BLENDING OFFLINE AND ONLINE FEEDBACK ON EAP WRITING

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Abstract. *Traditional feedback on second language writing in an EAP context can incorporate many different messages and modes, and seems to benefit from a flexible, multifaceted and contextualised approach. The submission of student writing through online platforms provides tutors with even more feedback options. As part of the ongoing process of determining good online feedback practices, this Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) project evaluates interventions regarding the blending of offline and online feedback in an English for Academic Purposes programme at a UK university. Student and tutor perspectives on the implemented processes are considered, highlighting the respective strengths of both offline and online interactions and informing the discussion about how to combine these into feedback that is as pedagogically rich as possible.*

Key words: *student writing, feedback, blended learning, Turnitin*

1. INTRODUCTION

In the context of English language tuition at a higher education institution, the practice of providing feedback on student writing is typically a core element of teaching and learning processes. With the continuous development of different electronic tools which support and enhance feedback provision, tutors are faced with some significant choices about the ways in which they integrate online feedback with more traditional offline feedback practices. Especially where higher education institutions are standardizing submission and evaluation procedures by means of learning management systems and plagiarism prevention tools, EAP teachers need to find ways to make these platforms work for the purpose of providing language-related feedback to second language writers. Based on investigative principles of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL), this paper discusses issues influencing these decisions from a practice-oriented perspective, including the analysis of tutor and student opinions regarding various writing and feedback processes implemented in an EAP programme at one British HE institution, thereby also responding to the call for more accounts of how EAP tuition is actually conducted in practical terms (Wette 2014) and how students evaluate feedback-related interventions (F. Hyland 2010).

There is already a substantial body of research about feedback practices in second language writing tuition focusing on areas such as written error correction (Truscott 1996; Ferris 1999; Bitchener 2008; Evans, Hartshorn and Tuioti 2010; Ferris, Liu, et al. 2013), but feedback processes can encompass a whole range of messages and modes of delivery. In addition, the transition to a digital form of academic literacy is changing processes continuously (Stapleton 2010; 2012) and further development of online

feedback tools such as Turnitin means practitioners need to stay up to date (Gilbert & Maguire 2013) and keep considering the relationship between computer-mediated and other forms of feedback (F. Hyland 2010).

The project described in this study was based on the initial premise that for feedback practices to be most effective, they need to be contextualised and multifaceted, conveying a variety of messages in different modes (K. Hyland 2006). In the final analysis, this assumption is confirmed with regard to the combining of offline and online feedback: Good practice results from the considered blending of appropriate software tools, oral interaction and classroom activities. Such blended feedback can result in guidance which is richer and wider in scope for the students, and whatever the role of technology, it remains the responsibility of the tutor to make good judgements on what students need to see, hear and think about with regard to their writing.

2. The Multifaceted Nature of Feedback Processes

The fact that the area of feedback on second language writing has received quite a lot of attention in field-related research does not mean that any conclusive consensus has been reached about what constitutes either sound theory or good practice. If anything, it can be ascertained that perceptions are varied and that there are many diverging feedback-related practices. Where feedback provision is seen as a primarily administrative activity, comments are often grade-related and guidance for students is kept to a minimum (Ivanič, Clark and Rimmershaw 2000). However, it must be assumed that the main aims of feedback provision are fundamentally pedagogical and that teachers give feedback because they believe it makes students into better writers (Evans, Hartshorn and Tuioti 2010). Even assessments which are themselves designed for summative purposes can almost always also provide an opportunity for long-term learner development and meaningful formative feedback, certainly in the context of EAP, where grades are rarely an end in themselves. Still, while the general purposes of providing feedback may be uncontroversial, there is a great diversity of approaches with regard to the actual messages that are conveyed through feedback and the modes chosen to deliver these messages.

