



THE UNIVERSITY OF
MELBOURNE

What difference does it make?

Measuring the effect of individual intervention in academic writing

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Critical Intersections: the 12th Biennial Conference of the Association for Academic Language and Learning,
University of Wollongong 25-27th November 2015

Academic Skills (AS)-Early Childhood (EC) collaboration

30-min 1:1 'itutes'
Self-select & referral



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Graduate Program
Out-of-discipline sts
Mixed cohort

Advice to Academics

Feedback on assignment briefs
Participation in meetings & PD

Support - Group

Meet academics, discuss assignment
Targeted (tailored) workshops

Initial student contact

Early transition workshop
Diagnostic writing assessment

Support - Individual

Individual sessions
Sts flagged by diagnostic & in-program

Success elements

Multi-faceted: timely, linked approach

Interventionist orientation: positivist model, good service fit

EC understand nature of AS service: not just 'remedial'

AS viewed as 'part of the EC team': not external or 'add-on'
– crucial buy-in

Early Childhood program rich & willing research area

Led us to thinking about evaluating impact ...

“So ... what difference does it make?”

Research Project

Measure impact of service

What effect does 1:1 academic advising have?

Focus on writing – most common assistance

Research on intervention

Effects of intervention programs on cohorts of students or their progress, discipline knowledge or skills

e.g. Kasper (1997); Song (2006); Woodward-Kron (2009); Baik & Grieg (2009); Storch & Tapper (2009)

1:1 evaluation

ALL context: Success linked to reported usage levels & justification of 1:1 service provision rather than evaluation (Stevenson & Kokkinn, 2009; Chanock, 2007)

Evaluation of 1:1 is difficult & lags behind program evaluation; often not open or scrutinised (Chanock, 2002; Stevenson & Kokkinn, 2009)

Clerehan (1997) & Chanock (2000) dialogic learning; Chanock (2007) how 1:1 informs work with groups and classes

Intention – research aim

To quantify the effect of individual Academic Skills (AS) intervention with a selected group of 1st year Master of Teaching Early Childhood (EC) Teacher Candidates

Research question

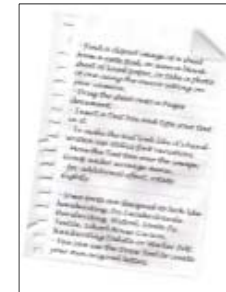
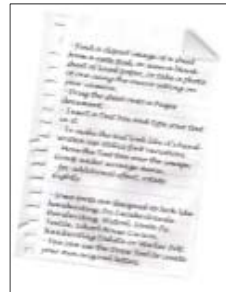
What measurable effect does AS intervention have on the performance outcomes in academic writing tasks completed by first year TCs in the first semester of their academic program?

Internal question:
What if we weren't here?



