5-2022

Applications of Affinity Spaces in English Language Instruction: Writing and Peer Review of Fanfiction Based on Video Games in an Academic English as a Second Language Writing Course

Marta Halaczkiewicz
Utah State University

Recommended Citation

Applications of Affinity Spaces in English Language Instruction: Writing and Peer Review of

Fanfiction Based on Video Games in an Academic English as a Second Language Writing

Course

by

Marta Halaczkiewicz

A dissertation in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

Instructional Technology and Learning Sciences

Approved:

_____	_____
Jody Clarke – Midura, Ed.D.	Deborah Fields, Ph.D.
Major Professor	Committee Member
_____	_____
Jina Kang, Ph.D.	James Rogers, Ph.D.
Committee Member	Committee Member
_____	_____
Joshua Thoms, Ph.D.	D. Richard Cutler, Ph.D.
Committee Member	Interim Vice Provost
	of Graduate Studies

UTAH STATE UNIVERSITY
Logan, Utah

2022

ABSTRACT

Applications of Affinity Space into English Language Instruction: Writing and Peer Review of

Fanfiction Based on Video Games in an Academic English as a Second Language Writing

Course

by

Marta Halaczkiewicz, Doctor of Philosophy

Utah State University, 2022

Major Professor: Dr. Jody Clarke-Midura
Department: Instructional Technology & Learning Sciences

The purpose of this dissertation study was to address challenges English Language

Learners encounter in academic English language writing instruction. I designed and conducted a

classroom-based research study in which I introduced elements of affinity spaces as a

pedagogical solution to the problems of academic genre rigidity, classroom feedback

superficiality, and minimal language development. The students in the course wrote fanfiction

pieces based on their weekly gaming experiences. They engaged in beta-reading providing

feedback in a course online discussion board. They also wrote reflection essays at the end of the

assignment. Using sociocultural theory as a lens, I conducted qualitative analysis of the

fanfiction pieces, the discussion boards, and reflections to explore 1) students' experiences with

this type of activity (fanfiction), 2) types of feedback they engaged in, and 3) the relationship

between the feedback process and students' language development. The findings show that

students had a generally positive experience with writing fanfiction and the online feedback process. They also attributed their language skills improvement to fanfiction writing and reading, and the feedback they received. In terms of feedback on writing, participants provided some feedback types that were similar to fanfiction writers in the wild (Black, 2009) such as praise and encouragement. However, participants also provided feedback that offered constructive advice on grammar and vocabulary, which is not common in fanfiction in the wild. Finally, I present contrasting cases to illustrate how two students' perceptions of their language gains measured up to their writing scores. While both students perceived improvement in their vocabulary and grammar, one received more feedback and showed marked increase in her writing scores while the other, who received a small amount of feedback, did not show improvement. The findings suggest that using creative writing genre combined with an online feedback process has the potential to provide motivation to write, result in quality constructive feedback, and lead to improved language development.

(198 pages)

PUBLIC ABSTRACT

Applications of Affinity Space into English Language Instruction: Writing and Peer Review of

Fanfiction Based on Video Games in an Academic English as a Second Language Writing

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Marta Halaczkiewicz

This classroom-based research study explored applications of informal online spaces in

formal language instruction. Using sociocultural theory as a lens, the present study examined

how using creative writing genres and online feedback practices, may assist with alleviating the

three pedagogical issues of academic writing instruction: rigidity of academic topics and forms,

superficiality of in-class feedback process, and slow language development. Students in an

intermediate English language course wrote weekly fiction inspired by their favorite video

games. They also engaged in a scaffolded feedback process facilitated in an online space. At the

end of the semester, they wrote a reflection on the assignment. A qualitative analysis of student

creative writing, online feedback, and student reflections allowed for exploring 1) students'

experiences with this type of activity, 2) types of feedback they engaged in, and 3) the relationship between the feedback process and students' language development. The results show that students found this assignment helpful in building their English vocabulary and grammar, as well as improving their writing skills. Participants enjoyed learning a new writing style and developing academic skills. They identified reading their peers' writing pieces and receiving feedback as factors for why the topic and form of this type of writing was enjoyable and motivating. An important finding in this study was that while students engaged in feedback that focused on praise and encouragement, they also offered feedback on vocabulary and grammar, which is rarely present in the wild. Finally, two contrasting cases are provided to illustrate how students' perceptions of their language gains measured up to their writing scores. While both students perceived improvement in their vocabulary and grammar, one, who received a large amount of feedback, experienced marked increase in her writing scores while the other, who received a small amount of feedback, did not show increase in writing scores. The findings suggest that using the creative writing genre combined with the online feedback process has the potential to provide motivation to write, result in quality constructive feedback, and lead to improved language development.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

 I would like to thank all the people without whom this dissertation would not be possible. First of all, my husband who supported my academic pursuits and helped me move forward when I thought it was time to quit. Second of all, my two children who believed in me the entire way and who, for the first time in their lives, will see their mom no longer in school. Next, my parents who made this work possible with their relentless encouragement pushing me to achieve academic successes which they never did. Their obsessive gaming also served as an inspiration for my current research. I'd also like to thank my major professor and advisor, Dr. Jody Clarke-Midura who picked me up when others failed to, offered relentless feedback, and never stopped encouraging me to continue with my work. Thank you for your mentorship and friendship. I would also like to give my gratitude to the rest of my dissertation committee. Dr. Deborah Fields, thank you for opening the worlds of affinity spaces to me and for always being willing to meet, in whatever modality, to discuss my ideas. Dr. Jim Rogers, your support spans through my research and teaching. Thank you for your patience, care, and flexibility, as a mentor, colleague, and supervisor. Dr. Joshua Thoms, thank you for your insightful feedback, close reads of my work, and new reading suggestions. Your efforts have helped push me forward and kept me on my toes. Finally, Dr. Jina Kang thank you for all the kindness you showed me and for sharing statistical tricks and tips without which my analysis would not be possible. You all have contributed to this dissertation in different and profound ways and I will be forever grateful for having you as part of my doctoral journey.

Marta Halaczkiewicz

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CHAPTER I – INTRODUCTION

Writing is one of the most challenging skills to master for English Language Learners (ELLs) (Annamalai, 2016). Academic writing is no exception (Ángel & García, 2017; Arkoudis & Tran, 2010; Cennetkuşu, 2017; Hyytinen et al., 2017). It is a crucial academic skill that serves not only as a vehicle to showcase knowledge but it is also a tool that facilitates learning itself (Huang, 2008). However, ELL college students' writing performance is affected by a multitude of motivational factors such as anxiety, previous experience, or engagement in the course and cognitive factors such as complexity of the writing task, knowledge of the topic, or writing strategies (Lam & Law, 2007; Phakiti & Li, 2011; Zhang & Cheung, 2018).

Academic English language programs in the US recognize this issue and support writing instruction by providing courses that focus on this important skill (di Gennaro, 2012; Larsen, 2012). However, ELLs in those courses are often disconnected from the task and lack writing motivation (Al Bulushi, 2015; MacArthur et al., 2016). What is more, they often produce writing that is repetitive and formulaic (Al Fadda, 2012; Giridharan, 2012; Hyland, 2016; Phakiti & Li, 2011; Rosmawati, 2014). As a result, writing becomes an obstacle and, as reported by my own English as a Second Language (ESL) students, it is not perceived as a language developmental task but a hurdle to jump over in order to get into the university (Halaczkiewicz, 2020).

In this dissertation study, I set out to explore an innovative pedagogical approach to academic writing. My research was guided by sociocultural theory, which I assumed, both as an instructional approach and research methodology, would give me the best chance to mitigate the pedagogical challenges of teaching and learning of academic writing. In this chapter, I first outline the challenges that ELL students and, as a result, their instructors face in academic English language writing. I move on to describe a pedagogical approach that could be applied to

mitigate each of those challenges. Then, I introduce the purpose of the present study and the

research questions guiding my inquiry. In the final section of this chapter, I explain the

significance of the study in the larger research and pedagogical context as well as define the key

terms in this dissertation.