The messages which tutors pass on through their feedback may focus on areas such as grammatical accuracy, spelling, punctuation, lexical precision, register and style, coherence and cohesion, textual organization, task achievement, and presentation of content. In addition to this, there may also be more general messages about academic values, the role of writing at university and about the fundamental identity and competence of students (K. Hyland 2006). With such a diversity of areas which can be covered in feedback, tutors clearly need to be selective when deciding which elements to highlight.

One tradition in the teaching of second language writing focuses on the need for students to develop effective writing *processes*. Donald Murray's instruction to tutors to "teach writing as a process not product" (Murray 1972) expressed the fundamental idea of the approach to writing which concentrates on the distinctive thought processes and steps that successful writers may follow to achieve their aims (Flower and Hayes 1981). With regard to feedback, this means that tutors comment on the path that has led to a student's submission and how they might be able to work more effectively. What is more, feedback is itself integrated into different elements of the writing process such as drafting and editing.

In a *genre* approach to EAP writing, the central message delivered to students is the need to become aware of the features of texts written in a higher education context. The role of teachers is to introduce students to the communicative practices and to highlight conventions of the academic community. This often means a focus on styles, structures and functions employed in academic writing of various kinds. In relation to feedback, Hyland (2006; 2007) points out that a genre approach provides tutors with the tools to provide precise guidance, describing in what ways exactly the students are in control of the genre with which they need to engage and how they can adapt to academic discourse more effectively. The kinds of discipline-related texts which students are actually asked to write in higher education vary tremendously in terms of genre, so writing tutors can point to more generic models or, where relevant, to models of successful discipline-specific writing (Wette 2014).

While an emphasis on the writing process and academic genre has solid theoretical foundations, in practical terms, many tutors may be more concerned about giving feedback related to grammatical accuracy, for example where students' proficiency levels are lower. The question of error correction has been given special attention by second language writing researchers ever since Truscott (1996) claimed that grammar correction should actually be abandoned because he believed it to be ineffective and even harmful with regard to student learning. Ferris' (1999) initial response, as well as other subsequent studies (Chandler 2003; Bitchener 2008; Ferris, Liu, et al. 2013) show that Truscott's premise is too categorical and that those teachers and the even larger proportion of students who find written corrective feedback helpful and constructive are quite justified. However, it seems important to make a distinction between different types of corrective feedback. With direct feedback, students are given the correct form. Indirect feedback involves pointing out errors by locating (e.g. underlining) them, by providing the student with metalinguistic clues (e.g. abbreviations or symbols) about the type of error that has been made, or by doing both. While underlining of errors with a description of the error type seems to be the most popular option, the effectiveness of different types of corrective feedback ultimately depends on contextual factors and the specific aims which are pursued (Chandler 2003; Ellis 2009).

So the messages which are conveyed to students through feedback need to be selected deliberately and sensibly. The range of comments which can be provided is wide and it is clearly not feasible to provide in-depth feedback in every area ranging from sentence level accuracy and textual organization to the communication of main ideas, academic genres, the writing process and everything in between for any single piece of writing. Any attempt to do so might actually overwhelm students. Instead, the goal should be to identify areas in which students can gain the most from feedback (Handley, et al. 2007). Still, tutors need to be aware of the breadth of possibilities and feedback processes needed to facilitate the communication of multiple and diverse messages.

Turning to the *mode* of feedback which is used, a similarly mixed approach seems advisable. It is suggested that feedback is most effective when it is delivered in different ways and allows for several interactions (K. Hyland 2006; Gilbert and Maguire 2013). Firstly, a distinction can be made between written and oral feedback. While there are practical benefits to providing written feedback, face-to-face interaction between teachers and students, for example in specially arranged 'conferences', allows for further clarification and for meanings to be negotiated, resulting in more extensive editing work done by students (Goldstein and Conrad 1990). Another important variable is the timing

of feedback. Tutors who want to be involved as the students go through the different drafting stages tend to believe that feedback provided during the writing process is more effective and meaningful than feedback provided afterwards (Ivanič, Clark and Rimmershaw 2000). So, varying modes of feedback provided by the tutor might include guidance given in class while students are working on their writing tasks, oral or written comments on draft submissions and a comprehensive written evaluation as a final form of feedback.