Method

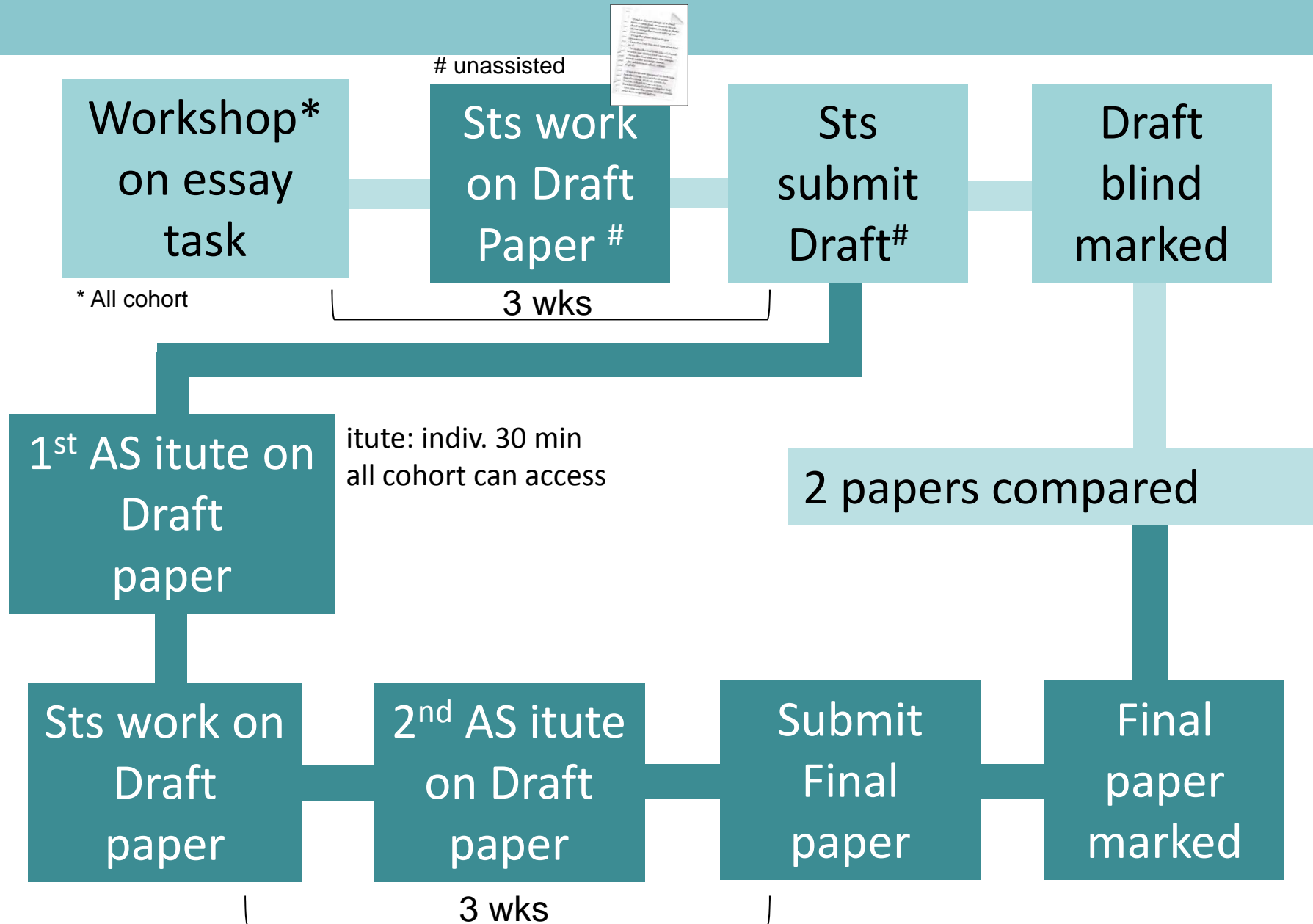
2000w essay / 50%



Examine **non-assisted** & **assisted** versions of a piece of writing for differences within a set group

Tried for a 'closed loop'

Research - process



Participants

Participants: 12 students

9 int / 3 Eng L1 (looking for 40! ...)

First semester, first year Masters

Volunteered

Academic Markers: 2

Pre-marking meeting: papers blind marked, same markers

Familiarity with assessment and marking mechanism

Rubric / criteria developed internally

Limitations

Sts knew 1st draft assistance was going to happen

Self-selected based on perceived or actual weakness?

Submitted first version earlier than everyone else

Markers subconsciously looking for improvement

Small group, one paper, single discipline

Non-longitudinal

Analysis

Quantitative

Difference in marks btw draft and final

Post-assistance questionnaire to participants

Qualitative

Comments on papers from markers

Comments on papers from Adviser

Reflections from markers and Adviser

Results of marking from draft to final

All marks went up, none went down!

1 grade pos average shift - ave Pass grade to ave H3 grade*

(*cohort final average H3)

11 of 12 sts improved 1-2 grades; 1 sts' grade stayed same

14.3% average positive mark shift

Shift varied from 3% to most dramatic shift of 30% (2 sts)

4 fails in draft 1 to 0 fails at final

6 students with word count issues to 1 (penalties apply)