Pedagogical Challenges of Academic Writing Instruction

Academic writing is a crucial college skill and is one of the focuses of English language

programs preparing students for American colleges and universities. Yet, it remains one of the

most difficult skills ELLs attempt to master (Hyytinen et al., 2017). Students find it difficult to

engage with the writing task (MacArthur et al., 2016) which is often reflected in their bland and

formulaic writing (Giridharan, 2012; Phakiti & Li, 2011; Rosmawati, 2014).

One of the first challenges of academic writing for ELLs is the selection of writing topics

and the unyielding form of the academic writing. Topics that are aligned with specific majors,

thus more interesting and allowing for more connection and engagement, are perceived as more

difficult and ultimately students tend to steer clear of those (Huang, 2008). ELLs fear that their

language proficiency and subject-specific knowledge might stand in the way of their successful

completion of the writing task (Giridharan, 2012). On the other hand, general topics that ask

students to draw on their opinions and experiences, while being perceived as more accessible

(Giridharan, 2012), might not pose enough of a challenge or stimulate much language

development (Phakiti & Li, 2011).

To further complicate the matter, students have to navigate the multi-dimensional rules of

writing for college. There is the rigid structure of academic essays with distinct parts which need

to follow in a predetermined order (i.e., introduction, thesis, body, conclusion). In addition, ELLs

have to master expository and persuasive genres that their future professors will expect them to

be fluent in. They also need to learn to lend credit to their words by using and citing sources and properly documenting them. What is more, besides improving their general English language proficiency, students need to conquer the complex academic discourse with all its register and lexicon rules (i.e., formality, academic vocabulary, etc.) (Ángel & García, 2017). As a result of this topic and form inflexibility, ELLs may be disconnected from writing, unmotivated, and experience little writing skill development (MacArthur et al., 2016; Winer, 1992).

Another challenge that both ELLs and native English speakers battle with is the loneliness of academic writing (Magnifico, 2010). While the act of writing takes a lot of concentration, time, and quiet space for which being alone is a requirement, the other stages of the writing process like pre-writing and revisions offer a chance for engaging in communication opportunities. Second language writing pedagogy has long recognized this opportunity and engages students in a variety of communicative and collaborative writing activities (Cotterall & Cohen, 2003; Johns, 1993; Zhang & Cheung, 2018, Yu & Lee, 2016). However, student work rarely reaches passionate audiences. As a result, students are disengaged from their writing and often bored with the task (Al-Mahrooqi et al., 2015; Bräuer, 2001; Winer, 1992).

To make matters worse, the sparse communication opportunities that do make their way into the ESL classroom are often too short or too superficial. For example, ESL students are often required to share their writing with their classmates in peer review activities (Li & Li, 2018). Unfortunately, the in-person peer review process is often fraught with students' low self-confidence in their ability to give feedback, low trust in quality of peer feedback received, or culturally motivated anxiety of face-to-face direct critique (Giridharan, 2012; Kim, 2015). In addition, the peer review process is bound by the time constraints of a class. Namely, the teacher may not be able to devote ample time to in-class peer review allowing several rounds of

feedback. A student's work may be reviewed only once providing limited suggestions. In my own practice, I have found that a closer look by multiple set of eyes yields a detailed picture of needed revisions. However, this thorough process of reflective, in-person peer review is time-consuming and can be frustrating (Hu & Lam, 2010; Kim, 2015; Naumoska-Sarakinska, 2017), as my own students have often noted.

Due to the above constraints, creating tasks for ESL academic writing courses that promote language development can be a major challenge for the instructor (Shawer, 2013). Ensuring that students are engaged and learning is a constant struggle (Alamri, 2018; Mutekwa, 2013; Shawer, 2013). First of all, to keep students engaged, instructors have to assign writing prompts that use topics striking balance between encouraging and challenging students so that students feel confident while also developing their language skills. At the same time, students have to be carefully guided through the complexities of academic writing forms without feeling overwhelmed with the multitude of rules. Second of all, opportunities for thorough feedback have to be thoughtfully designed into the writing instruction, so that they do not become superficial or rote (Kim, 2015). In the end, if not designed thoughtfully, writing tasks may discourage students and result in their language development stagnation (Huang, 2008).

With the above constraints in mind, the ESL writing instructor in me set out to find pedagogical application to aid in my academic writing instruction. The researcher and writer in me, set out to explore the literacy practices with a particular focus on non-academic spaces that are populated by engaged writers. My discoveries are described in the next section of this chapter.

Spaces for Engaged Writers

One of the areas that boasts a variety of literacy practices are online fan spaces. Writers who are inspired by their passion flock to online spaces to share their creations with others who share their interests. In my quest for engaged writing practices that I could adapt for my own instruction, I discovered these spaces. These areas have been studied and described by literacy scholars who dubbed them *affinity spaces*. Affinity spaces were first described by Gee (2004) and are spaces created around a common passion, called a *common endeavor* such as a video game, a movie, or a book. The participants converge, mostly online, and exchange their knowledge about and experiences with their passion. The spaces which facilitate this convergence of passions are called *portals* and include fan websites, blogs, wiki pages, YouTube channels, discussion boards, social media groups, among others. Most of the communication takes place in writing by the ways of instant messaging tools, discussion posts, or comments. However, one of the most prolific writing spaces are those of fanfiction sites. These sites invite authors of fiction that is based on fan genres such as literature (e.g., Harry Potter), video games (e.g., Pokémon), or movies (e.g., Star Wars). The authors share their fanfiction and engage in an iterative process of revising their work (Black, 2009; Finn & McCall, 2016).

Affinity Space Characteristics that Promote Writing

Scholars studying affinity spaces have delineated their many characteristics contributing to such passionate participation (Black, 2007; Curwood et al., 2013; Gee & Hayes, 2012; Hayes & Duncan, 2012). As previously stated, academic writing instruction is fraught with challenges of motivating writers and engaging them in a meaningful writing process. Below, I focus on those characteristics of affinity spaces that are particularly conducive to passionate writing and might help alleviate those pedagogical issues. Examples of fanfiction site practices will serve as an illustration of each chosen affinity space characteristic.

Content is Transformed by Interaction

The participants of affinity spaces need to interact in order to negotiate what becomes the content of the portal (Gee & Hayes, 2012). They also negotiate standards, values, and rules of the space. On fanfiction sites, the authors negotiate the rules of sharing their work as well as the etiquette of posting and responding to posts. Authors also communicate to others via their profiles where they leave disclaimers about themselves and their work. These include statements of who they are, where they are from, what type of writing they do, and their expertise levels (Kelley, 2016). In addition, once the piece of writing is posted, it is subject to scrutiny from other authors and undergoes often lengthy revision processes until it becomes a permanent part of the fanfiction site (Black, 2009). In this practice, authors solicit feedback for the piece they post, often specifying what kind of help they would like (e.g., grammar, content, everything, etc.). In active fanfiction spaces, this feedback may come within a few hours from posting. Other times, it may come over several months. Authors use the feedback to revise their work to improve language or slightly change the content of the story. Very often, this is a multi-draft process (Kelley, 2016).

Learning is Proactive and Welcomes Asking for Help

In affinity spaces, participants communicate with each other to actively seek assistance (Gee & Hayes, 2012). Fanfiction websites are set up with that in mind by providing comment sections, private messaging, or "liking" tools (Lammers, 2016). Fanfiction authors also reach out to others requesting feedback on their writing (Kelley, 2016). They depend on other fan writers' expertise and advice and the affinity space portals offers the infrastructure for this exchange to take place. In this manner, fanfiction sites give writers many options of independently pursuing assistance from others.

Encouragement and Feedback from Audience

Affinity spaces are characterized by a presence of passionate audiences (Gee & Hayes, 2012). The participants all care about the same common endeavor and willingly offer encouragement and helpful feedback (Burke, 2013; Magnifico et al., 2015). Fanfiction sites are a prime example of how passionate audiences support writers. The communication tools mentioned above facilitate the revision process inherent in fanfiction writing. Authors engage in beta reading – a process of reading new fanfiction and providing feedback for authors to improve their writing (Black, 2007). Besides receiving and providing feedback, authors also communicate to encourage each other in their writing development (Black, 2009; Kelley, 2016).