Another dimension can be added to feedback by asking students to conduct peer reviews. These activities seem to be effective as the student to student relationship has a fundamentally different power dynamic to that between teachers and students. According to Choi (2013), peer feedback used in combination with teacher feedback creates a learning context with a richer combination of affective factors (lower anxiety levels in particular) and increases students' composition-related metacognitive knowledge. When students evaluate another piece of writing, this appears to raise their awareness of what may constitute successful work, thus also strengthening the formative aspect of the feedback process. In addition to peer feedback, self-evaluation and self-correction provide a further important perspective in the reviewing process. Depending on the type of teacher feedback that is given, opportunities for self-correction can usually be integrated into the writing class quite easily, again creating meaningful learning opportunities (Lam 2013; Lázaro Ibarrola 2013).

3. TAKING FEEDBACK ONLINE

While the 'slow death of handwriting' (BBC 2009) may not have reached its completion quite yet, it can be assumed that the vast majority of written work in UK higher education is generally typed and submitted in a digital format nowadays. The portability and ubiquity of electronic devices continues to grow relentlessly and is still in the process of revolutionising the way we interact with texts of different kinds. In addition, the further development of software related to marking and the provision of feedback means that EAP writing tutors have some significant choices to make about the integration of such tools into their teaching.

In the discussion about second language writing, little distinction is usually made between handwritten and typed work but it can be argued that the concrete and cognitive processes involved in each form are really quite different (Stapleton 2012). One could speculate that the ability to easily go back in a sentence or paragraph to insert words and edit parts is likely to have a significant impact on the way micro-planning processes take place. When they are online, students can also make use of instant spelling and grammar checkers, thesauruses, dictionaries, translation tools, etc. The vast array of sources of information immediately accessible through the Internet also seems to shape the intertextual practices of writers significantly as they process and integrate what they read into their writing almost concurrently (ibid.). The available tools and resources should not be seen as purpose-defeating short-cuts or cheating aids in the writing class. Rather, students need to learn to use them appropriately, develop an understanding of the inherent pitfalls and employ them effectively. By way of example, encouraging students to consult corpus-based online concordances has been shown to help them with the immediate usage issues arising while writing and is also claimed to enhance students' general

awareness of lexico-grammar (Yoon 2008). Academic literacy is largely a digital form of literacy and, if students are to be further introduced to the writing practices of the academic community, this necessarily involves an engagement with the standard processes of this 'electronic age' (Stapleton 2010; Stapleton and Radia 2010).

For work that is submitted electronically, there are a number of options with regard to feedback. While submission via email is a possibility, plagiarism detection platforms have become a standard medium in well-resourced settings. Turnitin is claimed to be in use by 1.6 million instructors worldwide (iParadigms LLC 2014). The primary function of the service, namely to check the originality of students' work, seems to have become almost indispensable for the assessment of writing which involves the use of pre-existing texts (Stapleton 2012). From a formative perspective, such platforms also play an important role in teaching students about acceptable and problematic uses of sources (Buckley and Cowap 2013). In addition to providing information about similarities with other texts, Turnitin provides assessors with some interesting options for providing feedback. Comments, which can be saved for recycled use, can be inserted into the work, in the margin or in a separate column. Feedback may also be voice-recorded. Text can be highlighted or provided with 'Quickmarks' to point out issues. The rubric function allows markers to create scales and criteria by means of which the work can be categorised or graded. All of this means that feedback can be similarly direct or indirect and focused or unfocused as work marked on paper, leaving it mostly up to the tutor to decide how and to what extent the different options are used. Students receive their feedback online and tutors are able to set up additional self-evaluation and peer review tasks through the platform.

