tivities running was fundamental for the success of the ARC and this meant constantly following where the students' posts were taking them on the forum, stimulating their participation and reinforcing those that were placing their perspectives online. This work was aimed at creating and solidifying a secure Community of Inquiry (CoI), as Garrison and Vaughan (2008) refer to it.

It was also important to tutor the students that reached out for assistance either with their English when wishing to place a post on the forum or when organising their work for the assignments. Tutoring was done both online and in person.

After each lesson, the materials were placed online and activities were launched that would keep students informed of other dimensions they may want to get more information about. They also were able to discuss issues brought up in class. (See appendices for examples of materials used in the lessons.)

During this stage, assessment was possibly the most important phase for the students, therefore the assignments were launched and clearly defined both in the lessons and online. Students were given the possibility of getting in touch with the lecturer in the office, through messages on Moodle and by email if they felt they needed any help.

The data collection taking place included questionnaires, audio recordings of the face-to-face lessons, class observation and note taking, all the texts students were writing, including forum posts (Appendix 8), Moodle messages (Appendix 9), blogs (Appendix 10), emails and assignments, and towards the end of the module, interviews and focus groups. (See Appendix 11 for examples of student assignments)

5.5.5 Structure, Flexibility and Independence in AR and in Data Collection

This section explains and exemplifies the different data collection methods that were used in this research. By defining how each method was structured, it became possible to obtain the data required through diverse methods to be able to look at the research questions. The next sections look into each method in detail. Laurillard (1997) demonstrates

the design of learning materials begin with the definition of objectives and the analysis of student learning needs (p.182).

The course syllabi were structured and defined by me and the lecturers that participated in the ARCs at the University of Madeira, as well as by the students' own suggestions in accordance with what they think shall be most useful to them in the future.

Flexibility shall be most prominent at the initial stage for all groups in that the syllabus shall be very flexible allowing the students to propose the content they consider most beneficial for them. Ariew and Frommer, in Rivers (1987), claim that one of the advantages of CALL is flexibility. They point out:

students may or may not follow a sequence, control their own progress, (...) and practice according to interests or levels of proficiency. (p.179)

Flexibility is revealed throughout the whole writing module, as it allows students to do the work at their own rhythm. Although flexible, it adds to learner autonomy, making

each student responsible for his / her learning. Flexibility resides within some choice of materials that the students will find and pick out when doing research themselves.

Independence can be seen as one of the ultimate objectives of a module like this one. As teachers, this is always one of our major concerns: that our students learn enough to use all the knowledge acquired as independent people in their future professions. Hopefully, this module will help each student to become an independent thinker and writer. Independence and autonomy shall be revealed in the linguistic choices students make when writing their assignments, as well as in their capability to look for and apply newly found knowledge during the module and hopefully in their future professions too.

5.6 Data Collection and Data Analysis

Data collection includes questionnaires, interviews, focus groups, lesson recordings, field notes, class observation, research diaries and students' texts. Each of these are looked at in detail and will be referred to again in the data analysis chapter.

In this section, data collected during the ARCs and that enabled modifications between the cycles shall be listed and explained. I shall refer to methods, aims, contexts, content, participants and analysis of each.

Data collected included:

- Questionnaires (Appendix 2, 12)
- Interviews (Appendix 13)
- Focus groups (Appendix 14)
- Face-to-face lesson audio recordings and observation notes
- Research Diary
- Texts from:
 - o Assignments

-
- Forums
 - Blogs
 - Emails.

5.6.1 Questionnaires

As the first data collection method was a questionnaire, I shall begin by looking into how these are structured and what their importance within the research field is. Questionnaires helped me shape my b-learning research module by providing me with essential information about students working habits and IT skills and access. These questionnaires are the only part of my research that is quantitative and were analysed using Excel.

Initially we look at the general aims, method, context and participants. Then a more detailed view shall be given of each of the 3 questionnaires.

I. Methods and Aims

In this section, the aims of using the questionnaires are delineated due to their nature, namely their design and how they are adequately used to acquire data from and about the students' learning experience and online and writing habits. Questionnaires were chosen as the target population was quite large and came from varied backgrounds. They were applied to about 300 students in ARC1 and ARC2 and 25 students in ARC3 in the classroom and were essential to provide information about the different degrees each student was in. The aims here were to get the information that was necessary for running a module that catered to the different students' needs. It was also essential to know how many students actually had computers and internet access as well as their IT skills and working habits. The last questionnaire aims at providing students' impressions about their b-learning experience.

The aims of the ARCs are clear and have been previously mentioned and questionnaires are used to help ensure validity of the research. By triangulating data, there is the opportunity to cross-check information given through diverse sources and gathered from different people who share the same or similar thoughts on an issue. Designing carefully structured questionnaires enable the researcher to draw ‘valid inferences from [the] data in terms of generalisation, association and causality’ (Oppenheim, 2000: p.6).

This research instrument requires piloting and readjustments before being given to the real subjects of the research, which were carried out with some CELTE Masters students at the University of Warwick. They helped clarify instructions and specify some of the questions, narrowing them down to exactly what was required to know about the subjects as that would help with triangulation of data later on. Galloway (1997) defines what types of questions can be helpful when designing a questionnaire. The first questionnaire in my ARCs was structured using mostly dichotomous closed-ended questions but some had open-ended questions as sub-questions so students could express why they had chosen a preference. Students were asked to place an ‘x’ in the boxes provided for the dichotomous question types. Semantic differential questions were also used as a means to get further opinions about a dichotomous question and ranking order was also requested in one question.

In relation to the open-ended questions, there were both unstructured and sentence completion type of questions. This type of question was mostly used in Questionnaires 2 and 3 as more detailed information from the students was needed at that point. Particular attention was paid to the order of the questions and the layout, to maintain questions and their wording simple, clean and concise, so as not to burden students with filling out these questionnaires. By placing simple straight forward questions at the

beginning helps students to begin writing and helps get more positive reactions towards the questionnaire, as they mostly see these as a bore to fill out.

The subjects for the questionnaires had also been selected as they were the students attending the courses within which the b-learning writing module was integrated. Before the module began I needed to get to know the subjects better in terms of some personal information, their computer skills and habits and their English language skills. Thus, the first questionnaire was designed with these in mind and was subdivided into three parts and given to the subjects before the b-learning experience began.

The second questionnaire was aimed at understanding how the students were viewing their b-learning experience and it was administered online during the second half of the b-learning module.

The last questionnaire the subjects were asked to answer aimed at getting their overall impressions of the b-learning experience and was given to them in hardcopy on the last day of the module. These three questionnaires helped me follow-up on most of the subjects throughout their experience during the ARCs. In order for the follow-up to be as accurate as possible and because filling in questionnaires can be tedious, students could answer them either in Portuguese or English. This ensured that they were able to communicate exactly what they thought without linguistic barriers.

It is also important to mention that when I handed out these questionnaires I guaranteed all students that they would remain anonymous and explained that they were requested to register their names so that I could relate the information to them for the module as their lecturer, but that they would remain anonymous in the research data analysis. They were in no way obliged to participate in the ARC therefore they could choose to not answer the questionnaire if they preferred. Everyone agreed that I could use the data they were giving me.

II. Context, Content and Participants

In this section, the questionnaires are explored in terms of the context, content and participants. Given the need to get access to information early on in the cycles, as well as the context of students known to not fill in questionnaires put online for course assessment, I chose to hand them out in the very first class and retrieve them myself before the end of the lesson.

i. Questionnaire 1

The subjects of all the ARCs were asked to fill in 3 different questionnaires, two of which were hard copy and one was online. The subjects were all the students in ARC1, ARC2 and ARC3. The first questionnaires were distributed in the first lessons of each course. In this way, I ensured that most students answered them as almost all students go to the first classes in each semester so that they get an overall idea of the courses. By handing the sheets to the students and waiting in the classroom to re-collect them also heightened my chances of getting back as many responses as possible. It is also useful to be in the classroom to clarify any questions the students may have as the questions were all in English.

Questionnaire 1 was subdivided into 3 parts and the questions fitted onto an A4 page, front and back. Part A asked about personal information of each student, such as name, age, sex, degree, year of study, and student status.

Part B had questions relating to students' computer skills and habits. This part was composed of 12 questions altogether, 9 of which were closed-ended dichotomous questions. 8 of these had open-ended sub-questions. The remaining 3 questions were graded questions, 2 of which used semantic differences and 1 requested ranking order.

Part C aimed at obtaining information about students' English language skills. It had 6 questions: 1 was to fill in with a number, 2 were built was a semantic differences type, 1

was open-ended of sentence completion type and 2 were closed-ended dichotomous type. (Questionnaire 1 in Appendix 2)

ii. Questionnaire 2

The participants of this questionnaire were those that had registered to do the b-learning module on Moodle for ARC2 and ARC3. The questionnaire is already part of Moodle and is a general questionnaire that aims at finding out about the students' experience of working on Moodle. I uploaded the questionnaire for the students 2 weeks into the module.

It is composed of 5 unstructured open-ended questions that are in Portuguese.
(Translation in Appendix 15)

iii. Questionnaire 3

This questionnaire was given to all the students in ARC1, ARC2 and ARC3 present in the last f-to-f lesson of the b-learning writing module. It aims at understanding what the students thought about the whole module and what they would change if they could. This last question is useful for the modifications of future designs.

Personal information was requested at the beginning of the questionnaire, but the students were assured that they would remain anonymous. 8 questions that are subdivided into 4 dichotomous questions followed by a sentence completion sub-questions and 4 unstructured open-ended questions make up this questionnaire.
(Questionnaire 3 in Appendix 12)

III. Analysis

This section will describe how the questionnaires were analysed using Excel and Moodle too and how the analysis fed into the research. In ARC1, 184 responses were processed on Excel. The number of responses dropped in the online questionnaire as

was to be expected, but I did want to try this technique to see how students would react to it. In ARC2, 39 responses were received and in ARC3, 20 responses were placed online.

Although questionnaire 3 was also given to the students during a lesson in hard-copy, less responses than from the 1st questionnaire have been obtained. Some students dropped out of the courses and that made the numbers dwindle. 74 answers were received in ARC2 and 35 in ARC3.

The questionnaires provide the study with quantitative and qualitative data. They underwent statistical and analytical processing so that coding could occur for further detailed analysis. NVIVO8 helped match and contrast information from questionnaires 1, 2 and 3 and some development in students' outlooks on the ARCs was seen. These questionnaires supported triangulation of data which included the crossing of queries that could both be seen through a qualitative and quantitative perspective.

5.6.2 Interview

As another data collection method, interviews were essential at different stages of the research, namely before I began planning the ARCs and at the beginning of each ARC. Mostly teachers were interviewed in order to get their perceptions of students' writing skills and what needed to be achieved, how they thought materials could be useful and how they implemented writing tasks. Interviews also played an important role when individual students could not find the time to participate in the focus groups being carried out at the end of each ARC. These were looked at as another source of feedback and proved essential in getting information about individual impressions on the module. This section will look at each of these stages and at the types of interviews carried out.

I. Methods and Aims

As referred to previously, interviews were part of the intervention at different stages. In this section, I shall define their importance at each one. My aims changed as did the types of questions asked. I worked with semi-structured interviews as these are more adjustable to my way of being and how I conduct research and develop relationships with the subjects. They allow room for further depth in certain subjects yet maintain a line of thought throughout the whole interview.

I adopted semi-structured interviews, which is seen by Gillham (2005) as having a structured but flexible nature. Gillham reveals that this interview's flexibility is balanced by its structure. He claims that it should have a list of questions that is used for all interviewees involved. He also gives importance to the time that is allowed to each interviewee and claims that it should be equal for all the subjects. Nunan (1992) reinforces this idea when he delineates that the researcher has a general idea about where he wants this interview to go and his / her own interests, topics and issues dominate the interview. Most of my interviews took up to about half an hour each.

Flexibilty is seen by Gillham to be balanced by structure. This is expected to be a part of the list of questions as these undergo a process of development that ensures their topic focus. Interviews that are semi-structured enable the researcher to plan an interview that is exploratory. On the one hand, one has a list of pre-prepared questions as well as follow-ups and probes, but on the other hand, this type of interview allows the setting of focus to be wide-angled due to the use of open-ended questions, as Gillham proposes. This stimulates the interviewee to speak more freely on the topic that he / she has been questioned on. It proved quite useful when talking to UMa lecturers, as lecturers generally enjoy talking about their areas of expertise and sharing their perspectives, so this allowed them space to speak freely.

Gillham believes the semi-structured interview anticipates analysis and facilitates the organisation of gathering data from interviews. All these points were considered whilst structuring the interview questions. He divides this interview into 5 main phases:

- Preparation Phase: This happens before the interview and involves the definition of the topic area to be explored, selecting the interviewees and the preparation of the list of questions for the interview. Preparing the questions presupposes a period of work whereby the researcher has to narrow down the focus after carefully analysing the questions' logical sequence as well as follow-ups and probes that will enable the interview to have flexibility.
- Initial Contact Phase: This phase takes place just before the actual interview begins. The aim is to create a comfortable atmosphere so the interviewee feels at ease to talk to the researcher. This is viewed as primarily social interaction which may or may not have a link to the line of questioning which shall take place after a degree of empathy and ease has been created among the researcher and subject.
- Orientation Phase: The interviewer has to be very conscious of this stage as it is here that the interview is pointed in the direction the researcher wishes. This is done using follow-ups and probes when the researcher deems necessary.
- Substantive Phase: Gillham describes this phase as the main empirical focus for analysis, thus this would basically be most of the interview.
- Closure Phase: As in the Initial phase, this is seen as partly social and cognitive, for the researcher must round up the interview with a closing question, thank the interviewee for his / her time, leave the idea that a future interview may be useful for further research and make sure that the subject is willing to partake in other interviews (p.31-32).

Once the researcher has determined the topic that he / she wishes to cover and begins to think about how to conduct an interview that will provide his / her research with the desired data, scaffolding of the questions begins. Rubin (2005) refers to the importance of ‘scaffolding’ the interview in order to first come up with a skeleton for it. This step took me through a few drafts until getting to the list of questions I actually used for the interviews.

Rubin divides the question types into Main Questions, Follow-up Questions and Probes. I have chosen to use this terminology due to its simplicity. The main question types that Rubin explains and that were adopted in the interviews that were carried out included ‘Opening the Locks’. These are designed to encourage the subject to talk about his / her experience at length, so the data gathers depth on a particular topic and it helped to gather data about different perspectives related to students’ writing. ‘River and Channel’ makes the researcher feel the need to follow a certain train of thought and it is probable that some of the main questions may cease to be of importance when tagging along with the interviewee. It is however important to have the main questions planned out so the general aim is set and both the researcher and subject are aware of the research questions.

In order to gather the most information out of well designed main questions, Rubin recommends ‘Comparison and Contrast questions’, whereby one questions what is thought to be the best and worst characteristics of certain situations. ‘Confirmatory main questions’ also help to certify that certain information that one already has is in fact correct. This helps solidify the data of the research and was used often throughout the interviews conducted.

McGill and Beatty (2001) add a few more question types which enabled me to better my interviewing techniques:

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- Affective questions: ‘How do you feel about...?’
 - Probing questions: ‘What aspects of ... do you think might be relevant?’
 - Checking questions: ‘What you plan to do is... Is that right?’
 - Reflective questions: ‘In what way was... confusing?’

Follow-up questions come after the main questions and are also prepared before-hand.

When wording follow-ups, Rubin believes that these should make the main questions either more specific or general in order to pinpoint information or to search for a general picture.

Probes are techniques that keep a conversation flowing whilst ensuring clarification.

Rubin refers to various types of probes:

- Continuation Probes: these are used to encourage people to talk and to illicit more information. (hand gesture to continue)
- Elaboration Probes: these suggest the need for elaboration in detail of a concept. (‘Please can you specify ...’)
- Attention Probes: these are meant to let on that the researcher is paying close attention to what is being said. (Leaning forward; ‘I understand.’ ‘Can I quote you on that?’)
- Clarification Probes: these indicate that something should be explained. (‘Sorry?’ ‘Could you explain what you mean by...?’)
- Steering Probes: these are used when the conversation gets too far off track. (You mentioned..., can we go back to that?)
- Sequence Probes: these help place things into the correct order. (‘So, first you.... And then?’)

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- Evidence Probes: These probes aim at certifying whose position is the most reliable or which argument weighs more. ('How do you know that?')
 - Slant Probes: these provide clues as to what side your interviewee has taken and help interpret answers. ('So you agree with...?') (p.175).

So, on the whole interviewers need to understand the diverse functions of main questions, follow-ups and probes as well as how each function in certain types of interviews. Probes are, for example, very useful in unstructured interviews as a means to stimulate the subject's ideas, whereas follow-ups help to obtain the desired depth in semi-structured interviews. Despite the confusion that arises from distinguishing probes and follow-ups, I understand the difference to lie in the fact that follow-ups should be prepared and foreseen prior to the interview. Probes are instinctive reactions to keep the conversation going and no prior preparation is needed.

II. Context, Content and Participants

Each set of the above-mentioned interviews took place in different contexts with different participants and this section shall demonstrate how each one was carried out. After looking into many types of interviews as well as their objectives, I decided upon the semi-structured interview to begin collecting my data. I carried out a pilot study and then moved onto interviews with lecturers and undergraduates who are part of the English and German Studies Department (DEAG – *Departamento de Estudos Anglísticos e Germanísticos*) at the University of Madeira (UMa). The semi-structured interview seems to be the one that is most appropriate for my research. Despite the preparation that is necessary, this type of interview leaves room for introducing questions the interviewer thinks appropriate providing the interview with flexibility to probe into an issue that seems interesting. This is of utmost importance to me as I was

trying to understand how writing was viewed in DEAG. Having room to explore areas that may be touched upon by the interviewees and that I may not have had the sensitivity or awareness about is of utmost importance to enable a more in-depth approach to the research.

Interviews were also carried out at high schools with Engineering and English teachers before the ARCs began and learning about what the students wrote at the previous educational level helped define the direction of the writing as well as the teaching methodologies.

In order for data retrieved from interviews to be reliable and valid, there are a few issues that have to be taken into account. These include the type of questions, their design; the diverse steps followed from the trial interview through to the final interview itself; the structure, organisation and ordering of the questions; the way in which the questions are pruned so they prove to be relevant to the research; how the interviewees narrative is extended by putting them at ease and linking the questions so they see the logic behind the questioning and how the data is presented.

By planning the questions and then submitting them to a process of development whereby the focus on the topic narrowed, the interview is guided towards providing the adequate information on the topic in question. Due to the open-endings of the questions, it is easier to ensure that the interviewee talks about his/her own experience and puts across a personal opinion. If the open questions are insufficient to obtain the information required, the flexibility of this type of interview will allow probing until the information needed is disclosed. This flexibility also enables further probing into new or interesting topics that might be brought up and that were not initially contemplated. This type of flexibility also helps in ensuring that the data given is of a truthful nature. If one realises that an answer is dubious, this flexibility allows to cross-interrogate by

posing the same question in another manner or allows the interviewer to probe further into the matter so it may become clearer whether the interviewee's stand point is in fact truthful and honest or not.

III. Analysis

In this section, analyses of the interviews are described. The software and hardware used and how they enabled analysis is discussed. The use of Mp3 players/ recorders and the ease of copying files onto a computer are part of this discussion. The importance of Soundscriber, as freeware that makes transcribing a less arduous task is also looked at. Coding of these interviews is an inevitable part in this section too.

Transcribing and translating some of the interviews involve various steps that take up quite a large amount of time. This is begun by writing up, as soon as possible, what was said during the interview and then conducting a content analysis of the transcription. As to the translation process, I do that simultaneously to transcribing. Some of the interviews carried out with high school teachers and some university lecturers needed to be carried out in Portuguese as they were unwilling or unable to do the interview in English.

Gillham (2000) provides a few tips on how to transcribe interviews. Transcriptions should be well identified with names, which are mostly codified, positions of interviewees, dates, place or codes because they might be needed at a later stage in the research. One must not place too many words on a page allowing generous margins for all the coding references and notes that will be later added in. 350 words with double spacing is considered adequate by this academic. He advises researchers to use different typeface for his/ her own questions and other meaningful parts of the interview, such as interjections. However, when using NVIVO8, which was probably unavailable when Gillham wrote this book, it does most of the above automatically so formatting is not

such a concern anymore. Soundscriber proved to be extremely useful to transcribe most of the interviews. I used NVIVO8 for transcribing excerpts but Soundscriber is much more effective when transcribing whole interviews. Soundscriber makes controlling the timing of each walk cycle and rewinding much simpler as they can be programmed to the speed that each transcriber needs to write down what is being heard.

Once the recorded discourse has been written up, the researcher goes through the transcripts trying to pinpoint the substantive statements. At this stage, repetitions and other irrelevant information are ignored. This will make it possible to mark up the categories. It is quite a difficult task and requires practice. Breaks should be taken when finding the categories so that the brain is not given time to start forming its own groups. These categories can then be grouped according to the questions asked and can thus be given a group heading. Comparing the substantive statements with the categories takes the researcher to the next stage. An analysis grid is filled in this phase. Gillham provides some interesting models of grids (p.65).

The analysis sheet is composed of the list of categories as well as the codes for each interview. Each substantive statement is written up against the referent category. If a count assignment needs to be done, this can be completed on the same sheet or two separate ones. By this I mean counting, for example, the number of instances something occurs within a category. This shall indicate how many people share a certain idea. By tabulating the statements, the interviews are attributed a range of responses and this provides material for qualitative analysis. Once again NVIVO simplifies this whole process at the touch of a few buttons.

Gillham goes on to elucidate the importance of tabulating statements as this brings ‘the summary category to life’ and helps ‘convey a range of responses’ (p.70) that will provide organised material for the analysis. He differentiates surface and meaning

analysis when doing content analysis. By meaningful analysis, it is meant that categories are created which can be used to bring together different ideas relating to a single topic. These are of high inference and normally include things like human behaviour or feelings. Descriptive categories, for example, of objects, fall into surface analysis and are of low inference. A range of responses helps analysis when a category can be further divided into sub-categories, thus providing more detail about a single category. These additional links help add depth to the major category. For example, when looking at Blended-learning, some subcategories might be ‘interacting, communicating and guiding. These are seen as high inference, whilst a surface analysis could include ‘hardware, Moodle and message’.

5.6.3 Focus Groups

As a follow-up to the interviews carried out, focus groups were essential to get direct feedback from the students after their writing modules had ended. This section looks at how focus groups are set up and how they are monitored and moderated and why they are carried out in this research. It also reflects on the feedback that was acquired and how that fed into the research.

Focus Groups were carried out as it is easier to get students to participate in groups rather than on their own. It is essential to get their feedback and it is an economical way to gather essential information in a limited period of time. They also provide constructivist views on the research and can feed into the triangulation of data.

I. Methods and Aims

These focus groups were carried out as a means to obtain more qualitative data about the intervention from participants’ perspectives. This data can serve as confirmation or contradiction of data previously gathered. This section looks at how I steered the group

conversations so the students were able to express their honest opinions about their experiences during their b-learning module.

The aim of the focus groups carried out in the ARCs was to get a better perspective of the students' views of the b-learning writing module, what they had enjoyed or disliked, what they had felt they had learnt, if this was the case, and what they would change for future projects, if they thought it was worth trying to disseminate in other courses at UMa.

Morgan (1996) views focus groups as another means of obtaining qualitative data and attributes 3 distinct characteristics to them. According to him:

they are a research method devoted to data collection, [...] it locates the interaction in a group discussion as the source of data and [...] it acknowledges the researcher's active role in creating the group discussion for data collection purposes (p.130).

Despite being general views, they do help define focus groups as another perspective and source of data for research.

According to Lofland and Lofland (1984 in Dushku, 2000), focus groups 'can validate previously collected data' (p.765). By comparing and contrasting data obtained from individual interviews, groups can help clarify, explain, confirm or contradict data helping to gather more valid and trustworthy data. However, focus groups have a dialogic relationship with participants and data, by causing reactions that can help feed into the data or block out people from being able to put their opinions across. Groups can also hinder the appearance of information due to peer pressure and it then becomes the moderator's responsibility to try to create a comfortable atmosphere so everyone feels at ease to talk about and share his/ her opinions and experience.

Despite trying to give the subjects room to talk about what they thought was pertinent, my focus groups can be considered ‘more structured’ (Morgan: p.144) as I made an effort to guide the conversation towards my research interests. I also tried to control the group dynamics to give the quieter students a chance to also share their opinions. This was done when I had indications, such as looks or heard interjections that certain students wanted to participate but were unable to get the opportunity to talk.

In order to moderate focus groups, the researcher needs to understand something about group dynamics and the ‘group effect’. It is quite easy to see the dissemination of an opinion in a group, especially when a strong point is put forward by a group leader. It is then the moderator’s function to try to get other group members to express their opinions without controlling or guiding the conversation. The issue is then finding the distinguishing features within each group when the analysis is being done. This can be detected by what the group is focusing on and then also defines the categorisation and coding that is done. Care needs to be taken when analysing and interpreting so that both do not get used as being the same. Analysing is seen as data handling while interpretation includes thinking and inference of personal perspectives.

Another difficulty in focus groups is mentioned by Catterall (1997) who refers to focus groups not taking part in a ‘natural environment’ and that may influence how topic-related the discussion may be. This is because natural conversations do not tend to stay on the same topic for more than a few minutes, and we, as researchers, need that to happen. On the whole, participants in focus groups normally enjoy their experience and realise how they are helping someone else obtain data.

II. Context, Content and Participants

From the previous section, it can be seen that these students had all been part of the b-learning writing module at UMa. Thus at the end of each ARC, focus groups were

arranged according to students' willingness and free time. These took place in the departmental meeting room and how this environment exerted some influence on the subjects will also be discussed in this section.

The focus groups for my research were carried out towards the end of each ARC and were held whenever the students had some extra time. Each focus group lasted between 15 and 30 minutes depending on the time the subjects had available and how talkative they were. There was a set of 7 questions that I asked as the conversations touched the subjects I was interested in. The questions are as follows:

- 1- Describe your experience on Moodle. Positive/ Negative? Why?
- 2- Describe your experience during the writing module. Positive/ Negative? Why?
- 3- Describe your experience in the classroom with 2 teachers and 2 linguistic codes.
- 4- How did the written feedback help you with your writing assignments?
(What are your writing habits?)
- 5- What are your routines when you turn on your computer? Has Moodle become part of them? Why/ Why not?
- 6- Did Moodle help you meet people or get to know them better?
- 7- What would you change in the b-learning experience? Is it worth implementing in other courses?

With these questions in mind, the focus group would begin with the first 2 more general questions and the students' discussions gradually touched on the other issues I needed to get information about.

The subjects for the focus groups were recruited during the f-to-f classes. At the end of the last lessons, I unraveled that I would need volunteers to help me get further insight about their experience and that all they needed to do was simply talk about what they thought and had done during the past month for the b-learning module.

The subjects were thus mostly self-proclaimed as they volunteered to participate in the focus groups. I tried to work in mini-groups as that would enable each element to be able to talk more. The groups varied from 3 participants to 8 in each group. During ARC1, I managed to have 1 focus group and these were selected due to being active online and participating regularly in the activities.

3 focus groups were held at the end of ARC2 and 4 focus groups were held at the end of ARC3. For these last two cycles, all participants volunteered to participate. I took great care in explaining what they would be requested to talk about and how very simple it would be as they only needed to talk about their own experiences and share their opinions. I also told them how essential they were in the research and the role they all played in enabling a greater understanding of the research at hand. In order to make them feel more secure they could speak in Portuguese or English. In order to entice a few more subjects, I also offered to provide English fruit tea and Belgian chocolates to those who participated. There is a small possibility that one or two more students decided to volunteer due to what was promised but I think most understood how important it was for the research to get their perspectives.

The participants were asked for permission to audio record the focus group and to use the data in the research, which they all agreed to. The recordings were no longer frightening as they were used to having the f-to-f lessons recorded. During the focus groups, the students were asked some open ended questions leaving them to discuss these and express their views. Some groups were much more spontaneous than others so

moderating the discussions eliciting opinions from those that were not speaking was essential.

III. Analysis

To conclude this section on focus groups we look at how the analysis is done. When analysing interviews, the analysis falls very close to that of focus groups. They also need to be transcribed and coded, only given the addition of various people communicating simultaneously at times.

After having done all the transcriptions, coding enabled me to determine some criteria. Initially two main groups arose: writing and b-learning. Interaction and motivation also came across strongly during the focus group discussions. This led to the major point that is now the focus of this research: CoI. Triangulation is enhanced with the data provided from these focus groups. Analysis of this data on NVIVO8 enables connections between the codes to be made.

5.6.4 Face-to-Face Lesson Audio Recordings and Observation Notes

Despite all the above-mentioned data collection methods, as an education practitioner-researcher, lesson recordings and observation records are also essential methods to get valuable data. Thus this section looks at how this method can contribute to a better analysis of the intervention.

I. Methods and Aims

Although this section is very straightforward and simple, it shall describe how data was collected during the face-to-face lessons. The aim was to gather any opinions the students' may have emitted during the lessons about their experience of the module or about their writing skills. Once the students had understood the reason for wanting to record the lessons, they soon forgot about the recorder's presence and had with normal students' reactions. Looking at these issues in further detail, this section shall also

include the importance of observation notes and how the feed into the triangulation of data.

Audio recordings of lessons prove quite useful when there is a need to analyse our own performance as teachers or when we need to remember certain discussions that happened during a lesson. This technique of gathering data was useful to confirm my own notes taken during the lesson or to compare to my diary entries.

A small mp3 player/ recorder was taken into class every lesson and placed on my desk, together with the laptop, books, handouts, board markers and any other materials taken into class and was integrated into my teaching tools. It would be turned on at the beginning of the lesson and turned off after the class had ended and it never felt as though it was in any way threatening to the students.

All lessons are recorded and saved with the dates of the lessons and are saved in the courses' folders on my laptop.

II. Context, Content and Participants

This section correlates to the information provided on page 21 in the Narrative accounts of ARCs and is therefore seen here in a summarized manner. The context is in the face-to-face classes and the participants are the students that had come to the class at that particular time.

At the beginning of our first face-to-face lesson, the class was asked if they minded if the lesson was recorded as I needed to have reminders about what the lesson had been about so that summaries on Moodle could be written up. I also asked if the data retrieved could be used for research purposes, explaining that if anyone did not wish to be part of it, they had every right to and all they needed to do was talk to me and I would ensure that any of their interventions were not used. All students agreed that the lessons could be recorded and that the data could be used.

III. Analysis

Analysis of class recordings includes transcriptions of the parts that are deemed a valuable piece of evidence. The notes also mentioned in this section are useful as a means to justify a position that was taken when cross-referencing with other data.

Detailed analysis of these recordings has not been carried out. The lesson recordings are used for triangulating with other data sources. Therefore only excerpts that are needed are transcribed. I listen to the recordings when I find my diary refers to class discussions that were useful to the research. They are useful to understand students' reactions to the activities done in the lessons related to writing and then seeing how they actually managed to apply what was learnt in their writing. Transcriptions of the excerpts that are pertinent are done on Soundscriber.

5.6.5 Research Diary

The role of a practitioner-researcher in data collection includes keeping a diary. In this section, diaries are looked at as reflective elements that generate critical thinking about one's own teaching practices. In the case of ARCs, they help to restructure the cycles according to what is viewed as negative or positive elements.

I. Methods and Aims

Keeping a research diary is seen as elementary for ARCs as it helps researchers reflect about their object of study and think critically about our own practices. In my case, it enables reflective thinking both as a researcher and a teaching practitioner. Hughes (1996) explains that research diaries generate a history of the research project, provide material for reflection, provide data and record a development of research skills.

I tried to write in my diary after each lesson but at times that was not possible as either students would need to talk to me about their assignments or I had work that needed to be dealt with when I got back to the office. Whenever it was possible, I would write

down my reflections in the diary on the same day as the lessons, but there were days when there was not

II. Context and Content

My diary is a reflective diary as it helps me think about actions carried out and how they can be modified and developed. It also records effects of those changes. By registering how the lessons had been, I added in thoughts about particular moments, critical views of activities or tasks that I thought could be done in another way and at times questions would arise. These would be written down so I could later look them up. At times, mind-maps are also included as ideas come to me.

III. Analysis

Silverman (2005) demonstrates that in order to analyse the data recorded in diaries, one needs to reread and assess the input so as to be able to evaluate and have an overview of what has been achieved during the period of the research. When assessing the diary, it helps to infer what is required to do better and modify. The diary helps to keep a reminder and identify whether the targets have been achieved and what did not quite comply with the original objectives.

As a margin was left to the left of each page, as I reread, views were registered in retrospect and these helped get another perspective into the data, first as a practitioner involved in the project and as a researcher looking back on the ARCs done.

5.6.6 Students' Texts

When looking at all the previous elements of data collection, this one seems to be slightly different as they are a result of the module itself. Some of these texts were part of the learning process and others are the outcomes of the knowledge acquisition that took place throughout the module. Students' texts as data include interactions on online forums, online messages and emails, and students' written assignments too. These are a

valuable source of data as they are the direct product of what the module aimed at ultimately.

I. Methods and Aims

In terms of research objectives, their texts need to be looked at from two different perspectives. Students' written assignments are the product of the module and the result of the knowledge they acquired through their learning experience. However a detailed discourse analysis of these assignments is not the aim of my research. The students' online written interactions became the main research interest as it is through this written discourse that data emerged showing how communities of inquiry are formed.

Gathering the different texts written by the students as data was possible due to how the module was designed. As one of the aims of the ARCs was to get students to write in English with more ease and confidence, most of the activities and assignments of the module involved writing.

II. Context, Content and Participants

The previous section has brought into perspective how students' texts serve as data for the purpose of this research. As previously claimed, these texts are placed into two categories, their written assignments and online interactions. Both are within the context of the b-learning module, yet the context of when and how they are written varies. This section looks at these differences. The content of each written text differs as each assignment has been placed within a different situational context. The forums also develop diverse issues and these shall be made clearer next. Most of the texts retrieved are texts that were written online by the students registered on Moodle for the writing module and have to do with activities that were planned or discourse that developed as a means of communicating students' own interests on the platform.

The forums were created as a means for the students to write shorter texts on a regular basis, helping them to learn more vocabulary about issues that were interesting to them as well as learn new syntactical structures as the need to communicate would drive them to try to write more often. These texts are the main written discourse elements that formed the basis of my research.

The blogs were intended to help students write reflectively about their b-learning experience. It was also a space for them to write about anything they liked enabling their classmates to get to know them better.

The emails and messages functioned as an important means of communication between the students and lecturers for problem solving, support, feedback, motivation, guidance and information.

Students were also required to write assignments for all 3 ARCs. The aim of the assignments were for students to have a better understanding of different genres in English as to what regards their structure and layout, have more practice and a clearer perspective of the writing process and learn how to put forward arguments.

III. Analysis

The analysis of these texts is a lot more complex than may, at first, meet the eye. The forums shed light on how CoI develop and how that can be seen through the texts the students have written and the information they have shared with each other. Emails and messages can be looked at in terms of register and I pay particular attentions to discourse elements that indicate how the CoI developed socially and give indications of the development of the relationship between teacher and student(s).

5.7 Data Analysis - NVIVO

One of the essential working tools used as part of the methodology of this research is the software NVIVO 8. This section will show how this data analysis programme

enabled me to process the large amount of data that had been collected. Starting with the advantages it portrays through to the difficulties its use induced in my research methodology will be approached here. Despite not mastering NVIVO, it helped to sift through the data with the level of knowledge that I possessed to work with it. Bazeley (2002) explains:

the consequent capacity to link qualitative with quantitative data and qualitative interpretation of text with interpretation of numeric analyses—do, nevertheless, make possible an entire new range of analyses that have the potential to greatly enrich our understanding of the social and behavioural world (p.242).

NVIVO has the potential to help researchers gather their data and code it in diverse ways, thus enriching the probability of useful and reliable outcomes and Bazeley sees there is room for the scope to be extended.

5.7.1 Methods and Aims

To provide an overall perception of NVIVO and how it contributed to my research methodology, this section will look at the aims and methods I set myself as a researcher. Due to the bulk of data that had been collected and the multiple data sources that I was able to draw from, I needed an aid to help store, file, organise and process it. NVIVO was portrayed as being that essential aid and after struggling for a few months with it, it did indeed allow me to gain a perspective of the data as a whole. The following paragraphs illustrate these notions in more detail.

Mixed methods (Morse, 1991; Creswell, 1994; Sale et. al., 2002; Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004) have often been seen as having been positively impacted by QSR software and more specifically by their qualitative data analysis (QDA) software (Bazeley, 1999, 2002). This is due to the ‘enhanced flexibility and convenience’ (Bazeley, 2002: p.241). Inputting the data from the different sources took some time but was a simple process of uploading the data from one file to another. Having all the data

imported into one place and in folders designated for each type of data gathered is reassuring to the researcher who can then manage the data efficiently. The main folders are identified according to the different types of data in them: Focus Groups, Forums, Interviews, Lesson Pdfs, Lesson Recordings, Students Assignments and Transcriptions. Each of these in turn has folders that were named ARC1, ARC2 and ARC3. In each ARC folder is the data referent to the main folder it is under and that was acquired at the different stages of the research.

With NVIVO8, all the audio files could be stored, listened to and coded on the software, which was impossible to do when I started working with NVIVO7. This helped in segmenting the excerpts that were considered valid in the triangulation of data as a means of solidifying ideas that came from data from other sources, further exemplifying or justifying positions taken due to the interpretation of the data.

5.7.2 Coding

This section is concerned with the coding process and will go into notions of free and tree nodes that will then be exemplified in the analysis chapter. This process is one that takes months to define in a manner that makes sense when coding the data. Further information about the diverse stages coding underwent are now looked into.

The next step was to code the data, but the question remained: where to begin? The choice was to code the transcribed interviews and then move onto the forums. From the interviews with the teachers, the codes that were emerging were related to writing issues and learning and teaching methods. Words such as ‘genre’, ‘proposal’, ‘language’ were repeated in the interviews. These could not be seen as categories as they were not linked and were coded as free nodes. These free nodes were later dropped completely as they didn’t feed into any of the tree nodes that were being coded. They lost all importance once the coding began to veer towards CoI and the data was much richer.

When the forums were looked at, another pattern began to emerge. NVIVO was enabling the viewing of the forum texts in another light. As is explained beneath:

What most people do with NVIVO is work through the texts they have and code blocks of text to one or more NODES or sub-nodes representing themes. The purpose is largely to retrieve illustrative material for a textually based argument (Byrne, 2005: p.4).

