Cutting the apron strings with CALL

Turning ESL students into self-sufficient college writers

Sarah Jarboe &
Paul Sundberg with
John Leidenheimer
Allison Nielsen
Rationale for study
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- EAP writing courses typically offer international students valuable textbook-based presentation-practice but too often leave them dependent and ill-equipped for actual college writing on their own, evidenced by:
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  • Grammatical errors (often basic)
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  - Inappropriate/idiosyncratic formatting
  - Unprofessional spelling errors & typos
  - Grammatical errors (often basic)
  - Unnative-like collocations
Personal anecdote

- Writing intelligible Swedish letters to semi-monolingual Swedish relatives!

- *God jul och gott nytt år!*  
  Äntligen är universitetet slut, och nu är vi på vinterlov, tacka Gud! Jag har varit fullt sysselsatt med arbete de sista fyra månadern ändå sedan jag kom fram till Arizona i augusti. Jobbet har varit interessant, men jag tycker att jag har …
Learning objectives
Learning objectives

WHAT?
Learning objectives

WHAT?
Learning objectives

WHAT?

Learners will become self-sufficient university-level writers in English,
Learning objectives

WHAT?

Learners will become self-sufficient university-level writers in English, proficiently using a variety of (computer) resources to compose and edit their writing to fit US academic standards/conventions.
Learning objectives
Learning objectives

HOW?
Learning objectives

HOW?

By training learners to:
Learning objectives

HOW?

By training learners to:

• a) find and use good-quality computer-based/web-based writing resources for English
Learning objectives

HOW?

By training learners to:

- a) find and use good-quality computer-based/web-based writing resources for English
- b) develop a variety of strategies for using the resources successfully to manage the quality of their writing
Theoretical basis (CALL for writing)
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Theoretical basis (CALL for writing)


Friday, March 27, 2009
Theoretical basis (CALL for writing)


Chapter 4 “Writing” (6 tips)
Theoretical basis (CALL for writing)


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• Tip 3: “Teach learners how to benefit from interactive help and feedback from the computer”
Theoretical basis (CALL for writing)


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• Tip 3: “Teach learners how to benefit from interactive help and feedback from the computer”

• Tip 6: “Help learners develop their writing strategies”
Theoretical basis (CALL for writing)

Tip 3: “Teach learners how to benefit from interactive help and feedback from the computer”

- Instant, high quality linguistic feedback, e.g. spelling/grammar checkers, etc. (Ferris, 2004)
- Error correction has critical time: “when … producing meaning-focused language” (Swain & Lapkin, 1995)
Theoretical basis (CALL for writing)

Tip 6: “Help learners develop their writing strategies”

- L2 acquisition through writing strategies: psychological, sociological, and linguistic
- at all stages of writing: (invention), (writing) analysis of L2 models and monitoring of one’s writing, (revising) editing at various language levels
Theoretical basis (CALL for writing)

“Teachers cannot teach everything, but they can teach students strategies that will help them write and improve their writing over time” (C & J, 119).
Research design

• **Treatment Group:** 4 “Advanced I” Reading/ Writing classes (Jarboe & Sundberg) received (4-5) supplementary Computer lab sessions in addition to regular instruction using assigned R/W textbooks (CALL)

• **Control Group:** 2 Advanced I R/W classes (Leidenheimer & Nielsen) - only assigned textbooks (non-CALL)
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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>FALL '08</th>
<th>SPRING '09</th>
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<td><strong>CONTROL</strong></td>
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<td><strong>LEIDENHEIMER</strong></td>
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<td><strong>NIelsen</strong></td>
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<tr>
<th><strong>JARBOE</strong></th>
<th><strong>SUNDBERG</strong></th>
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Subjects

• AECP Advanced I students (multinational college ESL students)

• total subjects \( N = 79 \)

• treatment group \( n = 54 \)

• control group \( n = 25 \)
Computer-based Treatment
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Four/Five full class periods once-weekly of “self-sufficiency laboratories” introducing:
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1. Editing/formatting functions in Microsoft Word (2007 or 2003)
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Computer-based Treatment

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1. Editing/formatting functions in Microsoft Word (2007 or 2003)
2. “Grammar Safari” – Google News search
3. Online mono-/bilingual dictionaries and thesauri
4. Web Concordancer: corpora search
5. Academic writing resource: OWL (Purdue University) – not all classes
Assessment tools
Assessment tools

- **Pre-test** – same for treatment and control groups
Assessment tools

- **Pre-test** – same for treatment and control groups
- **Post-test + Questionnaire** – given to both treatment groups and control group

Contents (pre- and post-tests):

1. Locating computer resources
Assessment tools

- **Pre-test** – same for treatment and control groups
- **Post-test + Questionnaire** – given to both treatment groups and control group

Contents (pre- and post-tests):
1. Locating computer resources
2. Editing while you write
Assessment tools

- **Pre-test** – same for treatment and control groups
- **Post-test + Questionnaire** – given to both treatment groups and control group