While plagiarism detection services have gained wide-spread trust, the next logical stage in computer-mediated feedback of student work is much less developed. Turnitin currently relies entirely on the input of feedback by users but the introduction of Automated Essay Scoring systems (AES) is changing the possibilities available to HE institutions (El Ebyary and Windeatt 2010; Dikli and Bleyle 2014). For example, Criterion software, which builds on the system used in the automated scoring of TOEFL writing exams, is advertised as providing immediate and detailed diagnostic feedback in the areas of grammar, usage, mechanics, style and organization & development (ETS 2014). AES may have validity in producing an overall essay score for mass-administered exams but providing meaningful formative feedback is a rather different proposition. El Ebyary and Windeatt (2010) tentatively concluded from their research that the use of Criterion software produced positive results and that students had positive attitudes towards it. However, Dikli and Bleyle's (2014) more recent application and analysis of the same software led to a more sceptical outlook based on the inability of the system to provide feedback which was consistently clear and accurate enough. So while students, and possibly teachers, may like the idea of getting the computer to provide quick feedback, the expectations created may be unrealistic and could result in a serious case of misplaced trust. Although AES systems have been in development for a good number of years now, their application in classroom environments still seems to have some way to go before reaching any kind of maturity, making it an interesting field to be kept under close observation.

Whatever the future role of AES, it seems clear that computers are not about to replace teachers in the feedback process in any comprehensive sense. Fundamentally, AES does not evaluate semantic relationships in the text (Dikli and Bleyle 2014). It

cannot respond to the thoughts and ideas expressed by students in any meaningful way, nor does it empathise or take a student's overall learning into account. Also, how does it alter the writers' sense of audience if they are essentially addressing a machine? It seems clear that the multifaceted feedback described in the previous section will always rely on rich interpersonal human interaction. So the integration and use of technology is generally valid insofar as it facilitates and complements the teacher-student relationship. *Blended* learning is about searching for the optimal mix of technology and traditional forms of education in a certain environment. In terms of the writing process, some components are probably more suitably carried out off-line and online completion is more effective for others (So and Lee 2013). With regard to feedback, handwritten comments and face-to-face tutoring definitely have their merits, but computer-mediated guidance and online consultations have advantages, too (Jones, et al. 2006).

4. THE CURRENT PROJECT

Pre-sessional and in-sessional language classes for international students at the University of Bedfordshire are linked by means of a Communication Skills programme which they participate in both before the commencement of their degree course and also once they have started. Writing tuition forms an important part of the programme in view of the students' need to pass a language skills test including a writing component as well as their need to familiarise themselves with general and discipline-specific requirements of writing at university. In the current study, the principal question that is investigated is how the process of providing feedback on student writing can be optimised by blending offline and online practices in such a context.

The perspective from which the project was approached was very much that of an insider, namely as a tutor with some programme coordination responsibilities. The principles of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) formed a basic framework of practitioner research underpinning the study. While SoTL draws on a wide variety of theoretical streams, its focus is the practical realities of the teaching and learning environments in which researchers find themselves (Hutchings and Huber 2008) and the aim is to enhance student learning through inquiry, collection of evidence and critical analysis (O'Brien 2008). While the qualitative techniques and undeniably somewhat subjective approach to the investigation of the research question could be seen as being 'soft', the value of this kind of study is the validity it has as part of a genuine exchange about reflective practice between teacher-scholars. This approach allows for a more holistic analysis of the teaching and learning choices that are made in one context and invites others to consider how this resonates in theirs. It has been suggested that too few studies related to second language writing look into how it is actually taught (Wette 2014), so it is hoped that a description and evaluation of the changing feedback processes in one programme makes a modest contribution towards filling this gap.