The fact that this research deals with texts with the aim of getting students to process texts and that all this research needs to be demonstrated through texts seems to add to the reason for using NVIVO in this manner. The forum posts were guiding the research towards CoI and as this was grounded in the data, NVIVO enabled me to see it, as the research never began with the creation of a CoI as one of its aims. As Richards (1999) explains:

[it] is designed for the researchers who wish to display and develop rich data in dynamic documents (p.412).

Thus, NVIVO nodes began to take shape. Initially the data was coded into the three major components of CoI: Social, Cognitive and Teaching Presence. These began as free nodes but very soon after there was a need to add sub-nodes to these and the free nodes were easily altered to tree nodes. There were only two nodes that remained as free nodes, namely Degree, Hobbies. These elements do not interact with any of the other nodes as they are essentially isolated elements that characterise the subjects of this research.

The tree nodes were under the hyponym, CoI, which then had sub-nodes: Cognitive Presence, Social Presence, Teaching Presence and Metacognition. The image below shows how the tree nodes were structured.

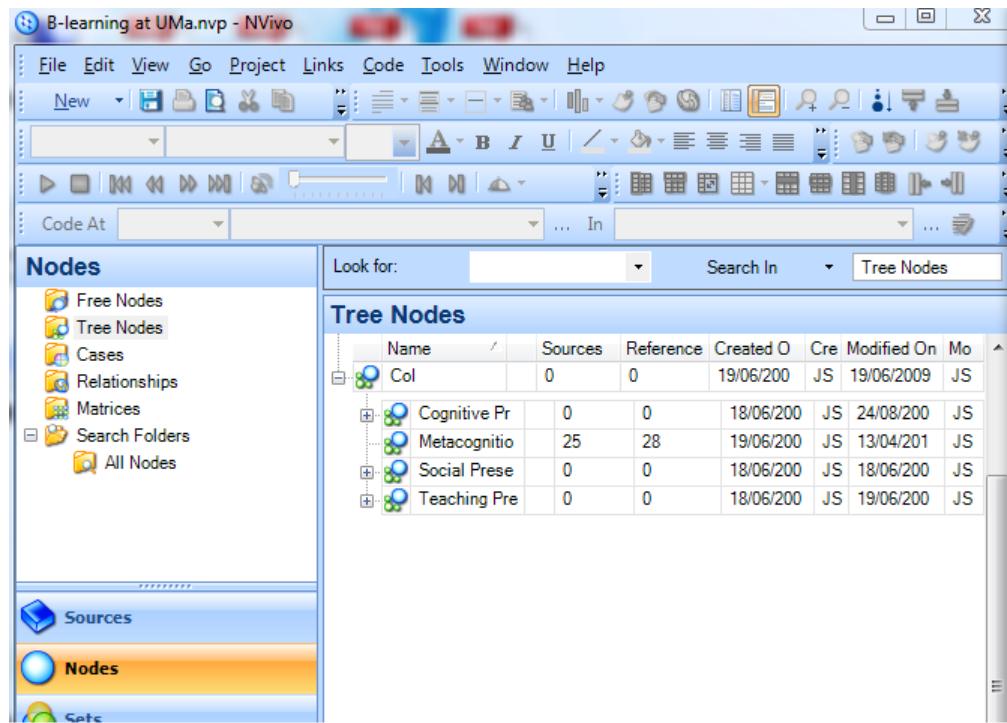


Figure 27 - NVivo8 Tree Nodes

These were the main tree nodes which can be seen as the starter nodes. These nodes were further coded on and grew as coding of the forum texts continued and the coding stripes showed the density of these nodes, whilst others became insignificant. The free nodes 'F2F' and 'Common goals' can be seen in the image below (Figure 28), but there were very little codes linked to them and they thus were not relevant to the analysis being carried out.

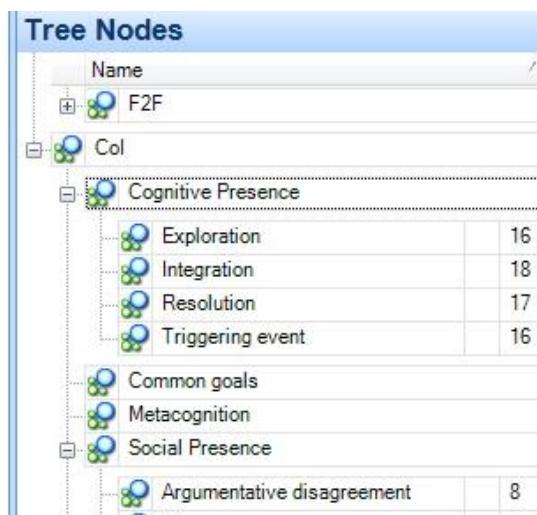


Figure 28 - Irrelevant Tree Nodes

From the hyponym, CoI, the sub-node that had the most coding was Social Presence and can be seen in Figure 29, below.

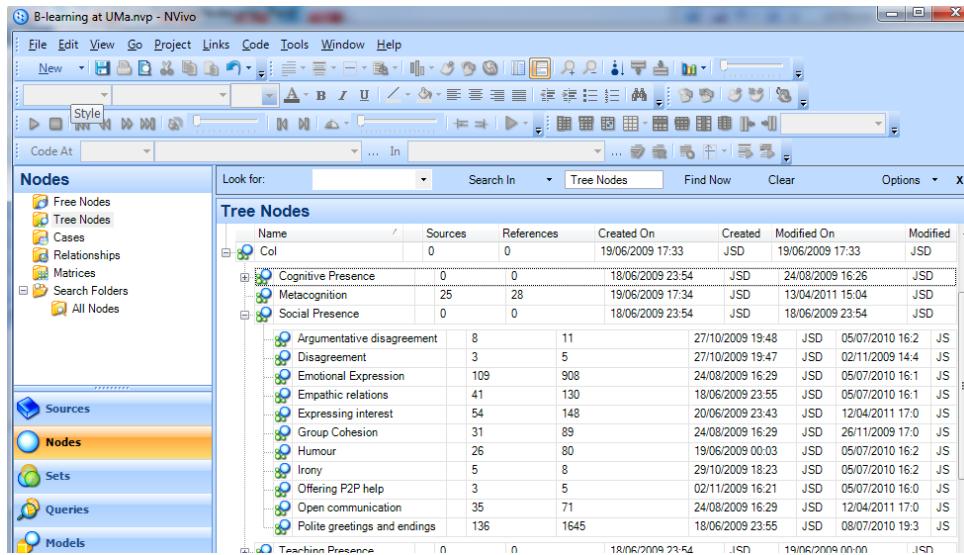


Figure 29 - Social Presence in NVIVO8

The sub-nodes that arose from the data helped me add a few more indicators to Garrison's initial Categories and Indicators of Social Presence. These can be seen in detail in the section on Social Presence on page 102. Once the sub-nodes were defined, coding became simpler to manage as I knew specifically what I was looking for in the data. Occasionally a section of text that couldn't be placed under the sub-nodes that existed came up and in an attempt to include this data, the new indicators arose. An example of this is 'Argumentative disagreement' which arose in 8 sources and had 11 references altogether. When compared to 'Disagreement' which was purely just an expression of negation, the numbers of the previous sub-node are quite significant.

With Teaching Presence, the coding was rather straight forward as the indicators previously developed by Garrison and Vaughan (2008) and Robinson (2009) served as the basis for the sub-nodes. As I was the teacher and still very conscious of the forum posts I had made and the reasons for doing them, analysing the data and coding it was a

simpler task than when interpreting other people's posts on the forums. The nodes on NVIVO8 can be seen in Figure 30.

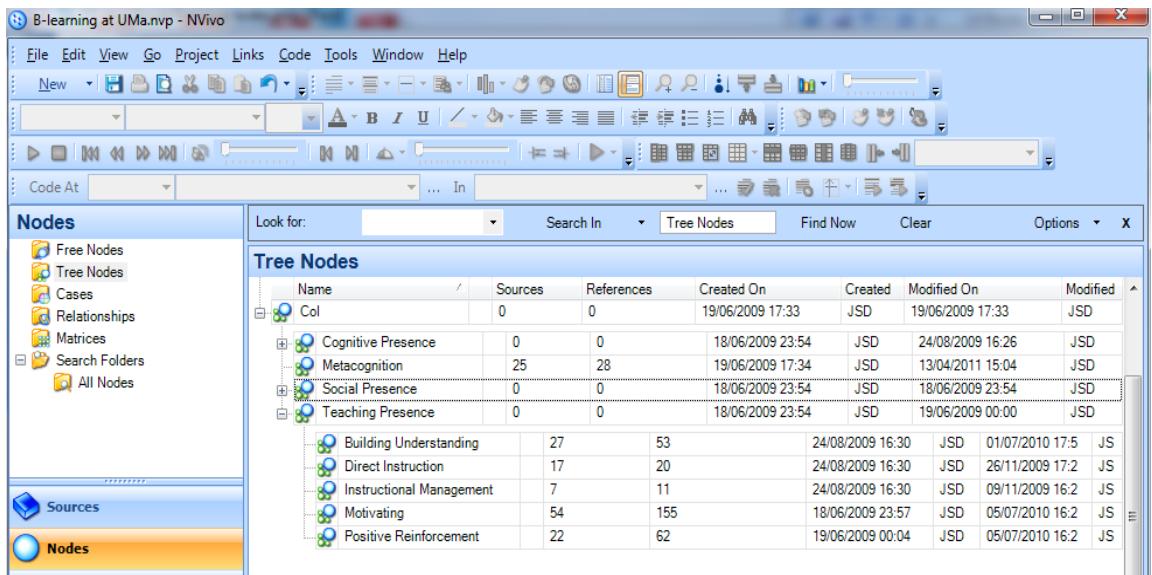


Figure 30 - Teaching Presence in NVIVO8

The most significant sources were attributed to the sub-node Motivation and Building Understanding which sheds some light on the roles that teachers take on in b-learning teaching and learning environments.

Figure 31 illustrates the coding that occurred in relation to Cognitive Presence.

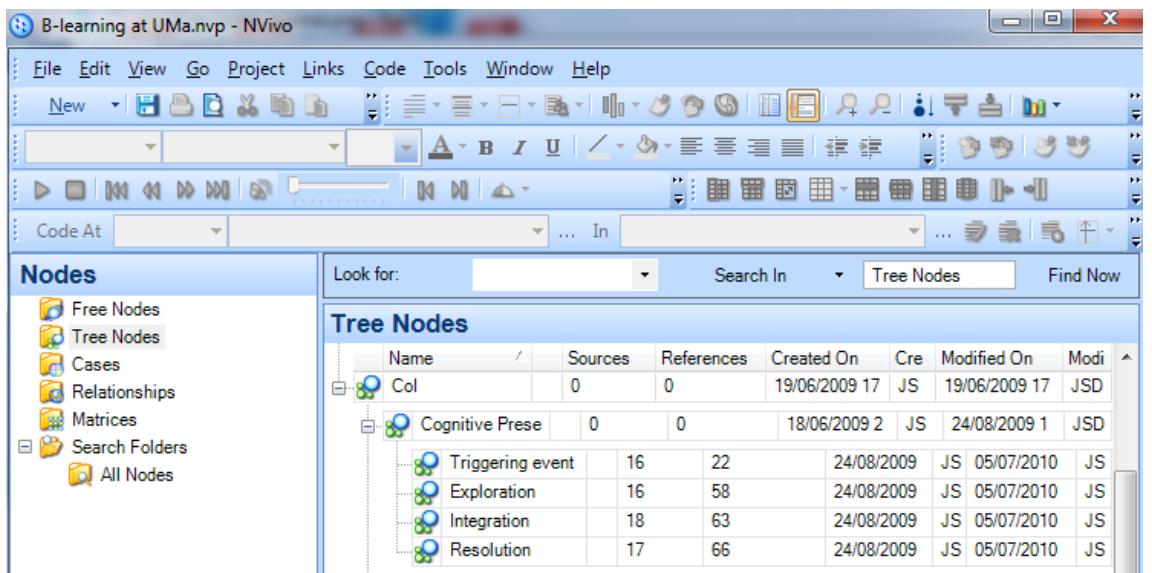


Figure 31 - Cognitive Presence in NVIVO8

These nodes arose from the same sources as the previous ones (Garrison and Vaughan, 2008; and Robinson, 2009) and the data shows that they are in fact valid nodes as they appear throughout the data that was analysed in my research. The detailed analysis of cognitive presence can be read in the section of Data Analysis (see Cognitive Presence on page 213).

6 Data Analysis, Findings and Discussion

In this chapter, the data analysis shall be presented and the findings discussed. Within this discussion, the CoI is the major focus in the analysis chapter and the data will help establish how CoI developed and what role it played in the learning and teaching experience. In order to frame the analysis, a short overview of the relationships that exist between Moodle, b-learning and CoI is provided before the analysis itself. Given the different sources of data, this chapter will begin with a case study of the research so an in-depth analysis can be made. Further perspectives are given into b-learning, the teacher's and student's(') role, interaction and CoI on Moodle.

6.1 The Relationships Between Moodle, B-learning and Communities of Inquiry (CoI)

B-learning and Moodle cannot be seen separately from CoI in this research, as they are intricately intertwined and this can be seen in the different ARCs, as each module on Moodle evolves (see Narrative Description on page 54 and Data Analysis - Forums on page 212). The CoI begin to develop with students' interactions and given the chance, students automatically start socialising which is the basis for a community to begin to arise. As the module develops, cognitive development takes place as learning and teaching occurs and all this is monitored through teaching presence.

The current economic situation of most European Universities, due to the crises in our countries, is bringing about change to higher education and the way that universities function. This changes realities in the institutions yet knowledge and quality remain the focal point of higher education. Garrison and Vaughan (2008) are of the opinion that 'Blended learning is emerging as the organising concept in transforming teaching and learning while preserving core values of higher education' (p.143) If changes are occurring, then both teachers and learners need to adapt to ensure the best solutions are

obtained with what we have. In this research, Moodle enables the introduction of b-learning into UMa and, due to the CoI created throughout the modules, learner-centred pedagogies could be applied.

The relationships between B-learning, CoI and Moodle occur on various levels. On a learning and teaching level, Moodle is the learning platform that makes B-learning possible. It is also through this learning platform that the CoI develop as students interact with each other whilst learning occurs. B-learning is the teaching and learning method that was seen as one that could stimulate students' awareness and thirst to better their writing skills in English for the modules taught during the ARCs.

In order to accomplish the aims of the writing modules and ensure students gained more confidence and knowledge about writing in English, different assignments were designed and adapted to b-learning. Some of the assignments were carried out in class (see Narrative Description) and others were placed online, on Moodle, for students to do when they saw the need to. The students' and teachers' common aims in the module, which included students becoming more confident writers in English, is another element that brings B-learning, CoI and Moodle together. As these students communicated in English on Moodle, their socialisation within the group grew and they began to create a CoI whilst writing in English and became more at ease with the language. However these students (and I, initially) were unaware that their interactions were gradually building a community of inquiry. I'm sure they felt part of a community, a class that was participating in a module, but the specificities of a CoI was not one of their reasons to participate. They were carrying out the module requirements and it was on the forums where a fine balance had to be found by the teacher so as to allow students to develop their interests so students maintained interested and became more and more motivated to keep writing.

Making these modules learner-centred enhanced the link between B-learning, CoI and Moodle as without these, this pedagogy would not have been possible. As Allan (2007) reveals, learner-centred pedagogy is ‘students’ active participation in construction of knowledge and meaning’ (p.53) and is also seen as ‘learning based on real-life and authentic situations that are relevant’ (p.53). Through the discussions on the Moodle forums, students managed to discuss what was close to their experiences and issues such as computers and gaming were discussed very avidly on forums, creating a strong social presence within the CoI. (See Narrative Description and Data analysis for excerpts of the forum discussions and their analysis.) They shared a common interest and this helped develop many of the elements in Social Presence in the CoI such as Empathic Relations, Argumentative Disagreement, Offering P2P Help and Expressing Interest. Group cohesion is very strong throughout the forums on computers despite their differences in opinions at times. This forum was one of the most learner-centred discussions online.

Moodle allowed the students to connect on a social level, on a cognitive level and helped develop their relationship with the teachers, therefore the teaching presence in the CoI was also enhanced due to the b-learning framework. Moodle strengthens teacher-student/s relationship through ‘the ease and speed of communication’ (Murphy and Hurd, 2011, p.51) online. The teacher is much more accessible online than if students wait for a lesson to talk to the teacher. On Moodle students could contact me by email, messaging or through the forums and I was able to react as soon as I saw they had contacted me and could respond. As their teacher, I made the most of the speed and ease of communication to constantly motivate students and reinforce their ability to do well and to keep writing in English. According to Murphy and Hurd (2011), motivation is kept through positive talk, thus B-learning gives teachers the possibility to foster

more positive talk through quick responses to students' queries and thus keep them motivated. This implies a shift in teacher's mind-set from the traditional context and classroom conditions to a more present and active presence online so as to also understand and accompany how a course through b-learning evolves. Teacher's roles also shift from the teacher-centred lessons to being learner-centred classes and thus the teacher's role becomes one of a guide, a moderator and an expert that students can rely on throughout the module.

By redesigning courses, so the modules could be incorporated into b-learning, a change was made in how course content and materials were presented to students, how students worked with the materials, how students viewed the course, their classmates and their teachers. (See Narrative Descriptions for examples of materials.) Moodle offers virtual space and a platform to offer students a variety of resources on different media in the hope that students will be interested in the module and be able to learn as much as possible using whichever materials they feel more motivated to access. The CoI also has a role to play in terms of the materials students access, as through the learner-centred pedagogy, students also find information and have the freedom to share it with their classmates online. This was done in the modules and I felt that the students reacted very positively to resources presented by their own classmates. 'Learners are more likely to succeed in language learning if they are working on material in which they have a personal interest' (Murphy and Southgate, 2011, p.17). Not only is the cognitive presence being developed in terms of the Triggering Event, Exploration, Integration and Resolution, but the social presence in this CoI is also being stimulated in relation to Group Cohesion, Expressing Interest and Empathic Relations to mention a few. Thus the relationship between resources and learning can be seen as being fostered by Moodle and stimulated by the CoI.

Teaching presence is the ‘glue’ behind b-learning through Moodle. The teacher has the responsibility to design the module and then to maintain the students’ interest and motivation so that learning occurs. The teacher needs to moderate communication on Moodle in order to guarantee that b-learning occurs and keeping students active both in class and online is a task that requires dedication, time and a variety of activities to lead to the outcome that is writing in English. The construction of the module leads to the deconstruction of the traditional notion of learning as teachers and students become part of the teaching presence through b-learning because roles of experts can interchange and everyone learns from one another. Spaces also change from classrooms to virtual environments and the benefits of these are quickly absorbed by interested CoI and learning can thus occur.

B-learning goes from strength to strength when students begin to take on more responsibility for their learning and how they process the knowledge that they have access to. They share their opinions about education and are eager to show how familiar they are with operating systems and gaming. The students openly discuss current issues in English and gradually become more confident with the language as they see they are able to communicate in English. Thus learner responsibility presents another common element to b-learning, Moodle and CoI. All three ensure that knowledge is acquired through a variety of sources and students have the responsibility to make a conscious choice of what they think is best for their learning process. This adds to their confidence as learners too. This is seen by Murphy and Southgate (2011) as autonomy, when they formulate that ‘a b-learning environment provides more different choices and decisions for learners, so arguably increases the opportunity for learners to exercise their capacity for autonomy (p.46). Murphy and Hurd (2011) add that this type of learning is one of interdependence and interaction as ‘learners are not working in a vacuum, but are

interacting with peer learners, teachers and others in the course of their learning' (p.48). This interdependence is clearly one of the characteristics of a b-learning environment which Moodle supports in this research and that the CoI nurtures.

6.2 Case Study

A case study shall be presented in this section as an introduction to the data analysis and discussion. Given that ARC1 was ineffective, a case study from this ARC has been selected to exemplify that, despite the cycle not working on a general basis for a whole class, there was a degree of success with those students that chose to participate. Given that:

The case study is a research strategy which focuses on understanding the dynamics present within single settings (Eisenhardt, 1989: p.534), this seems to the most adequate way of presenting data of what occurred during part of ARC1.

The subject is chosen due to his effective participation in most of the activities and on the presupposition that as much data as possible on this individual can be gathered and cross-referenced. I do not aim to imply that this case can be generalised to the whole target audience. This is an intention of providing a snippet of a student who took part in most activities organised for ARC1.

Data for this case study derives from questionnaires, interviews, focus groups, online forums, emails and messages, which according to the quote mentioned beneath, provide appropriate sources for a case study.

Case studies typically combine data collection methods such as archives, interviews, questionnaires, and observations. The evidence may be qualitative (e.g. words), quantitative (e.g. numbers), or both (Eisenhardt, 1989: p.537).

The data will help draw upon the student's impressions of the writing module, overall perceptions of what he has learnt and evidence as to how he fitted in and helped build a CoI, despite it being of much smaller proportions than the ones built in the ARCs that followed this one.

6.2.1 ARC1 – Student 1

Looking into ARC1 for individual cases to study was extremely difficult as this ARC was not very successful in getting students involved in the whole b-learning experience. Thus each individual either has an online presence but did not come to face-to-face classes at all or has come to classes but did not do the tasks and others that simply did not engage at all. This made me narrow down on particular concepts within b-learning and look into specific student interactions within that framework. The student that most stood out was St1 due to his online participation on the forum. This student's interaction shall be looked at taking into account the social presence in CoI. He made his presence felt to those interacting through the abundant use of humour and his ease in communicating his own thoughts. Excerpts of his interactions shall be added to exemplify how he achieved communication and how he also instigated classmates to participate and write.

I. CoI – Social Presence.

St1 has a stronger presence than any of the other students as he has a larger number of interactive accounts than others. His strengths lie in the use of humour, how he expresses interest in what others are communicating, the recognition of a common goal that the whole class has in the module, metacognition and how he develops empathic relations with his classmates.

The coding process of all the data related to CoI started with Garrison's notions of categories and indicators, (See Communities of Inquiry, on page 100), yet as need for

more codes that did not exist in Garrison's denominations came up, Robinson's social presence assessment came in very useful as can be seen in the chart presented below. My own additions to this theory can be seen as they are in bold and italics in the chart. This case study is analysed through Robinson's framework but never setting Garrison's essential framework aside.

Category	Social presence indicators
Affective	Expression of emotions Use of humour/ Irony Self-disclosure / Open communication Empathic relations Expression of interest
Interactive	Continuing a thread Quoting from messages Referring to others' messages Asking questions Complimenting, appreciative Expressing agreement Expression of disagreement Argumentative disagreement Offering P2P help
Cohesive	Vocatives Using inclusive pronouns Phatics, salutations Group Cohesion

Figure 32 - Adapted from Robinson, 2009¹¹

II. Affective Presence

This student's engagement is affective and effective. He establishes a sense of familiarity and friendliness with everyone online due to his choice of informal language. St1 intentionally draws in his readers due to the stance that he asserts. He opens up his interactions to criticism and discussion which involves other students in his discussions. He expresses emotions with the use of multiple punctuation marks. E.g: '*a new one???*'; '*wronnnnggggg!!!!*' This also shows signs of spontaneity, which is part of asynchronous interaction which is written quickly and in this case, enthusiastically. By asking rhetorical questions, this student ensures he is attracting interactivity. St1 also uses acronyms to express emotion: '*heheheh lololol*'. Most other students express emotions by

¹¹ Robinson, K (2009) 'Encouraging social presence and a sense of community in a virtual residential school', *Open Learning*, 24/2, p. 135.

using emoticons but this was not seen very often in ARC1. The next cycles have more incidences of emoticons as will be seen in the section on social presence.

St1 uses humour as his most predominant social presence indicator. See for example when he interacts with his classmates who are trying to find out what ‘lie’ he has placed in his description, which was one of the first tasks: *‘Aleluiaaaaa!!!! someone got me! I’m not a great a swimmer i can’t swim at all! in a race between me and a rock i guess the rock would win!!! heheheh lololol’* Here St1 exaggerates to demonstrate that he has been waiting for such a long time for someone to find his lie but he also makes fun of himself by use of a comparison to an inanimate object that accentuates the fact that he cannot swim at all. He uses a discourse marker that emphasises contradiction whilst clarifying his position and taking a stance on the matter. He also has an interesting reaction to what his classmates reveal they can do: *‘i think were gonna have a nice little talent show at uni! we got singers, dancers, and cooks! all we need for a nicce party at school’* Not only does he repeat what others can do but also enhances their skills by saying that others can actually enjoy what they have to show. His use of repetition helps create cohesion in the discussion and engage his audience as well as establish a closer relationship with the other person. St1 has good use of the English language, despite some grammatical errors, he often uses catch phrases at the right time which show his humorous intentions. At the start of a game that a classmate pushes forward, St1 comments: *‘its show time!!!!’* placing a smile on the readers’ faces and instigating them to play along. His use of humour was a good tool for other classmates and myself to interact with him. He was sharp and quite ready to respond to threads quickly, even if it is simply to react to someone else’s comment without really adding any content, as: *‘oh my goood!!!! im drowning in so much love! please make it stoop!!! lololol’* or when he chooses to express what many of his classmates may also think but not say: *‘ehhhhhwwwww! math! iv got to figure out who invented math and give him*

a nice "whack" because i have calculus I and its completely confusing and annoying. its a nightmare....'.

His attitude towards the community was always a very positive one and he manipulated the discussion towards positive communication effectiveness.

Open communication is yet another indicator of affect and St1 uses it as a means to create a relationship with his classmates online. St1 is unafraid of stating his beliefs and sharing personal information. He shares evaluative expressions and opinions whilst making a face-threatening comment: '*it would be very nice if everybody could participate actively ..it's been fun talking and guessing about other people so i hope we can keep up the and continue doing some fun and imaginative games.*' Here St1 shows what he thinks about the first activity and communicates his views on the fact that not everyone was participating. He hedges his criticism on his less active classmates but enhances how fun it has been with those that are active. At this point he tries to save face by using humour (Holmes and Stubbe, 2003), and making light of a serious situation (Hay, 2000).

St1 reveals some personal facts in an effort to establish his status in the community:

'Hi, I'm St1, studying at UMA for the first year.

I'm a very enthusiastic student and i love to learn. Now thinking about i like school it's not that bad! I'm a great programmer knowing about 6 different computing languages but a little lazy.

*I love computer games and singing..oh! i almost forgot i love to go on vacations to the beach and i'm a great swimmer!
that's about it!'*

His personal account is quite revealing compared to some other students' descriptions and this opens up the communication lines for others to interact with him. He has made his stance clear by the excessive use of adjectives which takes the description to an extreme, which adds laughter to his text. The relationship that this student establishes with the text shows the reader his personality and credibility. Hyland (2005) explains that:

Writing is central to our personal experience and social identities, and it is in our writing that an understanding of the workings of meta-discourse has the greatest pay-off (p.6).

In this quotation, Hyland makes clear how St1 uses the text to put across his social identity. St1 does indeed use the text to his favour by triggering favourable attitudes from his readers.

In relation to empathic indicators, St1 enthusiastically interacts with girls especially ensuring he establishes empathy. As he is a 1st year undergraduate, I think this attitude is quite normal and healthy. Once again, St1 uses humour to establish empathy: '*i think that u cant be that crazy because your too "sweet" to be crazy!*' he says to a female classmate, who claims to be a little crazy. He uses an empathic indicator as he flatters his classmate by sweet-talking her, yet he does not want to be seen as a sweet-talker and thus uses speech marks for the word 'sweet'. Is that seen as less 'sweet' than the idea he is trying to convey? It seems he chooses to use a disarmer in order not to lose face. He does not want to be seen as flirtatious but rather as funny.

The last indicator related to affect is expressing interest which St1 does quite well with repetition. He asks colleagues about things they have said: '*Because why should you come to Madeira after 4 years of architecture to start again at first year on engineering??*' or '*Perfect! We have apparently a great dancer on campus....Latin rhythms...interesting*' In the second quote, St1 expresses interest by using words such as 'perfect' and 'interesting' to convey that he is both impressed by what the classmate can do and that he is curious about her skills. His text shows spontaneity and quick thinking due to the use of mid-utterance changes, hesitations and repetitions. Interactivity is established due to the dynamics of the discourse.

III. Interactivity

In this category, the social presence indicators include continuing a thread, quoting from messages, referring to other's messages, asking questions, complimenting, expressing disagreement, argumentative disagreement and offering peer-to-peer help. The following paragraphs will expound on what these do by providing examples taken from St1's interactions on ARC1 forums.

St1 manages to be interactive when he follows threads and he uses various indicators to do the same thing. '*People Wronnng! she cant be a mother of two already!!!!*' Here St1 shows he is following the thread by repeating the exact words from the previous message in the thread. Seeing as each thread is shown, the reader can still remember what he/ she previously read or can still see.

At times, St1 continues a thread by asking a question: '*a new one??? about wut??? can we get a preview or some info about it?????*', he queries when I claimed I would start a new topic on the forum. He expresses interest by asking about it and by referring to the topic with the pronoun 'one'. He also requests more information. This indicator of question asking is repeatedly used as a means to obtain interaction from colleagues: '*for a merengue dancer u cant be very shy is that the lie?*' He repeats her skill as a merengue dancer and then asks her to respond to his claim. This does indeed function very effectively as the question is directed at a person in particular who will feel the need to respond to the direct question. As can be seen from the quotations, he uses very little punctuation and seems to ignore many simple grammatical rules. This however was overlooked as the major aim was to incentivise students to write in English and as long as their messages were understandable, I chose to stand back and avoid corrections.

In relation to complimenting colleagues, St1 does this quite often as a means to obtain interactivity, always with humour at hand. '*Perfect! We have apparently a great dancer on*

campus' and '*Teaching for 7 years is a very great achievement for such a young teacher...*' are ways he finds to pay compliments. He also uses words such as 'impressed' to show how much he looks up to what some people are capable of achieving: '*i'm impressed someone being a programmer for 15 years, studying informatic engineering, and still have time to travel that much!!!*'

St1 does not reveal his disagreement very often in ARC1. He hedges his disagreement: '*Not really...*' or tries to save face with humorous techniques to achieve this: '*wronnnnggggg!!!!!*' or '*Hey thats cheating!*'. Another example of this is '*i don't want to be a mood killer but you don't necessary have do practice sport to keep your body healthy,(...)*' He does not 'want to be a mood killer', using his own words, and thus justifies his point of view and tries to save face, but rather weakly as he does not find a very good argument for this position.

In terms of offering peer-to-peer help, only one incidence was coded: '*we can be your future "guinea pigs" for your studies or projects such as the human behavior on an online forum chatting to unknown people.*' Although here, I also have some doubts as to whether he is simply taking the opportunity to call the class my own 'guinea pigs' as they were aware I was using their interactions for my PhD or if he genuinely would like to help out his psychology colleagues. He humorously hedges the term into his writing. He reveals a sense of cohesiveness in his personality traits and writing style by using repetitions and his constant humorous interactions with the other students, which gives him a lot of credibility.

IV. *Cohesive Nature of Interaction*

In this last category of social presence, the indicators include vocatives, using inclusive pronouns, phatics, salutations and group cohesion. St1 has less cohesive indicators than affective and interactive ones. He uses vocatives very rarely, but they do appear,

namely: '*My god!*', '*People Wronnng!*' and '*here little kitty!!!*'. The inclusive pronouns St1 uses are 'we' and 'us', however these appear quite seldomly in his discourse. He has a much stronger use of 'I' in his interactions. The salutations that St1 writes are very simple. He uses 'Hi', 'Hi there' and 'Hi (name)' and never uses any of the formal/informal ways of ending a piece of writing. This is probably due to his rapid responses and that he keeps a thread going for a while, therefore he feels no need to end his conversation with anyone.

V. Conclusion

St1 was an avid participant in the forums in ARC1. His discourse shows how he interacts with his colleagues and with me, his teacher. Although I did not start out with the intention of creating a CoI, it is very rewarding to see how this student did indeed contribute for the development of one. There was no guidance to create these indicators and it fascinates me that they came out naturally. This student managed to realise he needed to take certain steps to achieve interaction on the forums. He shows his disappointment in his other classmates who chose not to interact: '*More people makes it more funny to try and figure out the lies!!!!*'; '*it would be very nice if everybody could participate actively ..it's been fun talking an guessing about other people so i hope we can keep up the and continue doing some fun and imaginative games.*' To this I reacted and thanked him for trying to call upon his classmates to interact and for all his enthusiasm too. He replied: '*no need to thank! i gladly participate in any comment posted online! its nice to talk to other people in english since im living in a totally Portuguese language based island.*' When questioned why he thought we were not getting the response I had thought, he replied: '*the students dont realize that learning english only enriches their culture! wich makes them smarter and more comprehensive of some situations and some conversations!*'. This showed me that the English language was indeed a barrier and the advantages of interacting and writing in English had to be enhanced in the next cycle. Lessons were learnt with the inactivity of students in ARC1 and more appropriate

methods were applied in the subsequent ARCs. St1 proved not only to be a great pivot for the small CoI that was created in ARC1, and was also a great aid to my appreciation of the reasons that were leading students to be participating so little online.

6.2.2 Findings

This case study offers various angles of insight particularly into the Social Presence in the CoI. The student's engagement is affective and effective due to his use of informal language and his ease in open communication. He creates relationships with classmates when he openly expresses emotions, openly embraces humour to interact with his classmates and uses repetition, which causes group cohesion. This clearly shows the student is comfortable enough to use the forums to interact. B-learning has the capacity to offer a relaxed and reliable environment created on Moodle to enhance the learning experience, which in this particular case was to stimulate the students to write more in English. This student's experience gave him the possibility of using the best of both teaching and learning practices because he was able to interact online and also have the F2F lessons from which to learn. One of the recommendations of good practice (on page 315) lies precisely in students being able to see the advantages of being exposed to both realities in b-learning and this student clearly communicated his understanding of his b-learning experience. Adding to his own spontaneity and personal drive, he was able to take responsibility for his own learning experience and knowledge acquisition. This particular student even took on the teacher's role when he himself tried to get his classmates to interact on Moodle, thus collaboration took place on various levels. He collaborated with his classmates and with me, the teacher, and he collaborated as an 'expert' towards his classmates by trying to teach them the advantages of participating. These are some of the b-learning and CoI principles that can be seen in the case study

and that will be referred to again in this chapter in the Discussion section (See 6.4 on page 309).

6.3 Writing Skills Development

The analysis in this section looks at written language in the online means of communication, namely the forums and a few examples that appear in their assignments about metacognition. The students' confidence in writing in English on Moodle is looked at through the CoI framework in b- learning with the intent of exemplifying how the data helped to see the essence of each student's participation in the community and how their interaction stimulated them to write more in English. The students' writing skills per se are not going to be examined as this does not fall into the scope of this thesis. The impact of technology on language learning is discussed by Shetzer and Warschauer (2000):

[...] whereas previously educators considered how to use information technology in order to teach language, it is now essential also to consider how to teach language so that learners can make effective use of information technology. Working toward both these objectives, rather than just the first one, is what distinguishes an electronic literacy approach to a network-based teaching (p.172).

And for this to be achieved, the language teachers have many more roles to play in and outside the classroom. In the ARCs, the lecturer not only is the teacher but also moderator, designer and motivator on Moodle, who partakes and guides discussions in forums, messages, notice-boards, creates online questionnaires and hot-potato exercises and provides links to reliable sources related to the content being taught.

Given that the ultimate aim of the ARCs and the online module was to better students' writing skills in English, this section will look into how students lost their inhibitions to venture into writing in a foreign language and how they reflected on the changes that occurred in their writing habits. As the data was coded, certain elements relating to the

essence of communities of inquiry came out as enhancers of the students' writing skills and the data showing students' and the lecturer's perspectives about its importance shall be put into perspective with concrete examples in this section.

With students' written performance online, major focus will be placed on how their written discourse actually helped form CoI and how these, in turn, helped the students to communicate through written English discourse.

6.3.1 Written Assignments

This section gives some insight into the initial objective of the writing module and how metacognition, the section that follows, plays a role in the acquisition of knowledge. The writing module began with simple writing tasks and built up on students' knowledge to get them to understand and be able to produce more complex and academic pieces of writing, enabling them to work on writing skills in English to help them obtain better grades in various courses throughout their degree.

ARC1 began with writing very short summaries in class in pairs to start the students overcome the fear of writing in English and get them into the realm of English vocabulary. Peer support plays a major role in written tasks in the module and students' perspectives express and exemplify their importance. Moffett (1983) explains

A student responds and comments to a peer more in his own terms, whereas the teacher is more likely to focus too soon on technique. A student, moreover, may write off the comments of a teacher by saying to himself, "Adults just can't understand," or "English teachers are nit-pickers anyway," but when his fellow human beings misread him, he has to accommodate the feedback. By habitually responding and coaching, students get insights about their own writing (pp.193-195).

By this and as shall be seen through the data provided, students use language that is simple and very 'theirs'. Therefore, when they use abbreviations and slang, it is seen as appropriate language amongst their colleagues of their age group as well as when it is

used in online interactions. They ‘talk’ to each other on the same level, with similar lines of thought and from similar experiences and backgrounds. The teachers are often seen as an authority and ‘expert’ in the classroom and criticism from them might not be as easily accepted as when it comes from peers.

Equally, Gebhardt (1980) expresses:

Since students feel fear and frustration privately, they need to be helped to see that they are not alone, that they can receive feedback from others who themselves are fearful and frustrated and so themselves need help (p.71).

Examples of fear and frustration of participating in online discussions are also provided in this chapter that show how some students felt fearful about their English writing skills. It was up to the teacher and peers to help these less confident students see that they were not alone. It is through their metacognitive skills that they reflect upon the learning experience that has occurred. The data shows how creating a safe online environment gave such students a trustworthy place for them to share their fears and queries and be offered help.

Examples of some of their written assignment texts can be found in the appendices and the gradual development in complexity of form, language, content and critical understanding and expression can be seen from one task to the next.

6.3.2 Metacognition

Given the importance of metacognition in the writing module and in the CoI, how the students view their own learning experience and for the purpose of this study, metacognition shall be viewed as the thought process that occurs about a certain cognitive experience or task that has occurred and that an individual has a level of consciousness of how it was processed. Basically, it can be seen as thinking about thinking.

In this writing module in particular, I requested that the students reflect upon their thought process when they were trying to write and then to register the metacognitive process about their paragraphing technique. The objective of appealing to their metacognitive skills is for them to not only process the theory behind the writing but then to look into how they write and why they chose to write and paragraph their essay the way they did. This adds to their understanding and takes their practical writing skills a step further into higher-order learning with metacognitive recognition.