**Contents (pre- and post-tests):**

1. Locating computer resources
2. Editing while you write
3. Writing situations (strategies)
## Results (treatment groups)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>FALL '08</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>JARBOE</td>
<td>AVE</td>
<td>SUNDBERG</td>
<td>COMBINED (J &amp; S)</td>
<td>AVE</td>
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<td>(PRE)</td>
<td>POST</td>
<td>GAIN</td>
<td>(PRE)</td>
<td>POST</td>
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<tr>
<td>(N = )</td>
<td>(x)</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>(x)</td>
<td>(x)</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>(x)</td>
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<tr>
<td>AVE =</td>
<td>(x)</td>
<td>66.1%</td>
<td>(x)</td>
<td>(x)</td>
<td>82.5%</td>
<td>(x)</td>
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<tr>
<td>HI =</td>
<td>(x)</td>
<td>86.7%</td>
<td>(x)</td>
<td>(x)</td>
<td>93.8%</td>
<td>(x)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LO =</td>
<td>(x)</td>
<td>36.7%</td>
<td>(x)</td>
<td>(x)</td>
<td>56.3%</td>
<td>(x)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(N = )</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>17</td>
<td>17</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AVE =</td>
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<td>51.1%</td>
<td>62.0%</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>50.9%</td>
<td>80.0%</td>
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<tr>
<td>HI =</td>
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<td>79.5%</td>
<td>83.3%</td>
<td>48.3</td>
<td>79.5%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
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<tr>
<td>LO =</td>
<td></td>
<td>25.0%</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>-16.2</td>
<td>13.6%</td>
<td>33%</td>
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</tbody>
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FRIDAY, MARCH 27, 2009
Results (control groups)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>LEIDENHEIMER (Fall)</th>
<th>NIELSEN (Spr)</th>
<th>COMBINED (L &amp; N)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(PRE)</td>
<td>POST</td>
<td>GAIN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N =</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AVE =</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>44.5%</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HI =</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>60.0%</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LO =</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>23.3%</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N = number of participants, AVE = average, HI = higher intensity, LO = lower intensity.
Results (control groups)

- Students were not “blank slates” but resourceful learners.
- No scores were 0%.
- Many already had successful tools and strategies.
- Many were resourceful in answering questions they hadn’t thought about.
# Results (compared)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>PRE AVE</th>
<th>POST AVE</th>
<th>GAIN</th>
<th>N</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>TREATMENT</strong></td>
<td>51.0%</td>
<td>71.0%</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>30</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>CONTROL</strong></td>
<td>58.3%</td>
<td>54.0%</td>
<td>-4.3</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>DIFFERENCE</strong></td>
<td>-7.3%</td>
<td>17.0%</td>
<td>24.3</td>
<td>16</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(49.3%)</td>
<td>(21.7%)</td>
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Results:

Questionnaire (treatment)

(see handout)
Computer-based writing aid 1:

Editing in Microsoft (Office) Word (2003/2007)

- Word count function (e.g. proposals)
- Spell checker function
- Grammar checker function
- Thesaurus (synonym) function
- Formatting for university assignments (Times New Roman 12, double-spaced)
Computer-based writing aid 2:

Advanced Search (Google News)

- Resource: news.google.com
- Hyperlink: “Advanced news search”
- Selecting dependable corpora: e.g. New York Times, independent.co.uk
- Selecting variety of English: (US/UK)
- Searching words/phrases for collocation testing (“Grammar Safari”)
Computer-based writing aid 3:

Online dictionaries and thesauri

- Thesauri: MS Word or dictionary.com
- Monolingual English-English dictionaries: dictionary.com
- Bilingual dictionaries: (various languages) endic.naver.com/ (Korean-English) etc.
Computer-based writing aid 4:

Concordance search

Resource: Web Concordancer (English)
(Hong Kong Polytechnic University)

Tasks:
- Corpus selection (Brown, LOB)
- Word look-up
- Sorting left and right for context
- Morpheme look-up (prefixes, roots, and suffixes)
Computer-based writing aid 5:

OWL at Purdue University

Resource: [owl.english.purdue.edu/owl](owl.english.purdue.edu/owl)

Tasks:

- Finding ESL aids
- Finding models of various university and professional documents
- Finding APA/MLA style help
Discussion

Limitations

- 1.25-hour labs are too short
- Not enough practice time in writing problem-solving to strengthen strategy effectiveness (3/4 of time was introductory/presentation)
- Any real improvement in student writing? (actually use tools?)
Discussion

Future needs:

• A reliable online English grammar parsing program (free)
• Websites to send vital written work to for final expert native-speaker editing
• Reliable list of good-quality bilingual dictionaries on the web
Control Group (addendum)

From John Leidenheimer’s Control Group (N = 11):

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

• Students were computer savvy.
• Students were resourceful and relied on a variety of tactics to accomplish the tasks.
• Ex. Students had trouble generating a computerized citation but were able to find an example on the internet.
• Most tasks were accomplished through the use of monolingual and bilingual sources.
Control Group (addendum)

GENERAL THOUGHTS/CONSIDERATIONS

- The American English and Culture Program (AECP) is structured around a textbook-based approach to teaching writing.
- Instructors have the liberty to use technology and supplement material as they deem appropriate in order to accomplish the goals and objectives of the curriculum. However, the students purchase the book and the administration expects the majority of it to be used.

1. Although implementing a technological writing component in the curriculum may be beneficial, it is not always feasible with the types of students within the program. Many students, even at advanced levels, lack the basic writing skills at the sentence and paragraph level. Most of the time an 8-week session is devoted to helping students express their ideas better. Furthermore, majority of our learners possess weak spelling and grammar skills. Relying on computerized sources for such correction may indeed hamper the overall development of the learner.

2. Plagiarism is problematic. It has been my experience that when asking students to use internet sources for writing, many students will inevitably fall into the trap of plagiarizing. A more accurate assessment of the student's writing proficiency is better obtained through a series of in-class writing assignments.

- With regard to my particular control group, citation and reference was just being introduced at the time of the assessment. I was to utilize a variety of text-based exercises as well as internet sources to accomplish the goal.
Thank you!

Sarah Jarboe (sarah.jarboe@asu.edu)
Paul Sundberg (paul.sundberg@asu.edu)
John Leidenheimer (john.leidenheimer@asu.edu)
Allison Nielsen (allison.nielsen@asu.edu)