Collaboration between teaching staff and also between staff and students to enhance teaching and learning can be an important element of SoTL projects (Vaughan 2010). With this in mind, separate focus groups with tutors and students were chosen as a key instrument to assess how changes to the feedback process were implemented, to gauge opinions related to the interventions and to receive input and suggestions about how further improvements might be made. Focus groups were also chosen for data collection

because of the underlying assumption that feedback processes are multifaceted and that they depend on interlinking contextual factors which are most meaningfully understood and discussed in conjunction with each other while taking different perspectives into account.

While decisions about how to teach writing and how to provide feedback on written submissions was previously left largely up to individual tutors in the EAP programme under discussion, the start of a new academic cycle was chosen as an appropriate opportunity to introduce some standardisation across groups and to engage in a deeper and more detailed exchange among teachers about their practices.

The first step in the project was a survey of feedback provided to student writing on Turnitin during the completed academic year, encompassing 358 papers graded by the teaching team. The purpose of the initial survey was to gain an impression of the typical areas of feedback and to identify commonalities between the comments which different tutors made. The information and insight taken from this overview over historical feedback flowed into the creation of three types of standardised comments: a new set of 'quickmarks' (short comments which can be inserted into the student's work to highlight specific issues) was generated. A more extensive 'rubric' for scoring was produced, incorporating different categories of competency. Thirdly, a 'cheat sheet' with a list of popular comments was formulated and combined with web links to more extended explanations and exercises related to certain writing skills to encourage students to engage in self-study in those specific areas. For one, the aim of consolidating tutors' comments was to make tutors more aware of some of the useful feedback provided by others and to provide some new impulses. It was also expected that the time which tutors spend writing frequently repeated comments about such areas as grammar, structure and style could be significantly reduced through standardisation. At the same time, the amount of actual feedback received by students was intended to increase and become wider in scope. The scoring rubric was intentionally designed to incorporate elements which seemed to have received less attention in the historical feedback. And finally, the aim was to provide a more direct link to guided and independent learning by including links and suggestions for further study. It was decided that the use of an AES service was neither beneficial nor feasible in the context. The changes that did occur were introduced to the teaching team through a workshop and one-to-one training sessions.

The next intervention was some remodelling of pre-sessional and summer courses to allow for more focused writing sessions in computer rooms. Students on a range of courses were asked to attend a plenary lecture together and were set a writing task related to the lecture topic. From there, the different groups went to computer labs with their tutors and could work on the task using discussions, internet research and essay planning activities. Students were also able to start writing their essays with their tutor explicitly present for support, guidance and initial oral feedback on the progress that was made. Students were encouraged to complete the essay task outside of class time and submitted via Turnitin. Tutors then marked the work online using the different options provided. Turnitin was set up so that students could not see their feedback until the time of the following writing session, allowing tutors to monitor how students read and processed the feedback through self-correction activities and rewriting tasks. This follow-up session was also used to complete online peer reviews of other student essays, focusing on content and organisation of the text.

5. TUTOR AND STUDENT PERSPECTIVES

After the implementation of changes to the feedback process, separate focus group discussions with tutors and students were held. The analysis of these discussions concentrated on the perceptions of tutors and students regarding the different ways in which feedback was mediated both in the classroom and online.

The first stage of the feedback process in the project under discussion was the guidance provided in the classroom while students started planning and drafting their essays. Tutors reported they generally found it important to go through the initial stages of the writing process in a more controlled way, for example by discussing students' initial responses to the essay task and asking students to create an essay outline with pen and paper so others could comment on it. Once students started typing, tutors saw their role as "walking around, looking over [student's] shoulders, monitoring, being available for questions" as well as giving advice, eliciting correct forms and reminding students of the expectations related to the task. It was felt that providing intermittent feedback like this was highly effective with students working on computers because they could easily go back in their work and make changes. Students appreciated this dynamic interaction and appeared to have felt deprived when their teacher was prevented from providing immediate support and feedback in a writing session.