Flavell (1979) developed a model of metacognitive monitoring that helped shape my own perception of metacognition. He subdivides metacognition which aided my comprehension of the issue and simplified the language I used in the lessons to explain metacognition to the students. *Metacognitive knowledge* is seen as all previous knowledge that has been acquired through people's cognitive processes, tasks, goals, actions and experiences. *Metacognitive experiences* are viewed as conscious cognitive or affective experiences that accompany intellectual enterprise. *Goals/ Tasks* are seen as objectives of cognitive initiative. And finally, *Actions/ Strategies* are perceived as cognitions/ behaviours used to achieve goals.

So, basically, my students have the metacognitive knowledge of how to spell words and put ideas together to compose essays. Their goal is to enhance their writing skills in English through the task that has been given to them and then they use a strategy to complete their metacognitive experience. The metacognitive knowledge is processed through experiences that happen due to goals that are set and that are acted upon to be achieved.

Looking at the students' reflections at the end of a written task on the paragraphing technique they used helps to understand their process of metacognition. Student 1 justifies why the particular technique used was efficient in his essay:

'The paragraph technique mainly used in this essay is the one referred to as chain. It is the easiest form of paragraphing in my point of view and helps to link sentences and ideas in a systematic form. The ideas are recurrent and this helps in transmitting the main message to the reader. This topic "The Importance of Storytellers" also allows this form of paragraphing to be used more adequately seeing that it is a light topic and even though it may have a history, there are also many deductions that are made about this subject and allows us to introduce our personal point of view. Therefore, there is also the use of pronouns to refer back to people or things that are mentioned before in the previous sentence or paragraph.'

In the reflection, the student reveals that the 'chain' is the technique he finds the 'easiest' to use as he tries to organise his ideas in a 'systematic form' and as they recur, this technique helps him get through to the reader. This student has developed the awareness of writing for an audience and how important it is to adapt his writing style to the aim of the task as well as adapt it to the reader. It seems that the introduction of a personal point of view and deductions add to the repetition that was previously mentioned. The 'chain' has been fully understood as the student is able to make reference to the pronouns used when there is a repetition of nouns that need to be inferred. The link between the last sentences in a paragraph and the first sentence in the next paragraph is also explained in connection with the pronouns and repeated ideas, thus showing that the notions have been taken in and applied. Metacognition has effectively led this student to another level of understanding how writing is done and how he wrote his text. Biggs (1999) explicates that this reflective process

provides a systematic way of describing how a learner's performance grows in complexity when mastering academic tasks (p.37).

The student has engaged with his own work and has had to reflect and write down what was achieved in his text and this process leads him to *deep learning* (King, 2002: p.3).

The next student has a very succinct manner of showing his understanding of the thought behind his writing and paragraphing technique.

'The paragraph techniques which I have chosen were the stack and the balance. These two techniques were the most suitable ones, since I have expressed my personal opinion on the subject and also contrasted two points of view.'

This student has chosen to use the paragraphing techniques as a way to express various aspects of his point of view on the subject and then counter-balance two points of view.

This shows his understanding of the terms and application in the essay. The text is written in a very assertive tone and is coherent showing that the student has some confidence in the task that was done. In terms of the transitions used in this short paragraph to obtain cohesion, the student demonstrates a conclusion and summary of his thoughts about the options that he made. The student clearly explains the techniques used and why they were used, which confirms full understanding of the content learnt and reflective writing has this aim. Moon (1999) refers to this level of learning as *transformational learning*, whereby the student has the capability to critically reflect on his own work and take that step forward from using it to actually being able to justify how and why he is using what was learnt. After having corrected this text, I am able to ascertain that the stack has been adequately used for the accumulation of equal weighted ideas on an issue and then the balance has been used as a means to oppose his personal opinions with those that are expressed in the text he was asked to read.

In the excerpt found below, the student uses the word 'think' to express the process that occurs in metacognition. This student also used the chain to link ideas in different paragraphs and then the stack as a method of listing various arguments.

'Actually, I think I have used two techniques in my essay, The Chain and The Stack, because, on the one hand, I tried to connect some paragraphs to

each other, and on the other hand, I also tried to expose my arguments and compare them in different generations.'

This student has chosen to use these two paragraphing techniques as he was trying to combine two discursive purposes. The student wanted to ensure his arguments were cohesive when he later contrasted different generations' point of view. The fact that the student is able to coordinate his arguments in writing and then rationalise why he chose the paragraphing techniques add to his capacity of metacognition and reflection. Biggs (1999), Kahn (2006), and Moon (2009) all consider reflection a process that aims at some form of further engagement in the learning process that ultimately leads to self-monitoring and autonomy.

Similarly, another student used the same two techniques but manages to explain in a rather more eloquent fashion why her text is structured in such a manner. This student justifies her position as seen below.

'The paragraphing technique I used was **the chain**. The four paragraphs of the text are formed by sentences that link them to each other, establishing a connection between the ideas and so, every idea can be interpreted in relation to the other o there is repeated vocabulary, since it is inevitable repeat certain ideas or concepts that are central to the issue, but always using them with a certain stylistic and formal variation within the text. The text begins with the importance of storytellers nowadays, the means they use to narrate, and then, highlighted.

I chose this technique because I wanted to explain my point of view in a way that I could be more persuasive and convincing. I needed to have my sentences connected so I could make my ideas clearer and sequential. I tried to relate my opinions with some facts, building my argumentation from there and because of that I also use The Stack, as a writing technique.'

Stylistically, the student is aware of the use of repetition to achieve the adequate paragraphing technique. The student also keeps in mind that one of the ultimate objectives of writing this piece is to put across her ideas clearly and objectively and

expressed that the connectivity of ideas is the means found to achieve this clarity. Her first two sentences do however lack some cohesion as her explanation is not very sequential. She recognises that the stack serves her intention of listing points of view, but does not seem to have the skill to connect her themes in this metacognitive task. This student is reasonably cohesive and coherent in writing out the rationalisation of her choice in paragraphing techniques and the way she did her task. Her transitions are made through additions, cause and effect, examples and summaries. She emphasises her choice of technique by choosing bold and visually enhancing the word, making it stand out stylistically. However, she needs to work on her separation of themes into different paragraphs. So, on the one hand, metacognition is achieved as she is able to rationalise the thoughts behind her writing, but on the other, she still needs some practice in putting the paragraphing techniques into practice.

The next student using the stack explains that it is used to list different perspectives, yet fails to see that the balance is then needed to make the comparison that is referred to in both quotes.

‘I used “The Stack” as the paragraphic technique because it allowed me to compare some facts from the Under a Banyan Tree story with my own arguments that support my position about the importance that I think storytellers have in our society. The essay has a main topic and related vocabulary, which I think makes my point of view clear to the reader.’

The student was unable to see that when comparing facts that reflect on the one hand, his own position and on the other hand, the position presented in the story, a balance starts to be formed, especially as his own opinion did not coincide with the position stated on the story. With the presentation of two different points of view, the structure inherent to the text is a balance of arguments, be they heavier to one side or the other.

The last examples provided are of students who, despite trying to engage with their texts did not manage to do so efficiently. Not only do these students reveal difficulties with the English language but they also expose their inability to come to terms with the paragraphing techniques as their explanations do not justify the choices that they pinpoint.

1 - 'I used 'the step' in this assignment as I ordered my ideas and used the keys words to build the essay. In the essay the ideas are displayed in an orderly fashion, with concrete history from where storytelling originated from, my personal opinion and the evolution from storytelling until the present days.'

2 - To write this essay I used the paragraphing technique called "The Stack". I chose this technique because, in my opinion, it is the best way for the reader to understand the writer's point of view. This happens at the beginning of the text when the reader can see right at the start, with the help of the topic sentence, what is going to be exposed in the document.

3- I use the stack to organize my text.

Text 1 exemplifies how the step can be misunderstood as a means of 'ordering ideas'. The writer of Text 1 did not understand its function nor gives an adequate explanation of how he structured his text. The following text actually chooses the right paragraphing technique for her argumentative text but then is unable to justify and explain the choice. Nothing that is said demonstrates how the paragraphing technique used in Text 2 enables the student to structure her argumentative text. Text 3 sheds no light whatsoever on the student's understanding of the paragraphing techniques.

Moon (2007) referred to some of the constraints that students face when asked to reflect upon their own work. She mentions factors such as having to express the reflection in written form as a major constraint due to the mental nature of reflections. The fact that

these texts are to be shown to someone else also seems to place students in delicate positions as sharing thoughts or critical views of their own work can be hard to share with others. Most of the time, reflective writing in HE is assessed and this is viewed as yet another factor that hinders students from effectively reflecting on their own work. Unfortunately there were some students who did not reflect on their writing and chose to write sentences very similar to that in Text 3. Needless to say, these students' reflections added nothing to their texts and many times did not demonstrate this technique in their text at all, showing no knowledge having been acquired in this area. They did however have the possibility to place any questions online, regarding the marking, yet none of these students used this possibility.

There seemed to be a divide between the students' metacognitive skills and the online interaction. The discourse used online has a different register and this may have been why the students did not use it as an option to discuss this skill. The next section looks at online discourse and how metacognition feeds into its focus in the writing module.

6.3.3 Online Discourse

Online discourse is considered essential in the writing module as it is mostly through the students' online discourse that they are able to practice their writing in English. In this section, a detailed look into students' online participations on the forums will occur. Their importance in relation to CoI will be made clearer as we look at concrete examples taken from the students' written interactions.

Online communication for Chism (1998) is mainly social, but in CoI, it reveals two other dimensions. Besides Social Presence, Cognitive Presence and Teaching Presence are considered. She refers to the sharing of knowledge through online communication and that does indeed come through in many forums, especially in those where students show up as the experts and share their knowledge.

Another of Chism's focuses is refining communication skills. Students did work on their writing in English and developed their critical and creative communication skills, studied and practiced argumentative skills, online research skills and presentation skills too.

As seen below, online discussion is often viewed as somewhat disorganised yet as having a goal. Although it is a written form of communication, it can be viewed as spoken communication and this adds to its confusing nature.

Online discussion is paradoxical. It consists in a flow of relatively disorganized improvisational exchanges that somehow achieve highly goal-directed, rational course agendas. Despite the apparent incoherence of online talk, participants have established norms that regain the coherence and personal character of conversational interaction (Herring, 1999 in Xin and Feenberg, 2007: p.216).

The importance and definition of online discussion is often queried, yet there are researchers who value it as a useful addition to education. As Hamilton & Feenberg (2005) disclose, interaction online seems to have been downplayed in education by those who possess the economic potential to help develop it, thus hopefully the following analysis can help bring more attention to its effectiveness as well as demonstrate what a CoI is. As Garrison points out, 'An interactive community of learners is generally considered the sine qua non of higher education' (Garrison et. al., 2005: p.13) explaining that if students are interactive, then effective communication is taking place and learning is a process that occurs through communication.

Following Anderson and Garrison's (1997), Moore's (1989) and Garrison and Cleveland-Innes' (2005) notions about online communication in a CoI, it is essential to maintain interaction flowing to help students explore ideas and stimulate their critical and reflective thinking skills (metacognition). These particular researchers see a CoI as crucial in HE as it provides a place for students to communicate beyond the simple

social interaction they are used to on other networking sites. It allows communication to occur between students and their teachers or other experts about the content being taught and is thus valuable to scaffold and model critical inquiry.

I. Writing in Communities of Inquiry

With the intent of detailing how important online discourse is to the development of CoI, the following sections consider how students' and my own discourse have highlighted a few more indicators that can be added to the 3 major components of CoI: Cognitive, Teaching and Social Presence. Throughout the analysis of the data on NVIVO, various codes were used and these can be seen in the print-screen below. These codes shall be discussed in detail further on.

Name	Sources	References	Created On
F2F	1	1	19/06/2009 17:31
Col	0	0	19/06/2009 17:33
Cognitive Presence	0	0	18/06/2009 23:54
Exploration	16	58	24/08/2009 16:28
Integration	18	63	24/08/2009 16:28
Resolution	17	66	24/08/2009 16:28
Triggering event	16	22	24/08/2009 16:27
Common goals	18	28	19/06/2009 17:34
Metacognition	25	28	19/06/2009 17:34
Social Presence	0	0	18/06/2009 23:54
Argumentative disagreement	8	11	27/10/2009 19:48
Disagreement	3	5	27/10/2009 19:47
Emotional Expression	109	908	24/08/2009 16:29
Empathic relations	41	130	18/06/2009 23:55
Expressing interest	54	148	20/06/2009 23:43
Group Cohesion	31	89	24/08/2009 16:29
Humour	26	80	19/06/2009 00:03
Irony	5	8	29/10/2009 18:23
Offering P2P help	3	5	02/11/2009 16:21
Open communication	35	71	24/08/2009 16:29
Polite greetings and endings	136	1645	18/06/2009 23:55
Teaching Presence	0	0	18/06/2009 23:54
Building Understanding	27	53	24/08/2009 16:30
Direct Instruction	17	20	24/08/2009 16:30
Instructional Management	7	11	24/08/2009 16:30
Motivating	54	155	18/06/2009 23:57
Positive Reinforcement	22	62	19/06/2009 00:04

Figure 33 - NVivo8 Tree Nodes Expanded

i. Forums

In the ARCs, the forums were the most important element used to help students write in English. Due to the writing in the forums being of a more informal character, it helped many students lose their fear of writing in English and enabled them to develop some language skills too. These forums also played a major role in shaping the route this research took. The data from these forums had originally been collected to be able to analyse students' writing and see how b-learning could enable students to develop their writing skills in English, but once coding began, this research began to lead me towards CoI as many of its characteristics arose through the data, and consequently these elements in the research gained more weight and interest.

Thus forums have become the major source of data for analysis and are essential for realising how communication occurs in this CoI. Xin and Feenberg (2006) have expressed they see communication as an integral part of the learning process.

The social relations of communication are entangled with the learning process in ways that, though difficult to analyze, are grasped to some degree intuitively by teachers and students who draw on a lifetime of educational experience (p.3).

In this way, it is inspiring to be able to register this communication that has always occurred orally and that is so essential to the learning experience. Through b-learning, the best of both forms of communication can be latched onto and some examples are looked at in this section. The above mentioned authors confirm the role that forums play in b-learning when they say:

In our view, engaged collaborative discourse is the best use of online forums for educational purposes. It should play a significant role in both blended and distance learning (Xin and Feenberg, 2006: p.3).

The examples in this section shed light upon the notion of ‘engaged collaborative discourse’ given that students exchange knowledge on the forums and help each other acquire new knowledge.

Garrison’s CoI framework helped with a deductive form of coding the data on NVIVO but there were codes that then arose inductively and are added onto the original framework. The analysis will first focus on Cognitive presence, followed by Teaching Presence and finally Social Presence.

A. Cognitive Presence

This section analyses how cognitive presence contributes to CoI and how students’ interactions exemplify the components that constitute this presence. Has this b-learning writing module created a CoI where cognitive presence can be seen? For the intentions of this research, Garrison et. al. (2000, 2001) provide a definition of cognitive presence:

Cognitive presence is defined as the extent to which learners are able to *construct and confirm* meaning through sustained discourse in a critical community of inquiry (Garrison, Anderson and Archer, 2001: p.11).

The students’ learning experience occurs when a CoI is created and each element invests in cognitive presence. Communication becomes the vehicle for learning to be sustained and this section will take a look at the various stages that discourse represents within cognitive presence.

a. Triggering Event

The triggering event is seen as the moment that cognitive presence is prompted. This is mostly instigated by whoever is leading the course, which in this case was mostly me. However, given that some of the themes developed on the forums were also started by students, I found a few cases where students activated other classmates’ thought

processes and knowledge acquirement on a certain theme. Garrison views the triggering event as:

the problem, challenge, task proposed by you, the faculty member as part of the design of your course. This means a focus on problem-solving for part of your course goals (Garrison et. al., 2004: p.64),

but I shall add another dimension to it by supplementing it with students' interactions that stimulate further debate and the ongoing acquisition of knowledge and have taken on a teaching presence.

- *Triggering Personal Opinions*

In the forums, many direct questions function as the triggering event. Below are some examples taken from various forums that demonstrate how this occurs. One of the means of triggering cognitive presence is by sharing some personal knowledge first and then asking a question related to that. The following example is about the Discovery Channel and an attempt is made to find people with similar tastes.

I enjoy a lot seeing Discovery Chanel because i learn a lot with it.

There is so many things that we can learn in this chanel. Is there anyone that agrees with me?

By sharing a personal opinion, this becomes a trigger of both cognitive and social presence. In the social presence realm, this excerpt includes self-disclosure within the affective category, and asking questions within the interactive category (See Figure 28 on p.158). This interaction appeals to knowledge about the channel and to same-minded people on a social level. By placing the question after sharing personal information, people will resort to explaining why they too like watching it, thus triggering cognitive awareness of what is learnt.

The next two examples are taken from my own interactions on the forum and show how triggering cognitive presence can be done by the teacher.

Hello J,

I'm so proud to have such exemplary students! 😊

Question: what do you all think about the amount of plastic bags we use when we go to the supermarket? Do any of you re-use plastic bags or take them with you to the supermarket?

Take care,

Jane

I begin by using positive reinforcement and then list some questions related to the previous person's interaction. My questions aim at getting students to reflect on their own actions when they go to supermarkets and their opinions on plastic and recycling. The positive reinforcement, enhanced by the use of an emoticon, has the objective of stimulating students' interest in a topic that also clearly interests me. The human need for recognition and stimulus got many students to share their thoughts and write about what they do in relation to recycling. Once I had triggered this cognitive presence, I then continued to reinforce the other students' participations too. In the next example, the same technique is used.

Hi everyone,

I was reading through all your descriptions and it seems that this class has quite a nice group of people with whom many of you have already developed steady friendships with.

Tell me... what do you think about friendship?

Which do you think are the fundamental elements for real friendship to flourish?

Have a nice weekend,

Jane

As a way of getting as many students as possible on board, I begin my interaction by relating positively to the whole class and the relationships that I have noticed between them. When working in blended learning environments, part of the lecturer's role is to observe in class relationships that may be enhanced through online interaction too. Therefore a tighter sense of the community of practice can be forged. In the post, two questions follow, that will trigger their arguments on the theme of friendship. It is a simple theme that is easy to write about and that everyone has an opinion on. By showing them that I have a positive view of them, I am getting rid of their fear to communicate with me. After all, I had read their descriptions and had understood them and come to the conclusion that they were a pleasant group of people, so this should reassure them and trigger their appetite to share more views on the forums. The students did indeed put across many arguments and then ended up discussing different views on the issue.

- *Triggering Digital Discussions*

This next example also adopts the interrogatory form but the question is much more complex than the previous example. There is an introduction to the thread that the student is creating and a description of the reasons that led to its creation. The interaction ends with a question about benefits and disadvantages of the internet. To get classmates interested and thinking about this topic, the trigger appeals to their prior knowledge of the issue but stimulates some thought, organisation, justification and perhaps even some research into the matter.

Hello folks, let me introduce u a new theme that might have funny and serious responses! The internet is seemed as a source of information and communication much powerfull and the most important way to people get conected across the word. May u indicate some benefits and causes from the use of this toll"internet"?

Despite all the grammar and spelling mistakes, many students were stimulated to try to get their ideas across and wrote about subjects that interested them. In my diary this thread led me to think:

It seems to me that this issue is allowing many students to lose their fear of writing and their need to communicate and interest in the forums that they have created themselves is getting them to write so much more.

The thread on computer games was the most successful one on the forum in terms of actual interactions of participants. There were many students willing to add their knowledge to this discussion and many used the forum as a means of showing and discussing what they know and this interaction increased what they knew in the field, as can be seen in the next example.

How about Windows vs. Linux? What do you think about this two systems? And whose da best for what.

In my opinion windows is good for games but Linux is better for internet? Helps and question please ask and respond....good luck.

Here the student triggers knowledge about this theme by placing a question that opposes two very well established systems that he knows is part of his classmates' daily lives, but then links it to games and how they run best. He then strengthens the trigger by adding a plea for help and he did indeed get a very heated argument going amongst his classmates. The next example also questions students' opinions about the operating systems and belongs to the same thread. The only difference here is that the trigger is made in relation to notebooks instead of games.

Hi!

This year i Bought a notebook that comes with Windows Vista , after using one month, i changed to xp.

The Windows Vista on the desktop and without any program open, uses

50 % of my memory RAM (2 gb) while the xp uses 30%.

With Windows XP i dont have many crashes as Vista, and Windows xp is more fast than Vista.

And you, Which one you prefer? XP or Vista?



It seems that this trigger resorts to exploring available knowledge on the area by giving a concrete example of a problem he is encountering. Once again, this trigger not only stimulated a high level of interaction, both in numbers of discussions that followed and the lengths of the discussions too, and also in terms of the quality of the knowledge that was shared. The request for help prompted cognitive and social presence in these forums and these examples shall be referred to again when we look into social presence in CoI.

The last two examples in this section show a slightly different approach to triggering cognitive knowledge. The students hint at knowing much more about the issue that they launch on the forum but ask their classmates to first share what they know.

i want to start here an argument for both of this 2 games.

Therefore chose the best of them (in your opinion).

Travian:

www.travian.com

Tribal wars:

www.tribalwars.net

I would appreciate that you justify your opinion.

For now, i will keep mine opinion, because of dinner, later on (possibly by midnight or something similar) i will post.

My regards.

V.

In the example above, the student states what he/ she aims to achieve in this thread: a discussion about games. He offers his classmates some links so they can get more information on the issue and asks them to 'justify' their opinion. This is the trigger and the interaction ends with some more tantalising information, that of his own opinion to be given later on. In terms of the CoI, this student has managed to pinpoint a common interest with other members of the community and is aiming at some online interaction with like-minded people. He has triggered knowledge related to these games and the language that gamers use. This thread proved to be a long one where students eagerly shared their experiences and were at ease to use gamer's vocabulary, which they also clarified whenever there was a question.

In the next example, a student shares his own personal blog and his experience since he first began writing it. He triggers cognitive knowledge about blogs and photos because of an urge to share his own blog and get his classmates involved in it too.

Hey everyone

I started this theme in the open forum for everyone who has a blog and want to share it with "the World"!

I've a blog named "Pores-do-Sol", the main idea of this blog was only to share Sunset photos with everyone who want to see my blog, but due to the lack of photos,time and opportunity to take photos i changed the theme of the my blog a bit, now the blog has everything that i think it's worth to be posted, since mails I recieve , music videos, everything. But

still has some photos of sunsets that some friends send me 😊

You can take a look here : www.pores-do-sol.blogspot.com

With this interaction, students logged onto the blog and discussed what they saw, shared their own blogs or other blogs they liked and also gave this student some of their own sunset pictures for him to post on his blog.

Triggering thus occurred throughout the different forums on different levels. At times the teacher triggered more interaction from students who were not very active or discussions of certain issues that had not yet been explored on the forums, and at others, students triggered discussions about issues they were interested in and enabled cognitive presence to occur in the forums. The students triggered knowledge that could be shared from their own experience or from colleagues who were ‘experts’ in the field, and triggered linguistic choices related to areas that used jargon, or simply explored vocabulary on the different subjects that were triggered. This leads us into the next important part of cognitive presence, namely the Exploration of knowledge that occurs after the trigger.

b. Exploration

This section shows how the students pick up the interaction from the trigger phase and make an attempt to express their ideas in relation to the theme that was triggered.

Exploration is viewed by Boston et. al. (2009) as:

where students explore the issue both individually and as a community, through reflection and discourse (p.69).

In the exploration stage, students gather their thoughts and relate them to discussions whilst socially registering their analysis of their individual and personal knowledge together with what has been presented to them in the discussion (Garrison, 2003; Garrison et. al., 2000, 2005, 2010; Shea et. al., 2003, 2010a; Darabi et. al., 2011). A

clear explanation of how exploration occurs is when an individual is able to cognitively bring his personal reflection to a social register, as Park mentions:

Exploration can be defined as shifting between the private, reflective world of the individual and the social expression of ideas (Park, 2009: p.143).

There seems to be movement from inner thoughts to another level where these thoughts are outwardly expressed to a community and these ideas then become part of a social process. Ideas trigger other ideas and when one is expressed, these need to be initially interiorised and processed with the person's personal knowledge and experiences and that interpretation is how the idea is explored and only then can it be passed onto others so they too can add their own knowledge to finally socially create knowledge with another dimension.

- *Exploration of the Internet*

In the writing module, and in the forums, in particular, students actively explored various ideas that were triggered in the computer games forum. Some examples can be seen below.

well this is a good theme and very vast, let me see...

At the internet we can get many information as you said, we can get stuff on it, and as the time goes on, many services are using the internet to help ppl, like online shopping, communication centers.

The most usefull tool of the internet is the possibility of comunication with others at long distance, this way we can get together intire familys and friends.

Internet is not always good think, VIRUS, the worst problem, it can destroy all system in no time.

There are also bad hackers, that put virus running on the internet, invade your privacy and steal.

Many other good things and problems will be mencioned by others (i think).

cya around

The student above tries to relay to his personal experience with the internet and how useful or prejudicial it can be. At the beginning of the intervention, the student seems to have a hard time pinpointing exactly what he wishes to explore and uses vague words

such as ‘information’ and ‘stuff’, yet as he writes, the thoughts seem to get clearer. This post shows indications of being a spontaneous interaction, reflecting the character of the exploration stage. There is a pause in the very first sentence: ‘let me see...’, which converges his thoughts into a pattern of written discourse, giving a sense of spontaneity to the discourse act. His sentences are short and each one develops an idea, which indicates how his mind was working at that precise moment as it was jumping from one idea to the next. The relatively simple lexical density that is used also is an example of spontaneity as he has not had the time to think about more complex vocabulary to express his ideas.

This post also shows this student up as a confident writer, despite all his grammatical errors. He has a variety of ideas linked to the topic showing that he stands quite comfortably in the discussion of this topic. This student demonstrates that he has participated in online communication often as he has developed some linguistic habits that are common in online communication such as the abbreviations he uses and takes for granted that the readers will understand too: ‘ppl’ (people) and ‘cya’ (see you). He almost challenges his classmates to add other arguments for and against the internet. In this way, this student has made his classmates transactional actors in the discourse. This means that the students have been given a role to play and thus have become an integral part of the discourse act.

The next student seems to have given more thought to his post than the previous student because the ideas that are registered seem to be more concrete.

Hello

Internet, was undoubtedly a good theme too the forum, someone could say that the internet is Messenger and chats, but the internet is the digital world, there we all can do everything we want.

This issue generates very controversy, so I will give my opinion, on some points that I think internet is positive and negative.

The best part is that set at home on computer we can communicate with each other anywhere in the world, in real time, we can also see that we are communicating through the video conference, can also pay bills, buy music, videos, can study, can find almost what we want to find,
on the other point we are subject to hacking, virus, the form obscene as other people use the internet.
In conclusion internet is very useful if well used.

Ps: If use internet always use Anti virus.

This student makes reference to concrete things that can be done and that are considered by him to be very useful. These ideas seem to mirror the student's own experience using the internet. He begins by giving the creator of this forum a positive mention and thus validates the initiative. He uses an emphatic validity marker, 'undoubtedly', according to Van de Koppelaar's (1985) taxonomy, which gives emphasis to the students' point of view that the forum was a good choice. Care is also taken to write a word of caution to his classmates about how essential an anti-virus is.

This student's interaction allows the reader to have a glimpse into the cognitive process that is occurring. He is exploring and engaging with the ideas that were put forward by the classmate before him and then has put those together with his own experience and has added to the knowledge previously expressed. From this post, we can apply Grice's Maxims of Relevance (1975) of Quantity, Quality and Manner. This student's post is relevant to the theme being developed and he writes without compromising any ideas. He is also clear when putting his arguments forward, so there is no obscurity about his intentions. From this analysis, the student's exploration of the issue is very relevant. It is interesting to see that despite all the spelling mistakes in this post, the message is still very clear. Curiously many words are spelled as he seems to pronounce them and that is why when they are read, they can be understood. It seems that a corrector has been used but has placed in homophones but the choice of the word has been the wrong one.
Examples are:

-
- cooed ☺ could
 - would ☺ world
 - while ☺ will
 - set ☺ sat
 - beals ☺ bills
 - haking ☺ hacking

When looking at the examples of the previously analysed two posts, we realise how writing down ideas leads to the development of the cognitive process. Not only have these students had to relate to their own experiences but also think about how they could actually write them down for others to understand. The first example shows how putting ideas down in writing can help define thoughts, giving this exploration stage major importance in the cognitive process. Once the CoI has begun to explore notions related to the theme, some of the students can go onto the next cognitive stage, namely Integration.

The following two participations in the forum represent two students engaging with a trigger that I had begun. At this stage, exploration takes place as I and other students who are unaware of the terms need to link these terms with our own understanding and personal experiences. A student had mentioned the term ‘point whores’, which I had never come across, so I asked what that meant:

Hi V,

Please excuse my ignorance, but what on earth are 'point whores'???

Thanks,

Jane

These two students engage in an attempt to explain what the term means and when it is used.

Heheh 😊 I knew you were going to make a remark

I think he meant to reference an Internet term for "people who play (some online game) with the sole purpose of achieving points and raising their rank", sometimes deviating from the true purpose of the game.

Sometimes it is used in forums for those who write a lot of posts to achieve higher forum ranks.

Anyway not a very appropriate term lol.

The first student engages with me, the lecturer, socially before providing an explanation for the term. This is done through the use of humour in the form of an emoticon and an interjection, 'Heheh', representing laughter. He seems to have already foreseen I was going to request further details about the term and actually responded to my trigger before the student who used the term initially. At this point, doubt about the trigger remains as I question whether my request for further explanation is seen as the trigger or whether the student's choice to use the term was the trigger. Perhaps both posts can be used as triggers about the issue?

'Point whores' is described in a way that a lay might understand the term. Simple vocabulary choice is made and not only is a quote used, correctly identified through the use of speech marks, but the student also proceeds to explore his own perception of the term. This is where we have proof of exploration occurring. This student also characterises the expression as 'inappropriate', which, in turn, triggers a reaction from the student who introduced the term and which can be seen below. An opinion has been challenged and a face threatening act has occurred at the end of this interaction and therefore a response is awaited. There is a slight scuffle for dominance in this discussion.

The classmate inevitably reacts to the previous threat as can be seen in the post below.

Hi there.

Sorry Miss Jane for didn't answered sooner, but i think that Sergio have made a good explanation of the term.

But i do disagree with him, when saying its not a "ver apropritate term" in the context of the game, because i don't believe that term to be so much agressive such as like "noob" or "nub" or other online terms.

These term i also don't agree, that are used only for people that makes alots of post in forums only because to have "hingh ranks" or something like that.

For example: the term " point whore makes more sense on "Travian" than on "ogame" because you can a high rank player on OGame and you don't need do have army to protect your account, in other hand, in "Travian" having many villages usually its a sign of a good player and dangerous players, because he can makes more troops, therefore there some players in "travian" that are HUGE (or by other words) have many villages, but don't represent any real menace, giving themselves the reap purpose of the term "point whore".

This end my point of view, wich i am trying to defend that using "online terms" are important and can be acceptabe when the context is appropiate.

If you by other hands, says that these terms, are not approapiate in the context of english and its gramactic, i would agree with that.

Sincerely

V

P.S.:

I will make a topic with online terms and explanation of them, in this section.

The student, V, who initially used the expression in a thread tries to apologise for not being the first to give an explanation of it and acknowledges that his classmate has done a good job of clarifying it. A positive evaluation is made at first as this will soften the disagreement that this student expresses later in this post. He then reacts to the accusation made by the previous student about the term 'Point whores' not being 'very appropriate'. This expression has made him lose face in the CoI as the accusation has been made publicly. V expresses that he 'disagrees' as a way of saving face. He points out that the term is not aggressive by giving the reader synonyms for the word. This adds to his position of power within the CoI, as he is showing his degree of expertise in the field, thus making it harder for anyone else to question his claims. As Spencer-Oatey (2007) explains, issues of face and identity are often 'social and cognitive in

nature' (p.19) and in this case, both are playing a role in the student's loss of face. Not only is his position questioned in the social realm of the CoI but his knowledge and choice of terms is equally doubted.

From this student's perspective, the term is acceptable if used within context, but he also accepts that it may not be appropriate in all contexts or be grammatically correct. His attempt to save face is made explicit when he writes 'my point of view', reinforcing that this is simply a personal perspective, and by his choice of words, 'trying to defend', which insinuates that he has been 'attacked' and he needs to 'defend himself'. He felt negatively evaluated by others and has justified his perspective and then proceeds to add another possible perspective to the argument. It seems that this comment, placed at the end of the interaction, may be directed at me as the lecturer who he views as the 'expert' in English and he thus feels the need to register his thoughts as someone who may be committing a mistake if the expression is viewed from a linguistic perspective. Spencer-Oatey formulates that 'norms develop prescriptive and proscriptive overtones' (p.19) and keeping this in mind, he is looking at educational conventions that determine the type of language that can be used within a classroom, or in this case, on a learning platform. As the lecturer and moderator of this forum, I did not feel any need whatsoever to explain the lexical implications of the term, as the two above-mentioned students had already fully broken it down within its context and it seemed quite clear to me and anyone else that may not have been familiar with the term.

Engagement at this level with the terms that triggered cognitive presence exemplifies Park's (2009) notion of exploration as being knowledge that is processed at an individual level and that then is expressed at a social level. This term was mentioned by one student who got other members of the community exploring the word amongst themselves on a social level.

Another thread that revealed some exploration on a cognitive level was one on Windows XP vs. Vista. Students genuinely gave this thread some thought and were very open to discussing these issues that were clearly close to their experiences. I have selected a few students' interactions to exemplify how exploration took place in this thread.

Hey,

I recently changed to Windows Vista and i have to say it's way cooler than XP.

Sure you need more RAM and a better CPU wouldn't hurt, but if your PC is Vista ready, don't even think about it. :D

About the RAM it's true it uses more RAM but that's not a bad thing.

"In Microsoft Windows Vista it is called SuperFetch, and it reserves about 33-50% of system memory for this purpose. Essentially Windows Vista looks at how the computer user accesses application and data, and keeps the most often used applications and tasks loaded into cache memory. This makes loading applications quicker and is supposed to offer users a smoother ride. It does not take system memory away from the OS or applications, if memory demand his high SuperFetch will automatically adjust its size."

Anyway XP is still great. :D

No opinion on other OS, always been a Windows user (never a fan). 😊

The example provided above responds directly to the trigger that was in the beginning of this thread. The trigger was referred to previously, as an example which is part of the section discussing Triggers, and is the post that contains the Windows logo. In it, the student asked specifically: 'And you, Which one [do] you prefer? XP or Vista?'. The student referred to above responds by linking his personal experience to the one mentioned in the trigger. This Windows user has also used both OSs and puts his idea across that Vista is much better. He also quotes some information taken from elsewhere to justify the position taken, known as a validity marker (Van de Kopple and Shoemaker, 1988). It is more specifically known as an attributor, as the student

attributes the quote to someone else other than himself, although he doesn't exactly say where he took the quote from. Despite the student's preference of an OS, he makes sure to make his limited knowledge clear. This is done with some humour, represented in the smiley and the words in between parenthesis: 'always been a Windows user (never a fan). 😊' It is a way to save face in case other classmates choose to contradict his choice. According to the Schwartz Value Inventory (SVI), this attitude shows conformity of face and values, as he follows choices made by everyone else and the OS most people use. The next post shows another point of view on the same issue of OSs.

This student is able to see that whichever choice is made, people have different experiences that may be different to his own. Therefore, it is with ease that this student says that:

'And the fact that Vista looks way cooler than XP does make me happy. 😊' to end his discourse act. The use of humour adds to the empathetic relationship that students develop amongst themselves within the community. Humour helps the student to save face in the eventuality of there being any type of evaluation by another classmate. The discussion continues and various perspectives are explored as can be seen in the next example taken from this thread.

Yes, I agree Vista is still rough around the edges although I'd not be too sure about microsoft continuing the OS as they released a downgrade (which by the way I believe to be first ever released by them) and even though they're releasing SP1, which is expected to fix most of its major flaws, they are also announcing Windows 7 (Windows Vista's successor) to be shipped in 2009, not to mention they're still releasing SP3 for Windows XP, thus continuing Vista's predecessor...

From a personal point of view, if you're looking for a good reliable OS that won't drain all your hardware resources to produce fancy visual effects and useless anti-piracy background checks you should have a go at one of the many Linux distros available free of charge. They're easy to set up, bundled with lots of free software that do exactly the same thing (in some cases even more) as the paid ones available for Microsoft's OS.

On the other hand, if you're looking for an OS to play games and the alike, you better stick to Windows XP and hope Windows 7 won't be based on futile policies like Vista is...

The example used above expresses very similar points of view to the previous one, yet this discourse has some linguistic choices that enhance the analysis of this exploration phase. Beginning the discourse with ‘Yes, I agree’ makes it easy for the reader to link this student’s discourse with the previous ones in the thread. There is an inference to what was previously said, enabling the reader to engage with the thread in a logical and sequential manner. The restricted nature of lexical variety in this theme leads to repetitions from one post to the other, which also brings about cohesion and coherence in the thread that the students can follow. This student fosters empathy with the classmates participating in this forum, through his positive evaluations of their posts, as well as with the ideas that have been expressed by them. This positive expression registers acceptance of the cognitive knowledge that has been shared.

This student then resorts to ‘hearsay’ as a way of adding some reticence about the OS actually continuing to be used due to the release of the first ever downgrade that has been made available. Words such as ‘I believe’ and ‘are expected’ demonstrate that this student is not completely sure of the information that he is sharing but by using these words, there is some security as this knowledge has also been passed to him from somewhere or someone else and responsibility does not lie on him. He has a stance that shows a position about the topic yet he imposes nothing on anyone else. It is a means of maintaining face throughout his interaction. He is careful when writing his text so it is tactful and avoids any type of confrontation with colleagues and maintains himself safe from any type of negative evaluation.

As a way of giving credibility to this interaction, the student then uses the expression: ‘From a personal point of view, if you’re looking for...’. This indicates that an individual opinion is being put forward, yet the student draws in the reader when he signposts ‘you’. This student is giving the reader an opinion about what might be best

for whoever is reading this discourse. The student is sharing with the community his expertise when he reports that the OS he is writing about is ‘...avai[l]able free of charge...’ and ‘They’re easy to set up...’ and expressing what he thinks on a social level and advises that ‘...you should have a go at [it]...’.

c. *Integration*

This third phase directs students from their own opinions into a more structured phase of content. Their ideas are organised in a more reflexive manner facilitating testing and integration of various hypothesis from different sources, which may have also led to some convergence amongst classmates but that ultimately is integrated into construed content (Akyol and Garrison, 2010; Garrison, 2000, Garrison and Anderson, 2003; Darabi et. al. 2011).

• *Integration of Religion and Change*

As examples of the integration phase, excerpts taken from two forums on religion and science and reliability and credibility of sites, shall be analysed. These discussions were triggered by questions that I had placed on the forums as a means of integrating face-to-face content being taught with the work being done online.