In sum, I hypothesize that affinity spaces have the potential to mitigate the pedagogical shortcomings of current writing instruction. Using a typical writing genre present in affinity spaces such as fanfiction, may prove beneficial in English language writing instruction.

Mitigating Pedagogical Writing Challenges Using Affinity Spaces

With the above-mentioned characteristics, affinity spaces have the potential to be beneficial in writing instruction especially when it comes to engaging students in the process of writing and fostering language development. First of all, affinity space writing practices, such as fanfiction, allow for greater topic and form variability. Using the common endeavor to serve as an inspiration for writing may provide an element engaging students in the task (Curwood et al., 2013). Giving students the choice of topics that spark their passions outside of formal academic settings may facilitate greater personal involvement in what they write (Thorne et al., 2015; Steinkuehler et al., 2010).

In addition, writing within affinity spaces provides the same benefits as any other type of creative writing. By breaking with the rigid form of academic writing, students may feel

liberated to tinker with form and language (Bräuer, 2001). This type of writing gives the ELL students authority and freedom to experiment allowing them to find their voice and space in the English language discourses (Iida, 2008; Jeon & Ma, 2015). For non-native speakers of English, this is a rare opportunity to claim expertise in a domain (such as knowledge of their passion) in the context where they always depend on others as language experts (Burke, 2013; Thorne et al., 2015).

The second area where affinity space practices might bolster academic writing is the feedback process. As mentioned above, classroom feedback opportunities might be too short, too superficial, or too intimidating (Giridharan, 2012; Kim, 2015; Li & Li, 2018). Facilitating the feedback process using online portals of affinity spaces might offer a solution to this problem. To begin, affinity space portals' communication infrastructure of blogs and discussion boards allows for students to post their writing, comment on it, or post a reaction in a form of a "like" or "thumbs up/down" icon. Changing the feedback mode from synchronous classroom activity to asynchronous online participation allows students to spend more time reading, reflecting on, forming a reaction to, and constructing a response to other students' writing (Yu & Lee, 2016). Even if there is a deadline to complete the collaborative task, the technology-enabled feedback process takes pressure off performing the review on the spot in the classroom (Zhang & Cheung, 2018).

What is more, the online feedback option gives each piece of writing an opportunity for feedback from multiple readers. While in class, feedback is often facilitated by pair work (Yu & Lee, 2016), thus requiring additional time each instance another review is initiated. However, when facilitated, online, that same piece of writing can be reviewed multiple times without taking up precious classroom time (Huang, 2008). Further, shifting the feedback to online spaces

promotes a thriving collaborative participation in a dynamic writing process (Zhang & Cheung, 2018).

In addition, sharing their writing in an online context, ELLs may feel less vulnerable to criticism as they do not need to physically face their reviewers, which is often part of an in-class writing workshop (Hu & Lam, 2010). For example, students who come from cultures which perceive criticism as a confrontation, may find solace in commenting in an online space rather than in the classroom (Naumoska-Sarakinska, 2017). Students providing feedback in an asynchronous online mode, may be able to do so without feeling like they are creating tension (Yu & Lee, 2016). This may be difficult to accomplish in an ESL classroom where discussion and maintaining eye contact is expected and encouraged by the Western culture. In addition, providing feedback online allows students to take their time formulating appropriate responses (Yu & Lee, 2016).

Finally, incorporating affinity space practices into writing instruction has the potential to mitigate the pedagogical challenge of fostering language development. Literacy practitioners and scholars have observed and documented instances in which a careful application of affinity space creative writing practices provided opportunities for language improvement. For example, when allowed the opportunity to engage in creative writing genres, students tend to become much more committed to the task as it becomes personal (Bräuer, 2001). The allowed freedom of form requires ELLs to draw on lexical and grammatical structures that are necessary to communicate their ideas clearly, an opportunity not available when they are expected to use the target vocabulary and grammar dictated by the course. Thus, being encouraged to search and find the structures they need, students experience language gains that they credit to the freedom that creative writing allows (Bräuer, 2001).

As an additional benefit of affinity space writing, students often recognize their own language gains. For example, in research conducted by Sauro & Sundmark (2016), ELL students perceived that participating in collaborative and creative online writing spaces contributed to their own development or mastery of English language writing skills. After a semester of engaging in fanfiction writing based on the fantasy world of Tolkien, students who previously identified as struggling with writing, reported significant change in vocabulary and grammar development. The participants attributed the gains to the collaborative mode of writing as well as the online feedback activities.

As mentioned above, affinity spaces could prove helpful in mitigating the challenges of academic writing instruction for language learners. However, the pedagogical design needs to be done with caution. First, affinity spaces appear spontaneously in the wild (Curwood et al., 2013; Gee & Hayes, 2012; Lammers et al., 2012). One should not expect for those spaces to organically materialize in a formal classroom setting. It would be prudent to carefully evaluate the instructional needs of students to effectively apply characteristics of affinity spaces to inspire the passionate participation similar to that which occurs in the informal settings.

Second, the feedback on the portals of affinity spaces is a time-consuming process (Black, 2007). The participants engage with each other on their own schedules and some pieces of writing may take many months or even years to receive comments or review suggestions (Black, 2009). This may not be feasible for most university courses which last no longer than a few months. Providing a structure of feedback activities including deadlines and number of reviews, may assist in expediting the process and aligning it with the semester timeline.

Based on these observations of the benefits of writing practices within affinity spaces, I set out to test their application in an academic writing classroom setting. I designed a semester-

long curricular unit for a writing course in an intensive English program (IEP) I teach. I first conducted a pilot study (Halaczkiewicz, 2020). Based on my findings, I made changes to the course for my dissertation study. I describe both the pilot study results and the final course design in Chapter II of this dissertation.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the present study is to explore the efficacy of using affinity spaces in formal academic writing instruction. I used Sociocultural Theory (SCT) to guide the design of the affinity space activities and to understand students' participation in the activities. As described by Vygotsky (1978) and later expanded on by other scholars (e.g., Chaiklin, 2003; Cole, 1996), learning is a process that involves several elements. Human learning happens in the process of tool *mediation*. The *tools* can be physical such as a stick as well as semiotic, such as language. By interacting with and manipulating tools, humans develop more knowledge and understanding of their surroundings. The more they know, the more tools they can use, the more they are able to develop. In their development, they are often assisted by other humans who help them expand their knowledge. Those people are referred to as More Knowledgeable Other (MKOs) and they play a crucial role in facilitating the learning process.

I applied SCT to examine the process of learning to write in a new language in several ways. I wanted to explore the language development of my students using this new pedagogical approach. In writing instruction, we measure development by assessing vocabulary, cohesion, organization, or grammar gains. Those are usually reflected in rubrics that are used for scoring writing. Students are prompted to focus on those areas if they want to improve their writing skills. Thus, I was interested in examining how my students perceived their development in writing by looking at different writing skill measures. I wanted to know if my students thought

that the affinity space activities helped them improve their writing skills in English. This inquiry led me to my first research question:

1. *What, if anything, can we learn about students' experiences participating in the fanfiction writing assignments from their final reflection essays?*

I was also curious to see how my students used the instructional tools to mediate their own learning in affinity space activities. The mediation process in this activity was accomplished by writing fanfiction pieces (I will refer to them as *fanfics* from now on) as well as giving and receiving feedback on fanfics. The tools in this task included the fanfics and the affinity space portals (both in- and out-of-class). I wanted to explore how my students interacted with each other and how, if at all, they served as MKOs to each other. The research question I pursued because of this was:

2. *What kinds of feedback did ELLs provide in the in-class affinity space?*

Last but not least, a student's perceived development may not necessarily be the true reflection of reality. I was interested in knowing whether the students' perceptions of language gains were actually reflected in their fanfics. What is more, I wanted to find out if the feedback they gave and received contributed to their writing development. This is what led me to my final research question:

3. *How was the feedback received in the in-class affinity space reflected in the student fanfiction writing?*

With these questions in mind I set out to choose my research design, data sources, and analysis methods. Before I move on to those, however, Chapter II will dive deeper into the background and context of my dissertation study.