Interestingly, students seemed quite apprehensive about the use of online spellcheckers, thesauruses, concordances and internet sources when asked about these. Their hesitant and evidently nervous responses seemed to indicate that they were not sure to what extent the use of such online aids was permissible and if it conflicted with the requirement to 'write your own words'. When asked about this, teachers acknowledged that students did not seem to use online resources much and that they had given fairly little attention to the appropriate use of online tools and sources in their teaching and feedback. This was identified as a missed opportunity and an issue that could easily be addressed during the sessions in the computer room.

When asked what kinds of feedback students could remember getting from their tutor through Turnitin, they mentioned punctuation, spelling, tenses and vocabulary. Upon further prompting, structure (text organisation) was added. Even though all students had received at least one comment about style and another about content (task response) through the rubric function, no students mentioned these areas. Teachers confirmed that the majority of their comments provided on Turnitin were related to lexical and sentence level accuracy but felt their feedback was actually more encompassing than it would have been if they had marked on paper. The rubric categories required them to include precisely such areas as general style and task response in the feedback.

Generally, students did not seem to see either major advantages or serious disadvantages in receiving their feedback online compared to feedback on paper. However, tutors had very pronounced opinions about the experience of marking online, ranging from "Hate it!" from one tutor to "I always preferred hard copies but really got into it!" from another, and "I really enjoyed it!" from a third member of staff. Teachers' preferences primarily seemed to correspond to the perceived speed with which they were able to complete the marking job. The teacher who expressed particular aversion to online marking felt marking on paper was much quicker, while the teacher who seemed most enthusiastic argued marking online was actually faster. A less clear but similarly interesting observation was that teachers who provided less direct feedback (e.g. by only highlighting

errors rather than providing the correct form) also had a greater preference for online marking. Turnitin has not really been designed for specific error correction and one tutor particularly missed the inability to draw arrows to highlight syntactical issues. Overall, it seemed teachers were much more positive than negative about the system, though. The rubric function was the most popular element, appreciated by all, including more sceptical members of staff. Although it appeared that students had not engaged as deeply with the pre-formulated feedback provided through the rubric as with more specific comments inserted into the text, the range of areas covered as well as the speed and ease with which scores are produced were judged to be very helpful from a marker's point of view.

The follow-up sessions, which were typically also conducted in computer rooms, represented a third stage of the feedback process. Tutors reported different ways of using these sessions, generally blending off-line and online work. One option was to deliver short teacher controlled input sessions on language-related problem areas which seemed to be relevant for the whole group. Teachers also printed passages from typical student writing and used these for error correction activities. Students were asked to go online and read their feedback carefully before completing rewriting or self-correction tasks while tutors monitored progress, providing further feedback and clarifications. Both students and teachers reported that these tasks resulted in more time being spent on digestion of the written feedback compared to when students accessed feedback in their own time. However, precisely this need to invest precious classroom time was also seen as a restrictive factor by staff.

Tutors were free to decide whether their groups needed to complete peer reviews through the online platform or not. A teacher who opted not to make use of this function reasoned that he thought his students' ability to provide meaningful feedback was limited and that they might "reinforce each other's problems" when looking at more or less deficient work. Tutors who did make use of 'PeerMark', which required students to rate such components as the introductions, paragraphs, style and ideas in other essays, were optimistic about its pedagogical value, commenting that this was particularly effective when students worked in pairs to evaluate essays. Students did indicate that they saw giving peer feedback as helpful because it improved their "way of thinking about essays" and they seemed to enjoy it as a novel activity putting them in the teacher-like role.

6. THE ADDED VALUE OF BLENDED FEEDBACK

It is clear that each experience of teaching and learning is essentially unique and that any attempt at generalisation is fundamentally problematic. Nonetheless, the project under discussion provides some useful insights into how writing and feedback processes can incorporate a combination of both offline and online practices, certainly in the context of the type of programme looked at in this study. As inevitable technological change continues to occur, these kinds of experiences and insights are key factors that will help to give shape to the further development of feedback procedures.