When coding the integration phase, the following students’ interaction was particularly interesting due to the thought process that occurs as the ideas are registered.

I agree with this theme, because in this era, religion was extremely important.
As we know today, the Church dominated and controlled every human current of thought (religion, spirituality and science) and everything that didn’t follow it’s standards was automatically condemned (ex.Galileu Galilei).
In those times most of the knowledge and their convictions that scholars had, were devoted to the church teachings, while a very small part was reserved to the preoccupations of the physical world. They gave instead, a lot of importance to faith and salvation of the souls, but did not care about the control of nature.
Concerning Mathematics, this science never put in question, the religious believes, of those times, and because of that, always had an open field for free development.

Tecnhology also had some progress because of the human believes in the capacity of knowing new worlds, of sharing knowledge , (building ships and using new tools for overseas discoveries of New Worlds), but even this was limited by the Church that only looked forward to the evangelization.

This student reveals that some thought has been given to the subject and she has come to some conclusions when gathering ideas in an attempt to write them down so others are able to follow. Different ideas have been processed for this student to be able to formulate these statements relating to how religion allowed or limited some scientific developments. According to Moore (1989), there are three core types of interaction, namely, learner–teacher, learner–content, and learner–learner. In these posts, these three types of interaction have occurred and produced the integration of the content enabling the cognitive process to occur. The students interacted with the teacher when reading and doing the task. Then they interacted with the content by exploring what was taught with their own research and consequent organisation of thoughts and information to integrate the knowledge and express it in a post, thus communicating with each other.

This next student focuses more on religion itself and in particular, Christianity.

I think that the Christian Church take some theories from Greeks and Romans and make from them laws than can't been questioned: for example a theory of everything was made for 4 elements of Aristotle, or the theory of geocentric of Ptolemy. I think that Church really was afraid was to change. Ironically, that was his mistake. A system that doesn't change, that doesn't evolve, eventually breaks. That's why Christian Church ends for divide in so many churches.

Of course this is only my opinion.

By starting the interaction with ‘I think’, the student explains that he will be presenting the reader with a hypothesis. This is then followed by an example and then with another more general hypothesis about change, which seems to show how the student has gathered information from various sources and thus come up with this theory. He ends the interaction by revealing that ‘this is only my opinion.’ It is a way of maintaining face while opening the path to interaction from classmates on the issue. His stance and

attitude allow for agreement or disagreement on the topic. These students have shown critical reflection and integration of content taught with their own opinions and have opted to share them with the class. It is essential for a CoI to have students who are willing to communicate online. Van Tyron and Bishop (2009) explain that by interacting and directing their attention towards the integration of information and summarising their ideas so they can express them, there is more possibility of the development of a higher level of knowledge acquisition.

- *Integration of Knowledge on Credibility and Reliability*

The next examples are taken from the forum on assessing credibility of web-sites and the first interaction shows how conflicting ideas can lead up to one particular theory on the subject.

Hey, 😊

Just by reading a topic, it is impossible to know which one is more reliable.

Anyway, i've trusted Wikipedia for some time now, and i think i've never been disappointed. So i'll have to go with wikipedia.

The problem with Wikipedia is that anyone can edit, so you have to trust everyone's bit of information.

The good thing about Wikipedia is that anyone can edit, so it's almost impossible to be persuaded to some point of view.

Also believe that a site from the University of Stanford is to be trusted.

P.S. In an encyclopedia (Wikipedia) you share your knowledge not your opinion. :D

Take care,

P

This student relies on knowledge drawn from past experience and claims that he has trusted Wikipedia for a while. Yet, this student also toils with the idea that having anyone edit the information can both be harmful and positive. Finally this student adds a

hypothesis that seems to have come from his opposing thoughts on the interchangeability of the information on the site. He concludes that reliability does not seem to be an issue as an encyclopaedia actually shares knowledge and not opinions. He seems to be happy with that conclusion, due to the additional use of an emoticon representing a very wide smile.

Trustworthiness, from this student's point of view, comes from knowledge without an expression of personal opinions. Personally, I am not of the same opinion, yet as a lecturer and moderator, there was the need to give the students space and time to discuss the issue thoroughly to see if some opinions could be changed or fortified because as Gunawardena et. al. (1997) and Sing & Khine (2006) explain, when interaction is deep and makes itself sustainable, this can bring out the social construction of knowledge and allowing students the space to help each other grow and build their own knowledge is a goal to which many teachers aspire.

The next few examples reflect diverse opinions on the sites that were given to the students to analyse in terms of reliability and credibility. I have chosen these interactions that show a shift in students' views on the issue and how the cognitive process occurs throughout their online discussions.

Heyy 😊

I think Wikipedia is a good place to get some information about everything we need. OK, I know, the content could not be 100 % credible but you can see the references (*credible and reliable*) that every topic points in the bottom of the page.

Did u know that in only 6 years it has become the fast growing information source with over 2 million articles? 😊

L

The student above also trusts Wikipedia yet has a discerning way of managing the credibility of the information found there. This student shows that his cognitive process

has taken his critical awareness a step further than the previous student. This student explains that as he cannot be totally sure of the information on the site, he therefore looks at the references found at the bottom of the pages. As well as reacting positively to the message before and liaising with the idea posted about using this site regularly, this student also relates his previous knowledge to that obtained in the face-to-face lesson about ensuring their research online is done whilst taking certain aspects into consideration. Integration is occurring at this point of the cognitive process. References are one of the aspects mentioned in class and this information seems to have played a role in the student's cognitive awareness of how to look into a site's sources. Nevertheless, the student feels he needs to back up his initial comment with information discovered about the site. Factual evidence is used as a way to justify this student's point of view that the site is indeed credible and reliable and as a way of maintaining face within the CoI.

This next student also resorts to information that was discussed in our face-to-face lesson on the issue to support the position taken.

Hello Colleagues!!!! 😊

I think the best site is wikipedia because it give us a lot quality information, it's a official recognition, furthermore, it is regulary update, the last actualisation was on 1 March 2008, at 04:18.

So we can trust in the information of this site, it's credibility and reliability.

Good job everybody!!!!!!! *** 😊

When in class, we discussed how sites that are regularly updated generally provide their users with up-to-date and perhaps more reliable information as its creator is active and puts in the effort of looking things up and placing online what he/ she thinks is most relevant. The student defines that as this one is regularly updated, giving the exact time and date of the last update, the site offers 'quality' information. Integration has occurred as the student has managed to gather knowledge from various sources, has explored the

diverse notions and is now able to apply it and express an opinion on it. Despite this student not actually engaging with all the content at hand, she engages on a social level with her classmates. The interaction begins with a warm acknowledgement of all her classmates and ends with positive recognition for everyone's work on this task. Engagement on this level adds to the sense of community that is developed amongst the students taking this module and the sense of closeness is further enhanced by the use of the emoticons and asterisks, symbolising kisses. This conjunction of emoticons and asterisks are mostly used by female students and sometimes used by male students who are mirroring female interaction and becoming somewhat flirtatious with them.

The following three students discuss the reliability of the authors' posts on Wikipedia and engage with the integration of previous colleagues' posts and their own points of view.

- <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/aristotle-rhetoric/>

This site seems to be the more reliable because you can find the author there, appears to be a professional work, it looks like a look of bibliographic references and it's well written.

Wikipedia is a great site to find information and most of the times is a credible and accurate but it can be modified by anyone and that person can be someone that doesn't know what he/she is talking about, it rarely happens but it can happen,
take care.

The example above reveals a different choice to the ones made by colleagues shown before, of a reliable source, yet the student still feels the need to discuss Wikipedia, given the focus of the thread. This is due to the interactivity present on the forum's posts, such as the terms of address and questions that students are placing in their texts. On this level, this interaction shows that the student has engaged with the content and has considered past experience on the site. He questions the authors who publish information on Wikipedia and acknowledges that despite thinking it is rare, he still considers the credibility of such authors. This shows that the student has taken his line

of thought a step further, as the site has been used on previous accounts and recognises that many of the classmates use it, however there is a degree of criticality that has now made its way into this student's discourse as a product of the content learnt and the discussions that have occurred online, enabling integration of the knowledge. However some people take on more critical perspectives when integrating knowledge, as can be seen below.

In my opinion, and after some research work, the Edu urls are in my top list of reliable and credible sites. I don't trust in Wikipedia, i use it, but only for quick researches, not for important ones.

Like almost of you said, in Wikipedia everybody can contribute with information, but if you think about it, where from that information is coming? The source is always the best place to do research work, and Wikipedia is not a source.

The example above is a slightly more radical view of the thread that has been developed on Wikipedia. This student, as have those in the previous examples, shows integration of the content learnt and contributes to the discussion with his own point of view. He mentions that .edu urls are generally very credible as previously discussed in the lesson, due to their source being universities, academics and scholars, and documents that are placed online will have passed through some scrutiny. This student puts his point of view across by using the interrogative form, adding to the interactivity of the forum. He maintains face by protecting himself from criticism by saying that he agrees with colleagues, and then makes a very soft face-threatening-act by questioning the site's liability. He does not direct his question at anyone in particular but places his question to a more general audience, thus softening his critical perspective without threatening anyone in particular. This integration of knowledge in this section of the discourse will trigger other students to further their critical thinking.

Hello, all

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rhetoric>

This site is credible but not reliable because there is no nameable author an wikipedia is a free encyclopedia in which anybody can edit the texts even if the person in question don't have qualifications on the matter.

Have a nice day.

C B

In continuation of the thread, the student above subtly enhances the difference between credibility and reliability. Integration takes place on a lexical and semantic level in this example, whereas most other students were looking into the overall content being discussed. The post above also takes interaction with the CoI onto another social level by ending with a general polite comment to all and wishing them a nice day. The next example also takes the integration of knowledge onto a slightly different level, namely by integrating knowledge from other fields of knowledge.

Hello,

As a Design student I have developed certain skills that allow me to analyse web pages from different points of view such as: functionality, usability, graphic design issues, standards (style guidelines, related products), technical writing, internationalization, multiple platforms etc. In other words, I present the best option available in graphic terms to the client's need using computer/human interaction to that same purpose. I also see if such interaction is successful or not, if the users are satisfied according to what they consider to be a good visual design.

As a user I think that the wikipédia is a good site because we can identify the contents (title, author and organisation responsible for the page are identified), the continuity (the site is maintained and updated). Furthermore, the site has official recognition (quality information), internal and external links (hyperlinks and reference links) with related information for further knowledge, etc. We could say many things about wikipédia but the biggest compliment is that it serves its purpose – information.

However, wikipédia is not the only web page that is this well-designed. Analysing the sites that were available, I chose the following:

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rhetoric> 😊

<http://www.public.iastate.edu/%7Ehoney/Rhetoric/>

<http://rhetoric.byu.edu/Encompassing%20Terms/rhetoric.htm>

<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/aristotle-rhetoric/>

See you

This student looks into the graphic components of the sites provided for the task and brings in what he knows in terms of their user-friendliness. He tries to write assertively by enhancing that he writes as a ‘design student’ and a ‘user’ which gives the CoI a sense of his status and stance on the issue. It helps him establish an online identity with the characterisation of his social roles and skills that he has previously developed that allow him this degree of expertise on the issue. His level of integration is one that has various sources simultaneously.

- *Integration of Educational Issues*

The next three examples are taken from a thread on School and Education. As a way to get students developing their vocabulary whilst still writing in English, I had triggered interaction by posting an article on Education and asking students to comment on it. These students not only explored the information but also seem to have integrated different points of view to form their own hypothesis on the issue. At this point, it is essential to point out that distinguishing between exploration and integration is not very straightforward. Whilst looking up the coded data, doubts began to arise in relation to these texts, due to the uncertainty of what is actually the students’ own previously developed points of view and what could be perceived as the integration of a personal perspective, that was then developed by the information in the text and other classmates’ perspectives that had been explored in this thread on the issue at hand.

Hello everyone!

I agree with point of view because we all know that school children are not well behaved in the classroom nowadays.

When a child goes to school he is already the product of his education at home. If he doesn't have education he won't show it.

For many years (the last two decades) psychologists and social scientists have bombarded parents and teachers with the idea that nobody should say "No" to a child and that a child

had all the rights in the world including protest at home with parents and then at school with teachrs and classmates. No one was allowed to contradict a child. Now we have the result. Children and teenagers growing up and demanding instead of obeying rules.

I don't believe it will get better because it will take many years again to change the attitudes, mentality and behavior since nursery schools and primary schools so that when they get to secondary level they know what have to do.

Besides this, rules at school have to be strict. People have to learn to respect. An organized society also needs respect and rules.

Take care all, good night,

AA

As these students in ARC3 are in education, this is a theme that they are very interested in and have discussed many times but not in English. The opportunity seemed to be welcomed as many students were eager to discuss the text and participate with their own ideas. The example above shows how integration occurred after the student reveals she agrees with the argument put forth in the text and also relates some issues brought up in the text with her own personal views and then finally coming up with a hypothesis that is much more generalised than the theme itself: "Besides this, rules at school have to be strict. People have to learn to respect. An organized society also needs respect and rules." and "Children and teenagers growing up and demanding instead of obeying rules." This student uses lexical cues that enable the analysis of her discourse. "I agree with the point of view" shows that the student has read, thought about and integrated the issues in the article. She maintains unity within the CoI by agreeing with perspectives that have been shared by her classmates, revealing interaction between them and intertextuality through the repetition of some ideas and words. The dynamics of the context adds interpersonal and ideational functions to the texts that interweave in this manner. She tactfully hedges in her own ideas with "I don't believe", a projective verb that indicates that this student has a personal perspective that goes against another view that she has been considering. "Now we have the result" is the cue to a conclusion on this theme.

This student shares her ideals and manifests her ‘future’ role as an educator in her post. Her identity as a conservative educator who believes in old values comes through her text by the way she expresses her points of view. This student uses attributors, ‘psychologists and sociologists’ to give weight to her argument. These validity markers help her classmates assess the truth in her post. The next student does not integrate as many angles of the issue but also has a critical attitude.

Hello teacher Jane...

Today, education is not like in the old times.

Education in our days, is not easy. Like most people said, education starts at home with the father and mother. They are who ought to teach their kids good manners. At school, teachers complement both the good or bad education that parents have given them at home.

Literacy in school prepares the younger ones for the future. I agree with the article when the author claims: in our days, parents are too soft to their kids and spoil them very much.

Take care

P N

(Editado por Jane Spinola em Terça, 15 Abril 2008, 01:03)

In the example above, this student does not go into as much detail as the previous one but there is indication of gathering of thoughts and ideas that have led to the integration of knowledge on the theme being discussed on the forum. This student renders that she has taken many views into account with “Like most people say,” which in Kopple’s classification, is a commentary that adds to the interactivity of her post by including an imagined contribution from the audience. She also appeals to the reader’s metaphoric imagination with the inclusion of a proverb that ‘education begins at home’. She gives a critical perspective of the article when she claims that “I agree with the article” and inserts a quotation taken from the article, bringing authenticity to her argument. Finally a hypothesis is formed: “Literacy in school prepares the younger ones for the future” signposting the final stage of integration, as well as her stance on the issue.

d. Resolution

The final phase in cognitive presence is resolution and is seen as the section of discourse where the conclusions are presented. At this stage, the learners have worked through their thoughts, combined them with other sources and come up with solutions showing ‘higher-level integration’ and resolution (Weinberger et. al., 2005). Other perspectives also see the importance of interaction in the learning experience as Darabi (2011) expresses:

The higher-level integration and resolution of new information ... usually occur as the result of collaboration of instructor, student, content and environment Collins *et al.* (1991). In order to create such an instructional experience, online learning should facilitate learners’ cognitive presence (Darabi, 2011: p.223).

As Darabi brings to the forefront, arriving at a resolution is a consequence of interaction between the various players in the educational context, the content and the context and these will be looked at in this section.

At this point, a few examples of resolutions are analysed. The first few forum interactions exemplify how students reflected on themes such as Christianity, Computer games, Computer Operating Systems and Site Credibility and Reliability.

I thing that the Christian Church take some theories from Greeks and Romans and make from them laws than can't been questioned: for example a theory of everything was made for 4 elements of Aristotle, or the theory of geocentric of Ptolemy. I thing that Church really was afraid was to change. Ironically, that was his mistake. A system that doesn't change, that doesn't evolve, eventually breaks. That's why Christian Church ends for divide in so many churches.

Of course this is only my opinion.

In this first extract, the student primarily has been looking into Christian influences and its influence on science through time. Two resolutions have been made through the expansion of his thoughts. This student realises that resistance to change hinders

development, yet is also able to see that ‘ironically’ what initially leads to stagnancy of thought, ultimately led to a radical change in religion. In ARC1, despite there not being as much interaction as I had hoped for, there were still elements of cognitive presence in CoI. Given that this research was not actually initially aiming to create a CoI, finding codes of cognitive presence in such a limited community add to the validity of this CoI that developed in ARC1.

- *Resolutions on Digital Criteria*

The following forum interactions, taken from the forum with the most posts, shows that the students interested in the area of computers arrive easily at resolutions. This is claimed due to the high numbers of items coded as resolutions when compared to other forums where resolutions hardly appeared and also when comparing this research to other studies that claim that resolutions were hard to find in online communication.

Integration and resolution especially require “time for reflection” which may be more likely to occur in the extended time period of the threaded discussion. The lack of comments in the resolution category was also noted by Garrison and colleagues, and may be due to a number of factors, including the complexity or difficulty of issues raised, a lack of student skill or information to propose or test a resolution to the problem at hand, or a missed opportunity on the part of faculty who could have pressed for a resolution to questions being raised by the discussion (Meyer, 2003: p.63).

Inspite of Meyer’s comment that resolution needs time for reflection, it is with some satisfaction that my data provided me with results that can be coded as resolutions, without having had as much time as was suggested was needed because the interactions came quickly as responses. The intensity of some of the discussion forums allowed for this process to take place.

From the resolutions that arose, it seems the issues were not extremely complex and the students found they had sufficient knowledge to emit opinions on the issues, contrary to

the case cited by Meyer above. The examples that follow show students' ability to arrive at resolutions.

Hello

Internet, was undoubtedly a good theme too the forum, someone could say that the internet is Messenger and chats, but the internet is the digital world, there we all can do everything we want.

This issue generates very controversy, so I will give my opinion, on some points that I think internet is positive and negative.

The best part is that sitting at home on computer we can communicate with each other anywhere in the world, in real time, we can also see that we are communicating through the video conference, can also pay bills, buy music, videos, can study, can find almost what we want to find,

on the other hand we are subject to hacking, viruses, the form obscene as other people use the internet.

In conclusion internet is very useful if well used.

Ps: If use internet always use Anti virus.

The student above indicates that he has arrived at a resolution by using the words, 'In conclusion', indicating the end of a line of thought. This forum thread has been used previously to indicate the exploration phase and it is a good example to see how the student uses information that is cognitively processed on different levels. This student seems to have passed the integration phase as there is no indication in the text that he is considering colleagues' perspectives, yet there is also nothing to prove that what seems to be a personal perspective may not have been shaped by what was previously read in the forum. At the end of the written discourse the student makes a sound statement claiming what seems to be quite straightforward to him: the internet is useful but does need to be used with care.

The next example is used simply to exemplify that resolutions do not always appear at the end as in the previous thread.

Hi L! 😊

There are already a lot of Kamael servers (few are 100% Kamael but they are getting

there..), you may try this one <http://l2wz.com/files/> . But I'm sure you will find a lot more and better 😊 .

I'm playing in Gustin server and my main char is a Gladiator (dual swords) .

Kamael race is fun to play, but starting all over again is not very fun, I rather stick with the Gladiator character... :P

What's your favourite feature? PVP, castle sieges, quests, or something else?

Regards,

Ne

The thread above has a resolution at the very beginning of the written discourse. The exploration of the issue at hand is discussed after having presented the resolution. And, curiously, this text includes a triggering event at the very end of the discourse act. This student seems to feel the need to affirm his knowledge at the very beginning of the interaction. By placing such a statement at the forefront of a discussion, the student asserts his position on the issue and establishes his position of power and stance on the discussion. It shows prior and solid knowledge on the matter. The example that follows also has a resolution at the beginning of the discourse.

And the winner is Travian only because it have a goal giving some reason for us to play, either way all 3 games make yourselves addict to them, but its not real life, its only game.

If you wants to find me, look by the nick:

B2R or B2RSP, or even Segan.

But i have already quits of playing this games, giving my accounts away.

Sincerely

V

The student above had already participated avidly throughout the thread and was the student who had triggered the whole discussion on these games. The resolution is indicated with the expression: 'and the winner is', which gives the discussion a light and 'game-like' feel to it. This expression almost shows that an award has been attributed to the game that most students wrote positively about, reminding us of competitions that are often launched on other media such as TV and radio. There is care to include the

reason that makes this particular game the winner, namely that it is goal-oriented. This is a resolution that efficiently sums up what was discussed by many students. This student had already defined his position within the hierarchy of this thread as he had initiated the interaction and had a stance of an expert in the issue, thus him taking on the role of ‘prize-giver’ is in accordance with the coherence and orderliness (Fairclough, 2010) of his interactions, as he has dominated the thread since the beginning. However, not all resolutions are so clear, as can be seen in the example beneath.

Hi, C!

I had Asus G1s with Vista and i changed to Xp!

I have changed too, the asus F3SV and the F3SC of my friends, and they work fine with windows xp (i have all the drivers to xp)! 😊

If you want i can help you!;)

This student has come to a conclusion that is not in any way a clear one, yet for those following the discussion on OSs, it is clearly a resolution. This student has followed the thread and can identify with the classmates’ opinions and experiences and has related to their comments. Not only has this student shared his personal experiences with both OSs being discussed but has the confidence to conclude that if one of his classmates wants, help can be given. This shows that he feels very at ease with the knowledge that he has on the subject and thus is able to conclude that he can offer help to the classmate that needs it. According to Simon’s (2004) *Self-aspect Model of Identity*, the student has shown his *abilities* with computers and OSs and his *behavioural characteristics* which include being eager to help others. Use of the emoticon adds a dimension of social interaction to the help that is offered. The next example also provides a resolution to the same subject as the one we are currently looking at.

comparing OS's will always be a controversial issue but in general there will always be people on both sides with good arguments defending the OS they use and why they use

it..

i already tried vista and got a little bit dissapointed at first but i wasn't surprised because afteral it's microsoft LOL 😊

i've been using XP for a couple of years now and it took me a few years to change from win2k to XP because in the first years (like what's happening with vista now) the XP OS had many issues that needed a little bit of tweaking, most people in the business might remember how the introduction of SP1 and SP2 almost turned XP into a brand new OS.

I believe vista will never dominate the market even when SP1 is officially released because there is also an SP3 coming out for XP soon and according to some news it also makes XP faster and more stable.

according to other news it seems that microsoft will discontinue the support for XP (wich means that no more SPs will come out for it) and also will put an end to vista's reign with the introduction of a new OS on the market already in 2009, correct me if i'm wrong but vista will never really be a "good" OS..it'll only be average until a new OS comes out, those who now what Microsoft is capable of, know that history repeats over and over again when a new windows is released..lol

don't fight over what OS is better..just use what suits you better on your daily tasks..there's always a suitable OS for your needs 😊

This student allows for an extensive exposition of his thoughts following steps such as exploration and integration until finally emitting a resolution that exhibits his well-pondered perspectives. After carefully considering personal opinions and other sources, the student concludes that there is no need for the current discussion to continue as people should simply use the OS that best suits their needs. This is written in a humorous manner by using the imperative form to tell classmates not to 'fight' over the different OS and by ending the resolution with an emoticon of an open smile.

He shows he is well versed on the theme as he has personally worked with the OSs and his correct use of all the abbreviations used professionally demonstrates his expertise in the area. His stance is therefore a very secure one yet he does try to maintain face when he hedges about a probability that makes him slightly insecure. He uses the projective verb, 'believe', as a means of making his claim slightly less assertive, which allows his attitude to waver slightly and allow for further interaction on the issue.

- *Resolutions on Credibility and Reliability*

The resolutions presented in the next two examples are slightly different to the ones looked at previously because they are direct solutions to a problem that was presented to the class as a task.

Greetings,
For credible and reliable information, from the list given, I choose this one:
<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/aristotle-rhetoric/>
Because:
1st: It's a .edu domain, which means it is from the education sector;
2nd: There is a lot of information there, I think they know what they are talking about;
3rd: Crossing some of the information with other sites, the result matches;
4th: Stanford University;
5th: Site is updated regularly, last update at *February 27, 2008*.
Stay well.

This student decides to present the resolution at the beginning of his answer and then develop the rationalisation behind the choice. He shows a clear linear stance from the simple visual appearance of his post. Using Van de Kopple's (1988) Classifications in visual metadiscourse, this student has used chunking and a skeleton for his text to be easily read. The chunking is achieved through his use of numbers and this in turn has built the skeleton of the physical appearance of the post. His language is simple and concise ensuring that the resolution put forward leaves no room for doubts.

This site is credible but not reliable because there is no nameable author and wikipedia is a free encyclopedia in which anybody can edit the texts even if the person in question don't have qualifications on the matter.

C B

Whereas, this student, whose answer is seen above, decides to put down an answer by splitting the criteria that had been part of the task. The student finds the site credible but not reliable and this is the resolution presented. She then explains reasons for the

resolution. She offers a resolution without much information to back up her opinion, yet she shows no hesitation in her conclusion.

- *Resolutions on Blogs, Education and Saving the Planet*

The next few quotes show how students place their resolutions within their texts by claiming them as personal points of view.

Since a while that i'm following your blog and i have to say that is an very interesting blog.In the beginning your main subject was to share some photos of the sunset, part of them taken by friends, but after a while, you began to alternate your main subject, and in my opinion, it's way better this way.

In the example provided above, the student has a resolution that intertwines with his own personal views of a classmate's blog. Besides being a very positive review of the blog, this text also gives the classmate some constructive criticism in the resolution by concluding that the blog is much better with the shift in subject matter. This student puts himself across as someone with some experience in reading blogs and hedges his way into putting across his resolution. This can be seen as both a way for him to maintain face and as a way to avoid making a face-threatening act to the student who has the blog. He thus allows for differences of opinion, but has premeditated how not to be offensive in his comment. Other resolutions offered do not take such positions into considerations and are very clear in their opinions, such as in the next post.

Hello teacher Jane ...
About your question, I think we use too much plastic bags.
I don't re-use the plastic bags, when I go to the supermarket. I use the plastic bags in my house , to put the rubbish in. But we must use cloth bags when we go to the supermarket, because we have to take care the environment.
Take care
P N

In this resolution, the student concludes that bags made of cloth are the best option to be able to care for our environment. This student addresses interactivity triggered by my

initial post on the matter by repeating words used in my text and addressing the question directly. She simply comes to her conclusion and puts it forward without leaving much space for arguments against her point of view. The next resolution on the same subject does allow for other perspectives, on the contrary to this post.

hello...

In my opinion it is wrong because we use too much plastic which is very bad for nature. 😞

I try to re-use plastics at home but I have to admit that I don't like taking plastic bags back to the supermarket. I don't understand why we don't use wickerwork baskets in madeira instead of plastic bags. 😊

I believe that if we all used our baskets, we would contribute to the wickerwork industry and people wouldn't lose their jobs. 😊

Moreover, it is very elegant to go shopping for food with a well- designed basket, isn't it?

J v

This student combines a personal opinion with the resolution. She states her opinion that people use way too much plastic and then proceeds with alternatives that are not only environmentally friendly but also economically viable and profitable for wicker-work in Madeira. This resolution was a very interesting one, given that the student was able to see beyond what everyone else was discussing on the forum, making her resolution very personal. She was careful to hedge using a projective verb, 'believe', and stated that these ideas were her 'opinion'. Another form of presenting a resolution is presented in the next example.

Hello everyone!

I agree with point of view because we all know that school children are not well behaved in the classroom nowadays.

When a child goes to school he is already the product of his education at home. If he doesn't have education he won't show it.

For many years (the last two decades) psychologists and social scientists have bombarded parents and teachers with the idea that nobody should say "No" to a child and that a child had all the rights in the world including protest at home with parents and then at school with teachrs and classmates. No one was allowed to contradict a child. Now we have the

result. Children and teenagers growing up and demanding instead of obeying rules.

I don't believe it will get better because it will take many years again to change the attitudes, mentality and behavior since nursery schools and primary schools so that when they get to secondary level they know what have to do.

Besides this, rules at school have to be strict. People have to learn to respect. An organized society also needs respect and rules.

Take care all, good night,

A a

This student also chose to liaise an individual opinion with a concluding statement, thus forming the resolution. In fact there are few conclusive statements at the end of this thread that demonstrate how the student has explored and integrated the diverse ideas presented by classmates and the ideas put forward in the text the students were asked to read.

B. Teaching Presence

Despite the fear developed in the 80s of teachers being substituted by computers when computers in classrooms began to be used, teachers remain fundamental in the educational system. Back in 1994, Schofield et. al. demystified, after some research into the matter,

Despite the often-expressed fear (or hope on the part of some) that computers will replace teachers, the GPTutor did not replace the students' geometry teacher-rather, it added to the resources available to the student (p.595).

Teachers roles have shifted from being Teacher-centred to roles that are much more subdued and lessons are more currently centred on the students. Shea et. al. (2010) describes teaching presence ‘as the source of “online instructional orchestration”’ (p.17), and Garrison, et al. (2000), as the “binding element in creating a community of inquiry”’ (p.96). The examples that follow help understand these perspectives.

a. Building Understanding

In this section, different situations arose that needed someone to step in to build understanding and, depending on the context, different people stepped in to help. Most of the time, this was taken on by the teacher, but occasionally, students also were responsible for building understanding.

Garrison et. al. (2007) points out that:

Creating a climate for open communication and building group cohesion are essential for productive inquiry. Baker (2003) found that “instructor immediacy [i.e., teaching presence] was more predictive of affective and cognitive learning” than “whether students felt close to each other” (p.168), and ensuring that the forums offered students a safe environment that fostered better understanding of the English language and its diverse writing parameters was one of the main aims in this writing module.

As the teacher, I often tried to ensure that students were fully aware of various views on the subjects that the students were discussing, but many other times, I made the most of students’ knowledge and found ways to get them to build their classmates’ understanding on issues that some students clearly dominated, as is the case of the computer games forum from which examples have already been explored. Students identify with their peers and are more likely to accept these perspectives. My aim was not only to cover as many perspectives as possible on an issue and build their understanding on various issues but to also enhance the variety of vocabulary that the students were exposed to at the same time, as a larger vocabulary makes understanding easier.

- *Building Understanding about the Writing Module*

Most excerpts will help establish why certain forums took a certain path as these almost help tell the stories behind each thread. The first example to be analysed relates to an

on-going heated discussion the students in ARC1 and 2 were having about this module being in English. It was essential that I used students' perspectives for those that were against the use of English to see themselves mirrored in their classmates and perhaps get a better understanding for the importance of developing their skills in English.

no need to thank! i gladly participate in any comment posted online! its nice to talk to other people in english since im living in a totally Portuguese language based island.

From the extract above, it is plain to see that this student is indeed enjoying participating in the forums in English. Thus it is my responsibility as teacher, moderator and motivator to hook onto this students' enthusiasm and try to get him to pass it onto his classmates, as he is fundamental at a later stage to help build understanding about why this module is structured the way it is. The teacher's role in recognising and making the most of students who can help build understanding can be seen in the following extract.

Pass your thoughts onto everyone in class plz. I think it would do them good hearing that from a fellow colleague. This really does help in communicating and overcoming some language barriers... and right now what's important is that you all do not lose touch with the language. I can't help wishing the class would realise how helpful and fun this can be.



Stay interactive plz. ☺

Besides valuing his interactions, there is an effort to explain to him the importance of passing his experience onto the rest of the class. As Akyol et. al. (2009) points out, 'creating and sustaining a learning community is valuable to enhance student satisfaction and learning through community involvement' (p.66) and, at this point, the community was in its embryonic stage and I needed all the help I could get to get other students onboard. By emphasising how writing freely can help overcome language difficulties and how important being in touch with a language can be for students to develop their understanding of a language, I was hoping to build more understanding

for why we had chosen to introduce this module in this manner into their History of Science and Technology course. Later on, one of the students also saw the benefits of this method and also tried to build her colleagues' understanding of how easy and rewarding it could be to participate in the initial activities online. Thus teaching presence does not only reflect the teacher's role but students could and did take on the responsibility of building understanding.

if everibody just took some time to analise everybody's description it can be easy to find certain lies in their statements. just pay attention and you might find out my lie...

When it came to stimulating the community to share sources as well on these forums, I tried to build students' understanding by reaching towards their sense of shared experiences with their community. I also resorted to using a proverb that is often used in songs; 'you get what you give'(title of a song by the New Radicals), which would enhance my chances of the students having heard it and it being closer to their experiences, therefore reaching towards expressions that they understand and know. This can be seen in the example beneath.

Enjoy and please do not forget to add to this forum any good sources you find. Don't keep it all to yourself... remember: you get what u give. 😊

At this point in the module,

Teaching presence was the glue that held a community of inquiry together because it served to initiate and maintain an environment where social and cognitive presences could flourish (Laves, 2010: p.7).

Building understanding with the teaching presence proved to be a cornerstone in the writing module.

- *Building Understanding about Reading*

The next few examples try to build on students' knowledge in terms of content instead of sense of responsibility towards their own learning which are mentioned above. Most

of the extracts are taken from student interactions that actively aim at building on classmates' knowledge.

Hi all,

Reading is what I do most of the time. It's become such a part of my life that for quite a number of years, I always carry a book wherever I go. It seems I do not know how to be idle anymore and when I read, it gives me a feeling of fulfilment as I am learning something.

My favourite book ever is *Beloved* by Toni Morrison. She won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1993 and The Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 1988. If you get the chance to read any of her books, please do. I'm sure you will really enjoy them as she is an amazing writer.

Keep reading as this is the best way to learn a language and its structure,
Jane

On the topic of 'reading', building understanding about authors was what was chosen as a starting point to stimulate interaction. I began by stimulating students' interest in sharing their favourite books with the class and I did this by giving the students some personal information first so they felt it was a safe environment to interact on. Not only did I reveal my favourite author but also took the opportunity to give them some background information about the author, thus building onto their understanding of the topic. There is also an attempt to explain to the students that reading is in fact one of the most important ways to learn and practice a language. As can be seen in the next example, a student mirrors my text and tries to build on classmates' understanding of her favourite book.

Hello

I usually have a book for reading I do like to read, sometimes without time but at bed a little read is good for relax... My favourite book and I still reading is Setimo Selo by José Rodrigues dos Santos, talks about environment about the problems that are to come if we do nothing, talks about events that are already happen and problems that comes with it. It's a good book I recommend.

Bye

Students shared their knowledge about their favourite authors and books and some gave brief overviews of the plot of the books they mentioned whilst others reinforced the strengths that reading enhances, each post building on the class's knowledge about authors and books to read. The next post focused more on the advantages of reading in general.

Reading is something wonderful and the choice is immense.

It is important to the intellectual growth of any person and provides great moments of leisure. Among so many of good writers and poets Fernando Pessoa reflects a charming genius. Among many interesting books would be difficult to choose one better than all the others, because it depends on the subject matter and style.

- *Building Understanding on Current Issues*

The following thread that shall be looked at in this section is related to environment within the 'Current Issues' forum. It began with me trying to build on students' knowledge about world events happening around them that would bring them further knowledge about the environment and enlarge their vocabulary in the area. It led other students to try to share knowledge which also functioned as threads that could build onto classmates' understanding of this issue.

Hi everyone.

Here's a link you might want to follow up on: <http://www.earthhour.org/>
It gives you some ideas of what to do that can help you play your part.

Play your part tonight!!!

In 2008, 24 global cities will participate in **Earth Hour** at **8pm on**

March 29. Earth Hour is the highlight of a major campaign to encourage businesses, communities and individuals to take the simple steps needed to cut their emissions on an ongoing basis. It is about simple changes that will collectively make a difference – from businesses **turning off their lights** when their offices are empty, to households **turning off appliances** rather than leaving them on standby.

If we all participate perhaps we can make a small difference. What is important is that we call people's attention to this problem.

Be attentive... do the responsible thing.

Jane

In the post above, a link was given to the students with the aim of them looking up more information on Earth hour and read the site's information in English. Not only would they be exposed to a site which I had checked was written in correct English, they could also develop their vocabulary on environmental issues and they could also learn what they could do to help protect our environment. There are diverse areas that I hoped students would develop further understanding for. The post also appeals to their sense of responsibility towards the world we live in. The use of pink was essential to draw students' attention to dates and times and major steps that they could also do to participate in Earth Hour. By writing using different fonts and colours, the visual aspect of the post would serve to build students' understanding of the possibilities available to them on Moodle. Although it breaks a bit with what is commonly seen as convention of teachers writing to students, it is very acceptable online. This post was equally aimed at students who tap into multimodal texts and stimulate students to be more creative and thus help students with different intelligences (Gardner, 1983).

Hello everyone 😊

I also help to keep the planet clean because I am responsible and I am aware of these necessities to have a cleaner planet.

In fact, I always turn the lights off when I am not in the room. I never have machines on when I am not using them.

Beside this I also separate the waste in my kitchen and I have changed all the lamps for those which don't consume too much energy.

At home I avoid using chemical detergents and sprays and I always buy recycled products.

Good night 😊

G O

The post above shows a student who has thought about the issue and that not only describes what is done to help the environment but also helps build colleagues' understanding by adding on information and vocabulary that had not been previously brought up in the posts.

- *Students Building Understanding on Computer Games*

The next examples come from the forums on computer games and these students reveal their game skills and knowledge about the different games they have played that they readily share what they know with the class. By sharing knowledge, they find it necessary to explain certain notions that are very particular to an area and thus help build onto other colleagues' knowledge.

In the beginning, while you're still a newbie, it can be boring, but when you learn to play, the technics, the strategies, etc, you'll find it very interesting...

In Savage you can be a fighter (with a FPS or TPS view, your choice) or a commander (with a RTS view), the role of the commander is to give orders to fighters, build structures to provide weapons and items and define all type of strategies to win the game... For more info on the game, please visit the official page at: <http://www.s2games.com/savage/> or you can also visit a community website at: <http://www.newerth.com/>

This last website refers not only to Savage, but also to its sequel called Savage 2: A Tortured Soul... You can find all sorts of info about the 2 games, videos, screenshots, etc... About the sequel, Savage 2, i dont like it that much as Savage 1...

Other important thing, Savage 1 is 100% free, i mean, you can download it full version on the community website...