Significance of Study

This study contributes to the current state of knowledge about literacy practices of ELLs. First of all, most affinity space explorations have studied participants in the wild (Black, 2009; Curwood, 2013; Lammers, 2016; Magnifico, 2010). In addition, very few of those studies focus specifically on language learners (Black, 2009; Thorne et al., 2009). Of those that do study affinity space practices of language learners, very few examine the applications of affinity space into formal instruction (Thorne & Reinhardt, 2008). Lastly, there is little research that traces language gains as a result of these practices (Sauro & Sundmark, 2016).

My dissertation study will expand our knowledge of how ELLs participate in affinity spaces in formal instruction. This research also elaborates on the efficacy of using affinity spaces with ELL students. My dissertation study will also contribute to what is known about the relationship between affinity space practices and gains in English language writing skills. Finally, this dissertation provides insight into how to use creative writing genres, such as fanfiction, in academic writing instruction for ELLs.

Key Terms

Activity System – a system in which many elements come together during human activity

Affinity Spaces – spaces that allow convergence of passionate participants who can exchange knowledge of and experience with their common passion

L1 -first or native language

Common Endeavor – the passion of affinity space participants L2 – second, additional, or target language

Community – all of participants in that share the same object of an action

Development – the process of learning in SCT

Division of labor – roles assigned to members of a community while completing an activity

EFL – English as a Foreign Language – students do not live in an English-speaking country

ELL – English Language Learners

ESL – English as a Second Language – students are immersed in the culture of their target language

Fanfiction – fiction written by fans inspired by their favorite literature, movie, show, video game, etc.

IEP – Intensive English Program

Instrument – tools manipulated in an activity

In the wild – this term describes practices that occur online and outside of formal instruction or classroom spaces

Mediation – the use of a tool in order to learn

MKO – More Knowledgeable Other, or a person who can assist in the process of learning like a peer, teacher, parent, colleague, etc.

Object – a goal or purpose of an activity

Outcome – the result of achieving an object of an activity

Portal – a space that affinity space participants use to share their passions

Rules – set of standards that a community agrees to follow while completing an activity

SCT – sociocultural theory

Subject – a person who participates in an activity

Tool – an object that is manipulated in order to learn

ZPD – Zone of Proximal Development, or the area that marks the potential to which we can learn

with minimal help from others

CHAPTER II – BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

In this chapter, I present the background and context for my research. First, I describe Sociocultural Theory, which guided both my pedagogical approach and research design. Next, I describe how fanfiction writing, a popular affinity space practice, exemplifies the sociocultural approach. Then, I describe my pilot study in which I explored a pedagogical application of affinity spaces in an ESL writing course. Finally, I end with how the pilot study results informed the pedagogical design of the writing course used in the dissertation study.

Literature Review

Sociocultural Theory

Sociocultural Theory (SCT) has roots in the early 20th century school of psychology (Lantolf, 2006). The Russian researchers of that school including Vygotsky, Leontiev, and Luria theorized that human learning is situated in and motivated by social activity and greatly dependent on interaction (Lantolf & Thorne, 2007). Even though each of those scholars focused on a different aspect of social learning, all of them examined the process of first language acquisition. Vygotsky has been associated with the birth of SCT and researched how children with the help of those around them acquire language (Lantolf, 2006). He saw that humans are in a relationship with their environment in which they change it as they are in turn changed by it. He proposed that humans use language as a way to engage in this dialectical process (Vygotsky, 1978).

Vygotsky noticed that children use tools in order to interact with their environment. He proposed that in this process they *mediate* their understanding of their surroundings by using physical as well as symbolic tools. A toy may become a tool of mediation that allows a child to see and manipulate it as well as to see "through" it as it interacts with the environment

(Vygotsky, 1978). Language is a symbolic tool of mediation that helps the child not only to accomplish a task but also to plan for, focus, and reflect on it (Vygotsky, 1978).

In the process of mediation, the tools that are being used purposefully over a span of history become artifacts (Cole, 1996) or important cultural objects that serve as both a tool and a driving force for actions (Chaiklin, 2003). Through the artifacts, humans perform actions in which they relate to each other and their context and use them according to the cultural norms (Cole, 1996). The collection of actions - that we take individually or with others - that serve the same purpose become an activity (Engeström & Sannino, 2010). Human activity results from the contradiction of what we know or can do and what we want or need (Chaiklin, 2003). It is thorough the activity that humans pursue their desires and needs. In this process of getting from what we have to what we want to have, the development takes place (Vygotsky, 1978).

According to Vygotsky (1978), this development is facilitated by the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). He describes ZPD as "the distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers." (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86). ZPD involves interaction with a More Knowledgeable Other (MKO) and is a measure that allows educators to assess human development (Chaiklin, 2003). In order to assess development, the learning task is structured as a problem just outside of the learner's knowledge or ability which they try to overcome with the help of an MKO (Engeström & Sannino, 2010). The learner's activity is also dependent on the availability of tools that might be used to solve the problem (Engeström & Sannino, 2010). In this process, the MKO plays a crucial role in one's journey from being able to do a task with assistance, to being able to perform it on their own. In this way, Vygotsky explains how development follows learning, that

is first the learner will perform activities and if they are well scaffolded and supported by MKOs and available tools, the development will follow.

Others have expanded on the Vygotskian process of mediation to help explain how human activity relates to its context and how development happens. Engeström & Sannino visualized activity as a complex system with several crucial elements (2010). According to them, activity is realized by a *subject* (person) pursuing an *object* (goal or purpose) by engaging *instruments* all the while following the *rules* and *division of labor* of the *community* they are a part of. In order for the *outcome* of the activity to come to fruition, all of its elements have to be in congruence. It is also understood that the community is composed of other subjects who also are pursuing the same object. If any of the elements are out of sync, the outcome is not going to be reached. This activity system works well in a context of a classroom. The class serves as a community where its subjects, students and teacher/s, engage in activity by mediating instruments, following rules in order to achieve the object. The object of the activity in a classroom is a curricular unit goal such as learning English language articles or writing a five-paragraph essay. Subjects have different roles (division of labor) depending on their reason to be in class, i.e., the teachers serve as MKO and as such design, deliver, and assess the curriculum while the students are there to learn and thus complete the tasks designed by their teachers. All subjects also follow rules of the classroom community such as explicit policies (e.g., following submission due dates, asking and answering questions, etc.) and implicit norms (e.g., culturally expected non-verbal cues, participation, etc.). If all the actions of the subjects in the community follow their roles and the community using the instruments available, the object will be reached.

Vygotsky and other SCT and activity theorists focused their studies on how children learn their native, or first language (L1). Inspired by those findings, Second Language

Acquisition (SLA) researchers called for adaptation of this social approach to studying how we learn other languages later in life (Firth & Wagner, 1997). This call influenced not only the way SLA researchers now study second language (L2) learning (Duff, 2007; Larsen-Freeman, 2006; Ortega, 2013; Thorne et al., 2009; Thorne & Reinhardt, 2008) but also the pedagogical approaches to teaching a language (Hannibal Jensen, 2019; Kim & Duff, 2012; Reinhardt & Zander, 2011).

Sociocultural Theory Constructs Realized in Affinity Spaces

One adaptation of SCT that has been used for teaching L2 writing is affinity spaces (Rama et al., 2012; Thorne & Reinhardt, 2008). In the following section, I describe how affinity spaces are an example of learning environments imagined by the activity system framework (Engeström & Sannino, 2010). As an illustration, I will use one of the most popular affinity spaces practices, fanfiction writing. The figure below showcases the relationships between the elements of Engeström's and Sannio's activity system model and how they are realized in affinity space activity.

