What difference does it make?

Measuring the effect of individual intervention in academic writing

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

**30-min 1:1 ‘itunes’**
Self-select & referral

**Support - Individual**
Individual sessions
Sts flagged by diagnostic & in-program

**Support - Group**
Meet academics, discuss assignment
Targeted (tailored) workshops

**Advice to Academics**
Feedback on assignment briefs
Participation in meetings & PD

**Initial student contact**
Early transition workshop
Diagnostic writing assessment

**Graduate Program**
Out-of-discipline sts
Mixed cohort
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)

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?
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

Workshop* on essay task

Sts work on Draft Paper #

Sts submit Draft#

Draft blind marked

1st AS itute on Draft paper

Sts work on Draft paper

2nd AS itute on Draft paper

Submit Final paper

Final paper marked

# unassisted

* All cohort

3 wks

iterate: indiv. 30 min
all cohort can access

2 papers compared

3 wks
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)
# GENERIC WRITING ASSESSMENT CRITERIA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criterion 1: Conceptual understanding of task</th>
<th>Criterion 2: Structure/organisation/task completion</th>
<th>Criterion 3: Evidence of research and citation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Weightings 50%</td>
<td>Weightings 30%</td>
<td>Weightings 20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Outstanding (H1) 8.9 or 10</strong></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Demonstrate very high level of abstract thought may demonstrate extended thinking on the topic</td>
<td>• Ideas presented in coherent (logical) and cohesive (linked) manner</td>
<td>• Use diverse sources of information highly appropriate to the task</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Presents an in-depth understanding of and engagement with theoretical perspectives and their application to practice</td>
<td>• Completes all required aspects of task to an exemplary standard</td>
<td>• Provides evidence of systematic research and uses classic/pivotal works of scholarship with high academic currency in the discipline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Offers a highly systematic synthesis, interpretation and analysis of research evidence</td>
<td>• Text response organised and sequenced appropriate to genre (e.g. clear paragraphing; use of headings or sections where appropriate)</td>
<td>• Provides relevant and contemporary evidence collected discriminatively from a wide range of appropriate sources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Demonstrates a very high level of critical engagement consistently and appropriately</td>
<td>• Coherence of ideas evident; response falls within designated word count range (see Notes below)</td>
<td>• Systematically applies academic referencing conventions appropriately and accurately in text and post text in text citations match Reference List</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Identifies patterns or trends in literature and analyses the information retrieved</td>
<td>• The message is clear, the reader finds the writing easy to follow; errors in expression rare and non-distracting; content relevant</td>
<td>• Required number of references is evidenced (may go beyond required reference minimum)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Writer’s voice and high level of independent thinking are clearly evident; recognises own biases and cultural context</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Systematically integrates source information; evaluates and synthesises information retrieved with own thoughts and voice</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Very high standard (H2A) 7.5</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Demonstrates abstract thought may have attempted extended thinking, but not always successfully</td>
<td>• Ideas presented in coherent and cohesive manner with minor inconsistencies or gaps</td>
<td>• Uses a range of information appropriate to the task</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Presents detailed understanding of theoretical perspectives and their application to practice</td>
<td>• Completes required aspects of task, though some parts may have been more detailed or clearly more balanced</td>
<td>• Provides evidence of research collected discriminatively from a range of sources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Offers a detailed synthesis, interpretation and analysis of research evidence</td>
<td>• Organised appropriate to genre; minor errors may be evident</td>
<td>• Applies academic referencing conventions most appropriately and accurately both in text and post text; minor inaccuracies may be evident</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Demonstrates a consistent level of critical engagement</td>
<td>• Coherence of ideas generally evident</td>
<td>• Required number of references is evidenced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Displays writer’s voice and independent thinking within the assignment</td>
<td>• The message is mostly clear, the reader can follow the message; errors in expression minimal and almost always non-distracting</td>
<td>• Integrates source information throughout the assignment most successfully; evaluation and synthesis with own voice mostly successful</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>High standard (H2B) 7</th>
<th>High standard (H3B) 7</th>
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<tr>
<td>• Demonstrates some degree of abstract thought, though may not always be successfully handled</td>
<td>• Ideas presented in generally coherent and cohesive manner, though inconsistencies evident</td>
<td>• Uses a range of sources of information appropriate to the task, though may not have included some classic/pivotal references</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Presents a strong understanding of theoretical perspectives and application to practice; minor gaps may be evident</td>
<td>• Completes required aspects of task though some parts need to have been more detailed or clearly more balanced</td>
<td>• Provides consistent evidence of research, though could have been more diverse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Offers a mostly detailed synthesis, interpretation and analysis of research evidence</td>
<td>• Writing organised appropriate to genre though some minor gaps may be evident</td>
<td>• Provides relevant evidence collected from a range of sources, though may overly rely on a limited range</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Demonstrates a consistent level of critical engagement, though may have offered more</td>
<td>• Coherence of ideas evident though parts may be verbose or ‘padded out’</td>
<td>• 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)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Displays writer’s voice and some independent thinking, though this could have been more evident</td>
<td>• 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</td>
<td>• Required number of references is evidenced</td>
</tr>
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</table>

**Notes:**
- **Allocation of an 8.9 or 10 grade is at marker’s discretion as to how well the paper fulfills 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

**Marking:**
- **H1 8-10 (90-100%)**
- **H2A 7.5 (75-79%)**
- **H2B 7 (70-74%)**
- **H3 6.5 (65-69%)**
- **PASS 5-6 (50-64%)**
- **FAIL less than 5 (<50%)**
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:

<table>
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<th>Final:</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 X H2B</td>
<td>4 X H2B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 X H3</td>
<td>5 X H3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 X Pass</td>
<td>3 X Pass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 X Fail</td>
<td>0 X Fail</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Survey of participants

How it helps most:

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?

Clear intro and conclusion sections

Improved support, links to theory / use of literature

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*
Bibliography