I'm the admin of a Savage 1 clan called "Extreme Tugas

As can be seen in the interaction above, the student calls attention to his/ her status in the game by revealing that 'newbies' need to persevere to find the game interesting. Thus suggesting that he too has been through that process of starting as a newbie and then being more experienced as he continued playing. This is how people are able to advise others to keep at something because it will become more enjoyable. The use of abbreviations, such as FPS, TPS and RTS, and the use of vocabulary that relates to the game, such as commander, sequel, screenshots, weapons, help the reader understand

that this student has spent some time playing it and that they as readers can trust the writer's perspectives. This helps build credibility whilst building on other's understanding of the game from a general point of view. Some students tend to be very technical about the knowledge that they pass on and thus build upon colleagues' technical knowledge.

I can play it in Medium spec. with an average frame rate of about 60fps, at a 1280x1024 resolution.

My computer is configured as follows:

Core 2 Duo E6400 (2.13 Ghz)

2 Gigs of DDR2 ram

NVidia Geforce 8800 GT 512 Mb

Game folder installed in a Sata II HD

Ah, and...

Windows XP Professional (Because Windows Vista can take 25% off Crysis in-game performance, scientifically proven). Before XP, I had Vista and the game was not very "fluid".

You can get such a pc for about 800€ nowadays.

Hope it helps

In the extract above, the student has taken on the role of an expert by laying down a list of technical characteristics that classmates may need to play a certain game. Not only are the technical details very exact but he also goes through the effort of claiming that one of the OSs has been 'scientifically proven' to lessen the game's performance. The student attempts to maintain face by adding facts obtained as validation for his position on the issue. It is plain to see that this student aimed at helping build classmates' understanding of computer characteristics so the game could actually run, as he ends the interaction with 'Hope it helps'. According to Schwartz's Value Inventory (1992), this student is showing benevolence, a characteristic common to people who offer help to others. Benevolence is seen as a very positive characteristic and may also help the student gather power within the CoI as he possesses knowledge that can help others.

Not many students reveal to have this aim as part of their inline interactions and most simply help build onto classmates' knowledge, as can be seen in the next example.

Hi there to you all.

This is my first reply on this forum and let us hope it is the first of many. Either way, not going off-topic, I must say that my favorite game, considering the options given, is PES. My experience on this type of game, and more, specific about these 2 games, starts with FIFA 98, therefore you can see that I am "veteran" on these games.

The advantages I choose or I think, that FIFA has, is the graphics and also that the game is "more funny" (it's more easy to make goals).

The disadvantages for FIFA, in my humble opinion, are the movements of the players, which sometimes it is not the best or the most realistic ones.

And also the AI, even on the hardest mode, doesn't give so much as a challenge.

About PES, I can say that when it first hit the game's markets it was a really good surprise, and did make a evolution on this type of game.

The advantages in this game, in my opinion, is the more realistic gameplay, beginning with the movement of the players, the "touch of the ball" and so on.

The disadvantage is that sometimes it gets really hard to make goals.

This is my explanation why I think that PES is better than Fifa.

My regards

V.

The student above attempts to build onto his classmates' knowledge of both games being discussed by listing the games' positive and negative aspects, according to his own personal experience in playing them both. Being able to list pros and cons indicates that the writer has some knowledge in this matter. He asserts his status among fellow computer game players in class by showing he has sound knowledge of the games with the technical terms and jargon he uses and by calling himself a 'veteran', almost self-identifying himself as an expert. According to Brewer and Gardner (1996) the student is attempting to mark his self-representation, on an individual level which then reflects on the group level. This particular student does maintain coherence in most of his posts as he is quite careful to research the topics he chooses to write about and his interactions always aim to add to the class's knowledge. As this was his first interaction, it wasn't

very dialogic but most of his interactions are. The next example looks at the dialogic importance in building understanding.

Interesting?! It's more than that!! But whit the right planes! The random planes that come with the FS aren't the most challenging ones, but if you can get some from PMDG, LEVEL D and Wilco you can almost feel what is to fly the real aircraft! In most cases every system is simulated like in the real plane !

Nonetheless FS teaches you the basics about flying and it's perfect for training Instrument Approaches and Navigation and for flying under instrument meteorological conditions. There are even studies that indicate that a student pilot that play FS has a better and faster evolution than one who doesn't!

There are even WAN where people can fly online with other and have to communicate with the Air Traffic Control like if it was the real thing!!

So, as you may already have noticed, I recommend this game to everyone!! BTW if you need so more realistic planes don't hesitate and contact me!

This next example above shows how students build on their colleagues' understanding without true intent of doing it but by sheer enthusiasm and develops a dialogic tone in the interaction. Inevitably, this dialogic engagement is one of the aims in the writing module as it offers an opportunity for students to interact and help enrich each other's learning experience. As can be seen below, most language teachers consider interaction fundamental.

The objective of language education should be not merely to facilitate effective language use on the part of language learners but also to promote critical engagement among discourse participants; therefore, CCDA [Critical Classroom Discourse Analysis] should be concerned with an assessment of the extent to which critical engagement is facilitated in the classroom (Kumaravadivelu, 1999: p.473).

Simply working towards language awareness does not produce the results needed of students in the real world and thus having a critical stance on issues and being able to communicate these are fundamental step in language learning. The student above shows this critical engagement when he exclaims, 'Interesting?! It's more than that!! But whit the right planes!' the student writes at the beginning of his interaction. This shows us how surprised the student felt when reading the previous message that described this

simulator as ‘interesting’. To this student it is much more. In his post, we can see dialogic awareness, as he overtly addresses his classmates who are his audience. Suggestions are also directed at his readers with very emphatic sentences, many of them ending in exclamation marks. All these elements add to the student’s capacity to sway the reader to see his point of view and then engage in the interaction with them.

The word ‘perfect’ is also used to describe the game’s performance and mention to scientific proof of the effects of this game is made. By passing on all this information and interest for the game, he is helping to build other classmates’ knowledge and as such a fervent recommendation is made, some may even venture to trying it out, with the added advantage of knowing a little bit more about the game from this forum. This student also offers to help others who might want access to the planes he deems ‘more realistic’.

Whilst all these discussions on games were ongoing, it seems one of the students realised that not everyone managed to follow the discussions. Thus, he decided that it was time to build upon students’ knowledge of the terms used in the game-world by the more experienced. This can be seen below.

First of all, sorry for the doubling post, unfortunately my 15 minutes, have passed away, so I cannot edit my post above.

Second I am making a second post, because I realized that I made my defense against the term that was applied (in a nice way) on me, which was "spammer". But I didn't tell, the reasons which lead me, to apply the term "point whore" on this topic and in this context.

In this type of games have usually players that are:

"noobs" or "nubs"- its a person that has some experience in the game, but doesn't know how to play, its usually arrogant and rejects to learn.

"newbies"- its a player, that is new on the game and needs (sometimes) a little help of the guys that are more experienced, to survive and learn the tricks of the game in question, with dedication and patience he can be a real good player.

"Leet"- its a experienced player, that knows all tricks, are very dangerous and trickys „usually don't need so much help as the newbies but also doens't like to teach others, exceptions when the "newbie" player is quite active and is receptive to learn.

"point whore"- its a player a have alots of big villages or points, making the less experienced to fear them, but the true is that player only plays for the points ranks and don't have so many troops with a acceptable ratio with them points, wich with team up can be easily taken down.

Also this type of player, is that ones that only spends one hour or 2 hours per day in the game, and likes to build and likes to show its friends the account he have.(this is last sentence and with my experience is the reason, for me to state that in "ogame", there are a high percentage of point whores.)

"warlord", "dukes" or "leaders", "diplomats"- they can small players but sacrifice they time of play in best for the alliance or tribe, but usually or its adviseble that they have some experience in the game and skills on the specific fields.

A warlord needs to be with strategy at long term, a diplomat needs to know how to speak and fool the enemies/allies, the dukes or leaders needs to know how to be fair enough and make decisions in best of the tribes.

And so on, there so more specific class, but for now its enough.

Sincerely

V.

Not only did the students' intervention clarify a doubt I had about one of the terms previously used and which I had enquired about on the forum, but he took the initiative of engaging with the readers and giving them some insight into the online gaming world and how the players are denominated depending on their status within the game. Definitions and spelling varieties are given in an ordered list, revealing his identity as an experienced player who has a full understanding of the terminology. Through this post, he establishes some dominance on the issue. This makes it easy for a learner to logically grasp the notions behind the terms. The terms are explained by the student's own words, making the language more easily accessible to all those that do not know much about online gaming and to those with some difficulties using the English language. Despite this student's grammar and spelling mistakes, the text is simple due to the choice of

elementary vocabulary used and although he has transposed the long Portuguese sentence structure to the sentences in English, he facilitates the readers' understanding through the use of commas throughout the long sentences.

b. Direct Instruction

Direct instruction is a means of giving students short and precise instructions that can be easily understood. They are mostly given by the teacher in order to ensure that the students understand what they are required to do in activities, assignments and tasks.

The teacher can be viewed

as a subject matter expert who knows a great deal more than most learners and is thus in a position to 'scaffold' learning experiences by providing direct instruction (Anderson et. al. 2001: p.2).

However, in forums, the roles are sometimes taken on by others and in this case, there are some students who also take on the role of 'expert' and help their classmates out by also giving direct instructions. Examples of these shall be seen in this section.

Direct instruction in forums also aid interaction and act as triggers for students to participate. Anderson also views direct instruction as a means of stimulating the learning and social activity a community needs to develop.

Rather, facilitation of discourse is usually integrated within direct instruction and in situ design of instructional activity. Under this heading we place teacher postings that stimulate social process with a direct goal of stimulating individual and group learning (Anderson et. al. 2001: p.7).

Laves (2010) focuses on the success of the learning experience and how direct instruction plays a part in it.

In intensive online courses, the use of teaching presence to create well-designed, organized courses, where discourse was clearly understood and encouraged as well as having a feeling of an instructor being close through direct instruction and feedback, was deemed to be vital for the learning experience to be successful (p.10).

With direct instruction, there are some that are aimed at the whole class as a way to get the students to participate in an activity and at other times, the direct instructions are directed at a certain student with the aim of getting him/ her to do something in particular or get him/ her to have a more active role in the community and socialisation process.

Hi there A,

I think I'm also going to go with cooking as the false statement. Even though I do see you have a bit of a creative streak... architecture... cooking.. well... it's possible but let's see.

I do swim btw... not as often as I should but I do. My shoulders are wider than most women's. I think you will notice when u see me in sleeveless shirts.

Take care A and invite ur classmates to join our chat.

Jane

The example above indicates that an individual connection is being made and a request is made, by me as the moderator, to get him to play a role in involving his classmates in the activity.

Hi A L,

Well that's a shame that you had to quit but they say that a change is always for the best so good luck here at UMa!!!

I think we need a few more of your classmates helping to find the false statement.

Perhaps you might ask them to logon?

Take care,

Jane

In the post above, the same request is made but this time, I felt the need to give some extra information, by asking the student to get classmates to logon to Moodle. The direct instruction comes in the form of a question here.

Hi there and welcome to this forum Fá.

I am learning how to salsa. At least I'm trying to learn... 😊

I find it very hard for you to be fluent in Mandarin. Am I right?

Please go round to your colleagues' conversations and find out a bit more about them too. Maybe you might find out what we have been unable to. 😊

Take care and stay active,

Jane

Due to the continuous difficulties in getting students involved in ARC1, direct instruction aided me in trying to motivate those that were participating online to get more active. The direct instruction is made by asking the student to look at other posts and comment on them. Then there is an attempt to lure the student into being able to do what no-one had yet accomplished in the activity that was underway. In the camouflage of a challenge, it aids the direct instruction and is completed with a winking smiley which helps create a sense of closeness.

Thks once again F. I really wish everyone would get a little enthusiastic with new stuff...

Fá... we need to know if we're right... we've been guessing and would like your response. And please go see what your classmates have written. It's fun to get to know who you're sitting next to in class.

Take care,

Jane

In the post above, I address two different students using direct address and personalisation, but aim the direct instruction to only one, as he has been inactive and his response in the activity is essential for colleagues to get feedback and strengthen interaction and the social presence in the community. There is a sense of urgency in my post, when asking the student to respond and a request that he also visit classmates' posts.

Well... the hunt continues... Give it your best shot everyone! S is playing 'hard to get'. 😊

Good one S! Keep us guessing.

In an effort to get other people on-board, I add some humour and expressions that students know and understand easily to give them a direct instruction to try to find a

colleague's 'lie' in her presentation. As Beeland (2002) says, 'Student engagement is critical to student motivation during the learning process.'(p.2) and that is the ultimate objective of all my lessons; that students are motivated to learn.

That is quite some time. So tell us P, which were some of your favourite places?
I think my favourite trip was to the Maldives.... simply gorgeous!!!

At times, asking direct questions were efficient ways of getting students to accept a direct instruction and motivate them to write more in the forums. In the example above, I ask the student which are his favourite places to travel but as a way of enticing him to share that information, I too share some personal information. In this way, the students can feel more at ease as there is a give and take of information going on. If I am trusting them with information, then that should give them some motivation to do the same as human nature and relationships develop through this give and take. As Kent and Taylor demonstrate:

a communicative give and take and is guided by two principles. First, individuals who engage in dialogue do not necessarily have to agree - quite often they vehemently disagree--however, what they share is a willingness to try to reach mutually satisfying positions. Although discussants may fail to reach agreement, dialogue is not merely about agreement. Rather, it is about the process of open and negotiated discussion (Kent and Taylor, 1998: p.325).

Yes, I see your point Fá... the two do not seem to mix.
Well P, have any of us got your false statement? Let us know.

'Let us know' is the direct instruction in the example above and is in the imperative form. It comes after a direct question and therefore the order and sense of urgency is softened, despite the use of the imperative form. The sentence before the instruction also helps to soften the order as it starts with the interjection, 'well' followed by a direct

address to ‘P’. This enhances the interactivity between me, as the teacher, and student P, as well as make the request for P to let ‘us’ know if the class has discovered his secret.

I found these videos that I thought might interest you. Take a look at them.

The example above also makes use of the imperative form that indicates some seriousness to the direct instruction. I had pasted some links that were important to the content being studied and as extra information that was particularly guided at those students who are more visual when they learn, I needed the students to understand how vital it is to at least take a look at what is posted and then they can choose whether the material is useful to them or not.



What a language??!!! There are quite a number of really fun tongue twisters in English.
Feel free to add to this list and make sure you practice. 😊

Jane

After a post on tongue twisters in English, a direct instruction is added for the whole class to see and interact. By making language fun, learning still occurs but on another level as motivation is high. By ensuring students feel free to add to what has already been posted, I appeal to their curiosity to find some more tongue twisters, find a way to get students to research online and read in English and engage with different aspects of the English language. This can be on the phonetic, semantic and lexical levels. I then add a short but precise imperative instruction to the sentence. The aim is that students understand there is always a linguistic objective behind all the activities and instructions given, even those given as though it were a game.



S c3 a9queso 1 .pdf

Hello everyone,

In this forum, you may like to discuss your notions of education. Do you understand why

children are becoming more and more violent in schools? Is our educational system changing for the best?

I shall attach an article which I ask you to read and comment on.

Take care all,
Jane

In the excerpt above, the direct instruction is given in a very short and clear sentence with simple language to ensure that this is indeed followed by the students. As a means of certifying that the students feel compelled to do the task, the use of 1st person singular is adopted in the active voice and the students are pulled in by the use of the 2nd person singular personal pronoun. The use of the personal pronoun is also used in the next example but in a slightly different way.

Sorry Mó... nope you did not guess.

Keep trying. 😊

Please do not forget to put up your texts too. Describe someone from the class without telling us their names. let's get this guessing game going!!!

Take care all,
Jane

This next example actually omits the use of the pronoun but it is understood that it is implied, especially as later in the sentence the possessive pronoun ‘your’ is used. Implied personalisation achieves the intent of involving the audience as a whole. By asking the students to upload their texts which describe classmates but omitting the personal pronoun, leads the reader to understand that they are a collective ‘you’ to which each of them belong. The next example also omits the use of the pronoun and still functions as a direct instruction.

Hello all,

How often do you go to the cinema? How many of you would rather stay at home and

watch a film? Are there differences between watching a film at home and in the cinema?

Tell us about your experiences. Oh... and which was the last good film you saw?

Take care,

Jane

The example above shows an attempt to get a new forum started. As interactivity is an objective, a list of questions is presented which is related to the theme of ‘cinema’, the title of the forum. These questions function as a polite way of giving students instructions to participate on this forum. However a direct instruction has also been included in the post. It is structured as an imperative, appealing to students to ‘tell us’ their experiences and opinions. The use of the collective ‘us’ is intended to give students the impression that class is anticipating finding out about each student’s personal perspectives. The post ends with an interjection, ‘Oh...’ which carries a sense of spontaneity in the written discourse. It shows that something was forgotten and quickly added onto the post, as one would do when talking to someone and this technique adds to the sense of proximity, which, in turn, adds to the empathy between the students and myself and helps create the CoI on a social level. As in this example, the next example also uses questions as a means of giving students instructions.

Hi all,

There are so many great series on Television at the moment. It's actually a shame that I do not have the time to watch as many as I would like to. Do you have any favourite series?
Which are they and why?

Don't watch too much TV though... it takes you away from your friends... 😊

Jane

But, in this example above, the question is not as subject specific as in the previous example with a list of questions. As in the previous post, this one is also aiming at creating a discussion on a new theme: ‘TV series’. Therefore some personal information

is exchanged with the hope of triggering the will to exchange information. As the question inquires about the series and why they like them, it leaves room for personal opinions and gives students the freedom to write whatever they want to. This post is ended with a friendly piece of advice, once again resorting to humour and an emoticon to reach them on a social and empathic level. In the next example, there is also an attempt to give the students an instruction but the exchange of personal information works in a slightly different way.

Hello everyone,

I was wondering how this experience of being a UMa student is being viewed by each of you. Tell us about your personal points of view. Discuss current issues that you would like to know other people's opinions.

I look forward to reading about your experiences and I'll tell you about my experiences at this and other universities too.

Take care,

Jane

In this example, I have chosen to begin the forum by addressing ‘everyone’, thus making a collective inclusion. Engagement occurs through attempting to include them as discourse participants. The imperative forms of ‘tell’ and ‘discuss’ are used to construct direct instruction and the 2nd person plural personal pronoun is used so students understand that their posts are directed at everyone in that class. The use of ‘us’ helps create a sense of unity and bond amongst all members of this CoI. However, not all students see themselves as ‘us’ in all contexts. In this CoI, roles seem to be fluid and both teacher and students take on different roles depending on the forums and the aim of the writers. Sometimes some students take on the role of the teacher and also give direct instructions, as the next example shall show.

i want to start here an argument for both of this 2 games.
Therefore chose the best of them (in your opinion).

[...]

I would appreciate that you justify your opinion.

For now, i will keep mine opinion, because of dinner, later on (possibly by midnight or something similar) i will post.

My regards.

V.

As can be seen in the example above, this student finds that he knows quite a lot about the issue being discussed and has therefore taken on an expert role in the forum. He has chosen to discuss the two games in opposition to each other and decides to give those participating in the forum a direct instruction: that the students justify their opinions when comparing the games. He uses a modal verb to show his stance on the content. The fact that he “would” appreciate’ justifications, gives the reader the deontic modality¹² (Lew, 1997) of the task present in the text. Although the writer personalises the text with personal and possessive pronouns, drawing classmates’ attention towards their task, the stance implies he is not leaving much room for opinions without justifications.

c. Instructional Management

Instructional management is essential to the flow of a VLE as the students need guidance as to how a course runs online and as moderators, teachers need to fulfil the role of an expert who is capable of instructing students on tasks, activities, use of the platform and all issues that organises their learning experience. As Garrison exemplifies:

Instructional management addresses structural concerns such as setting curriculum, designing methods and assessment, establishing time

¹² Deontic modality: directives that show obligation or permission

parameters, and utilizing the medium. This category of indicators of teaching presence is concerned with planning issues, both before and during the educational experience (Garrison et. al., 2000: p.101).

Despite the presence of instructional management in this module since its early stages, this part of the analysis will only look at how it comes across in the forums and the reasons for its use here.

In this section the examples are all quite similar, given that, in the forums, instructional management is always related to getting students to participate in the forums and guiding them to share their knowledge. The examples that follow are taken from posts that I have made, as their teacher and show how I have tried to guide them into helping to manage the system in getting their colleagues to participate in the forums too.

I think we need a few more of your classmates helping to find the false statement.
Perhaps you might ask them to logon?

As a way of persuading this student to get other colleagues to participate in the task, I begin by offering an opinion and then a suggestion. By using ‘we’, I include myself in the task and create a sense of belonging to a whole team, placing us all on the same level with a feeling of inclusion. In the suggestion, the direct address ‘you’ is an indicator of interactivity that appeals to the student directly, placing some responsibility on his/ her shoulders to ask other classmates to also logon to the platform.

Please go round to your colleagues' conversations and find out a bit more about them too. Maybe you might find out what we have been unable to. 😊

In the example above, the request is made directly at the student that I am interacting with. It is a direct appeal for engagement. The use of personal and possessive pronouns ‘you’ and ‘your’ bring the request directly to the student. As a way of giving instructional management, this polite request, that begins with ‘Please’, indicates the next step the student can take, which is to follow other students’ posts and find their lie.

The next two examples are also directed at a student in particular, which can also be seen through the use of personal and possessive pronouns, as in this example we have just looked at.

Pass your thoughts onto everyone in class plz. I think it would do them good hearing that from a fellow colleague. This really does help in communicating and overcoming some language barriers... and right now what's important is that you all do not lose touch with the language. I can't help wishing the class would realise how helpful and fun this can be.



Stay interactive plz. ☺

With the objective of using this student's enthusiasm about writing in English and how much fun he is having interacting online, I ask him to talk about his thoughts with other classmates. This polite request is made by placing him on a higher level than his classmates by acknowledging the way he thinks as something that could benefit the others. In giving him this power, I also try to narrow down the social distance between us both with the use of 'plz', the shortened version of the word 'please', commonly used when writing online, and with the emoticon at the end of my post. So, in this case, the student is seen as a transactional actor in the sense that I have given him a goal to achieve. A face-threatening act has been made to those students that are reading the forums but are not interacting, as well as those who may discuss the module but refuse to go online. However, this student can help save face by acting as a liaison between me and the students. As our conversations continued, the next example reinforces his status in relation to others.

Thks once again F. I really wish everyone would get a little enthusiastic with new stuff...

Fá... we need to know if we're right... we've been guessing and would like your response. And please go see what your classmates have written. It's fun to get to know who you're sitting next to in class.

Above is an example of how our relationship developed. By thanking him with ‘thks’, an abbreviated form which is commonly used in quick written online communication, the status of equality and proximity is maintained. Intertextuality and cohesion transpire through the repetition of the students’ enthusiasm in his previous post, whilst also showing how appreciated it would be if all students had his attitude. My repetition in the response also adds to the interactivity between our communications, enhancing the discussion that we have been having.

The second part of the post above is addressed to another student and this distinction is clearly marked as I address each student with their names and then direct the conversation towards each one, maintaining the theme of discussion that we are having. This second student launched his description, as the task required he did yet he did not interact with his classmates who tried to spot his lie, nor has he read his classmates’ descriptions or interacted with them, hence this appeal for his use of the medium to carry out the task. Besides the use of the personal pronoun ‘we’, which puts everyone on the same level and creates a sense of equality and unity, and the use of the possessive pronoun ‘your’, so the student understands that this post is directed at him in particular, there is an attempt to politely engage the student. There is an additional motivational reason to participate in the activity. In ARC1, this type of instructional management was essential, but it also came up at the beginning of each cycle and was used as a means of getting students involved in the learning process. The next examples of instructional management occurred later in the writing module and were directed at students who could take responsibility for their own learning and wanted to share knowledge.

Enjoy and please do not forget to add to this forum any good sources you find. Don't keep it all to yourself... remember: you get what u give. ☺

In the example above, the students in the sentence become transactional actors as they are given a goal which is to do what I too had done, shared information so that the

whole community could benefit from the diverse sources of knowledge the whole class had. As I had given an example of how it could be done, all students needed to do was follow by example and emphasis is given to this aspect of the learning process by addition of the proverb ‘you get what you give’, which is well known to this younger generation as it is also the title of a very popular song by New Radicals. By locking onto expressions that students are familiar with, I ensure their confidence grows because they realise they fully understand one of my posts in English and communication is effective for me as a moderator and teacher. A similar occurrence takes place in the next example whereby students are guided to manage the forums too.



What a language??!!! There are quite a number of really fun tongue twisters in English.
Feel free to add to this list and make sure you practice. 😊

A student took the initiative of starting a forum for tongue twisters and having taken advantage of a student’s resourcefulness, I add some instructional management to enhance that other students help build this forum. The use of ‘feel free’ is an expression that aids familiarity and gives students the impression of the inexistence of boundaries to interact with others.

d. Motivating and Facilitating Discourse

Motivation whilst facilitating discourse is a role of teaching process in CoI and is particularly important in blended learning due to students feeling the need for more encouragement when working online and feeling the need for human interaction. In the forums that occurred throughout the ARCs, my roles as moderator, facilitator and teacher involved an important element of motivation.

Anderson et. al., (2001) clearly see how these roles are intertwined when working with students and their online participation when the teacher's ultimate goal is that the students' learning experience is a rich one.

Facilitating discourse during the course is critical to maintaining the interest, motivation and engagement of students in active learning (p.7).

Pintrich (1989) also looks at motivation and recognises the complexity of cognitive contexts that teachers create in tasks and constraints that students feel, as well the motivational factors that intertwine and define how and when learning occurs.

Most of the time, the teacher's major role as a moderator on these forums, is to motivate students to keep participating online and practicing their English. Initially, the examples are taken from posts that took place at the beginning of each cycle and aimed at motivating students who were participating online to persuade their classmates to also partake in the discussion. Then the posts exemplify how these interactions are sustained.

- *Teacher Motivates Students who Motivate Classmates*

Often the teacher needs help to involve all participants and resorts to pivotal students as motivators. This is managed through personalisation and involving a student, giving him/ her a sense of responsibility and a goal to achieve. This is exemplified below.

Take care A and invite ur classmates to join our chat.

In the example above, the student is referred to by name, helping establish a relationship between writer and reader. The consequent use of the imperative establishes the writer's stance as the lecturer, capable of giving the student reader an order yet, at the same time, a fellow user of the forum, shown with the use of 'our chat.' There is a delicate balance in finding that mid-term between showing expertise and authorship in the course and establishing a friendly social distance so that students feel they can trust everyone online and participate with their thoughts and opinions. Being a teacher and

moderator implies that the power that is exerted over the participants must be flexible depending on the contexts and at times, it becomes asymmetrical at times. The text in the next example has exactly the same function as this one, yet it the message is passed using more polite language.

I think we need a few more of your classmates helping to find the false statement.
Perhaps you might ask them to logon?

The thoughts behind the order/ request are a bit more explicit in this post than in the previous one. The writer's attitude adds agency to the issue at hand, once again making the reader a transactional actor as he is requested to get classmates to logon and interact. This implicit proposition is achieved through hedging and the use of the projective verb 'think' and the approximant 'perhaps', which function as softeners. Both of these add to the 'avoidance of full commitment' (Bloor, 2007: p.104) on the writer's side, in an attempt to evade the possibility of any face-threatening activity, as it would not be helpful at all to place students in that situation at the beginning of a course. In terms of deontic modality, the use of 'perhaps' acts as a prod to get the student to react without being overly imposing because it is seen as a suggestion in the form of a request and thus involves the student in the shaping of the course itself, attributing more status to his interaction.

Motivating students occurs at different moments in the forums, but the need for it is essential when students are slightly reluctant to intervene in their classmates' posts. The next post is another example of a discussion that actually took place between the lecturer and a student about motivation, or lack of it in his other classmates so they participate and enhance their writing skills in English.

it would be very nice if everybody could participate actively ..it's been fun talking an
guessing about other people so i hope we can keep up the and continue doing some fun
and imaginative games.

The post begins with acceptability towards the activities that had been requested of the students online. Bloor (2007) explains that ‘acceptability’ demonstrates how a setting is appropriate and received and this student is reacting positively to the teacher’s ‘intentionality’, which according to Bloor relates to the text producer’s goal (p.7). The student acknowledges the relevance of the task and of what the previous post by the teacher had requested him to do. The previous post asked him to get colleagues to participate, thus entailing him with a goal, as a transactional actor in this discourse act and in the shaping of the writing course itself.

This request gives the student a certain level of dominance within the community he belongs to. As he has been participating, he has inner knowledge of how the activities actually work and what the outcomes are and is thus on a higher cognitive level, in relation to what the forum can offer students, than those colleagues who have yet to venture online and participate. He is also in a dominant position because he can easily communicate in English. Yet, this student does not seem to want to focus on this power position that he has gained and therefore tries to play it down by hedging into challenging other classmates to join in on the fun he is having. He attempts to soften what may have seemed to be a face-threatening activity from the teacher in the previous post on this thread by resorting to modality: ‘could’, which is a curious choice of modal verb, as it implies that some of his classmates may have come across barriers that deter them from participating. It seems ‘would’ would have been a better choice of modal verb, as his classmates were all able to participate yet chose not to, for whichever reasons they found. In interviews and focus groups, it became clear that some students hadn’t participated due to considering the English language a barrier and others due to pure ‘laziness’ as they were not attributed any marks for participating in ARC1.

In terms of ‘authorial stance’ (DuBois, 2007) created in this interaction between teacher and student, it fed on the ‘dialogicality’ present in the text. ‘Dialogicality’ according to DuBois is how words from the previous author are reused and interacted with (p.140). This can be seen in the text above when the student reiterates the teacher’s words about classmates not participating. The teacher has therefore created a stance in the text to ‘trigger attitudes’ so that more students may find themselves more motivated by a fellow classmate to participate online. The stance also gives the text agency and affectedness, making the student of this post an integral part of the attitude being put across. Both authors are of the same opinion that more students need to interact online for the activities to reap positive results.

The next post by the teacher continues with the same stance when she responds to the student’s text. The teacher is acting as a moderator who wants to motivate other students to engage with the writing module.

Thks once again F. I really wish everyone would get a little enthusiastic with new stuff...

Fá... we need to know if we're right... we've been guessing and would like your response. And please go see what your classmates have written. It's fun to get to know who you're sitting next to in class.

Take care,
Jane

The teacher acknowledges the student’s help by thanking him for his avid interest and a replication of the same stance is registered. By stating this position, there is hope that the ‘lurkers’ may be pushed to actually register their opinions if they realise how interesting their colleagues are finding the activities online. Nominalisation has the intent of giving this particular student a sense of power, through recognition of his enthusiasm and activity online and thus his agency is manipulated by the text that reveals his attitude of positivity towards the activities. As Spencer-Oatey (2007) points

out, this face value is ‘associated with positively-evaluated attributes that the claimant wants others to acknowledge explicitly or implicitly’ (p.10). In this way, not only the teacher is attempting to motivate this student to get his classmates to interact but this student is also motivating his classmates by expressing his stance in his post. This attempt to motivate students to get their classmates motivated continues in the next few examples too.

Well that's really quite an achievement for a 1st year undergrad. Well done. So I didn't guess... let's see if any of ur classmates manage to.

Take care,
Jane

As a way of motivating those students who are interacting and keeping them involved with the community of inquiry, the teacher shows some recognition of previous achievements and thus enhances this student’s face by commenting on one of his abilities as part of his identity (Simon, 2004; Spencer-Oatey, 2007). On the other side, the teacher down-plays her role at finding out this student’s ‘lie’ and uses instead the inclusive ‘us’ as a means of including herself within the community which has an overall goal of carrying out this task as a way to challenge the class to do better than the lecturer. This works as the motivator for students to take a closer look at some of the lies and find them out before the lecturer has the chance to. Then the next task is to maintain interaction.

- *Sustaining Interaction*

Managing to sustain interaction in a CoI requires the teacher to address students directly and appeal to their engagement. Tactics such as reinforcing objectives, boosting confidence, showing interest and challenging positions taken are used, as can be seen in the examples that follow.

Hey there C,

Well... about the prize... maybe I'll give the first person to discover a little something. 😊
You unfortunately didn't get it right... 😢 I do love chatting.

Let me see if I get urs...u don't like writing other genres. 😢 Am I right?

Take care... and don't forget to keep checking up on all ur other classmates.

Jane

As a means of sustaining the interaction in the example above, the writer resorted to prodding the student to look at her colleagues' posts and keep her engaged. Besides addressing the student directly with her name and responding to her query about what they would get if the discovered the lies in each other's texts, the writer tried to keep the student motivated by promising a prize to the 1st student to discover a lie and by interacting with her written text and establishing a closer relationship with the student. Although the student had not managed to find the writer's lie, the writer made an effort to help her save face and motivate the student to keep looking for it. The choice of words is important to establish communicative effectiveness without being face-threatening as without maintaining face, communication could break down at this point. The use of 'unfortunately' implies that it was chance that the student didn't get it right and the avoidance of the words 'wrong' or 'incorrect' makes the claim of the error less bold. The emoticons also help soften the tone of the text and aids in lessening the social distance created between both actors. However, not all students appreciate that they are susceptible to mistakes and the next example shows how the teacher motivates students who are more direct about their mishaps.

It's not a problem that we get each others wrong. It's just fun to get to know you and at least you can practice another genre of writing. 😊

Keep up the good work.

Jane

As the teacher and moderator of the forums, these roles implied paying attention to students' texts and picking up on less active, proficient or confident students and maintaining them motivated and involved in the interactive learning process. The example above shows that it is a response to a student's post and the function of this text is to instil confidence in the student so that participation continues without the fear of making mistakes. By making the goals clear and simple, the student can be further motivated to keep posting on the forums and learn. In this particular case, impersonalisation plays a major role in manipulating the students' attitude towards writing in the forums. There is no need to attribute common mistakes to the student I am responding to, so by claiming that mistakes are common and acceptable, I have made them impersonal and implied that it is fine and that everyone makes them. By placing this student on the same level as everyone in the class, agency is manipulated and hedging occurs and avoids making the student lose face. However, impersonalisation does not always work as a motivating technique and most times, the moderator needs to personalise the text so that the intention is clearly transmitted. This can be seen in the next example.

Hey there M-m,

Which of us is right... if any.  Go round and see what your classmates have written down and try to find out what doesn't exactly fit in with their descriptions. Looking forward to seeing your colourful interventions again.

Sleep well,

Jane

The student to whom the text above is directed had chosen to give herself a virtual user-name which she signed on with and thus, by personalising the message on the forum, it is seen as a direct response to her post. She will also understand that she is being given

some instructions by the lecturer, which indicates that the lecturer has been following her interactions in general and has seen that her interactions are restricted mostly to those that are made directly with the lecturer only. Thus, by using the imperative form, a direct instruction is given, yet this is softened by the additional information added to the sentence. Most directions are short and concise yet this one tries to justify the reason for the order as a way for the student to understand the reason for the instruction and thus feel more motivated to carry out what was asked of her. By personalising the message, attention has been drawn to this student and as she has been placed in a position that could allow for criticism, there was some need to counterbalance the Face Threatening Activity (FTA), so the teacher disarms the students' vulnerability by reinforcing a positive side of her interactions. Motivating the student to carry on participating is enhanced when the writer comments on the student's creative interactions. Besides being a way to help the student save face, it also aims to boost the student's interest in collaborating with colleagues so they too can benefit from her interventions.

The next post exemplifies another way of motivating students to participate, using positive reinforcement.

Tough one but finally got found out!!!  WELL done!

Keep interacting with your friends and classmates.

A new forum shall shortly be put up so stay alert!

Jane

Through positive reinforcement given by the lecturer for both the student who placed a hard to find 'lie' in his description and to the student who worked it out, she focuses on these students' identities within the community of inquiry. In terms of face, it helps these students feel valued and 'gives them a sense of belonging' (Simon, 2004: p.66) to the community. The lecturer then proceeds to motivate these and other students' interest

for what is to come with the withdrawal of some information relating to the forums that will be set up but letting on that something new is about to be launched.

Well... the hunt continues... Give it your best shot everyone! S is playing 'hard to get'. 😊
Good one S! Keep us guessing.

Humour is also used to keep students motivated to keep trying to find those 'lies' that are more challenging. By drawing in the students by claiming that the 'hunt continues', the teacher tries to create that environment of excitement when people are on the lookout for the unknown yet they know that something will be found. The use of vocabulary in the same semantic group continues when the lecturer invites students to give it their 'best shot', which is also related to hunting. Despite some danger of being misinterpreted, the expression 'playing hard to get' is used to continue with the humorous tone of the text. Although it could be taken as meaning something more sexual in nature, it was therefore placed within inverted commas so that it became clear that the expression is used in a humorous way, meaning that the student had been able to dodge a few students who had tried to catch out her 'lie'. Nominalisation ensures the student's inclusion and recognition for her interactivity in particular as she has been doing a very good job on this task of getting her classmates involved with her text. Recognising students' strengths also functions as a motivator for students to reveal some more information about themselves and adds to their inclusion in the community of inquiry. The example beneath reveals interaction of reciprocity of information between teacher and student.

Hi D,

Merengue is a nice dance. It's fun when you know how. So... if you enjoy dancing merengue, you cannot be very shy. Is that your piece of false information?

I also find your favourite author fascinating. What have you read by him?

Keep in touch,
Jane

Nominalisation occurs here to address this student directly and adds emphasis to the exchange of information and recognition of her interests. In this case, motivation occurs when the lecturer values and identifies with the student's preferences. By motivating students to give more information about themselves and interact more, the lecturer aims at the construction of an identity, where students reveal abilities, personal traits as well as some behavioural traits and social roles (Simon, 2004: p 45–47). At times, recognising students' strengths from a privileged position, helps others recognise these positions, therefore as the teacher identifies with the students' interests, other students may pay attention to the posts and interact with the students too. This can be seen in the next example.

Hi there C,
Nobody expects perfection and I am very pleased to see you communicating... that's what's important at this stage. I can see you're another very busy young lady and finding your false statement will not be easy either. 😊
Did you really play football? Perhaps this is what isn't totally true.
Take care,
Jane

Motivation occurs when the lecturer recognises the student's efforts to communicate. By lowering expectations and explaining the actual objectives at the heart of the forums, the moderator acts as a balance between what the student may see others doing and what is actually hoped that most students can achieve by interacting on the forums. Although she may feel threatened to participate due to weaker English language skills, it is the teacher's role to reassure her that what she is doing is good enough and encourage her to keep writing and lose the fear she has. The emoticon adds another dimension to the written text, namely when looking at multimodality of texts. Crystal

(2008) defines that ‘the meaning [of an emoticon] is entirely a function of the shape of the symbols’ (p.38), showing us how the mood of the participant can be transmitted through a visual component that can be integrated into written text and can add to its density and complexity, enhancing the readers’ understanding and feelings towards what the writer was trying to put across. The next example is particularly interesting regarding the use of emoticons.