Figure 1

Model of an Affinity Space Activity System (adapted from Engrstöm & Sannino, 2010, p.6)

**portals,
language**
(instruments)

participant
(subject)

**common
endeavor**
(object)

**skills
development**
(outcome)

**rules of
portals**
(rules)

**all participants,
MKOs**
(community)

fluid roles
(division of labor)
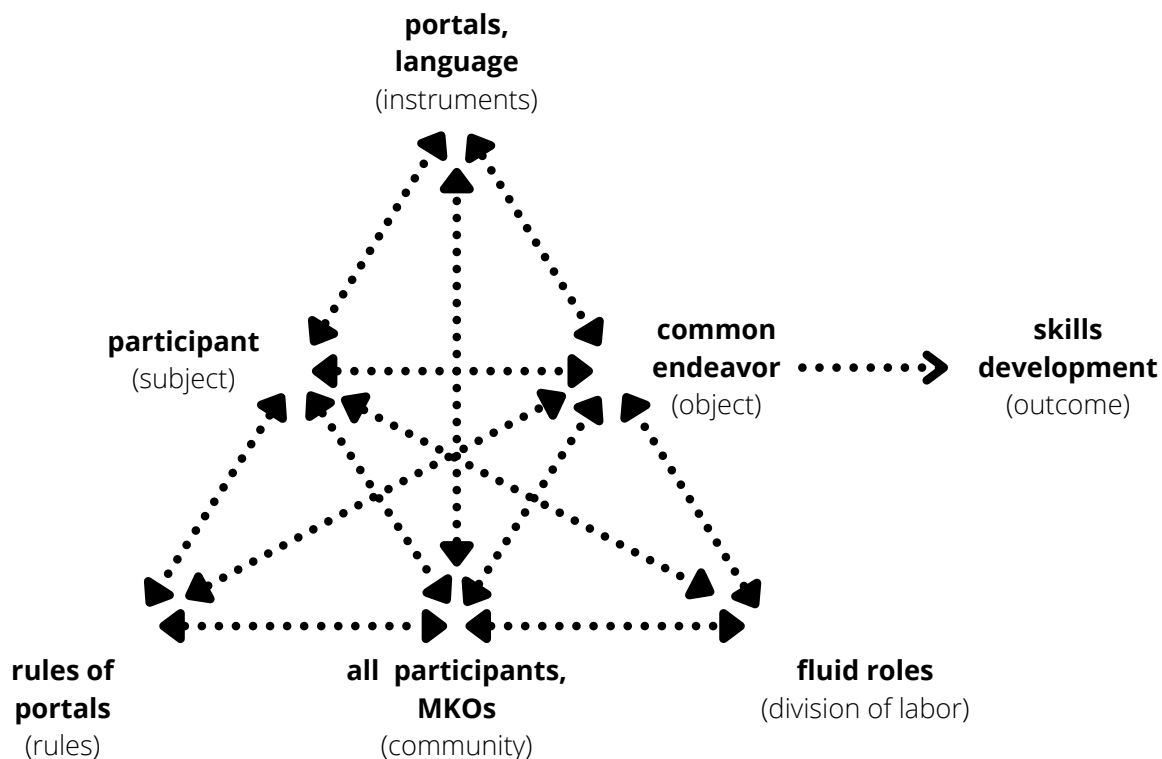
Object

The common endeavor which draws the participants into affinity spaces is the object of affinity space activity. Participants may come to affinity spaces wanting different outcomes; some may want to engage in a discussion about the common endeavor; some may be there to share their knowledge; yet others might want to learn a new skill connected to the common endeavor. For example, passionate fans of Harry Potter books might join a fanfiction website in order to share their writing with other fans but also to receive feedback for it (Kelley, 2016). Other people might be on that same fanfiction site only to read others' contributions and provide

encouragement to the writers (Burke, 2013). As a result, for some participants the outcome of the activity with the same object may be improving writing skills while for others it is keeping engaged with the passion.

Subject

A participant of affinity spaces becomes the subject that is pursuing the object of activity. In the Harry Potter affinity space fanfiction portal, the authors and the readers (Black, 2007) can become subjects of the activity.

Community

An activity depends on the community's engagement. In affinity spaces, the community is made up of all participants of that affinity space, i.e., other passionate subjects. The community facilitates the interactions that participants experience with each other as MKOs. An MKO has an unconventional, in Vygotskian terms, role in affinity spaces. The more weathered fanfiction writers may assist the novice writers by offering stylistic or language advice (Black, 2009; Finn & McCall, 2016; Kelley, 2016; Lammers, 2013). Affinity space participants become contributors on their own terms and in their own time. In contrast to the traditional role of an MKO recognized by the SCT framework of Communities of Practice, in which Lave and Wenger (1991) nested Legitimate Peripheral Participation, affinity space participants do not have to become members of the community and need not establish an expert, or MKO status in their field of interest (Gee, 2004). The progression from novice to expert and the relationship between those two roles in affinity spaces are more fluid and less formal than those in Communities of Practice (Gee & Hayes, 2012). Thus, the role of an MKO can shift between participants depending on the activity and the individual's requirement of other-regulation.

Division of Labor

The roles in affinity spaces are not as strictly assigned as they might be in other communities (Curwood et al., 2013). Affinity spaces are democratic in a sense that authorship and consumption of content in the portals are practices open to all (Gee & Hayes, 2012). As such, there is an ever-present potential for teaching and learning. For example, while all the participants share the affinity space, it is common for participants to engage in a form of apprenticeship. In this process, called Legitimate Peripheral Participation (Lave & Wenger, 1991), experts guide novice learners in accomplishing simple yet meaningful tasks and progressing through more responsible tasks. In affinity spaces, however, the process of apprenticeship is not structured or even linear, it is accomplished at a pace preferred by the learner, and it does not always lead to complete mastery (Gee, 2004). Participation is voluntary and there are no limits on the amounts of content contributions or consumption in portals. On a fanfiction site, the newcomers may initially only lurk (Ito et al., 2010) by reading others' (MKO's) work. They may increasingly offer encouragement to others' efforts end then finally graduate to sharing their own writing, thus becoming MKO's themselves. What is more, the roles may become reciprocal (Gee & Hayes, 2012), with participants receiving feedback from others in exchange for providing it to their writing.

Rules

Even though affinity spaces are spontaneous and seemingly unorganized, the activity in them is governed my many rules. The rules are often portal specific, such as an established etiquette of discussion board participation (Curwood et al., 2013). The language of affinity spaces is also guided by strict rules and participants need to be familiar with specialist language (Hayes & Duncan, 2012) that is specific only to the fans of a particular common endeavor. In addition, fanfiction participants negotiate standards and values of the space including statements

of who they are, where they are from, what type of writing they do, and their expertise levels (Kelley, 2016).

Instruments

For mediation to be successful, we need to use tools to be able to manipulate our surroundings (Lantolf & Thorne, 2007). Through this tool manipulation we mediate activity such as reading or writing. The participants of affinity spaces use different instruments. First of all, the portals of affinity spaces serve as material tools, accessible through the use of hardware and software tools (adding a layer of complexity of the 21st century digital age), that allow learning to take place. Within each portal, participants can make use of several tools to mediate communication, such as discussion boards, profiles, wikis, commenting, liking, etc. (Gee, 2004; Sykes et al., 2008). Ways of expression in the portals are examples of semiotic tools via which the participants engage with each other. These may be a in a form of artistic expression such as visual art (Aljanahi, 2019; Burke, 2013; Lammers, 2016) or creative writing (Black, 2007; Magnifico et al., 2015). The latter is mediated by the use of the classic Vygotskian semiotic tool, language. While participation in affinity spaces is mediated largely by the use of L1, research has highlighted many instances of participants who use their L2 to mediate their participation (Aljanahi, 2019; Black, 2009; Rama et al., 2012; Sykes et al., 2008; Thorne et al., 2009).