H1	80+
H2A	75-79
H2B	70-74
H3	65-69
P	50-64
F	<50

eta squared statistic
(0.67) indicating a large
intervention effect

GENERIC WRITING ASSESSMENT CRITERIA

Criterion 1: Conceptual understanding of task Weighting: 50% <i>What is written: theory, ideas, content of response</i>	Criterion 2: Structure/organisation/task completion Weighting: 30% <i>How task is presented & completed; genre or task type; logic, flow, intra-text links</i>	Criterion 3: Evidence of research and citation Weighting: 20% <i>Referencing; conventions in use of external sources and citation</i>
<p>Outstanding (H1) 8, 9 or 10**</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrates very high level of abstract thought; <i>may</i> demonstrate extended thinking on the topic • Presents an in depth understanding of and engagement with theoretical perspectives and their application to practice • Offers a highly systematic synthesis, interpretation and analysis of research evidence • Demonstrates a very high level of critical engagement consistently and appropriately • Identifies patterns or trends in literature and analyses the information retrieved • Writer's voice and high level of independent thinking are clearly evident; recognises own biases and cultural context 	<p>Outstanding (H1) 8, 9 or 10**</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ideas presented in coherent (logical) and cohesive (linked) manner • Completes all required aspects of task to an exemplary standard • Text response organised and sequenced appropriate to genre (e.g. clear paragraphing; use of headings or sections where appropriate) • Conciseness of ideas evident; response falls within designated word count range (see Notes below) • The message is very clear, the reader finds the writing easy to follow; errors in expression rare and non-distracting; content relevant 	<p>Outstanding (H1) 8, 9 or 10**</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uses diverse sources of information highly appropriate to the task • Provides evidence of systematic research and uses 'classic'/pivotal works of scholarship with high academic currency in the discipline • Provides relevant and contemporary evidence collected discriminately from a wide range of appropriate sources • Systematically applies academic referencing conventions appropriately and accurately in text and post text; in text citations match Reference List • Required number of references is evidenced (<i>may</i> go beyond required reference minimum) • Systematically integrates source information; evaluates and synthesises information retrieved with own thoughts and voice
<p>Very high standard (H2A) 7.5</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrates abstract thought; <i>may</i> have attempted extended thinking, but not always successfully • Presents detailed understanding of theoretical perspectives and their application to practice • Offers a detailed synthesis, interpretation and analysis of research evidence • Demonstrates a consistent level of critical engagement • Displays writer's voice and independent thinking within the assignment 	<p>Very high standard (H2A) 7.5</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ideas presented in coherent and cohesive manner with minor inconsistencies or gaps • Completes required aspects of task, though some parts may have been more detailed or more balance could have been evident • Organised appropriate to genre; minor errors may be evident • Conciseness of ideas generally evident • The message is mostly clear, the reader can follow the message; errors in expression minimal and almost always non-distracting 	<p>Very high standard (H2A) 7.5</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uses a range of information appropriate to the task • Provides evidence of research and uses 'classic'/pivotal works of scholarship with high academic currency in the discipline • Provides relevant evidence collected discriminately from a range of sources • Applies academic referencing conventions mostly appropriately and accurately both in text and post text; minor inaccuracies <i>may</i> be evident • Required number of references is evidenced • Integrates source information throughout the assignment mostly successfully; evaluation and synthesis with own voice mostly successful
<p>High standard (H2B) 7</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrates some degree of abstract thought, though <i>may</i> not always be successfully handled • Presents a strong understanding of theoretical perspectives and application to practice; minor gaps may be evident • Offers a mostly detailed synthesis, interpretation and analysis of research evidence • Demonstrates a consistent level of critical engagement, though <i>may</i> have offered more • Displays writer's voice and some independent thinking, though this could have been more evident 	<p>High standard (H2B) 7</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ideas presented in generally coherent and cohesive manner, though inconsistencies evident • Completes required aspects of task though some parts need to have been more detailed or clearly more balanced • Writing organised appropriate to genre; though some minor gaps may be evident • Conciseness of ideas evident, though parts may be verbose or 'padded out' • The message is clear for the most part, the reader can follow the message though there is sometimes strain; errors are evident and at times distracting; some content may be not relevant 	<p>High standard (H2B) 7</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uses a range of sources of information appropriate to the task, though <i>may</i> not have included some 'classic'/pivotal references • Provides consistent evidence of research, though could have been more diverse • Provides relevant evidence collected from a range of sources, though <i>may</i> overly rely on a limited range • Applies academic referencing conventions appropriately and accurately both in text and post text, though some mistakes are evident (e.g. a missing page reference for a direct quote; punctuation errors) • Required number of references is evidenced • Integrates source information in the assignment with some inconsistencies; at time writer's voice <i>may</i> be overshadowed by external authors' ideas, and evaluation <i>may</i> not always be evident