😊Poor L... are your friends picking on you??? You can do the same back to them you know... get active!😊

This example begins with an emoticon to establish the humorous mood that has been created in the thread. A few girls were bringing in what had happened in the university corridors when they discussed this activity occurring online and were playfully accusing each other of cheating. Thus, the teacher began her post with a wide smile, emphasising her understanding of the friendly accusations. By showing sympathy for the girl being accused, the lecturer indicates she is almost taking sides in this friendly argument and motivates the girl to answer back in the same tone and keep interacting. The smiley used at the end of this post is not as wide-lipped as the one at the beginning as that would be overdoing the effort of motivating the students. The initial emoticon indicates how the teacher was laughing with the situation and at the end she smiles as an encouragement to keep writing. Following this line of thought, the next quote also resorts to emoticons and the repetition of accusations as a means of maintaining the connection between the various elements of the community and interaction on the forum.

Another cheat??? Hey what's going on here? 😊

Let's wait and see if it's really worth cheating... 😊 Is she right??? Has she caught your lie Fil?

Take care, Jane

The excess use of punctuation marks reinforces the astonishment that the accusations continue yet it is softened by the use of the emoticon in the text. The emoticon insinuates that the lecturer understands that the students have a good relationship and are jeering at each other about their online and face-to-face relationship whilst interacting online and developing their social engagement within the community of inquiry. As a blended learning developer, the lecturer realises that this stage in the students' relationship is important and so stimulates the continuation of this type of humorous interaction. Identifying and understanding the development of various ties occurring online and in class help the lecturer engage the students in their learning experience.

Therefore, paying attention to details that the students reveal is important to be able to work on the value of blended learning as an enriching learning experience. In the next example, attention is paid to a student who wrote about his hatred for maths and the teacher attempted to keep him motivated by bringing in other students studying maths.

Fil, I can actually understand your position. I can also not imagine myself as an economist. I'm too much of a people-person.

However... a little maths is essential in our lives and I am sure that all the economics and management students can tell you that.

Engagement with the student takes place on an individual level with the use of nominalisation. Motivating the continuation of interaction and discussion of the issue occur when the teacher identifies with ideals and views previously expressed by the student. By insinuating that there are better people who can better explain the issue at hand, namely the students in this class who study maths, economics and management, the teacher is strengthening personal bonds and building onto students' trust issues as the teacher is depositing faith in their knowledge and valuing their opinions. The next

post exemplifies how the teacher works on a student's confidence, ensuring he feels safe enough to participate in English as his learning skills are important to her too.

Hi there N,

I wish you lots of luck with this big change in your life. You'll have to be very strong because the societies are quite different but I'm sure you'll be just fine.

As to your English... with a little bit of extra work, which I am very willing to help you with, you have the potential to be a good writer.

In relation to the time I work in DEAG, it's true... I have been there for 7 years.

As to your false statement: I don't think you write fanfics... might I be right?

Now go on to all your colleagues' participations in the forum and get to know them all a bit better. Also invite your friends / classmates to participate. As they say, the more, the merrier! ☺

Take care,
Jane

This post is a reply to one where a student had just revealed he had just arrived in Portugal from Venezuela and was very reticent to participate in the forums due to his low domain of the English language. Here the teacher is motivating him by offering help to the student in dire need of it as his English was learnt in Venezuela and the levels are not comparable to our English students' levels in Portugal. Nominalisation is used so that the student feels included in the community of inquiry and reads the teacher's post as a direct response to his post. The teacher recognises how hard this change can be and shows sympathy for his situation and this will enable the student to feel he can talk about this issue if he feels like it as there is some support here. The use of the word 'potential' also acts as a motivator as the student has the skills but simply needs to develop them. Creating a trustworthy environment is one of the roles the teacher plays when motivating students to interact.

- *Students Stimulate Classmates' Interaction*

Students also played a major role in maintaining a regular flow of interactivity in the CoI. The examples that follow show that the students achieved this by agreeing with previous posts and expressing interest in each other's ideas, asking questions and opinions, making suggestions, using humour and common experiences and at times repeating linguistic structures that the teacher has used.

This first post shows a variety of language functions such as agreeing and asking for opinions.

Yes I agree with you but i think that you must have a favorite book ... I don't read a lot but my favorite is Da Vinci Code ... What do you think about it ??? And what is that book do you realy like ?

This student's discourse markers include adding and giving examples. She establishes a friendly connection with the readers due to her informal use of language and interest in the readers' opinions.

This next post shows a student sharing a common interest and making a suggestion to engage others in virtual interaction in this CoI and on another virtual plane.

Hi everybody, im a fan of C.S 1.6, i play this game since it has released in 4 or 5 years ago. I dont know how many of you play this game but if you like to play this game tell me something, im loocking foward to play against my "partners" from UMa, bye everybody ;)



This example also shows the student on a common level with his readers as he expresses common interests and he attempts to engage with the readers to interact with him in a virtual game. This example then stimulated interaction amongst the students

who enjoyed playing online games. They began to call upon each other to express their opinions to organise a Lan-party as can be seen in the example below.

Defenely, we can all play with each other online, at home or in a "lan", we decide where to play, its a matter of time untill everyone starts giving their opinion. bye ;)

Another thread that activated students motivating other students to interact was one that resorted to common memories that they all had about old computers and computer games as can be seen in this next example.

Does anyone remember chucky egg? lol and saboteur?

Chucky egg!

Saboteur!



Those were good ol' times!!

Spectrum 48k or the compatible DKtroniks with the similar chipset!!

I miss those cassettes and the loading sound... hahah

blip*..ZZz..*brrrr *ti *ti *ti ... blip* It could take as much as 15 minutes to load some games!!

My first "computer"... lol.. it did compute..but not that fast!

My second ... err.. "computer"! 😊

THOSE WERE THE GOOD TIMES! 😊

This student uses an array of computer jargon that only similar minded classmates will follow and identify with. He also resorts to onomatopoeia as a means to re-awaken common memories. This post was followed by a stream of similar posts with an exchange of memories and the CoI was further sustained with this discussion. Students were getting each other to write in English about things that had been experienced in English as all commands of these older games and computers were in English.

The last example in this section is representative of mirroring language that occurs online.

Good night...

I`am sorry A V... I was not describing M J .Keep up with a good work,keep trying .

Your description i think you talk about M.

P N.

At times students tended to copy language that the teacher had used to stimulate interaction. The expressions seen above were used quite often in the initial interactions and then came up in students' texts showing that they had not only acquired the linguistic knowledge but had also understood its function within a CoI. The next section goes back to the language used by the teacher to stimulate discourse but will only provide examples registered by the teacher.

e. Positive Reinforcement

Positive reinforcement from the teacher helps most students maintain high levels of interest in any learning context. These characteristics need to also be part of the written discourse in the forums to show students that the teacher pays attention to each of them so that empathy between the teacher and students develop.

Expressions such as 'Keep up the good work' are repeated often as a means of ascertaining that students are doing well and need to keep that level of investment in the learning process. This can be seen in the examples that follow.

It's not a problem that we get each others wrong. It's just fun to get to know you and at least you can practice another genre of writing. 😊

Keep up the good work.

Jane

Well done S!!😊

Talking to strangers online can sometimes be dangerous. It's a good thing that C has the good sense to choose well.

Ladies... both S and C, keep up the good work. Get your other classmates to join us and keep interactive.

Take care ladies,

Jane

Other expressions include ‘Well done.’ and ‘Good job/ work’ and can be seen in the next few examples.

Hi P,

As a computer engineer, you are actually a bit different to most. You are very active which most are not. **Well done.**

I think you do not paint. Am I right?

By the way, where do you mountain bike? I tried that once and had so much fun. Maybe we could organize a class trip?

Don't forget to go round to your classmates answers and find their false statements.

Take care,

Jane

‘Keep it up’ is also a stimulus for those students that can be seen to be making an effort and are writing in English and can be seen in combination with emoticons as a means of adding some empathy to the interaction.

Hi V,

I greatly appreciate your explanations. 😊Great work!!! Keep it up. Soon I'll be an ace at the terms (even though I don't play any of them😊)

Sleep well.

Jane

At times, positively reinforcing implies interacting on a more general level with students and looking at what drives them and getting a better understanding of their experiences so as to be able to appeal to them on the same level and get them more involved in their learning process. Agreeing with students and thanking them for having

shared experiences or information are some other ways of positively reinforcing their interactions. Examples of situations like these can be seen below.

Hello T,

I agree with you: reading is important for our education. And if you read in English, it not only helps you understand the language better but also helps with writing. 😊

Don't forget everyone to read in English. www.time.com is an excellent source of general knowledge and high quality English.

Take care,
Jane

Thank you for these cartoons with such interesting perspectives and criticisms. Keep them flowing in and if anyone would like to comment on them, please feel free.

Have a nice weekend,
Jane

😊Good one C... self-confidence above all!

I'm sure he appreciated your seriousness.

Jane

Thank you G for being so environmentally friendly! 😊

It's so important for us all to play our part.

Take care,
Jane

It seems that students then also saw the advantages of positive reinforcement and they too began to use expressions that they saw the teacher using. Examples of words and expressions that have been looked at above are repeated in the examples below taken from students' interactions.

YES!!! You found my person 😊. Well done.

You are intelligent girl, hehehehe 😊

Some students developed their own means of giving positive reinforcement as can be seen in this next student's posts. He not only developed his own visually identifiable post but also linguistic patterns that became easily seen as his own.

Heyyaaa again,

A, yes, now you find the person that I describe. Congratulations!!

Take care,

D M

Other students found it important to reinforce what classmates had done and shown colleagues.

hey m, i don't have a blog but i found your's very interesting ...thumbs up for you :) !

I recomend the rest of you check it out :)!

In this manner positive reinforcement was very useful as a means of ensuring that the interaction continued in the CoI with a positive influence. This section is a very simple analysis given that it is quite straightforward and not much variation is available in the forums. The next section in this analysis is quite a lot more complex but an attempt is made to simplify the data so the reader can easily follow how social presence contributed to the CoI.

C. Social Presence

Social presence is perceived as the capacity that individuals possess to identify with other elements of a community. These people pursue interaction and communication as a means to develop relationships within this community (Shea et. al., 2005; Akyol and Garrison, 2008; Swan and Shih, 2005; Garrison et. al., 2010). As this presence was the earliest centre of studies about online interaction and learning, a few studies have

already been carried out on it and therefore this section will focus mainly on the additional indicators that were previously mentioned and added to Robinson's Social Presence framework in the Case Study.

A previous study shows how social presence is perceived and reveals itself in a community:

As Yoon (2003) found, social behaviors accounted for 26.3 percent of the total performed behaviors by virtual learning teams. He identified these as greetings, sharing of personal life, sharing of work and professional interests, discussing the course, pairing and member support, and sharing humor. Sharing of personal life, discussing the course, and sharing of work and professional interests decreased over time, while sharing humor and pairing and member support increased over time (Aragon, 2003: p.60).

Aragon looks at the social function of interaction and how the sharing of personal knowledge and information helps develop a community. This research provides some examples of social presence within the CoI that was created in the b-learning writing module. It also exemplifies how this presence contributed to cognitive and teaching presence as this one seems to be the link between both. It creates a bond between the other two presences and reinforces the effect of the CoI on knowledge acquisition and in this case, on the learning and teaching presence.

a. Polite Greetings and Closures

Here we shall take a look at the variety of ways that participants found to start and end their interactions. At the beginning of the module, it was common practice not to find any introductions to their interactions. However, as the teacher always added these, some students began to copy the expressions and gradually others began to be more creative and include some of their own expressions. This shows that scaffolding is occurring. Fahy (2003) explains how scaffolding plays a role in a CoI.

Scaffolding and engaging comments are specifically intended to initiate, continue or acknowledge interpersonal interaction, and to “warm” and personalize the discussion by greeting, welcoming and recognizing others. [...] Included are comments without real substantive meaning, “phatics,” which signify the speaker/writer’s readiness for interaction (Feenberg, 1989), greetings, and [n]etiquette-related devices such as closings and signatures, rhetorical questions (which gently suggest a position, while leaving open the possibility of further discussion about it), and emoticons (Fahy, 2003: p.5).

Some of the elements above are revealed in the data, such as the greetings and closures that followed, and discussed as they arise. Some of the most common and repeated expressions can be found in the grid below. Due to the elevated number of coded elements that referred to greetings and closures, they needed to be gathered and presented in a way that would be easily viewed and understood. The variety is quite rich as can be seen in both columns attributed to each of the social indicators.

Greetings		Closures	
Hello (+N/ Professor/ Teacher/ boys/ my friend),	LOL!	Take care (and stay active/ mate/ mate☺/ now)	(I recommend the rest of you) Check it out (☺ !.)
Hello!(!/ ☺)	BAH	Sincerely (+N)	-N-
Hello everybody/everyone/ every1,	Thanks once again (+N)	Have a nice/ good weekend	(*) Kisses*
Hi (+N/ every1)!	Good night ☺	Bye (☺)	Be cool.
Hi (to) all! (☺)	Go (+N)	Peace!	Stay nice!!!
Hi there (+N)	Dear colleagues	Stay well (and drive safely ☺/ +N/ m8s)	Regards, (+N)
Hi again	Lucky you (+N)	Good night.	Good luck.
Hey (+N/ guys)	I agree with you	Cya(.../ around)	Best regards
Hey, that's cheating!	Yeah, I also like...	See you (all/ ... ☺)	Have fun
That's cheating ... ☺☺☺	Yeah, I used to...	Stay interactive/ gold.	Hugs and kisses
Greetings! ☺	I also agree...	Keep up the good work	If you want I can help you!;)
Wazzup (+N)?	Yes, you found (+N)	Keep it up	See you in the dark side of the moon!
We have a winer!	Hahaha That was funny (+N)	Keep (trying/ in touch.	(Sorry/ Please/ So), try again ... lol ☺
Good idea!		Keep :D/ ;)	Anyone interested?
		Sleep well	Let us know.
		Tank you! ☺	Just my 2 cents.

Figure 34 - Greetings and Closures

These two indicators are not a part of Robinson's framework but they are considered essential in this research. In this table, the linguistic variety is not very great but the combinations of the same words with emoticons or with the addition of a personalisation, be it a name (+N) or more general terms, such as 'guys' or 'everyone' enriches the variety of this list. These indicators play a role in initiating an interaction and sustaining a discussion or in ending an engagement, which are essential parts of any discourse act. The lack of human smiles and facial expressions commonly associated with greetings and closures in face-to-face discourse acts are substituted in written discourse with the emoticons and punctuation marks.

The next indicators have more specific functions than the previously mentioned two. The analysis begins with disagreements and are followed by argumentative disagreements.

b. Disagreement

This indicator is also an addition to Robinson's social presence framework. Due to the elevated number of coded incidents of disagreements, there was a need to include it in the framework. These examples are relatively simple as they are straight forward negations towards an attitude or fact mentioned in a previous post.

hi to all to

Well about PES and FIFA, i wont talk about them, because i never play soccer games, i dont like them.

Good old Colin Mcrae, great game, but my pc is old and i can only play Colin Mcrae 2, it was a great game, i also tried the 2004 and i didn't like it.

Everyone say's that DIRT it's lot better on graphics and jogability, but i still havent tried.

But, the game i play all days is (sounds stupid) RUNESCAPE, its a mmorpg (massive multiplayer online roll playing game), its a java game, we dont have to install anything on the computer, we can lose years playing it, and im addicted to this game.

This example above is a clear example of a clear negation of a shared passion that has been expressed by another participant previously. The next example is similarly easily understood.

BAH.

This a topic for the "point whores" also knows as "sim city players".

[...]

Sincerely

V.

'Bah' probably indicates a negative attitude in many languages and in this interaction, it intentionally expresses disagreement. There are however more complex disagreeing attitudes in the CoI and can be followed in the next section.

c. Argumentative Disagreement

This is another indicator that has been added to the previously mentioned framework.

Here the examples show negative attitudes accompanied by justifications for the position taken in the interaction.

Hello

Sorry, but I don't like very much computer games.

May be because I don't have much time free. But it must be very interesting when we can play.

Who knows one day I can also play and enjoy it.

But have fun with your games.

Take care

T

The student in the example above expresses a dislike and makes a personal statement but apologises for her position before. This shows a level of friendly engagement with the other members of the community. She is also expressing this opinion in a thread where people who enjoy games are interacting and this is a way of avoiding a FTA. She establishes her position but allows room for others to challenge it. She explains why she is against games which also helps her define her position within the CoI as someone who is assertive. The next student claims to not agree with those who like a specific type of game and also justifies his position.

I've played a lot of MMORPGs over the years too, but I have to say none of them ever kept me addicted for too long.

The problem is that all of them seem to be just about grinding: you kill monsters to get levels, you get levels to get new skills, you get new skills to kill more/stronger monsters. Sure there are quests, but most of the time they're about killing monsters. Sure some have PvP, but that's hardly ever a big part in the game.

Currently I'm looking for a good skill online game, stuff that makes you work on it and develop reflexes or whatever. If anyone has some suggestion (or of a non-grinding

MMORPG) please let me know. 😊

This student shows his knowledge about the issue being discussed and unlike the previous example, shows a degree of expertise due to past experience. His argumentative position is fully justified with terms that the gamers can relate to.

d. Empathic Relations

Feelings of empathy with people come into play when they develop a relationship with others that is positively felt. As physical engagement is not possible, empathy relies on the written discourse to be developed and liking someone online can make feelings of trust develop quite quickly. (Preece, 2004)

Gallese (2003) discloses how the notion of empathy evolved from one of ‘self-other identity’ (p.175) which perceived mirroring of feelings and emotions as an integrated part of empathy. The simple recognition of other people’s feelings or emotions was not seen as an adequate explanation, yet it helped construct an understanding of this dubious term.

Burford and Gross (2000) confirm that ‘encouragement is a more assertive empathic response than is reassurance. One might think of reassurance as a pat on the back, while encouragement is more like leading them by the hand for a while’ (p.11). These authors emphasise that ‘Professors who are learning to teach online need to be aware that their students will need some empathic messages, not just feedback on the course content’ (p.13).

Dadds (2008) explains that, ‘Research that is high in empathic validity contributes to positive human relationships and compassion’ (p.280). Belenky et. al. (1986) refer that empathy has two sides and in education, this relationship between someone sharing knowledge and another receiving it reveals the importance of this dual sided perspective. The first is psychological and reaches out to others, whereas the second is a

psychological act of taking in someone else's 'spirit into oneself' (p.122). Examples of these empathic relations follow.

Welcome H,

It's nice to see yet another very active young lady here.

I think you don't play the bass guitar. I wonder if that's where you stretched the truth a little?

Don't forget to go round and see your classmates texts and false statements. There are quite a few singers in this class and I'm sure you'd like to know who they are.

Take care,
Jane

The example above shows the initiation of an empathic relationship. The teacher uses very positive adjectives to address the student and compliments her on the personality traits that she has revealed. The teacher also attempts to draw the student's attention to like-minded classmates so she too can develop empathic relationships with them.

This next post is a clear example of an empathic relationship developing between a male and female student.

you're a very deep and emotional thinker. i think that u cant be that crazy because your
too "sweet" to be crazy!
just a minor detail, wen i mean sweet i mean sensitive!
being crazy is your lie right?

Besides the flirtatious nature of the discourse, there is a lot of flattering expressed. There is also hyper-sensitivity to the choice of words used as the student feels he needs to explain his use of the word 'sweet' yet has not removed it or substituted it by another. He could have, due to the asynchronous nature of the communication yet he chose to leave it and indulge in the explanation of the word.

e. *Group Cohesion*

In group cohesion, the examples aim to show how unified the CoI is and how they regard each other and refer to each other. The next posts are examples of this indicator.

it would be very nice if everybody could participate actively ..it's been fun talking and guessing about other people so i hope we can keep up the and continue doing some fun and imaginative games.

The student who wrote this post illustrates that he was considering the class as a whole and he shows his interest in everyone being involved in the b-learning activities. He seems to have a notion of how a community can benefit if everyone plays their part.

The next post is slightly different as it appeals to the sense of responsibility of the group towards the group.

Enjoy and please do not forget to add to this forum any good sources you find. Don't keep it all to yourself... remember: you get what u give. 😊

The teacher wrote this post as a way to call to each member's sense of group cohesion. By appealing to the idea of sharing knowledge, the teacher aims to get the group all working together towards a common goal.

Hey guys, which is your favorite game, fifa or pes? A few days ago some of my friends were talking about some of us to join and play a tournament of PES.

We could talk between us and all we join in some room or something and play some tournaments of fifa or pes, whatever we decide to play...

Another thing is that if we get some free space and router (depending on the type of the router), we can make a major lan party.

Remember, this is only an idea....

Stay well m8s



The students who shared their knowledge about games were eager to latch onto group cohesion and began to engage with each other and planned some face-to-face activities so that they could all share a common interest.

f. Offering P2P Help

Due to the above-mentioned common interests as well as empathy and group cohesion, this indicator arises amongst the members of the CoI. They offer to give each a hand when they sense that someone could do with some help.

Hi, C!

I had Asus G1s with Vista and i changed to Xp!

I have changed too, the asus F3SV and the F3SC of my friends, and they work fine with windows xp (i have all the drivers to xp)!😊

If you want i can help you!;)

In this thread, the students were discussing OSs and there were a few students who were asking for opinions and this offer to help was made. It is very clearly expressed and there are no doubts about what the student can help with as he explains what can be done.

g. Humour

Yet another indicator in social presence is humour and there are quite a few examples of humorous interactions in this CoI. Due to limited space however, only two examples shall be discussed here.

Greetings! 😊 I go by the name of C G, but you may call me just C or Miau-Miau. I studied in Coimbra for two years, and this is my first in UMa. 😊
I have many hobbies such as Surfing the web, chatting with strangers online, watching Japanese animation, reading fanfics, writing (fanfics and others genres), last but not least drawing. Which I do all the time, mostly in classes. 😊 I get distracted easily. What was I saying? ... I forgot.

Ohh! 😊 I wish I looked like that. I don't. 😢

As for Teacher Jane 'lie', my bet goes for "chatting online".
Do we get a prize, if we get it right? 🎁

The example above was written by a female student who was quite prominent in the face-to-face classes and tended to lurk online instead of actually engaging with her classmates online. Once she started to interact, she revealed her very funny personality and quirkiness also came across. Her humour was enhanced by her use of emoticons and her ability to almost make fun of herself. The next example shows similar characteristics.

Well when i was studying the Law at Oporto University in the last year, i start to cook, because i was living alone, far away from home and without my parents. At the begining it didn't go well, so my solution was go eat outside, most of the times, i was with my colleagues eating not healthy food in a fast food restaurant (very bad indeed)! Soon i realise, that something had to change. I became an expert in mixtures:

- rice with tuna
- rice with melted cheese
- rice with bacon

Amazing...don't you think so? Joking...

But now, that i'm on island again 😊 i have my cook back, my mummy. 😊
take care...

In this interaction, the student builds an image up of himself and then is able to laugh at his own cooking skills. It is a strategy to avoid losing face, as he already has made fun of himself so he avoids others doing it to him. At times, irony is a strategy used instead of humour to help save face.

h. Irony

Irony shows a level of understanding for the issue being discussed and a certain distance from the issue too. The discourse registered below shows how words are played with to reveal irony.

I think this game is BORING. I once saw a friend of mine play CS and lol it's ... all the same EVERYTIME. A few guys shoting at eatch other. That sunds promissing. I'm stuned by the fact of so many people still play it.

Try SOMETHING ELSE (just a thought).

This student is quite blunt in taking a stance on the issue at hand. He stresses how boring he finds a game by writing the word in capitals so that it stands out visibly. He then resorts to playing with words that represent the exact opposite of what he really thinks and wants to communicate.

6.3.4 Findings

In this section, the researcher presents a summary of the main findings, including recommendations for good practice. The section starts by verifying how the variety of assignments and resources students access enhances their learning and helps them gain confidence to write in English. The first point to make is that the CoI provides the students with a stable and comfortable environment to be able to access various resources and acquire knowledge. The flexibility of the environment allows students to access the resources online when they have the time, and this brings with it a sense of responsibility for their own learning.

When looking at the section on Online Discourse (on page 209), the sharing of knowledge is achieved through online interaction and such dialogue and communication enables collaborative learning. Students learn collaboratively because they engage with the content, their teachers and with their colleagues, who at times are simply peers, but at others are also seen as more knowledgable experts because they find information or express viewpoints and share it with their colleagues. In terms of Metacognition (on page 202), a recommendation for good practice is seen as stimulating metacognitive skills helps students reflect on their needs and knowledge acquisition. When students consider the reasons why they applied certain writing techniques, they realise why and how they learnt the technique and understood their writing better and the subsequent assignment to write about it adds to their reflection of knowledge acquisition and how they applied it in a real situation.

When considering Cognitive Presence it is understood that the four different steps (Triggering event, Exploration, Integration and Resolution) the students encounter enable knowledge to be scaffolded, which in turn helps avoid sensations of feeling overwhelmed with information. This is one of the recommendations for good practice in b-learning that will be referred to in the Discussion section (on page 309) and that is also considered when designing a b-learning course as the students can easily be overwhelmed with the array of resources that are at their fingertips online. Cognitive presence is often triggered by the teacher but is often triggered by the classmates when they share information and interact online, which adds to the variety of sources. Collaborative learning is thus a constant element in the co-construction of the b-learning modules. There is a deconstruction of the traditional classroom in terms of the teacher and in terms of the space itself. Students have the freedom to act as teachers when they are holders of knowledge and feel the need to share it. Thus, both teachers and students constantly give and receive information and this enriches the teaching and learning environment as everyone benefits from the best of both, F2F and online environments. Another recommendation for good practise is to tap into students' interests to engage them and various examples in this chapter feed into this idea, especially when looking at the open forums when students wrote about their personal interests.

When taking into consideration Teaching Presence (on page 251), the teacher, one of the essential elements of any teaching and learning environment, has the responsibility of maintaining the CoI active whilst guiding and monitoring all interaction occurring. Within this section, the importance of how instructions are given can be seen. The teacher is seen as the 'expert' and therefore feels the need to stimulate students' understanding and interest in the learning and teaching experience and moderate students' interactions. These notions bring up yet another of the recommendations for

good practice which is the need for clear instructions. The teacher needs to ensure the clarity of instructions for all assignments and activities both online and during F2F sessions as students are often alone when accessing the resources and they need to know what is expected of them in order to achieve the learning objective. Clear instructions also avoid students getting lost amidst all the resources. With clear instructions, there is a greater possibility for students to explore and exploit rich media sources without feeling overwhelmed as they know exactly what is expected of them. This exploration, in turn, gives students leeway of choice of their preferred learning method, whilst also taking responsibility for their knowledge acquisition.

It is also important to refer to the dynamic nature of the teaching presence seeing that students were also able to take on the role of an ‘expert’ and communicate information they found or knowledge they had onto their classmates. This co-construction also permits an engagement with the learning experience on another level of collaboration. These students help maintain their colleagues’ interest in the module, which is another recommendation for good practice.

Maintaining students’ interest in the module is actually as much cognitive as it is social. Social Presence (on page 295) illustrates the importance of group cohesion, which is obtained through polite greetings and closure, empathic relations, humour and helping each other out. These all enhance the learning and teaching experience and they are essential to creating a relaxed and reliable environment within which to interact and manage students’ learning. Collaboration is of the essence in a b-learning learning and teaching experience and is non-existent without the social presence.

The following section brings together the findings and systematises them. The relationships between b-learning and CoI are revisited and lead into Recommendations for Good Practice (on page 314).

6.4 Discussion

This section relates the findings of the research back to the literature and evaluates the extent to which this action research project is significant in terms of its outcomes. In particular I will concentrate on whether b-learning can be seen as an effective means to encourage students to practice their writing. Another important area for discussion is the importance of a CoI in helping to sustain the learning and teaching experience and enhance the students' motivation to engage through written discourse.

This research points to findings that are in conformity with other studies that included b-learning and/or CoI. According to Akyol et. al. (2009), 'There is a growing emphasis on building learning communities in order to increase student participation and to foster learning in online and blended environments' (p.66). The CoI framework is now used due to its focus on critical thinking and collaborative relationships fostered. (Garrison and Anderson, 2003; Garrison and Vaughan, 2008) Issues that have connection and relevance to previous studies are discussed in this section, including the importance of feeling comfortable online which contributes to students' interaction.

This research study provided data gathered from Questionnaire 1 that shows a change in our society in terms of the access that almost all students

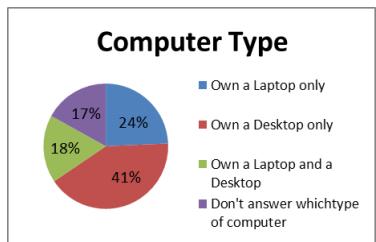


Figure 35 - Computer ownership

now have to computers. (Graph from Quest 1 analysis: Figure 35) Ross and Gage (in Bonk and Graham, 2006)

report on a study carried out in 2003 by SEUSISS (Survey of European Universities Skills in ICT of Students and Staff) where they concluded that '62% of new students enter the university using information and communication technology in their studies at least two or three times per week' (p.157). They also construe that 'with the global demand for technology in education comes a need for organisational change: the old way of doing things will no longer work' (p.157). From

the focus groups carried out in my AR study, students revealed expectations for something ‘new’ in HE. However, when provided with b-learning, my study showed that students needed direct compensation, and connection to assessment seemed to be the solution for the students to participate. ARC1 is a clear example of how students reacted when not given direct compensation for their work.

B-learning can add to the changes that are occurring in higher education whilst helping maintain and reinforce the quality of teaching and learning experience, which universities strive to attain. The importance of quality in higher education is explicitly drawn upon by Garrison and Vaughan (2008) who claim that ‘blended learning has emerged as a major break-through to enhance both the quality of the teaching and learning transaction and cost-effectiveness of designing blended learning courses’ (p.146).

Bersin (2004) considers that ‘the process of education and training is a fascinating and constantly changing journey. It requires an understanding of people, processes, technology and culture’ (p.247). In my study, AR captures this sense of journey because the process of practitioner research involved in a reflexive process of adaption, involvement and intervention allows a closer engagement with students, their concerns and development. As a research practitioner, the experience on this project reveals a benefit of b-learning in the process of change in higher education; that providing a more efficient management of a larger scale of interaction and communication between all participants of the teaching and learning experience. It becomes possible for all students to express their opinions and be heard/ read by others. In a classroom this is not possible, due to time constraints and managing too many interruptions and inputs in a lesson. Forums such as those related to Friendship or Games provided students room to

interact with each other and express their ideas on the issues and I, as their teacher/moderator was able to accompany and manage their written communications.

Interaction through b-learning ventures into various directions, not only in the usual patterns of teacher to student and student to teacher but there is more of a tendency towards student to student. It also becomes quite clear that students who usually do not participate in classroom discussions often participate online and it is a position that has been taken by other researchers such as Dziuban, Hartman and Moskal (2004); Waddoups and Howell (2002) and Wingard (2004). The reluctance to participate in class can be due to the restrictions of time or due to saving face in the F2F contexts which disappear online as there is always the possibility of taking time to formulate an interaction and, if need be, of going back to justify a position taken.

In the analysis on Epathic Relations and Group Cohesion (on page 301 and on page 302) as well as the Case Study (on page 192), the importance of interaction revealing the socialising process that occurs in b-learning is revealed. Marriott and Torres (2009) report on a study encompassing a writing course at the School of Languages and Literature, through b-learning in 2004 at the Universidade de Minas Gerais where interactivity is seen as ‘communication behaviours that provide evidence that others are present’(p.26). These include ‘agreement, disagreement, approval and referencing of previous messages and involves indicators such as continuing a thread, quoting from other’s messages, asking questions, complimenting and expressing appreciation.’ (p.26)

Marriott and Torres (2009) see it as significant that through b-learning, the role of management in a learning community changes. This role that is typically seen as the teacher’s role becomes ‘distributed among community participants’ (p.31). This is also pointed out in my findings (on page 306). My data supports the view that teaching presence is not solely the preserve of the actual teacher. The relationship to knowledge

and articulation of different viewpoints is much more co-constructed than in more traditional classrooms (Bonk and Graham, 2006). My data shows that students do in fact easily slip into the role of the expert when they have the warrant and know-how and feel they want to share this knowledge with the class. Marriott and Torres describe this as ‘decentralised leadership’ (p.32). Garrison and Vaughan (2008) explain that ‘each participant provides teaching presence’ (p.152). Examples of these moments can be found in the data analysis when looking at the forums about gaming for instance (on page 252 and 238). However, Garrison and Vaughan (2008) point out that ‘the reason for the power of context is the control of the teacher as designer and facilitator’ (p.151) which reminds us of the importance of the teacher in a blended context, who might, at times, lose the position of expert, yet he/she must maintain his/her position as a facilitator.

Student feedback (on page 306) suggests that students are able to engage in and use different learning styles. Many students appreciate the flexibility of being involved outside the classroom. The more collaborative nature of the co-construction and the ability of students to personalise their learning experience is evident in my data. Bersin (2004) believes that ‘people learn by doing’ (p.245) and a language is in fact learnt by using it and practicing its structures, thus this study helps demonstrate that increased use of blended learning is a way to enhance students’ engagement in using English.

B-learning makes it possible for us as teachers to reach out towards the different learning styles that people have. Bersin points out that ‘no medium is perfect for everyone. By mixing media, we appeal to the broadest number of learners’ (p.246). The chance to interact online can thus enhance the learner’s experience because it adds another dimension to their interactivity with the course content, classmates and teachers.

Besides their interactivity, student engagement gives them the sense of added responsibility for their own learning as well as the autonomy to choose when they interacted online. In Tecnologico de Monterrey in Mexico, a study shows that they ‘believe that student learning requires social interaction, collaboration and reflection by learners’ (Limon in Bonk and Graham, 2006: p.357). Limon adds that ‘these activities help students order their thoughts and improve their written communication skills’ (p.357), which is in accordance with the objectives of my research. Students learn if they invest and participate in the learning experience, the whole b-learning experience becomes richer. The student in the Case Study and others who participated in the focus groups showed they realised how their experience became more interesting when everyone participated. They also shared that they became more confident users of the English language as fear began to disappear as they got used to posting on the forums. There are more chances for students to participate and there is greater interaction of students online compared to their participation in traditional classrooms.

From the findings of this research and after the discussion of these, a list of the most important items relating to the learning and teaching environment created through b-learning and sustained by CoI has been developed and can be seen below.

B-learning and CoI can offer EFL students a relaxed and reliable environment to:

- enhance their learning experience through a variety of sources
- experience the best that both online learning and face-to-face learning can offer
- learn to take responsibility for their own learning experience and knowledge acquisition.
- make the most of a flexible environment that gives them room for what to study and when, where and how they choose to study

-
- learn through collaborative strategies by engaging and interacting with peers and experts.

Recommendations for Good Practice for Tutors using B-learning

This study has worked towards an appropriate methodology (Holliday 1994) for the integration of blended learning within a university setting. There was a conscious decision on the part of this practitioner to involve students in a constant process of evaluation and feedback. Consequently I have recommendations for good practice in the area of blended learning, with the caveat that tutors will have to find their own appropriate ways of developing courses. However, this is one of the great advantages of Moodle as a platform, as it has a history of collaborative open-source adaptation. Of all the VLE platforms it is the most flexible and does not have a lock-step feel (Brandle, 2005). The iterative nature of this research project is captured by Jones (in Bonk and Graham, 2006) who argues that ‘it is important to realise that technology should not be used merely to emulate traditional methods of delivery; the challenge is to identify the gains from applying technology and use these alongside existing best practices in multimodal delivery’ (p.192).

My research has been a case of adding elements to what was already there. Blended learning does not ignore traditional elements of delivery. It adds to them through a dialogic process between the traditional (F2F) and the on-line VLE. Therefore it is important to gather understanding of what the focal points when using b-learning are, as is the importance of being clear and concise when giving instructions in a b-learning environment. With the aid of Chickering and Gamson’s (1999) ‘Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education’, the list that appears below is what I consider recommendations for good practice for tutors venturing into the use of b-learning:

Principles for good practice in b-learning

1. Ensure students have understood and know how to use the learning platform and that technical support is available.
2. Write clear and concise instructions for each task, including aims, time-lines and expectations.
3. Use clear and easily recognisable symbols to represent common tasks and activities set up online.
4. Ensure students see the advantages of being exposed to the best of two learning and teaching approaches.
5. Explore and exploit as many rich media sources as possible and give students room to find their own preferred learning method when there is a choice.
6. Always check the quality of audio and visual materials so the content is more easily understood and explored by the student.
7. Stimulate metacognitive skills so students are able to reflect upon their needs and knowledge acquisition.
8. Vary the interaction methods to avoid students get bored and move towards their interests and experiences to get them engaged.
9. Remember to scaffold knowledge so students do not become overwhelmed by the bulk of information that is presented to them.
10. Value and personalise instant feedback to students' interactions online so their interest and motivation is encouraged.

These principles arise from the experience obtained whilst carrying out this action research study. This experience and knowledge covers the following areas:

- my prior knowledge as a practitioner;

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- my involvement as a research practitioner during this research;
 - my researcher understanding arising from investment in reading other academics' perspectives;
 - my experience as a research analyst working with data
 - my participation in these teaching and learning experiences

The above aids me in compiling a list of principles in the hope that they can in some way support and encourage other teachers to venture into b-learning and create CoI as a means to enrich the teaching and learning practices.

In order to clearly explain which of Chickering and Gamson's (1999) principles helped shape the principles for b-learning, here are their 'Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education':

- Encourages student-faculty contact
- Encourages cooperation among students
- Encourages active learning
- Gives prompt feedback
- Emphasizes time on task
- Communicates high expectations
- Respects diverse talents and ways of learning (p.76).

Chickering and Gamson (1999) refer to the encouragement of Student-Faculty contact in the first principle and in order to formulate the principles for this research, I felt their principle was too general. For b-learning to occur successfully, the contact between students and faculty members needs to be clearly defined at certain stages of the b-learning learning and teaching experience, for example, students who interact timidly for the first times need to be stimulated and often the contact between the teacher and

the student can help motivate them to continue interacting and help them gain confidence. The introductory steps on the platform need to be carried out with clear instructions and guidelines from the teacher and this direct contact makes the students feel secure about venturing onto this new learning platform. My principles also specify contact between students and technical support because a safe b-learning environment benefits from students feeling they have a technician at hand if they need that contact to solve technical issues without it hindering their learning experience. Consequently, my principles 1 to 4 add more detail to Chickering and Gamson's first principle.