Outcome

Finally, activity in affinity spaces leads to an outcome, which often result in learning. The affinity space practices result in vast development of new skills and knowledge making them incubators for learning. Many affinity space participants turn to their portals specifically to develop skills (Curwood, 2013; Fields et al., 2014; Hayes & Duncan, 2012). They take advantage of the expansive cache of knowledge (articles, tutorials, or videos) present in the

affinity space thanks to MKOs. The infrastructure of those spaces (messaging tools, blogs, image and video sharing tools, etc.) assists learners in moving along in their ZPD using as many resources as they need to learn, i.e., to be able to self-regulate.

For example, in one study, three adolescent ELLs who were avid fanfiction writers were able to tap into the vast network of multimodal resources to support their endeavors of writing in English (Black, 2009). Each of the ELLs was able to connect with an MKO in their affinity space who provided the feedback on their fanfiction. In the process that Black calls beta-reading (2009), the participants practiced and developed their English compositions skills, thus gradually traversing the ZPD of their language proficiency.

In sum, language learning in Vygotskian terms can be facilitated in an affinity space activity system. The infrastructure (the portals, content, means of communication, etc.) provides the learner with tools and access to MKOs. Using language (another tool) they mediate the environment in order to move forward on their ZPD and develop their language skills leading to learning the language.

The Pilot Study

To test feasibility of applying affinity spaces in a formal classroom, I, the instructor-researcher, designed a pilot study in which ESL students engaged in informal online writing based on their common gaming experiences (Halaczkiewicz, 2020). I hypothesized that video games being one of the popular common endeavors for affinity spaces (Hayes & Duncan, 2012) as well as a common passion of many ELLs (Thorne et al., 2009) would create a positive disruption in an academic writing course that typically offers limited writing topics or genres. The common game we chose to play was PokemonGo and it served as an inspiration for their academic writing. The game was a global hit at the time of the course and offered both novelty

of gameplay (using geolocation) and a sentimental connection to the Pokémon franchise popular in the 90s, the decade of most my students' childhood. Some of the examples of the writing students composed were comparison/contrast essays using two characters of a game or a cause/effect essay outlining the effects of playing the Pokémon Go game on health.

In addition, students explored online spaces devoted to the game in order to improve their gaming skills and in-game strategy. This way, students would feel more connected to other players of the game as well as getting exposed to gaming terminology and other non-academic vocabulary (Hayes & Duncan, 2012).

Lastly, I provided an in-class online discussion forum for students to share their weekly gaming experiences (Appendix A). These posts would allow students a break from the academic writing form as they would engage in an unstructured and free writing aimed at supporting each other and sharing experiences (Bräuer, 2001). They engaged in a social discussion where they gave each other advice, praised each other, encouraged and griped, much like the typical discussions present on a social media platform. I noticed that students engaged with each other outside of class both in-person and online. I was also much more drawn in while reading and grading their academic essays, which were usually dull and unengaging. I decided to examine closer how students engaged and what their perceptions of this novel pedagogical approach was.

I was interested in how my ELL students participated in affinity spaces related to Pokémon Go, how they perceived the affinity spaces related to Pokémon Go, and how they perceived video games as a topic in their English language course. The weekly discussion boards and interviews after the course ended served as primary data sources. Using qualitative analysis of two cycles of textual coding (descriptive and focused) (Saldaña, 2013) of the two data sources I found that students used out-of-class affinity space portals (such as game wikis and websites)

mostly to socialize with each other and their friends. However, the portal that engaged them the most was the in-class affinity space portal presented as a weekly discussion forum. They used the in-class portal for social connections, encouragement, praise, jest, and sympathizing with each other. They also shared their experiences with, opinions about, and tips for PokemonGo gameplay.

Interviews with five participants revealed that they had positive experiences with and attitudes about using affinity space portals in an academic writing course. They claimed it was an enjoyable innovation in otherwise formal instruction. This confirmed my prediction that a common endeavor of affinity spaces and a free choice of topic would help them engage in writing better (Curwood et al., 2013; Thorne et al., 2015; Steinkuehler et al., 2010). They also reported to be able to connect to each other better thanks to the in-class portal, a phenomenon also reported by affinity space research (Hayes & Duncan, 2012; Lammers, 2016; Thorne et al., 2009). This positive attitude extended to the video game as well. They all found the game easy and engaging to play. They appreciated the sentimental value of the game which reminded them of their childhood experiences with the Pokémon TV series and games. The participants' sentiments were consistent with what previous studies into affinity space found (Burke, 2013; Curwood et al., 2013). Specific details and findings of this study can be found in the article ""Let's Go on a Gym Raid Tonight!": Video Game Affinity Spaces in English Language Instruction" published in the TESL Electronic Journal (Halaczkiewicz, 2020).

The findings from my pilot study informed the pedagogical design of the ESL writing course that served as the context for my dissertation study. For example, I realized that participants were motivated by online social interaction in the in-class portal and that this could be leveraged in future research. I also determined that emphasis on language or organization in

grading of writing pieces were distractions from free communication. In addition, the participants reported weariness of playing the same game for a prolonged time, informing me that multiple games or switching games throughout the semester might work better in the future.

Inspired by the findings of my pilot study which revealed that both video games and affinity spaces were perceived positively by the participants (Halaczkiewicz, 2020), I incorporated them as a motivational enhancement of academic writing instruction. In addition, the research design of the present study focused on exploring fanfiction applications for ESL instruction as fanfiction ESL writers have reported on their perceived language development through the writing task (Sauro & Sundmark, 2016). In fact, creative writing in general has been perceived by language learners as a factor that improves their language skills in terms of grammar, vocabulary, and style (Bräuer, 2001). Encouraged by these findings, I took lessons from my pilot study and applied them towards the next iteration of the academic writing ESL course. The following section describes how I applied affinity space aspects in the course.

Pedagogical Design Addressing Writing Instruction Challenges

This section describes how I incorporated elements of affinity spaces into the intermediate academic writing course, which served as the context for this dissertation study. It is organized by the three main pedagogical challenges in ESL writing instruction introduced in chapter I: Academic writing form, feedback engagement, and writing skills development. Please see Appendix B for the assignments mentioned below.

Challenge of Topic and Structure

To address the first challenge, topic and structure, and to provide an engaging yet challenging topic for writing, students were asked to use video game experience as their writing inspiration. As with PokemonGo in my pilot study described above, students were prompted to

play video games and use those experiences as a springboard for their writing. Video games became the common endeavor (Gee, 2004). This was done in hopes of building a stronger connection to their writing topic (Black, 2007; Curwood, 2013; Hannibal Jensen, 2019). Students in my previous courses, as exemplified in my pilot study (Halaczkiewicz, 2020), welcomed this innovation to an academic writing course. However, having learned from my students that expecting one game to serve as a lasting motivator throughout the semester was unrealistic, I left the choice of the game to individual students. I also encouraged them to change and try new games from time to time to avoid boredom. I served as a resource suggesting games that were tested, free, and engaging in case students struggled with game selection.

To mitigate the challenge of the rigidity of academic writing structure, in this course, in addition to the regular academic essays, students composed weekly fanfics based on their gaming experiences. This way, the pedagogical design expanded into a new form of writing that allowed students the freedom of the structure and exploration of the language (Bräuer, 2001; Zhang & Cheung, 2018). They were prompted to write a short fanfic piece each week after a short time spent playing the video game or games they chose (Appendix B, see # 1-4). We devoted class time to understanding and practicing the many genres of this type of writing. Students explored varied types of fanfics of other writers as well as the fanfics written about their chosen game. This activity was meant to contextualize the common endeavor and see it as a productive and motivating factor of their writing practice.