While the integration of online educational tools and platforms often promises simplification and automation of processes, the reality can easily be tainted by an initial learning curve, limitations and frustration. With regard to online marking of EAP writing, it needs to be emphasised that the Turnitin platform was not initially designed for providing specific language-related feedback to students and requires a fair amount of

customisation to be used most effectively in this context. Tutors who are accustomed to providing written feedback on paper need to be familiarised with online processes and the different Turnitin functionalities. They may be reluctant to alter their practices and find online marking rather cumbersome despite the possibility of using shortcuts. Where writing sessions are moved to computer rooms, teachers also need to come to terms with the limitations which result from conducting a classroom session in a computer lab. The layout of such rooms is usually much less conducive to teacher-centred instruction and whole group discussions. There is also no doubt that providing feedback in the multi-faceted way which has been described in this paper is very time-intensive. It requires teachers to comment on work both offline and online, in both written and oral form, and covering a range of areas. Allowing students to work on a writing task during class sessions clearly requires the sacrifice of time which could also be used to cover other topics and areas. The availability of appropriate computer classrooms can be another limiting factor.

As mentioned, both students and teachers were mostly positive about the mix of offline and online feedback processes employed in the programme under investigation. Immediate and dynamic feedback provided by tutors while students start typing their essays seems to be particularly valued. It could be suggested that, to some extent, the use of technology in EAP is actually making it possible to 'flip' the emphasis in homework from writing to listening and reading. While individual writing has traditionally been consigned to homework tasks, it is now much easier for students to complete lecture listening exercises online, for example. At the same time, due to the ability to easily go back in a text and make changes when working on a computer, having tutors look over students' shoulders and comment on their work while they are typing actually seems to be a workable and effective strategy.

The value which is added by means of Turnitin tools for online marking as compared to pen and paper feedback mainly lies in the scope of the feedback which tends to be widened if functions are customised and set up for comprehensive marking. The primary purpose and most obvious benefit of Turnitin is the detection of plagiarism and the way it assists tutors to comment on any inappropriate use of sources. In addition, the ability to highlight parts, insert comments into the text, in the margin or in a separate column makes it possible to provide a variety of feedback types. Through pre-formulated comments and the rubric function, tutors can also be encouraged and reminded to address areas which they might otherwise not comment on. The result can therefore be more extensive and more multi-dimensional feedback for students without requiring tutors to invest significantly more time. Turnitin also simplifies the setting of peer review tasks, which seem to play a role in deepening students' understanding elements of writing such as text organisation.

Student engagement with written feedback seems to be boosted effectively by setting self-correction and rewriting tasks to be completed in class as well as providing an opportunity for oral clarification of written comments. It seems reasonable to assume that students have particularly significant gains to make when they spend more time reading and actively working with the feedback they have received.

7. Conclusion

Feedback on student writing seems to be enriched when the messages which are conveyed encompass a range of areas and when the modes by means of which feedback is delivered are multi-dimensional. In order to see how offline and online practices can be blended meaningfully, interventions were implemented in an EAP programme for international students at a UK higher education institution. The SoTL project provides some indication that appropriate blending can indeed result in feedback which is more multifaceted. Both students and teachers may respond positively to the use of technology at different stages of the feedback process. Provision of immediate oral feedback while students are working on computers provides an opportunity for general editing while writing and for discussion of the appropriate use of online resources. Online feedback systems such as Turnitin can help to simplify processes and have the potential to expand the range of comments students receive. Still, the further integration of technology does not diminish the appreciation of offline practices. For example, the value of dynamic and personal face-to-face interaction remains clear. So the relationship between offline and online feedback procedures is a complementary one.

The role of technology in feedback provision remains an interesting field for investigation, particularly in light of constant developments in areas such as Automatic Essay Scoring systems. EAP teachers will certainly keep on being challenged to assess how new services and opportunities can add practical value in their specific contexts and to judge which blend of feedback practices may maximise their students' learning.

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