Chickering and Gamson's fifth principle, 'time on task' (p.76) helped shape the 2nd principle for good practice in b-learning. In this 2nd principle, student-faculty contact is also safeguarded when aims, time-lines, expectations and tasks are efficiently communicated and agreed upon. Communication between the two parties needs to be extremely clear and concise in order for there to be no doubts whatsoever in relation to the expectations of the tasks/ assignments and the deadlines for these to be completed.

Chickering and Gamson (1999) refer to the encouragement of 'active learning' (p.76) in their third principle which b-learning can benefit highly from and which led to the specification in my principles of metacognition. The 7th principle for good practice in b-learning points towards metacognitive skills as a means towards student responsibility for the knowledge they acquire. This helps students take their learning into their own hands.

'Prompt feedback' (p.76) is supported by Chickering and Gamson in their fourth principle, which is addressed in my 10th principle for good practice in b-learning. Online feedback mentioned in my 10th principle is essential when students are interacting online as they are used to instant gratification online and that is why

personalizing instant feedback is of the essence to guarantee student enthusiasm. It is essential that students get feedback, but in b-learning the importance of online feedback In terms of communicating ‘high expectations’, Chickering and Gamson’s sixth principle, I believe these expectations come through in my principles for good practice in b-learning, namely in 4, 5 and 7, with the added value of ensuring students see the advantages of the learning approaches they are presented with. The high expectations in b-learning come in the form of communication between the teacher and the students and the relationship that they all have with the content being taught and learnt. If they are given diverse options, then the teacher has gone to the trouble of offering a wide array of resources and thus has expectations that the students make the choice and learn from it. This gives them the responsibility to make the most of the varied sources and media to acquire knowledge in the way they find most productive and efficient.

Chickering and Gamson’s last point referring to ‘diverse talents and ways of learning’ is specifically addressed in my own principles 5, 6 and 8. In these principles of good practice in b-learning, the diverse media sources and interaction methods are viewed as a means to catering to the diverse nature of our students nowadays. Not only do students have different levels of knowledge, but they acquire knowledge in different ways, as has been argued by Gardner and also developed in this thesis.

Chickering and Gamson do not mention the importance of clear and concise instructions but as a researcher and practitioner of b-learning, I realize how important these are to the success or failure of tasks and with the added dimension of asynchronous learning, this is placed as a principle of good practice in b-learning because it is the starting point of any interaction online.

The same occurs in relation to the use of recognizable symbols online which facilitates interaction and makes a VLE more user-friendly. Thus this point is one of the principles of good practice in b-learning.

Also not mentioned in Chickering and Gamson's principles but essential to the b-learning experience is ensuring that whatever media is used is checked prior to exposing it to students as any ill-thought out programme can hinder communication, learning and consequently interaction between the student and the VLE / other students or teacher.

The last point that I brought in but that isn't approached by Chickering and Gamson is related to scaffolding information. The need to bring in this element is due to the bulk of information that students come across when working online and scaffolding the information as well as teaching them how to do it themselves helps them to select only what is essential in a way that does not over-power their interest and yearning to learn. At times, the information was scaffolded before being taught to students, for example, in the lesson students were taught about paragraphing techniques. An example of students being taught to scaffold occurred in one of the lessons that focused on analysing websites and students were shown how to select information and scaffold what they consider essential to the task at hand. In b-learning scaffolding is an essential part of the teaching and learning process.

My study supports the findings of others (e.g. Shea and Bidjerano, 2010) that online environments support the co-construction of knowledge and increased social engagement. The additional interaction through social interaction and negotiation of meaning is both supported by and supports further asynchronous communication. The CoI framework (Garrison, Anderson, & Archer, 2000, 2001) is a useful analytic tool in detailing the elements of interactivity that flourish with effective engagement.

7 Outcomes

This last section takes the place of what is traditionally termed a conclusion. I opt for the term ‘outcomes’ because it has a more forward looking connotation which brings to mind implications, impact, and possible next research steps. I also use this section to illustrate some of the limitations of the study.

This research began with the aim of finding an appropriate methodology for engaging students at the University of Madeira in the learning process so that they would become more motivated and enhance their writing skills in English. Through an Action Research process, a b-learning writing module in English was embedded into 4 courses at the University and those students taking part in the module were stimulated to write more often than they would have had they been involved in a traditional face-to-face writing course.

The research had several key outcomes in terms of the development of a community of inquiry through a process of b-learning. I was able to confirm that it is possible to make progress on developing a viable CoI as an individual practitioner in a university setting. B-learning is within the reach of teachers who have the will to put in a few more hours of work to redesign their courses and then implement it with their students. The students’ learning experience is enhanced due to the engagement that occurs online. As VLEs such as Moodle are open-source, it makes b-learning a possibility at all levels of education without the institution having to invest money in VLEs that work in similar ways as Moodle (ie. Blackboard and WebCT).

Having had to invest some extra (unpaid) time in the preparation of a b-learning course and quite a lot of time moderating and facilitating online discussions and responding to online messages and emails, I realised there is a need for much better time-management. Students’ expectations need to be brought into perspective and

realistic time limits for responses need to be given to students. A window of about twelve hours to respond to a message now seems reasonable to me, but when a thread has picked up and everyone is eagerly engaging with the content, it is important that the facilitator realises this and interacts as soon as possible so that students do not lose interest and cease their engagement. It is also essential to invest time and effort at the very beginning of the creation of a CoI as the students need to know that the support and guidance of a real person they can identify with exists on the other end of those words appearing on the screen. Creating an environment of trust and freedom is crucial at the early stages when students are facing issues of getting used to the platform or to this new way of learning and communicating. This investment pays off in the long-run as effective monitoring and guidance enhances the chances of future success by eradicating or at least minimising problem areas at the very beginning.

It was also useful to verify that students' engagement levels in a CoI vary according to interest, time available, other scheduled tasks, motivation and even peer pressure, among other motives that they chose not to share. Despite the problems I had in ARC1, it was valuable to see that a minority of students can still sustain and develop a viable CoI. It takes a few dedicated and interested students to create a CoI that stimulates a worthwhile learning and teaching experience and once this is underway, there are always others that join in and help build it up further. My view is that it should not be seen as a failure when only a few students get engaged in such an on-line environment.

In terms of the ARCs, this research has made a contribution to an area that lacked research perspectives from a practitioner researcher's perspective. Conle (2000) reports a shortage of research voices from the point of view of a practitioner's reflective process and thinks that this problem is due to the 'lack of connectedness between work

and research' for a writer to be able to engage in narrative inquiry. One of the key contributions of this representation of the research process is the deliberate and principled use of a narrative form of accounting for key decisions and outcomes. Narrative inquiry enables a 'story' to be told (Bell, 2002; Clandinen and Connelly, 2004) and provides the practitioner researcher with a voice to articulate and interpret the authenticity and richness of the context of the ARCs (Kurtz, 2010). As AR is often quite difficult to portray due to being a messy process (Cook, 1998), with many procedures occurring simultaneously, a narrative account gives the researcher a form of representation which encourages key incidents, factors and experiences to be foregrounded. This also allows more personal knowledge and perspectives to be related to more conceptual and theoretical knowledge. Thus the narrative functions as a space to connect theory to practice and give the reader an account of the process which is more in keeping with the experience and realisations of the individual practitioner.

At the overall level of the CoI framework, it seems that metacognition plays an important role that Garrison does not consider. Although this thesis brings in most of the data related to metacognition from the writing process, it is important that both students and teachers reflect about the learning experience in a CoI. This reflective process repeats itself throughout the thesis as a means of scaffolding and acquiring knowledge on various planes, be it in enhancing writing skills, in redesigning an ARC, in moderating a forum in a CoI or in writing up a narrative account of the ARCs.

This thesis also provides a contribution to the criteria of Garrison's and Robinson's Social Presence in the CoI framework as can be seen on page 192. From the triangulation of data, social presence reveals more criteria than was offered by the framework. Thus, on the affective plane, this thesis adds open communication, empathic relations, use of irony and expression of interest to the list of indicators. On the

interactive plane, three more indicators are added, namely expression of disagreement, argumentative disagreement and offering P2P help. Finally, one more indicator is added to the cohesive category of the social presence: group cohesion, which is essential in a CoI which can only truly exist if there is a minimum level of group cohesion.

Regarding the contribution this research made on a local contextual level, it is worth particularly highlighting collaborative aspects of the intervention and discussions around such changes. By this I mean that there has been a contribution to the University of Madeira with the introduction of b-learning as a learning and teaching method that hopefully will be adopted by other teachers, especially those that collaborated with the research. Collaboration also took place for the first time in our department in the sense of teaching in each other's classes and sharing our knowledge and teaching time.

On a personal level, I developed my research skills on various levels. Not only did I explore software and learn to work with it as a way to enhance my research, but I also developed personal interactional and professional skills. In terms of specific pieces of software that were used, Soundscriber, Endnote and NVIVO made particularly important contributions. Soundscriber facilitated the transcription of interviews, focus groups and lesson recordings. MyEndnote online gave me the confidence that my references were being stored and that I would be able to assemble the bibliographic references with more ease and organisation than if I had kept them in a word document as I have done on many previous accounts. NVIVO has been my most important research tool due to the bulk of data that I had at the end of the ARCs. By manipulating and coding the data on this software, I could visualise the codes I needed to analyse together instead of having to finger through or scroll down hundreds of pages of forum interactions posted by almost 300 students. If NVIVO had not been used, the data

would have had to be restricted to a much smaller amount and the patterns that emerged of CoI may not have been decipherable.

The research skills that were developed include designing and carrying out questionnaires; interviewing skills; designing, carrying out, reflecting upon, re-designing and writing reflective pieces about ARCs; collaborating with other teachers; moderating online forum discussions; creating and sustaining a CoI through b-learning; manipulating and teaching language skills using Moodle and other online resources and discussing, presenting and justifying AR processes in workshops, symposiums and conferences. This research handled both paper handout and online questionnaires, thus skills were developed on how to design the questions, how to get people to fill them out and how to get the responses back. The development of my interviewing skills has proved very fruitful as I learnt how to carry out individual and focus group interviews. This knowledge has recently led to a participation in an on-going b-learning project, coordinated by Grier Palmer at the WBS, with fellow PhD researchers in the department, Abby Kendrick and Dillup Mutum. I was invited to set up and moderate an expert focus group on b-learning and student focus groups too. The transcription of the expert focus group was also done by me. We then wrote up a report and presented our findings from the focus groups, bench marking b-learning practices in UK universities and questionnaires that had been given to WBS undergraduates at the WBS at two Teaching and Learning Group meetings and had a presentation at their B-Learning Workshop held on 22nd March 2011. Grier Palmer then asked for help in setting up and moderating focus groups for their PhD tutors to report back on their teaching experience at the WBS. This project was undertaken with an ER PhD research fellow, Charoula Tzanakou.

7.1 Evaluation and Implications

This study had a series of limitations, undoubtedly because this is my first major research project. First of all, there was a lack of student engagement with the project in ARC1. This may have been due to very little exposure to an academic research culture at the University of Madeira or a lack of motivation to embark on projects that implied work with no immediate pay-back that they students could easily see. This lack of engagement caused an imbalance of data collection. At the end of ARC1, very little data had been collected so due to the redesign of the ARCs, too much data had been collected to be processed.

Time may have also been a factor in determining student engagement and data collection, as the modules only lasted a month and some students may have needed more time to get used to the platform and this way of interacting. If the research had gone on for longer, more longitudinal data could have been collected and the impact of the project on student writing skills may have been analysable. It would have been fruitful to establish a connection between online writing and EAP writing, but this goes beyond the scope of this study and will probably be kept in mind for future research projects.

Staff engagement and collaboration was also somewhat limited as the teachers who collaborated with this research did not interact with the students online. This would have eased my online time-load as the teacher feed-back and moderation could have been shared amongst two teachers. Nevertheless, their openness to the research was greatly appreciated and their collaboration was essential for the ARCs to be carried out.

As the version of Moodle we were working with was rather limited, there is now the intent of working with Moodle 2.0 and being able to upload videos, podcasts and

other such resources that we were unable to do previously. This version is much more promising and more engaging.

Analytic tools and functions in NVIVO could have also been explored more but due to the bulk of the data, coding took much longer than had been predicted and some functions could not be developed. Nevertheless, the UMa b-learning project is created on NVIVO8 and the data will be further analysed for future papers in Journals and conferences. A paper has been submitted to *The Internet and Higher Education* and I hope to present this research at Global Time 2012 and Ed-Media 2012. As there are plans for closer collaboration with one of the professors I collaborated with for this research to continue to integrate the b-learning writing modules into his courses, more data shall be gathered and fed into NVIVO too. The courses that I will be teaching will also have b-learning components and this will provide me with the opportunity to carry out some more ARCs.

There are other aspects of the data that will be analysed such as gender issues and online interaction. The way students communicate online seems to have nuances and this is a study that I would like to carry out and disseminate. Deciphering the link between online written communication and oral discourse is another area of interest that will be explored. This will also bridge the gap between registers that students adopt online for different types of writing depending on the function of the written text.

There are also plans to collaborate with Sherri Wei in Taiwan in order to exchange our experiences of b-learning practices in HE. We have already collaborated in a symposium in November, 2010 at the CARN International Conference 2010, Cambridge, UK, with Rossana Espinoza, another WIE PhD researcher, entitled, ‘Utopia and reality: Mismatch in action research cycles of online studies in three countries’ and it was a very positive experience that will be repeated in the near future. Presenting a

paper with my supervisor at BAAL, 09, with my supervisor, Steve Mann, was also a very enriching and useful collaboration as I learnt presentation skills from an experienced academic and presenter. The feedback from this presentation enabled the data analysis to develop with some perspectives that were suggested at this conference.

Maintaining collaboration with Steve and the University of Warwick is of great interest to me personally as to the University of Madeira. As the distance between us is not that far, I hope to build onto this relationship both in person and virtually.

Online networking is providing me with an abundance of AR and b-learning experts that I will be exchanging experiences and knowledge with. I am a member of the Learning and Development Group, the Blended Learning Forum, the Learning 2.0 and Linked to InBrain groups on LinkedIn. The Evaluation of Learners' Experiences of e-learning Special Interest Group (ELESIG) provides useful information and discussions about current online practices that I follow and hope to be partaking in their discussions more often. EdenTree have held some interesting Webinars that I have participated in and I have made contacts to also hold a webinar about AR and b-learning in the near future.

This research has thus opened the doors to many future projects and the data that has already been collected will be further analysed and disseminated in AR and B-learning environments. The knowledge acquired will be shared through collaborative projects and my teaching responsibilities at the University of Madeira and with the wider research community that I will continue to network with.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

**ÁREA: FORMAÇÃO CIENTÍFICA, CULTURAL, SOCIAL E ÉTICA****Unidade Curricular: Comunicação e Tecnologias da Informação****Bloco 2: Retórica e Comunicação****Ano lectivo: 2007/08 (2º Semestre)****Responsável: Prof. Doutor José Sílvio Moreira Fernandes****RETÓRICA E COMUNICAÇÃO****PROGRAMA****OBJECTIVOS**

- Compreender o sistema da retórica clássica.
- Entender os processos evolutivos do sistema da comunicação.
- Explicar o uso de técnicas da retórica nos novos meios de comunicação.
- Saber aplicar estratégias argumentativas em diversos contextos comunicacionais.

CONTEÚDOS**1. Retórica clássica**

- 1.1. Origens da retórica.
- 1.2. Teoria da retórica clássica.
- 1.3. Retórica, sofística e política.
- 1.4. Ascensão e declínio da retórica: causas e consequências.
- 1.5. Elementos da retórica clássica e sua aplicabilidade à realidade comunicacional contemporânea.

2. A nova retórica.

- 2.1. Demonstração e argumentação.
- 2.2. Adesão do auditório: estratégias de persuasão e técnicas argumentativas.
- 2.3. Uso quotidiano da argumentação.
- 2.4. Organização do texto argumentativo.

3. A retórica nos novos meios de comunicação.

- 3.1. Emergência da comunicação de massas.
- 3.2. Teorias e modelos de comunicação.
- 3.3. Retórica mediatizada: os *media* e a sua eficácia na construção de imagens do mundo.
- 3.4. Retórica e publicidade: do poder da palavra à eficácia da imagem.
- 3.5. Linguagem da persuasão na *internet*.

4. A retórica como discurso público.

- 4.1. Processos de formação da opinião pública.
- 4.2. Emergência e função dos líderes de opinião.
- 4.3. Opinião pública e sociedade digital.
- 4.4. Retórica do discurso político.
- 4.5. Retórica dos saberes: da cultura humanística à cultura científica.

5. Retórica e manipulação de informação.

- 5.1. Democracia e manipulação.
- 5.2. Manipulação e propaganda: causas, processos e consequências.

6. Módulo de escrita (em inglês): b-learning.

Obs. O Módulo de escrita será ministrado pela Dra. Jane Spínola.

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TEXTOS ONLINE:

- BOCC – Biblioteca Online de Ciências da Comunicação, www.bocc.ubi.pt
Silva Rhetoricae - Forest of Rhetoric - Error! Hyperlink reference not valid.

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Obs. Para cada ponto do programa, poderá ainda ser indicada bibliografia específica (monografias, artigos de revistas da especialidade e fontes primárias).

REGRAS DE AVALIAÇÃO

1. PERÍODO LECTIVO:

a) Dois trabalhos de grupo peso de 40% cada, sobre temas específicos do programa ou com eles correlacionados. Os trabalhos, no máximo de 15 páginas de formato A4, com tipo de letra *Times New Roman* ou equivalente, tamanho 12 e 1.5 de espaçamento, terão que reflectir, no âmbito de cada tema escolhido, os objectivos e os conteúdos estabelecidos no programa. Os grupos terão preferencialmente entre 3 e 5 elementos.

i) O primeiro trabalho deverá ser entregue até o dia 4 de Abril, em versão electrónica (na plataforma *moodle*) e em papel (Secretariado do DPEH). Esta componente valerá 20% da avaliação. Os restantes 20% estão reservados à apresentação à turma pelo grupo, com a participação obrigatória de todos os seus elementos (com duração total de 15 a 20 minutos), em calendário a designar.

ii) O segundo trabalho deverá ser entregue até ao dia 16 de Maio, em versão electrónica (na plataforma *moodle*) e em papel (Secretariado do DPEH). Esta componente valerá 20% da avaliação. Em calendário a fixar, os grupos serão convocados para que os seus elementos respondam por escrito, em 15 minutos e no máximo de uma página de formato A4, a uma questão relacionada com o conteúdo do trabalho. Esta componente valerá os restantes 20% da avaliação.

b) Módulo de escrita (b-learning): 20%, assim distribuídos:

- 4% para participação ou interacção on-line;
- 2 x 8% para escrita argumentativa.

Obs. A avaliação do Módulo de escrita (b-learning) estará associada às aulas ministradas no período entre 21 de Fevereiro e 13 de Março.

c) Os alunos que não obtiverem nota igual ou superior a 10 valores no total da avaliação deste período submetem-se à avaliação do período complementar.

2. PERÍODO COMPLEMENTAR:

Prova escrita, com peso de 40%.

Funchal, 6 de Fevereiro de 2008

Appendix 2



Questionnaire

This questionnaire will only take up 10 minutes of your time and is anonymous.
 Nothing you say can be linked to you at any time.
 Please answer truthfully as your answers shall be used for PhD research purposes at the University of Warwick, UK in order to create a project at the University of Madeira.

A - Please fill in the spaces with information about yourself and place an X in the correct box.

My name is: _____

I am _____ years old.

I am male / female

I am a fulltime student / working student.

My degree is: _____ I am in Year: _____

My department is: _____

I hope to get a job as / in: _____

B – Please cross (X) **one** answer or fill in the spaces,
 unless indicated otherwise.

1- I own a computer.

Yes / No

1 a - If you answered YES, is your computer a desktop or laptop?

Yes / No Where? _____

2- I have to share my computer with other people.

Yes / No

2 a - If you answered YES, with how many people do you share it with? _____

3 - I have internet access.

Yes / No

4 - I use my computer while studying

all the time.
 most of the time.
 hardly ever.
 never.

5 – I use my computer for:

(Grade answers from 1– 5: most used=1 to least used=5)

internet research.
 writing up my work.
 playing games.
 chats / forums / blogs.
 email.
 Others: _____

6- I consider my computer skills

Excellent.
 Good.
 Average.
 Weak.
 Very weak.

7 - I have taken computer courses.

Yes / No

The course/s was/ were about: _____

8 - I have taken an on-line course(s)

Yes / No

8 a - If you answered YES, identify the on-line course: _____

many important things.
 not much.
 nothing.

9 - I know what B-Learning means.

Yes / No

9 a - If you answered YES, B-Learning means: _____

10 - I have partaken in a b-learning course.

Yes / No

10 a - If you answered YES, identify the course: _____

10 b - I learnt:

- many important things.
 not much.
 nothing.

11 - I would like to participate in an on-line course.
11 a - Reasons: _____

Yes / No

12 - I would like to participate in a b-learning course.
12 a - Reasons: _____

Yes / No

C – Please tell us about your knowledge of English.

1- I have studied English at school for _____ years.

2 – I consider my overall English

- Excellent.
 Good.
 Average.
 Weak.
 Very weak.

3 - My writing in English is

- Excellent.
 Good.
 Average.
 Weak.
 Very weak.

4- My main difficulties in English are _____

4 - I will need to write English fluently in my profession

Yes / No

5 - I would take an English Writing Course if given the chance.

Yes / No

Thank you for your time and help.

Appendix 3

Rhetoric and Communication

- Schedule
- Moodle: Introduction
- Argumentation

Face-to-Face Lessons for Writing Module:

- 21st. February
- 22nd. February
- 28th. February
- 6th March
- 13th March

Deadlines for Online Work

- 1st. Task: **29th. February**
- 2nd. Task: **14th. March**

My email: jane@uma.pt

The image consists of three vertically stacked screenshots of the Moodle platform, each enclosed in a rounded rectangular border.

Top Screenshot: A screenshot of the Moodle login page. The title "Moodle" is at the top. Below it is a large input field containing the URL "http://moodle.dme.uma.pt".

Middle Screenshot: A screenshot of the Moodle Home Page. The title "Moodle Home Page" is at the top. The page displays various course announcements and links. A screenshot of a browser window showing the same Moodle site is overlaid on the main page.

Bottom Screenshot: A screenshot of the Moodle "Registering" page. It has two main sections: "Acesso para utilizadores já inscritos!" and "É a sua primeira visita aqui?". The "Acesso para utilizadores já inscritos!" section contains fields for "Nome de utilizador" and "Palavra chave", along with a "Entrar" button. The "É a sua primeira visita aqui?" section contains text about the registration process and a note about forgotten login information.

Profile Page

Jane Spinola

Perfis | Editar perfil | Mensagens no fórum | Blog | Relatórios de actividade

Requerido

Nome*: Jane
Apelido: Spinola
Endereço de correio electrónico*: jane@uma.pt
Ver correio
Correio electrónico activo: Este endereço de correio electrónico está activado
Cidade/Estado: Funchal
Selecione um país: Portugal
Zona horária: Hora local do servidor
Língua preferida: English (en)
Descrição*: Jane Spinola
Trebuchet

Entrance to Courses

Moodle no DME

Nome de utilizador: Jane
Português

Últimos utilizadores activos (nos últimos 5 min): Jane Spinola

Notícias: Sem notícias
Mensagens: Sem mensagens
Notícias: Sem notícias

As minhas disciplinas

História da Ciéncia e Tecnologia
Professor: José Manuel N. Castanheira da Costa
Professor: Jane Spinola

A Ciéncia e da Tecnologia marcaram profundamente o séc. XX e é de prever que a sua importâcia cresça neste segundo milénio. Nesta disciplina, pretende-se dar uma visão da Ciéncia e da Tecnologia através da história da sua evolução desde os seus primeiros passos até aos dias de hoje. Pretende-se abordar a Ciéncia e a Tecnologia, sobretudo, sobre a evolução da Matemática e da Física e as suas relações com o desenvolvimento tecnológico. Para cada época serão escolhidos temas de estudo e serão realizadas discussões e analisadas as suas consequências na evolução da Ciéncia e da Tecnologia.

Retórica e Comunicação
Professor: Sílvia Fernandes
Professor: Jane Spinola

Os objectivos da cadeira Rétorica e Comunicação são: - compreender a importância da retórica para a comunicação; - o uso de técnicas da retórica nos novos meios de comunicação.

Retórica e Comunicação on Moodle

Nome de utilizador: Jane spinola.: Amano (regressar ao meu perfil na rede)

Últimas notícias (Ainda não foram publicadas notícias)

Próximos eventos (Não há eventos próximos)

Ir ao calendário...

Actividade recente (Atividade desde Segs 13 Fevereiro 2012): Relatório completo das actividades

Sem novidades desde último acesso

Mensagens: Sem mensagens à esquerda
Notícias: Sem notícias à esquerda

Últimos utilizadores activos (nos últimos 5 min): Jane Spinola

MoodleDME | EDG 1.02

Participantes | Fóruns | Recursos | Pesquisar nos fóruns | Pesquisa avançada | Próximos eventos | As minhas disciplinas | Todas as disciplinas ...

Lista de tópicos

Welcome to your B-learning experience in this course! We will begin by understanding and exploring Moodle. This shall be our daily tool for our assignments and work carried out during this semester. Enjoy your learning experience!

I look forward to interacting with you! Join me in the forums so we can all get to know each other better. Simply choose one that interests you and tell us why.

Take care all, Jane

WELCOME

Programa e Regime de Avaliação

Programa e Temas

Cinema and Films

TV Shows

Sports

World News

Fórum Fórum

Fórum	Descrição	Temas	Subsistema
Welcome Hello to all,	Welcome to the course of Rhetoric and Communication, 2008. We hope you have a very fun-filled semester and that, above all, you learn how to become more eloquent users of language, both written and spoken. We hope you enjoy this learning experience. Good luck!	0	Sim

Fóruns de aprendizagem

Século	Fórum	Descrição	Temas	Subsistema
1	Cinema and Films	At the request of some class-mates here go a few more topics to discuss. How often do you go to the cinema? Do you like watching films? Is there any difference when u watch a film on your TV or Computer compared to in the cinema? I think there are some differences, but I'll let you all do the talking.	17	Sim
	TV Shows	How much time do you spend in front of the TV? Do you have any favourite TV Shows? What do you like about them?	6	Sim
	Sports	Let's go back catching up with some 'Missing without a trace' episodes. I find it interesting. I also like series that profile people. They always come up with some theories... 'No time' is one of the most common excuses not to practice sports. I'm also one of those. Are you?	14	Sim

Hello all.
In this forum, I leave it up to you to begin new themes . Feel free to discuss whatever you feel you would like to bring up.
If you need my help, just send me a message.
Take care all.
Jane

Tema	Iniciado por	Respostas	Última mensagem
what is Pan?		1	Seg, 19 Fev 2008, 18:50
Radio Control		3	Seg, 19 Fev 2008, 14:25
Rhetoric and communication		2	Dom, 17 Fev 2008, 19:49
Racism Yes, Not ?		4	Dom, 17 Fev 2008, u.zk
Song's		0	Dom, 17 Fev 2008, 02:54
Uma University		12	Dom, 17 Fev 2008, 02:54
Music		0	Seg, 19 Fev 2008, 04:37
The power of words in world		5	Seg, 19 Fev 2008, 01:24
Blogs		1	Qua, 13 Fev 2008, 23:37

Interacting on Forums

The screenshot shows a Moodle forum interface. At the top, there's a navigation bar with links to 'MoodleHOME', 'E&G 1.02', 'Fóruns', 'TV Shows', and 'Mathematic Results'. Below the navigation, a post from a user named 'Mathematic Results' is displayed. The post contains a message about average TV watching time and its impact on teenagers. A reply from another user, 'Re: Mathematic Results', is also shown, expressing a different opinion. The interface includes standard forum controls like 'Mostrar mensagem ascendente' and 'Responder'.

Posting on the Forums

This screenshot shows the process of posting a new message in a forum. The 'A sua resposta' (Your answer) section is open, showing a text area with a rich text editor toolbar. The toolbar includes options for font, size, bold, italic, underline, and various icons for lists, tables, and images. Below the text area are fields for 'Subject' (set to 'Re: Mathematic Results'), 'Message' (containing a message), 'Format' (set to 'HTML format'), 'Subscription' (set to 'Send me email copies of posts to this forum'), and 'Attachment' (with a maximum size of 500KB). At the bottom is a 'Post to forum...' button.

Assignments

The screenshot shows a Moodle assignment page titled 'Joice'. On the left, there's a sidebar with a yellow background containing links to 'Lição 9', 'Hi. This is who I am.', 'Summary', 'Lição 10/11', 'Sites to help with your research on', and 'Biography'. The main content area is currently empty, indicated by a large white space and a progress bar at the bottom.

Uploading Assignments

MoodleDME > ESG 1.01 > Trabalhos > Outline

Hello to you all.

We shall now begin to work more specifically on the essay you shall be handing in for assessment. I hot sources and have begun to read up on the theme you chose to write about. Please follow the steps below.

- 1- Look for information in the library, online in books, magazines and newspapers and get a general idea.
- 2- Determine which you think shall be your main topics within the theme you chose.
- 3- Look more carefully at each main topic and find which sub-topics you may need to develop.
- 4- **Start writing!** Start writing your essay with what you have gathered from doing the above mentioned tasks.
- 5- Send me your outline by mid-night this Thursday, 22nd November.

Good work! ☺
Jane

Disponível de: Terça, 20 Novembro 2007, 22:00
Data de entrega: Quinta, 22 Novembro 2007, 23:00

Submeter rascunho
Ainda não foram submetidos ficheiros

Enviar um ficheiro (Tamanho máximo: 10Mb)
 [Browse] [Enviar este ficheiro]

Personal Tracking

MoodleDME > Jane Spinola

Jane Spinola

Profile Edit profile Forum posts Blog


Jane Spinola
City/town: Funchal
Courses: História da Ciência e Tecnologia, Retórica e Comunicação
Last access: Monday, 18 February 2008, 08:58 PM (1 min 11 secs)
Roles: Aluno

[Change password] [Messages]
You are logged in as Jane Spinola (Logout) [MoodleDME]

Blog

MoodleDME > Jane Spinola > Blogs

Jane Spinola

Profile Edit profile Forum posts Blog

Add a new entry
No visible entries here

« »

The image contains two screenshots of the Moodle DME (Digital Media Environment) interface.

Screenshot 1: Writing a blog

This screenshot shows the 'Add a new entry' page for a blog. The title is 'Writing a blog'. The 'General' tab is selected. The 'Entry title*' field is empty. The 'Blog entry body*' field contains some placeholder text and includes a rich text editor toolbar with various formatting options like font, size, bold, italic, etc.

Screenshot 2: Messages

This screenshot shows the 'Messages' page. It displays a list of messages and users. On the left, there are three dropdown menus: 'Mensagens' (with 0 messages), 'Utilizadores activos' (Jane Spinola), and 'Menu do Blog' (with 'Adicionar novo tópico' and 'Ver os meus tópicos'). On the right, a detailed message window is open for a user named 'Fernandes'. The message content is 'Re: Great Photos'. The message window includes a recipient's profile picture, a 'Remove contact' link, a 'Block contact' link, and a 'Message history' link. At the bottom of the message window, it says 'Version without frames and JavaScript' and 'Transferring data from moodle.dme.una.pt...'. The message window has a 'Send message' button.

Appendix 4

Writing Module in English

- Schedule
- Moodle: Introduction

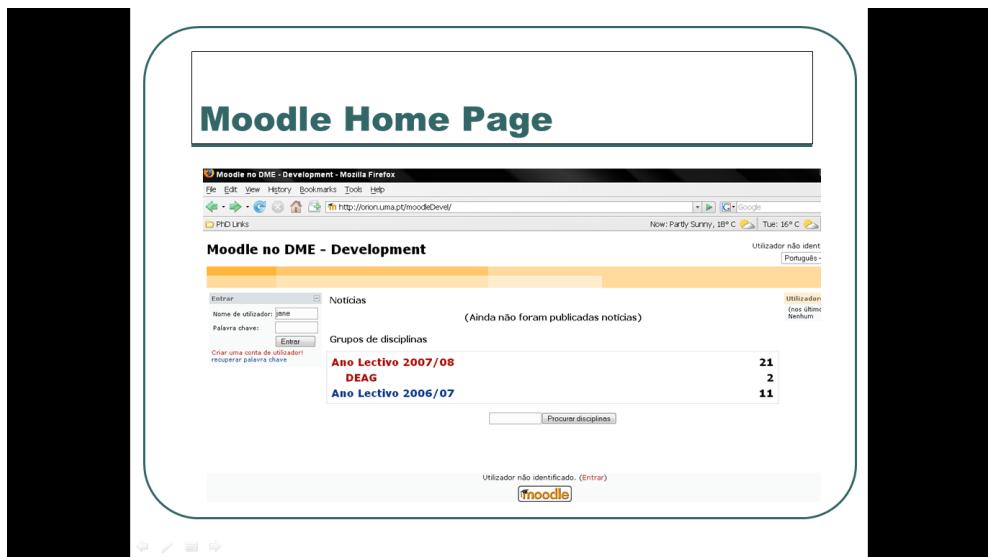
Face-to-Face Lessons for Writing Module:

- 18th March (Tuesday)
- 20th March (Thursday)
- 1st April (Tuesday)
- 8th April (Tuesday)
- 15th April (Tuesday)

Deadlines for Online Work

- 1st. Task: **21st March**
- 2nd. Task: **4th April**
- 3rd Task: **11th April**
- 4th Task: **16th April**

My email: jane@uma.pt



Appendix 5

**DEPARTAMENTO DE ESTUDOS ANGLÍSTICOS E GERMANÍSTICOS****SYLLABUS**

3. GRAU: Estudos Ingleses e Relações Empresariais (1º Ciclo)	4. DEGREE: English and Business Studies (1 st Cycle)		
DISCIPLINA: Língua Inglesa B2.2	CÓDIGO: LIN 01-02	COURSE: English Language B2.2	CODE: LIN 01-02
5. ANO ACADÉMICO: 2007-08	6. S semestre: 2	7. ACADEMIC YEAR: 2007-08	8. S semester: 2
UNIDADES DE CRÉDITO: 7,5 ECTS		CREDIT UNITS: 7,5 ECTS	
TEMPO DE TRABALHO: 10:30h/Semana; 210h/Semestre		WORKLOAD: 10:30h/Week; 210h/Semester	
DOCENTES: Doutora Dominique Costa Dra Jane Spínola: Módulo de Escrita 'B-Learning'		LECTURERS: Doctor Dominique Costa Dra Jane Spínola: B-Learning Writing Module	

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This English Language B2.2 course aims at developing reading, speaking, writing and listening skills in first-year undergraduates and to promote their confidence and fluency in the use of both written and spoken English. A recycling and consolidation of linguistic structures previously studied will be followed by an acquisition of new linguistic structures so that the students' knowledge of the English tongue may be improved.

The above aims can only be entirely achieved if students engage in class activities and fully commit to self-studying on a daily basis.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of the second semester students are expected to have developed language competencies with regard to listening, reading, writing, and speaking. They should understand the main ideas of complex texts, produce clear and detailed texts on a wide range of subjects, and interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible without strain for either party.

COURSE PROGRAMME

To consolidate students' knowledge of the key components of English grammar, to broaden their range of vocabulary, to help improve pronunciation, and to develop academic writing skills, the following aspects will be focused on throughout the course:

I. English Language

Reading will take up good part of the students' self-study program. Students will practise a variety of reading modes with the help of authentic English texts that will be handed in class.

- Reading, Interpreting and Linguistic Analysis in Context (different types of text and register)
- Fields and Modes of Discourse
- Cohesion and Coherence in Texts
- Speaking / Reading Aloud (stress / rhythm / intonation)
- Reading / Listening Activities
- Varieties of English: Standard / Non-Standard Forms
- Dictation Exercises
- Rephrasing Exercises
- Grammatical Exercises

II. Extensive Reading

The following short stories and novels will be studied and various tasks based on these will be given to students. These activities are exam relevant.

Short Stories: - “The Open Window” by ‘Saki’ (H. H. Munro)

- “Under the Banyan Tree” by R. K Narayan

Novels: - *The Day of the Triffids* (1951) by John Wyndham

- *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) by Jean Rhys

III. Writing Module

Writing genres and writing techniques will be worked on through B-learning. Writing skills with different types of texts will be focused on and students will be expected to hand in writing assignments on a weekly basis. Discussions will be held on online forums and a reflective blog shall be kept by each student.

- **IV. Grammar**

Revision, consolidation and acquisition of grammar items:

- **Classes of Words** (nouns / determiners / verbs / adjectives / adverbs / prepositions / conjunctions): consolidation
 - **Verb Tenses:** consolidation
 - **Irregular Verbs:** Full List
 - **Modals:** Present, Future, Past
 - **Direct Speech / Indirect Speech**
 - **Active Voice / Passive Voice**
 - **Conditionals:**

- Conditional I , Conditional II, Conditional III

- **Syntax:**

- Parsing / Identification / Function of Phrases

- **Types of Sentences:**

- Complex Sentences: Relative / Non-finite Clauses

- Compound-Complex Sentences

- **ASSESSMENT**

All students who have enrolled in this English Language B2.2 course will be tested by **Periodic Assessment**.

Students are advised to attend **all classes**, since all the work assigned during the semester is exam-relevant.

Home assignments are **compulsory**. In class meetings, students are expected to be participative and make active contributions.

Final grading consists of:

a) B-Learning Activities – Writing Module	20%
b) Written Exam 1	40%
c) Written Exam 2	40%

a) B-Learning Activities – Writing Module (20%)

- online participation in forums / discussion boards	4%
- writing assignments (4% x 4)	16%

NB: This writing module is mandatory for **all** students

b) Written Exam 1 (40%)

MARK	COURSE RESULT
below 7.5	Students fail the course and cannot take any other exam
between 7.5 and 9.4	Students take the Re-sit Written Exam in the <i>Período Complementar</i>
9.5 or higher	Students pass this exam and do not repeat it in the <i>Período Complementar</i>

c) Written Exam 2 (40%)

MARK	COURSE RESULT
below 7.5	Students fail the course and cannot take any other exam
between 7.5 and 9.4	Students take the Re-sit Written Exam in the <i>Período Complementar</i>
9.5 or higher	Students pass this exam and do not repeat it in the <i>Período Complementar</i>

NOTE: The *Período Complementar* is reserved for those students who have obtained marks between 7.5 and 9.4 in their Written Exams and for those students who, having passed their Written Exams, wish to do *Melhoria de Nota*.

i. **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

I - Compulsory Works

1. Compulsory Readings

- **Selection of texts and handouts** provided by the lecturers for every class.
- **Set Works**

- Bryson, Bill, *The Mother Tongue: English and How it Got that Way*, Harper Collins

Short Stories:

- ‘Saki’ (H. H. Munro), “The Open Window”
- Narayan, R. K., “Under the Banyan Tree”

Novels:

- Wyndham, John, *The Day of the Triffids* (1951), Penguin Books
- Rhys, Jean, *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966), Penguin Books

2. Grammar

- Foley, Mark & Diane Hall, *Advanced Learners' Grammar - A Self-study Reference and Practice Book with Answers* (London, 2005)

3. Dictionaries

- Jones, Daniel, *English Pronouncing Dictionary*, C.U.P.
- *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* (New Edition, with CD ROM), Longman
- **NB: Students must own their own copy of the compulsory works.**

II - Recommended Works

• Grammars

- BIBER, Douglas et al (1999), *Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English*, Pearson ESL
- *Collins Cobuild Grammar Patterns 1: Verbs*, Collins
- *Collins Cobuild Grammar Patterns 2: Nouns and Adjectives*, Collins
- MURPHY, Raymond, *English Grammar in Use*, C.U.P.