Challenge of Feedback

The challenge of insufficient peer feedback was met with three tasks that students had to perform after composing the fanfics. First, having learned from the previous study that students enjoyed the out-of-class interaction, I asked students to publish their pieces on fanfiction.net – an

online affinity space portal that allows multiple common endeavor enthusiasts to share their creative work – and monitor it for audience feedback (see Appendix B, #5). This informal space was intended for students to gain more chances to interact with audience and receive more feedback for each fanfic (Black, 2009; Kelley, 2016). It also offered a way to connect their in-class learning to the real world and aimed to provide the motivation for my students much like it did the ELL writers in previous studies (Black, 2007; Thorne et al., 2009). However, my expectations of the interaction on that portal were not very high as such in-the-wild spaces have a long turnaround time and may stretch well beyond the duration of a university course (Halaczkiewicz, 2019). In addition, I was aware of findings of previous affinity space instructional application studies (Magnifico et al., 2018) in which students were intimidated by the public forum of online spaces and the lack of instructor oversight of the online exchanges. Thus, I recognized that the in-the-wild affinity space participation may be sparse and provided a task that was completed within the classroom space.

The second task to help with feedback was for students to post their fanfics on the weekly discussion board for their classmates to read. This idea was inspired again by the success of the in-class affinity space portal from my pilot study (Halaczkiewicz, 2020). The discussion board was facilitated by Canvas, the LMS used at our university. The requirement for this assignment was to share the link to their post on fanfic.net (Appendix B, see # 6) so that the students would go to the out-of-class portal and thus read their fanfic it its natural habitat of other fanfics on the topic and be able to read the previous chapters of the story. This asynchronous exchange was meant to offer a space where students could see other students' writing as models and gain confidence in their own writing (Zhang & Cheung, 2018).

In the next task, students gave feedback to each other in this in-class affinity space portal. The feedback was facilitated by the same discussion board on which students shared their fanfic links utilizing the reply function of the board. The fanfic pieces were always due on the same day each week and the feedback was due 2 days later. The assignment required students to reply to at least two classmates with some constructive feedback (Appendix B # 7). As mentioned above, the process of reviewing writing in class can be flawed; it may not allow multiple readers or varied feedback (Giridharan, 2012). Students may also be too shy to criticize others' work (Hu & Lam, 2010; Naumoska-Sarakinska, 2017). It can also take up a considerable amount of class time (Kim, 2015). In this online writing space, students could devote more time and effort to give each other feedback. One fanfiction could receive multiple suggestions and different opinions. Students could also take their time forming their constructive feedback and provide it in a less formal environment. This way, each fanfic had the potential to receive in-depth feedback from multiple reviewers (Giridharan, 2012). The in-class portal also served as a safe space where students could give and receive indirect critique in a non-confrontational venue (Kim, 2015). I refrained from providing feedback as to not intimidate students and allow them to share their comments and thoughts without being influenced by the instructor's feedback. Ultimately, the feedback could be more frequent, more varied, and less intimidating. In preparation for this task, students studied posts on fanfiction.net and feedback they received. We examined several examples from the website and classified the feedback they received in an effort to scaffold the social interactions that take place in affinity spaces (Magnifico et al., 2018).

Challenge of Language Development

Finally, as a conclusion to the activity, I added a critical thinking piece to the extensive writing assignment. At the end of the semester, students wrote a reflective essay about the fanfic

assignments, including their creative writing experience as well as their perception of language gains (See Appendix B # 8-9 and Appendix C).

With these pedagogical interventions in place, I observed my students' progress over the course of the semester. After the semester was over, encouraged by my observations, I set out to explore the effectiveness of my pedagogical efforts in mitigating the challenges described in Chapter I. The questions that guided this research were:

1. *What, if anything, can we learn about students' experiences participating in the fanfiction writing assignments from their final reflection essays?*

2. *What kinds of feedback did ELLs provide in the in-class affinity space?*

3. *How was the feedback received in the in-class affinity space reflected in the student fanfiction writing?*

Chapter III provides an overview of my research design and how I set out to answer my research questions.

CHAPTER III – METHODOLOGY

Application of affinity spaces in formal English language writing instruction yielded several lessons that influenced my instructional design. The pilot study I conducted further informed how I applied affinity spaces into my teaching. Having taught the course again in this new design I was able to experience how it went logistically and get a general sense of how students received it. I noticed that students were engaged in both the writing and the feedback process more than usual. However, I wanted to explore whether my observations were confirmed and if this new iteration using affinity spaces indeed helped mitigate the challenges of English language writing instruction outlined in Chapter I.

In this chapter, I will describe the research process I engaged in for this project. First, I establish my position in this project as both a career English language instructor and a literacy

practice researcher. Then, I describe the research design including the research questions, the study context, participant sample, data sources I used, as well as the data collection methods. The third part of this chapter will detail the data analysis and what steps I took to answer each of the research questions.

Positionality Statement

My doctoral journey was inspired by the career I have chosen for myself. I have been teaching ESL courses in intensive English language programs for over 13 years. My job entails designing and delivering face-to-face courses (though, the mode of instruction has changed due to the COVID-19 pandemic) that prepare non-native English language speakers for studying at English speaking colleges and universities. My students include those who are on student visas, immigrants, or professionals who plan to continue with their undergraduate or graduate degrees or those who work on their English language skills. They range in age from recent high school graduates to mature learners coming back to get their degrees later in life. They also pursue a multitude of majors and professions from English to Music and from elementary school teachers to robotics engineers.

Over the years as an ESL instructor, I have taught a variety of levels of English proficiency courses that focused on speaking, listening, reading, composition, grammar, as well as specific content or topic courses that aimed to integrate all language skills. Yet, the courses that I have always found most fulfilling were the composition courses. Writing is an indispensable academic skill and yet one that does not easily translate from language to language due to cultural differences of organizing ideas (Clyne, 1987; Fox, 1994). After experiencing the switch from composing in Polish (my native language) to composing in English, I was fascinated by the differences in style and purpose of writing. I realized that mastering, or at least practicing

writing can make a difference not only in my academic performance but also in my confidence as a non-native speaker in my educational and professional pursuits. Having had innovative and patient composition instructors myself, I strive to empower my own students and give them the confidence of effective writing in English.

My own experiences in English composition courses have encouraged me to be innovative in my writing course design. I have explored ways to help students connect to their writing and see it as a tool rather than an obstacle. As in my own college writing experience, I have found my students enjoy opportunities to write to audiences other than their instructor. My students also put much more effort into their writings if they know that peer-review will be part of the process. Creative writing genres such as poetry, short stories, and drama have also helped my students make writing personal. In addition, sharing their writing with their classmates was a point of pride and gave them confidence. I have been greatly aided in all of these endeavors by technology that has made collaborative and creative writing more accessible in my classroom.

In addition to my passion for teaching composition, I also bring in my love for games. I am a casual gamer and game player. I have used many games to help my students engage in their learning. I have played games (physical and digital) with my students to help with grammar, vocabulary, and writing practice. I have gamified instruction to try to motivate students to accomplish course tasks. I have also guided my students in collaborative game design so that they can practice their expressive skills in English.

My design efforts each came with their own set of challenges, successes, and failures. From each course, I have gained a trove of new experiences and learned new design lessons. They also inspired me to learn more about how to make these learning experiences better for my students. That is why I decided to become a researcher and earn a Ph.D. Since I remained an

active instructor during my doctoral studies, I found it natural to use my own classroom as a research context. I have continued to use my research and experience as an inspiration for future course design and vice versa; the experiences in a course guided my literature review and research directions. Through this iterative process, I honed in on the questions that seemed the most pertaining to my own instruction and doctoral research (as noted earlier in this chapter).

The lessons learned in both my professional and personal journeys inform the research directions I take. These experiences as a language instructor, course designer, and a multilingual writer shape not only the areas I study but also how I study them. Recall that I described my pedagogical and research motivations in Chapter II.

Research Design

For this study, I chose a qualitative approach to research to understand students' experiences and participation in the in-class affinity space. Since affinity space is a relatively new area of research, this study was set out to be an exploration of the field and qualitative methods have the potential to yield a more detailed picture.

The research design was driven by my quest to ameliorate the problems that had plagued my instruction in academic writing courses. I have addressed the first problem of writing topic and essay structure rigidity by my pedagogical approach. Namely, I prompted my students to write outside of the regular academic composition norms and introduced fanfic writing in addition to the college essays.