Notes:

- **Allocation of an 8, 9 or 10 grade is at marker's discretion as to how well the paper fulfils the requirements of a H1
- **Word count:** grade the assignment first and allocate marks; if the word count is outside of +/- 10% then subtract 10%
- **Late assignments:** MGSE policy is that a late assignment loses 10% of the total possible mark each day the work is late
- **APA referencing:** MGSE preferred citation system is APA; references to accuracy and correct usage are made in reference to this system

Input raw score out of 10 for each criterion into the spreadsheet; the grades will be re-weighted by the Excel program to provide a mark out of 50

Marking: H1 8-10 (80-100%)	H2A 7.5 (75-79%)	H2B 7 (70-74%)	H3 6.5 (65-69%)	PASS 5-6 (50-64%)	FAIL less than 5 (<50%)
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Results of marking from draft to final

Marking criteria gain areas (out of 10):

1.0 ave gain in Structure / Organisation

0.95 ave gain in Research / Referencing

0.8 ave mark gain in Conceptual Understanding

Shifts:

Draft:

1 X H2B

2 X H3

5 X Pass

4 X Fail

Final:

4 X H2B

5 X H3

3 X Pass

0 X Fail

TEACHER VERSION
April 2012

GENERIC WRITING ASSESSMENT CRITERIA					
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Survey of participants

How itutes most helped:

Linking & flow / Structure organisation of ideas 5

Grammar / Language help / expression - word choice 4

Helped me get it in on time / pace myself 3

Referencing 3

“Really good for my mental health”! / Confidence

Least effective features

Only 30 mins long / Felt rushed

Get other help?

No 5

Yes 5 (classmates, partner)

Results – what did markers identify as issues?

Expression / language – awkward, unclear, grammar, word choice, sentence length, lack of signposting, run-on ‘shopping list’ expression, informal

Organisation – paragraphing (at times, severe)

Inappropriate presentation of info – tables, bullet lists

Referencing / citation issues

Clarity of argument – point being made? argument hard to follow

Results – what did markers identify as improvements from paper 1 to 2?

Improved support, links to theory / use of literature

Clear intro and conclusion sections

Clear expression

Stronger points

More logical structure and flow

Good examples, clearer definitions

Appropriate presentation – paragraphing

Main learnings

The markers and I agreed on the weak and strong points

BUT ... I did not identify the places for extra theoretical support or particular academic sources as much as the academics did

AS focus on expression, structure, links, cohesion, citation – though there is flow-on effect from the mechanical to the conceptual

Markers' reflections

Connection to AS

Workshop timing

What a mark is, what it means, what an essay looks like,
feedback

Change of assessment structure (more distributed)

Value of clear marking rubric – shared understandings

Emotional landscape of writing

Training in feedback – marking private, not scrutinised

My reflections / Conclusions

So, what difference *does* it make?

Make a positive difference – measurable effect in *this* study: a grade's worth

Advising on the 'right' things – areas that aid message – same page as academics

Areas where we have expertise – structure, org, expression, citations – have positive flow-on effect in content

Adjustments to cultural requirements of writing required – the 'craft of academic writing' (O'Mahony et al., 2013)

My reflections / Conclusions

So, what difference *does* it make?

Linked, multifaceted, holistic approach works – esp. when there is shared understanding of task – on ‘same page’

Approach to marking: emotional investment, feedback

Initial workshop timing: early v JIT

One-to-one assistance works

We do make a positive difference

Importantly... *we don't muck things up!*

So ... what *would* happen if we weren't here?

Students wouldn't perhaps do as well as they could in terms of marks, but ...

Would perhaps not be able *engage as completely and rigorously* with the program as they could

We are able to enhance engagement with the program: enabling sts to optimise the academic inputs they receive with the skills to engage with them, beyond the 1:1

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