- QUIRK, Randolph et al (1985), *A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language*, Addison Wesley Publishing Company
- SINCLAIR, John, *Collins Cobuild English Grammar*, Collins
- SWAN, Michael, et al., *How English Works*, O.U.P.
- SWAN, Michael, *Practical English Usage*, O.U.P.
- VINCE, Michael, *Advanced Language Practice*, Heinemann

• **Dictionaries**

- *Collins Cobuild Dictionary of English Language*, Collins
- *Collins Cobuild English Dictionary for Advanced Learners*, Collins
- *Macmillan English Dictionary for Advanced Learners*, Macmillan
- *Novo Michaelis* (Port./Ingl./Port.), 2 vols
- *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, O.U.P.
- *Oxford Dictionary of Current Idiomatic English*, 2 vols, O.U.P.
- *Oxford Dictionary of Phrasal Verbs and their Idioms*, O.U.P.

Appendix 6

1. *Good afternoon Profesora Dominique. I'm speaking to Profesora Dominique Costa who is a lecturer at the English and German studies department. Today is the 4th of January and it is about 10 past 4 right now. My first question for you is what courses are you currently lecturing and what years?*
2. So this year... in this semester, I'm teaching first years. So: English I: a language course +++ and then umm... Commonwealth Literature for senior students in the 4th Year.
3. *Ok. And how important is writing in these courses?*
4. Ok. In the 1st year, students arrive at the university with many flaws. More in the form of +... than in the efficiency of language in the spoken form. So, basically what we do, in this type of course, is to go back to uhh grammar essentially. So, syntax... everything which has to do with grammar. And then also vocabulary and essentially what they are asked to do is to read texts in English, from different sources, they should be able to provide answers.. uhh... reading comprehension; questions that they should answer because they're so much.. so used to in the secondary schools to use informal language, especially in the spoken form. They have uhh they find it very hard to adapt to academic writing. So, because generally they have no clue how to ... what sort of register to ... we request of them to use here. So we have to go into different types of discourse: formal, informal. And give them the rules of formal written English or academic English. And they find it very hard to because uh... a simple example: they can't get away with not using contractions for example. That's something that they have done forever in secondary school, let's say for 8 years,

so they will use contractions every time, uhh they have a lot of difficulties seeing the differences between formal usage of language for the ... and informal so uhh their written discourse generally is uhh you will find many markers of orality in the written discourse; the tone most of the time is going to be wrong; not the appropriate tone, so Uhh because they haven't done any of it: this type of writing in secondary school. So, they find it difficult to adapt in the 1st year and also their written is also quite chaotic. They don't know how to structure an answer, even more so a composition. That's uhh. These are faults that they bring also because they lack these elements in their mother tongue I think. So when you transpose that into a foreign language, it's even more difficult for them to bridge the gap. Essentially, so what we do in the 1st year in English I course is going back to basics, revising and trying to consolidate and erasing those basic mistakes they bring in from secondary school. And explain to them how to provide concise but correct answers in Standard English. Essentially, it's what we do.

5. *So are there any particular writing tasks that you assign these students?*
6. Well, in English I essentially, I give them different types of texts, either articles or parts of fiction, which they have to read aloud first and then work on the lexis of the text and then simply, we write 6 - 7 questions about the text and they are asked to write answers; let's say in 5 to 10 lines sometimes. Something that they do systematically because they've done so in secondary school is to simply cut and paste from the original text without signaling that it's a quotation. Ok? They simply pick out the information and paste it in the answer. And something that we ask them to do here is to re-phrase. So, provide, pick up the information – fine- but then use your own words and provide your own personal answer and

not simply just copy and paste. 99% of the students will do that: going to the text, even if the answer does not fit the way, the question, they will simply pick up it and put it there even if there is lack of cohesion and... so that's something that they have to be taught. Uhhh... and uhhh and also essentially how to organize compositions. Ok? They are generally asked to read a full text or novel; something that are quite unaccustomed to because they generally read just a few short stories, sometimes a play but a full text, let's say a hundred page novel; they have never done that so they are now required to do that and in the written exam, they are asked to write a composition or a topic taken from the novel.

7. *Ok. What about letter writing for example, do they do any of that?*
8. A little bit at the beginning of the semester when we deal with and when we revise the use of punctuation, and spelling rules and so on, and different types of texts, yes, but very, very, very quickly.

9. *Ok.*
10. +++

11. *Maybe notes?*
12. Notes also but not such.
13. +++

14. No, I haven't done it. Not in the 1st year.
15. *So, what pedagogic practices do you use in order to+++*
16. Well, it's difficult to say, mainly I ... what I've tried to do is draw their attention to mistakes that they bring in from secondary, that they are not even aware that they are making them. This is something that is constant, year after year. They arrive; they think they have a good level of English, even in the written form because nobody has ever shown them that they were doing these mistakes. And

what is frightening, in my opinion, is that many of these are basic, elementary mistakes that should not be there after 8 years of learning a language.

17. What do you consider basic mistakes?

18. Basic mistakes, for example umm.. not making a difference between this in the singular, followed a by a noun in the plural, so concordance of plural and singular, concordance between single subject and verb ... umm... using pronouns in the wrong way: instead of 'it', 'he' or 'she'. You know, interference from the mother tongue. Plenty of these uhh... irregular verbs it's awful. Even though irregular verbs which are so... you know you find them everywhere, things like I don't know... 'teach', you'll be getting things like 'teached' and 'cutted'. So things like that; basic stuff. Most students will be doing lots of mistakes on those, year after year after year, so they have to study the irregular verbs from scratch in English I for example. Syntax can be also very problematic, lack of cohesion, repetition, shifts of tenses between present and past and then back to the present and then past. You name it.

19. So when you're assessing the work that they hand in to you, these are the types of things that you're paying attention to.

20. Yes, and I try always to, you know, warn them and to draw their attention that they are making these mistakes which should not be made already at this level.

21. And how do you do that?

22. Well, I generally when they hand them over and then when I give them back, I make a list, for example, of some of the mistakes, the most current mistakes that I found in their writing and I give examples of mistakes which have shown up and I tell them 'Well, you have to watch out for these. These are this type of mistakes and should not be here. Why do you do them?' And sometimes I make

a comparison to Portuguese to show them that there is interference of the mother tongue and other times some of the mistakes, some of them are quite umm difficult to understand because they make mistakes in things which are similar to Portuguese so logically it's not interference of the mother tongue but they're still there. Ok? And these are recurrent mistakes, every batch of students every year ... they come along with the same types of mistakes, year after year, so I don't know what's going on in secondary school but they arrive here, all of them, systematically doing the same types of mistakes. Why?...

23. *When you give them the writing tasks, so... you've just spoken about feedback you give them after the task. What about before the writing task? Do you give them the criteria that you're going to be using? Do you give them guidelines?*

24. Not always. Sometimes. I always call their attention to +++ find that they are in an academic setting, therefore what is expected of them in the written form, is for them to use standard English and academic English, so in a formal context. I tell them don't do this, that, that but they know... after a while they know that they should but then when they write, it's nevertheless still there. Ok? So sometimes I circle and I put a question mark... 'Oh... I didn't know.' 'I wasn't thinking about what I was doing or was writing.' And so on and so on. That's the type of answer that you get. Ok?

25. *Do you feel that they learn from your feedback afterwards?*

26. Not all of them. I feel that some of them, when they arrive, they are already so far behind the minimum, that they won't be able to bridge the gap: some of them. Those who are trying or are willing to make an effort, after a while, they start, you know, paying attention and especially for example..., I see some of this in the spoken form and when they read aloud I call their attention to the

mistakes, the basic mistakes they keep on doing...things of Portuguese interference, things like the pronunciation of the 'l' sound in 'walk', 'would'... some after a while, some of them when they read and they say [wuld], they stop and say 'oops, sorry, would' and so they do a sort of self-correction. Fine. That's what I want them to do when they write. Some of them, after a while, can do that, others... it takes much longer.

27. *So, what do you consider most important in the assessment of writing itself?*

28. Well, speaking about 1st year; the exams are balanced in two parts. So, let's say, one part is written performance, per se, as such. That's what concerns providing the answers in full form and academic writing that's uh... plus the composition. That's more or less 50% of the exam and then I have the other part of the exam which concerns grammar, essentially phonetics and at the beginning of the semester we look at different things such as differences between British English and American English, the use of abbreviations, and so on, tenses, verb tenses. So, the other 50% are given to that, so it's a balance between the two. They should have a minimum in each part to pass the course.

29. *Do you find a difference between your first year students and your 4th year students?*

30. Thank God yes. Yes, there's a clear evolution. When they reach the 4th, there's a decrease in the number of students. OK? Some of them are not able to bridge the gap ever because they are so far behind when they arrive. Those of you who stay on and struggle and overcome their difficulties, when they reach the fourth year, they are proficient. In the written form, almost... uhhh not like a native speaker, but very close to it and they are aware of what they do, what they write. I think that they were not aware when they were first year students of course.

31. *So, what do you consider proficient writing? What do they have to master?*

32. Proficient writing is the writer in which writing you do not find those basic mistakes, who is able to distinguish between different tenors of discourse, different registers, uhh, who has already some sort of literary sensitivity. Ok? That can make a difference between different types of texts. And umm... essentially that's it. Cohesion is there, you have structure to answers. A different level of lexis.+++ usage. In 4 years, it's quite amazing, I think... the progress that we see and that's a good way and that's the case this year in which I am teaching a first year course and I am teaching a 4th year course, and the students that I have in that 4th year course have been my students when they arrived here, 4 years ago as 1st year students. So, the difference is enormous. Thank God.

33. *My last question for you today is: If we could make a change in the way that we are teaching writing and academic writing, especially taking into account that the Bolonha Treaty is coming along, ummm what should be taken into account? What should be changed?*

34. Hmm... hard to say. Uhhh very hard to say, this one, because, there are so many things involved at the same time, Uhh I think that students... the problem that Portuguese students have in my opinion is that the input on the students' part is not enough. Ok? These students that come from the Portuguese secondary system are not used to work on their own. That's something which troubles me in what concerns the Bologna process is that they should already, at this level, when they arrive here, show some sort of learning autonomy. They do not. Ok? In spite of being advised from the beginning of the semester, that they have to work on their own, prepare classes, do the written assignments which are given to them. What happens is that, most of the time, they have not done the

assignments, they have not read the handouts that we are giving them or that you gave them, they have not studied the different aspects of +++ through the semester, so it is as though uhh on their part, ... Well, it's not their fault, is it? So, because they have not been used to any sort of learning autonomy in the secondary schools and when they arrive here, they already have a hard time coping with the different system. Umm errr I can't be very optimistic about the future. Especially in the first few years of the implementation of the bologna process. Yes, because I think that most of the Portuguese students, the case here of this university, and the students that we have here, I think they are not prepared to cope with the demands of the Bologna system. Ok... Less..ummm... because for the Bologna system to function properly, you have to work much harder outside class. Ok? So they have to do things that they do not do at the moment. They have to work in the library. Some of the 1st year students never have been to the library. Ok? Some of them maybe don't know that there is a library or if they know they haven't used it during the whole semester. Ok. So they don't prepare anything, so... If they come unprepared to class, if there is a reduction in the number of classes, and if there is an increase on their studying... if they don't do that, how is it going to be? I fear that the number of failings will be much higher in the very near future. The first ...

35. just get used to it and change their way of working.

36. But I think that first, the first group of students that will be coming in next year, the change is going to be dramatic. It's already hard for them as it is. Then, with this new system, I think they're going to be completely lost. This could be, there is a possibility that this could be softened if we had the possibility of having tutorials. A tutorial system functioning like in England. Because as you know,

because of fund cutting we do not have enough staff to do this. We would have to have, for this to function, we would have to have small groups of students, that should be taken care of by individual tutors. Essentially, in the first semester, to help them organizing their studying and be there to you know to... because they have many problems and you can see some of those students who are willing, who are really keen on learning, there are not many but some of them, try but they don't know how to. It's going to be hard with this Bologna system because we are not going to have this tutorial system which I think is a must to change +++ so it's going to be something quite complicated to maintain...

37. Just hope for the best then.

38. Yes, we'll see... we'll see.

39. Ok. Thank you very much for your time and for your help and I'll interview you again in a few weeks time. Thank you.

40. You're welcome. OK.

Appendix 7

Structure of Argumentative texts:

- a) Introduction – thesis – conclusion
- b) Introduction – thesis – antithesis – conclusion
- c) Introduction – thesis – antithesis – synthesis - conclusion

Jane Spinola 2



Exercise:

'What kinds of censorship exist in our society where there is, officially, no censorship?'

- 1- Brainstorm the idea with a partner.
Write down your different ideas.
- 2- Write up a Major and Minor Premise.
- 3- Think about how you can put your brainstormed ideas together.
Write an outline of your argumentative text

Jane Spinola 9



Exercise:

- **Task 1: The main thesis, supporting arguments and conclusion.**
 - a.What is the main thesis?**
Circle the main thesis. Then write "main thesis" in the margin next to it.
 - b.What are the three supporting arguments?**
Circle each of the three supporting arguments. Then write "argument 1", "argument 2" and "argument 3" next to each one.
(Note: each of these consists of more than one sentence)
 - c.What is the conclusion?**
Circle the conclusion and write "conclusion" in the margin next to it

Resolution of Task 1

Childcare

The government should provide more financial assistance to parents who use childcare. Childcare centres may assist children in their early development. They give children an opportunity to mix with other children and to develop social skills at an early age. Parents and children need to spend some time apart. Children become less dependent on their parents and parents themselves are less stressed and more effective care-givers when there are periods of separation. Parents who cannot go to work because they don't have access to childcare facilities cannot contribute to the national economy. They are not able to utilise their productive skills and do not pay income tax. Government support for childcare services assists individual families and is important for the economic well-being of the whole nation.

- Main Thesis
- Argument 1
- Argument 2
- Argument 3
- Conclusion

Generic Outline

I. Introduction

- A. thesis: the main argument
- B. subarguments
 - 1. shape of the paper
 - 2. how everything interconnects

II. Body

- A. argument/paragraph 1
 - 1. state the argument, in context of overall thesis
 - 2. evidence, support, examples
 - 3. tie off the argument
- B. argument/paragraph 2
 - 1. state the argument, in context of overall thesis and previous argument (transition)
 - 2. evidence, support, examples
 - 3. tie off the argument
- C. argument/paragraph 3
 - 1. state the argument, in context of overall thesis and previous argument (transition)
 - 2. evidence, support, examples
 - 3. tie off the argument

III. Conclusion

- A. draw all the arguments together to show how they support the thesis
- B. make some broader speculations about the significance of it all

História da Ciência e da Tecnologia

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Appendix 8

MoodleDME > EdG 1 02 > Forums > Cinema and Films Update this

This forum allows everyone to choose whether to subscribe
 Obriga todos a estarem s...
 Mostrar/editar subscriptores
 Anular a subscrição n...

At the request of some class-mates here go a few more topics to discuss.

How often do you go to the cinema? Do you like watching films? Is there any difference when u watch a film on your TV or Computer compared to in the cinema?
I think there are some differences, but I'll let you all do the talking.

Começar um novo tema	Iniciado por	Respostas	Última mensagem
CSI		5	Sáb, 24 Mai 2008, 20:54
What was the last movie that you saw?		50	Sáb, 19 Abr 2008, 21:58
SAW I II III IV		10	Qui, 10 Abr 2008, 00:24
Hitman		7	Seg, 7 Abr 2008, 20:50
The Mist		4	Ter, 1 Abr 2008, 13:38
Oscars 2008 - Deserving Winners or not?		6	Qui, 27 Mar 2008, 23:37
Lion King		11	Qui, 27 Mar 2008, 12:45
RAMBO IV		7	Dom, 23 Mar 2008, 22:19

MoodleDME > EdG 1 02 > Forums > Open forum Update this

This forum allows everyone to choose whether to subscribe
 Obriga todos a estarem s...
 Mostrar/editar subscriptores
 Anular a subscrição n...

Hello all.

In this forum, I leave it up to you to begin new themes . Feel free to discuss whatever you feel you would like to bring up.

If you need my help, just send me a message.

Take care all.
Jane

Começar um novo tema	Iniciado por	Respostas	Última mensagem
Good vacations		0	Qua, 18 Jun 2008, 23:57
Food		14	Dom, 8 Jun 2008, 22:03
Grupo Lógica e Raciocínio		0	Qua, 28 Mai 2008, 01:25
what's your favorite perfume and why?		27	Sáb, 24 Mai 2008, 14:51
What's your favorite football team?		20	Sáb, 24 Mai 2008, 14:43
Cartoons		4	Jane Spinola Sáb, 17 Mai 2008, 12:33
Racism Yes, Not ?		19	Qui, 8 Mai 2008, 21:05
Opinion about Photography		35	Qua, 30 Abr 2008, 00:03

Open forum -> Food
por Quinta, 17 April 2008, 16:24

Hi 2 all of u
I decided on a new theme...hmmmmmm...a very tasty 1 anyway.
Lets all talk about food...favorites?
My favorite food is pizza...I normally don't eat pizza everyday or so, because otherwise I would b twice my size, and I don't consider it "real food" in a healthwise sense.
My favorite place 2 eat pizza is in Garajau at Carbonara Pizzaria. I found that I could mix and match the pizza according 2 my taste. So I tend 2 put some veggies and an extra dose of shrimp.
If u by and chance want 2 taste something that is mouthwatering and tantalizes your taste buds, ask for a Pizza Amalfi, with shrimp as an extra. They also put cream on this pizza to "link" all the ingredients together.
No u can understand y I don't normally eat pizza even though it's my favorite food...because it's so indulging and rich I can only eat half the pizza at a time.
Well I also like other foods, pasta and seafood based recipes r my favorite but I never discourage the strength of vegetables.
So ppl..let's c what your favorite recipes or foods r..please comment because moodle is taking a nap at the moment and we still need 2 practice our English till the end of the semester and what better way 2 do this than helping each other out while we r talking about something we like?

Take care
-M-



Appendix 9

The screenshot shows a Windows Internet Explorer window titled "Histórico de Mensagens - Windows Internet Explorer". The URL is <http://moodle.dme.uma.pt/message/history.php?user1=51&user2=1340>. The window displays a conversation between two users: E and Jane Spinola.

The interface includes a sidebar with a contact list and a navigation menu. The main area shows a message from Jane Spinola on Saturday, November 10, 2007, at 13:38:

Jane Spinola [13:38]: Hi There,
Just a reminder: please go onto Moodle and participate in our forums. We've got a fun one running that will help you get to know your colleagues and get used to interacting on moodle. There are also 2 lessons and 2 tasks up already so please check those too.
I await your visit and look forward to talking to you soon.

Take care,
Jane

The next message is from Jane Spinola on Saturday, January 12, 2008, at 14:04:

Jane Spinola [14:04]: Hi E
I need you to answer a few question for me. Just a few lines / 1

At the bottom of the window, there is a toolbar with icons for back, forward, search, and refresh, along with a "Enviar mensagem" button.

Version without frames and JavaScript



Appendix 10

The screenshot shows a Mozilla Firefox window with two tabs open. The title bar says "EdG 1 02: Blogs - Mozilla Firefox". The address bar shows the URL "http://moodle.dme.una.pt/blog/index.php?filtertype=course&filterselect=32". The main content area displays two blog posts:

My experience with Rhetoric and Communication.
por Vitor Gonçalves - Quinta, 29 Maio 2008, 21:36

In general i don't depend on not changing subject because according to my oppinion this subject is fundamental for our everyday.

Well, hello there.
I usually don't like to do some kind of presentation of myself on blog's, but in the ambit of one the exercises in the class Rhetoric and Communication I will do so.

I pass my free time in forums (such as www.bnnext.info), where I always try to find a good topic to have a nice discussion, preference something in social area. Other thing that I like to do as hobby is to solving riddles and puzzles that can be found on multiples sites (for example: http://enigmatics.blogspot.com/). Not so often, I try to do some sport independent of its kind (football, volley, etc ...). I think this is enough to know about me.

About the class Rhetoric and Communication, I must say it was a good surprise, because I usually don't like this type of class. I must congratulate Miss Jane to present me the method of b-learning, where I find a very good system to teach, and I really hope that this method spreads around our educational system.

The b-learning have without any doubts very good advantages, when confronted with the e-learning and the "traditional learning". It's a system where we can have the class when we have time and will, we can talk with more people therefore changing ideas within us self, in a larger scale, but its also a system that have the advantages of the "traditional" method, such as presence communication.

Another aspect, I would like to say about Rhetoric and Communication is that I find quite useful the oral presentation of our assignments, because it allow us to train in front of a public (which is my personal opinion, was the best of this class in whole semester). Also these class made me understand more clearly the "art" of communication, for example how to persuade a public, the effects of the advertisement in our mentality, the ABX model, the good and bad models of communication we have in the daily bases.

For last but also important, I really enjoyed the method of learning in the class, when we in one second were talking about the ABX model and in the next minute we were arguing about politics, ideologies, education, among others topics. I think that those arguing were useful to improve our civics skills, our role in society and also we get some motivation to learn Rhetoric and Communication.

For last and to finalize, I can only say that was one of the best class I had this year and congratulate the good work that Mr. Silvio Fernandes and Miss Jane Spinola had done.

Sincerely,
Vitor

Me, myself and I...
por Marly Piquira - Quinta, 29 Maio 2008, 14:13

Transferring data from moodle.dme.una.pt... Start Upgrade Paper doc - Mic... Appendix.doc - Microsoft... Appendix Index.doc - Mic... 1st Panel May 07 EdG 1 02: Blogs - Mozilla Firefox 7:59

Appendix 11

phrases in the text.

THE FUNDAMENTAL DISTINCTION

“Speech” – “phonic substance”, vocal”.

“writing” – “graphic substance”.

“The study of sounds is one dimension; the study of symbols is another.”

spelling

RELATIONSHIPS

Relationship between speech and writing

communicative

“differences in language structure: the grammar and vocabulary of writing is by no means the same as that of speech”

writing system

sound system

pronouncing

graphic contrast

spoken contrast

tone of voice: normal tone of voice, whispered tone

INDEPENDENT METHODS OF COMMUNICATION

independent methods of communication

Written formulations,

documents inscriptions manuscripts, editions, writings

“written English provides the standard that society values”

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN SPEECH AND WRITING

“The relationship between speech and writing can be analyzed in terms of contrast”

S interaction participants speaker,addressee.

W writer reader

S exchanges result: looser construction, repetition, rephrasing. Intonation and pause divide long utterances.

W repeated reading and close analysis, careful organization, with often intricate sentence structure discourse punctuation layout

S extralinguistic: gesture feedback lexicon of speech immediate feedback Deictic expressions

W time-lag “language read and interpreted by many recipients in diverse settings”

S Prosody: nuances of intonation, rhythm

W punctuation: graphic conventions genres: “cannot be read aloud but assimilated visually”

S informal graphic Slang contracted forms

W multiple instances of subordination syntactic patterns

S casual and unplanned discourse: non-verbal features.

W communication of ideas text

S “errors, once spoken, cannot be withdrawn” interruptions and overlapping speech audible

W “perceived inadequacies be eliminated” drafts

BLURRING THE DISTINCTION

linguists

categorization

“monologue while pretending it is a dialogue”

MIXED MEDIUM

mixed medium: "choose to use either speech or writing"

utterance

later point in time

statements

"speaking and writing are mutually dependent"

"language made up of speaking/listening activities and of reading/writing activities"

"successful use of language"

A POOL OF RESOURCES

"differences between speech and writing are as trends rather than as absolute distinctions"

shared context situation-dependent expressions

"There are few, perhaps no, absolute differences between speech and writing"

linguistic variation "distinguish all spoken from all written genres"

linguistic features

domain of linguistic enquiry.

2- Summary writing using the keywords and phrases in the text.

The basic difference between writing and speech is that the first relates to a graphic substance, symbols, and the second to a phonic substance, to vocal sounds, joining together in the matter of spelling.

However, the relation is not only limited to that: distinct communicative situations, differences in language structure – as grammar and vocabulary is different in speech and in writing. Both writing and sound systems differ also. e.g. It is neither possible to pronounce a graphic contrast nor write a spoken contrast in tone of voice (normal or whispered).

Nevertheless, both writing and speech function as independent methods of communication, i.e. within earshot, two people do not, with some exceptions, communicate with each other in another way than speech, and by writing when not within that space. Furthermore, certain written formulations, such as inscriptions and manuscripts, are provided with a certain respect that is rarely in concordance to speech. Hence, written English provides the standard that society values.

The relationship between speech (S) and writing (W) can be analyzed in terms of seven points of contrast:

1- In S there are participants' (speaker and addressees) interaction, whereas in W (between writer and reader) there is not.

2- In S, there is usually a looser construction, repetition, rephrasing, dividing vocalization with intonations and pauses, turning sentence delimitations indistinct, while W permits repeated reading and close analysis, with careful organization, easily identified units of discourse (punctuation and layout) and often elaborate structure.

3- In S, interaction relies also on extralinguistic features (gestures, outward manifestations), besides deictic expressions, establishing an immediate feedback. In W, such expressions are avoided and there is a time-gap between writing and reading. In addition, such language is to be interpreted by different recipients in different settings.

- 4- S possesses the most unique patterns of stress, rhythm and intonation of the language, though in W few graphic conventions relate to that. It includes several aspects of punctuation and genres, many of which cannot be read aloud but visually assimilated.
- 5- In S, many constructions are informal and with normal length, using slang and contracted forms, while on the contrary, in W, multiple instances of subordination in the same sentence and syntactic patterns occur.
- 6- S is used in casual and unplanned discourse, accompanied by non-verbal features. On the other hand, W takes a central role in the communication of ideas, as well as in memory and learning tasks, either in written records, tables, notes or texts.
- 7- While in S, once an error is spoken, it cannot be withdrawn, interruptions are normal and recognizable, in W, realized inadequacies can be erased (e.g. drafts), and interruptions unperceivable.

Nevertheless, technology made linguistics blend such distinctions between speech and writing. The electronic age brought the “monologues while pretending to be a dialogue”, ripped the interaction of speech and gave it to writing, elapsing the time-lag that existed and helped categorization and clearing the distinction.

On the other hand, there are the called “*mixed medium*”, where either speech or writing is chosen and one may influence the usage of the other, as when considering time-lag in speech (utterance to be heard later or in dictation) and the reading in writing (aloud or silently). Other situations require a mutual dependence between both speaking and writing: speaking/ listening activities and reading/ writing activities. Both mediums here work together to produce a successful use of language.

The differences between speech and writing are best thought of as tendencies rather than as absolute distinctions. Speech relies on a shared context, recurring to situation-dependent expressions. At the same time, also written material relies on such contexts. This way is considered by the author to be “*no single parameter of linguistic variation which can distinguish all spoken from all written genres*”. Furthermore, linguistic features are used by both genres, thus turning the “*distinction between speech and writing a (...) domain of linguistic enquiry*”.

Mark: 15/ 20 Keep up the good work! ☺

Appendix 12



Questionnaire 3

Please complete this questionnaire. You are asked to be honest and critical as your answers can help to better structure future projects that may be similar in nature.

Name: _____

Age: _____ Degree: _____

Please circle Yes/ No when requested and explain why you take that position.

1- Did you find this writing module useful? Yes / No

because _____

2- Did you attend these classes regularly? Yes / No

because _____

3- Did you check 'Lingua Inglesa A1' on Moodle regularly? Yes / No

because _____

4- How often did you check 'Lingua Inglesa A1' on Moodle? _____

5- Did you do the tasks requested on Moodle? Yes / No

because _____

6- Which part of the writing module did you find most useful?

because _____

7- Which part of the writing module did you find less useful?

because _____

8- Explain what you would change and why?

Thank you for your help.

Appendix 13

*ii.***A) Semi-Structured Interview for Lecturers**

- 1- Which courses are you currently lecturing?
 - Would you say writing plays a major role in it?

- 2- Which are your expectations in relation to writing that you have of students in your course/s?
 - Are there differences in your expectations in the writing skills of a first year and a last year undergraduate? Which are they?
 - Do you inform the students of your prior expectations before they hand in any written work to you?
 - How would you classify your students' overall writing skills? Very good / Good / Average / Poor / Very poor?

- 3- How important would you say writing is in your course/s?
 - What types of writing tasks do your students hand in to you?
 - Can you tell me, on average, how many written tasks students hand in (for evaluation) per semester?
 - What types of texts are the students required to be proficient in?

- 4- When you give them writing tasks, what pedagogic practices do you adopt?
 - Do you give them criteria for evaluation?
 - How do students react to written tasks? Do they enjoy them?

- 5- Which do you find to be the most adequate marking criteria for written assignments?
 - How do you assess the different writing tasks?
 - Do you have a marking code?
 - Which do you consider to be the most important aspects when assessing written work? Why?

- 6- From your experience, do your students find it easy to write? Why / why not?
 - Which do you find to be their major difficulties? Why?
 - Which skills do you believe students need to master in order to become proficient writers?
 - What practices do you adopt in order to help students overcome problem areas?

- 7- What is the difference between a confident writer and a student learning to master this skill?

iii.

B) Semi-Structured Interview for Undergraduates

- 1- Do you like writing?
 - Do you find it easy or difficult? Explain.
- 2- What do you write? How often?
- 3- Do you think your writing abilities have developed in the last few years?
 - What do you think helped develop this skill?
- 4- What types of texts do you write in your courses?
 - Which are your favourite and least favourite writing tasks? Why?
 - Do you find it easy to write your written assignments?
 - What do you find easiest and most difficult when you have a written assignment to do?
- 5- How are the written tasks given to you in classes? (examples)
 - Are the criteria explained? Which are they? Do / Would they help guide your work?
 - Is what is learnt in class relevant to help develop your writing ability?
- 6- Were you ever taught any writing techniques?
 - Were they useful?
 - Do you think you evolved as a writer due to any particular course? Which one and why?
- 7- How is your written work assessed in your courses?
 - Is the marking similar/ different in the different courses you take?
 - Would you like the marking to be similar / different according to the course you are taking?
 - What, in your writing, do you feel is most taken into account when it is being assessed?
- 8- Could you tell me how / why you think you have become a better writer?
 - Do you think it is important to be a skilled writer? Give examples of when you think it might be important.

Appendix 14

B-learning	Flexibility vs. Structure	Teacher Feedback	Peer Feedback	Communities of Inquiry
Questionnaires	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • + At the moment we chose our theme, that gave me greater responsibility as the more freedom we have, the greater the responsibility. (transl) • -/+ Unfortunately I cannot be present at the classes because I'm a worker-student, but I try to attend through the moodle, what turns it a very important instrument in my learning. • + It's so much easier to have access to the materials. (transl) • - I haven't had time to go to the forums, as besides UMa, I also work and at the time I get home, I can't turn on the pc. (transl) • - Perhaps the page is a little disorganised... (transl) • + We cannot deny that it is constructive as it is educational. • + What surprised me was that the teachers accepted this method with such ease. I think it's good because technology now is always with us and we have to adapt to current needs. (transl) • + I think that creating this idea of b-learning to me was a surprise and a good one. From this we can infer that Portugal is preparing for the future or is at least trying to take new measures in an educational system that is crying out for solutions and inspiration. (transl) • - We need more rules. Some people 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • + Each post shows each person's subjectivity making me believe that it is their true opinions. (transl) • -/+ I enjoyed the themes put forward by R, because they focus on problems with Humanity. There were however many messages left for me to read. (transl) • + I enjoyed the part of the books because I found many people had the same taste as I. • + It's great that anyone can comment and respond to what we write. (transl) • + All the interventions have his usefulness or advantage, but the behaviour that I more appreciate is the ones that create new themes and later it interacts with some regularity with those that answer to him. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • + I found that when we all communicate, it's a good way to learn. And we are also given the freedom to choose the theme which is in itself very good. (transl) • + I think the most beneficial part of this is not the individual participations but the debates of ideas and opinions here in this virtual reality, as a whole. The big difference from this one to other forums is that we then can contact "real" people with whom we discuss things. (transl) • + The fact that some people open forums in the wrong places show that they do not know how to behave in virtual forums which is quite bad. (transl)

	need rules. (transl)			
Interviews/ Focus groups				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • + We got to know people's opinions but I didn't make more friends because of it.
Class Observation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • - Accessing Moodle was difficult due to pc problems. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • + It offered guidelines about the English culture and Ss practiced their English. • - The need for a 1st class explaining Moodle. • Essential to keep reminding students of f-to-f lessons. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • - Get feedback from the beginning. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • + It's a lot easier to find someone on the internet who is willing to discuss a certain theme than if I were to wander around UMa trying to find someone to talk to.
Blog on Moodle	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • + The b-learning have without any doubts very good advantages, when confronted with the e-learning and the "traditional learning". It's a system where we can have the class when we have time and will 			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • + We can talk with more people therefore changing ideas within us self, in a larger scale, but its also a system that have the advantages of the "traditional" method, such as presence communication.
Forum Posts on Moodle		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • - About the Teacher Silvio and its more active participation, i also agree. • - It was very nice if we have a forum with teacher Silvio to talk about opinions, or theories that ancient philosophers like Aristóteles or Socrates create in old Greece. 		

Writing	Students' perspectives	Teacher Feedback	Peer Feedback	CoI
Questionnaires	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - It makes it difficult when there are many spelling mistakes which give us wrong meanings, but in the end we reach an understanding. (transl) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - It's hard for me when the English used is very "structured". (transl) 		
Interviews/ Focus Groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + I learnt a lot about academic texts. I now add in bibliographies and am careful about the information I get from the net. (transl) + The assignments were easy. - I had to keep looking for words in a dictionary. (transl) + The module helped us learn new words. 			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I think we ought to have chats... everyone at the same time. (transl) + It opened up channels of communication. Even if you didn't know the people, you would talk to them. (transl)
Class Observation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Why in English? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Please make sure that the themes you have chosen have been approved by me. You know teachers are not completely impartial ... if there are many assignments with the same theme then we have more to compare... as is obvious. (Professor Sílvio) 		
Blog on Moodle	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + This method of learning...b-learning is very useful to improve skills in English. I started to post on the forum...i think that amusing but my vocabulary in English is very small. I hope to learn a little more and increase my vocabulary. + This week was a little labor, began to search for work group and continue in our work, the theme has been well chosen and has been super interesting work it. + The work assignments have been pretty trouble-free and I especially liked the second one because my group's first presentation in rhetoric is the one with the 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - During classes, in my opinion there should much more practical work, because it would help us to understand the certain important items of the subjects and this would get us more involve a during classes and would for sure manage to wake more attention. 	

	advertisement, so it gave us some ideas on what to do.			
Forum Posts on Moodle	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • - I really think is that if the classes were spoken in Portuguese, this style of learning would have more interactivity among students, presenting the arguments that i present are simple, or people are ashamed of mistakes and wrong to speak English and do not speak for no more shame, or feel afraid to talk... Sory if i give some mistake, but my inglisch is not  perfect. • - This should be in portuguese...to me doesn't make sense speaking english when we are in a portuguese university. • + Its true that this is a portuguese university, but so what?? In Finland, there are Finland's universitysbut the classes are given in english. • + Of course this is an innovation in UMA pedagogy, so we slowly will get used to it. 			

Interaction/ Motivation	Students' perspectives	Teacher Feedback	Student Feedback	CoI
Questionnaires		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • + I think that interacting with our classmates and with Ms. Jane (who is very extroverted and original) is very profitable as we all get to know each other and show that there are magnificent ideologies. (transl) • I found Ms. Jane's interactions most interesting as she is always trying to motivate the students to participate online. (transl) 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • - I think that opening themes that might be in one forum only makes the issues hard to follow and this takes away the motivation. (transl)
Interviews /Focus Groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • - / + I didn't participate last semester as I didn't see any need to, but this semester I had to and I then went because I enjoyed it. (transl) • - Flooded with emails. (transl) • -/+ Only go in when I see something interesting in my email. (transl) • + The habits with Moodle made me now go more often online. It changed some of my research habits. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • + We did feel supported as you always answered our questions. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • - I didn't really know how to work in groups. Since I was 16, I've always worked alone. (transl)
Class Observation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • + Online things become easier and more comfortable. 			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • + Sometimes people have better friends online who they do not know than the people who are actually by their side.
Blog on Moodle	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • + I really enjoyed the method of learning in the class, when we in one second were talking about the ABX model and in the next minute we were arguing about politics, ideologies, education, among others topics. I think that those arguing were useful to improve our civics skills, our role in 			

	<p>society and also we get some motivation to learn Rhetoric and Communication.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • + I hope that this concept can cover other seats because it is an effective method to captivate the students • + The second task is launched and I have to say that I greatly enjoyed the theme. • + We also have a new learning method with teacher Jane, which I think came in much improve our learning 😊, I speak for me because with regard to foreign English language am not the big thing, and for this reason I have participated in forums, perhaps by the fear of failure. 			
Forum Posts on Moodle	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • - I have to admit, on UMA have to much disrespect too teachers and colleagues. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • + It's good to find a positive, open minded teacher that encourages students not only for the theme classes but also for life, who also gives good advises to the youngers. • -/+ It's a pity that some (almost all...) teachers can't see how important are their rule in a student's personality or individual motivation. Keep encouraging us I think we all need that... 		

Appendix 15

- **Em que momento na aula se sentiu mais comprometido como aprendiz?**
- **Em que momento na aula se sentiu mais distante como aprendiz?**
- **Que acção de alguém nos fóruns sentiu ser mais proveitosa?**
- **Que acção de alguém nos fóruns sentiu ser mais confusa?**
- **Que actividade o surpreendeu mais?**

Translation to English:

- **When, in the lessons, did you feel challenged as a learner?**
- **When, in the lessons, did you feel most distant as a learner?**
- **Whose interactions in the forums did you feel were the most helpful?**
- **Whose interactions in the forums did you feel were the most confusing?**
- **Which activities surprised you the most?**