In addition, I also applied an element of affinity spaces to help with the problem of superficial feedback. This was done in two ways. The first one included students posting their fanfics on an out-of-class affinity space portal where they could receive feedback. The second

way to improve feedback quality was the in-class affinity space portal of discussion boards where students were required to respond to each other's writing.

The last problem with writing instruction is that the two first problems make language development difficult and/or slow. Both the affinity space participation and fanfiction writing were my pedagogical solutions aiming to let students explore the language in terms of grammar, structure, and vocabulary and thus result in more development.

After the semester of using this new approach, it was time to check in with my students to see how they received such innovation. I also wanted to know how they mediated the new tools of online feedback given to them. Finally, I was ready to find out if any of those innovations led to language development. Those three queries were reflected respectively in the three research questions below:

1. What, if anything, can we learn about students' experiences participating in the fanfiction writing assignments from their final reflection essays?

2. What kinds of feedback did ELLs provide in the in-class affinity space?

3. How was the feedback received in the in-class affinity space reflected in the student fanfiction writing?

Research Context

The intermediate writing course described in chapter II served as the setting for this study. The course is offered as part of the IEP at Utah State University. Students for whom English is not their dominant language can take the course. It is the third of four proficiency levels being offered in the program with level one serving English language beginners and level four serving advanced English language learners. The course goals include student progression from paragraph to different types of essays. The course outcomes specify that students will

accomplish the goals above by composing coherent multi-paragraph texts using appropriate grammar and organization (see Appendix D for course description). Students earn four credits upon completion of course. It follows the university full semester schedule which lasts 15 weeks. The instruction was delivered in a face-to-face mode with the Canvas page available for material delivery and assignment submissions. There were 19 students taking the course when it was taught in the fall 2018 semester. Students came from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds including China, Dominican Republic, Ivory Coast, Japan, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Mexico, Peru, and Rwanda. I was the instructor of record and the sole teacher for this course.

Participants

I established an IRB protocol (see Appendix E for IRB approval letter) for data collection and arranged for a colleague from the IEP to deliver the recruitment pitch and collect consent letters from participants for the study among my students. We agreed to deliver the pitch in the latter part of the semester when most of student work was complete. This was done to allow easy access to all of the students before they leave for the inter-semester recess. This was also done to prevent influence of their participation in the study over their performance in the studied tasks, i.e., participants might overperform on tasks knowing that they are being studied (Gove & Geerken, 1977). To preserve students' privacy, I was not present during the recruitment pitch and did not receive signed consent forms until after I submitted the final grades for the course. Students were informed that participation would not influence their grade and that they could withdraw as any time without penalty. The language of the consent letter was adjusted to match that of the student proficiency. The colleague pitching the study was a trained ESL instructor who was equipped to further explain the consent letter and study participation if needed.

17 students (female=6) signed consent letters allowing me to use their submitted assignments as data for this proposed project. Table 1 below summarizes the study population. All names are pseudonyms.

Table 1

Participant Demographic Information

Name	Gender	Native Language
Abe	M	Arabic
Ahmed	M	Arabic
Ali	M	Arabic
Angie	F	Mandarin Chinese
Bryan	M	French
Jane	F	Mandarin Chinese
Javier	M	Spanish
Jay	M	Japanese
John	M	Mandarin Chinese
Kate	F	Mandarin Chinese
Larry	M	Mandarin Chinese
Lucia	F	Spanish
Mario	M	Spanish
Mary	F	Kinyarwanda
MJ	M	Arabic
Moira	F	Spanish
Tom	M	Mandarin Chinese

Data Sources

All the data for the present study came from products students created for this course: reflection papers, Canvas weekly discussions, and fanfics. Each data source is described below.

Reflection Papers

At the end of the semester, students reflected on the fanfiction writing experience in a short essay. In this assignment, students responded to a prompt asking questions about their perceived language development and impressions of this semester-long activity (see Appendix B #8). Each student produced a one- to two-page essay shared only with the instructor.

Canvas Weekly Discussions

Most of the engagement in each other's writing took place in the second affinity portal, specially designed for this course - the online Canvas discussion forums. This is where students commented and gave feedback to their classmates' fanfic pieces. Hence, for this study, I used the data that emerged from the students' weekly discussion participation. There were 12 Canvas discussions over the span of 12 weeks (see Appendix A).

Fanfics

Fanfics were creative writing pieces submitted weekly that consisted of a short fanfiction inspired by their gameplay (see Appendix B #4). Students could choose to write based on playing just one game, multiple games at a time, or switching between games. They could write one long story with a new "chapter" each week. They could also change the story each week or several times during the semester. This assignment was turned in via the online discussion tool in Canvas.

Data Collection and Preparation

There was no data collection outside of the course assignments. Participants did not have to engage in any additional activities in order to be considered part of this study. All of the data was collected by downloading or copying the assignment submissions of participating students from the course Canvas page and fanfiction.net site. I saved the downloaded reflection papers as document files. I copied the fanfics from fanfiction.net and saved them as text files. I copied the discussion threads from Canvas discussion boards and pasted them into a spreadsheet noting the date, the author, the receiver, and the message.

As outlined in the IRB protocol (Appendix E), I created a cross-list of student names and their pseudonyms that I assigned to each of them. Each data source (reflection paper, discussion

post, or fanfic) was saved under the participant's new pseudonym. I also read through each writing piece and post to change the names to pseudonyms in every instance in which I saw the student's name such as in the discussion posts spreadsheet where I marked authors and receivers, as well in each instance when students referred to themselves or to their classmates by their names.

Data Analysis

To answer my research questions, I employed qualitative analysis. I did so by engaging in what Lammers and colleagues proposed as affinity space ethnography (Lammers et al., 2012). One way to examine affinity space in this method of research is to study its geography of sorts by following participants as they traverse its multiple portals (Magnifico, 2010). I used, however, another way this method allows for: focusing on the local culture of one portal (Black, 2009; Curwood, 2013). The access to data from a semester-long course (3.5 months) allowed for examination of any changes and trends that took place as well as a deeper look at the participants' personal observations at the end of the course.

In the section that follows, I outline the details of the analysis procedures I followed to answer each for the research questions. The analysis is organized by research question.

Research Question 1: ***What, if anything, can we learn about students' experiences participating in the fanfiction writing assignments from their final reflection essays?***

To answer this question, I examined the reflection papers that students wrote at the end of the semester. Students submitted the papers as document files via Canvas. In this assignment, students were prompted to reflect on their fanfiction experiences (for details see the section on "pedagogical design" in Chapter II). I downloaded each file and saved them as word files. First, I performed a round of open coding, where I looked for patterns, themes, and categories that

emerged from the data (Saldaña, 2013). I used sentences and clauses as units of analysis. For each reflection paper, I made a list of themes with their details that the participant commented on. In Figure 2 below, you will find an example of what a result of coding one reflection paper looked like.

Figure 2

Example of Initial Coding of One Reflection Paper

Ahmed

Learned: new words, new style of writing, practice important, feel confident with writing ability
Developed: writing and reading, language thanks to practice weekly and over a long time, new vocabulary
Helpful/useful: reading others' stories
Enjoyed: the writing genre, writing about what you love – incentive to write, reading others' stories
Difficulties: continuing the story, lg. skill not allow to fully express thoughts
Easy: game choice (good variety), ability to change the story, writing fiction
Future: hope to continue, recommend to friends

Subsequently, I conducted a second cycle of coding in which I looked for themes and patterns across all the essays as well as how they were nuanced by identifying and organizing concepts and codes into themes (aka *axial coding*; Saldaña, 2013). I identified dominant and relevant themes which in great part were areas that the assignment prompted the students to comment about (Appendix C). I organized the codes thus-derived and participant names in a matrix in which I was able to analyze the details that each student used to comment for each theme/code. I further used color coding for details that seemed relevant to answering the research question. Figure 3 below exhibits a part of the analysis matrix as an example of my analysis process.

Figure 3

Second Coding Analysis Matrix for Reflection Paper Data

	A	B	C	D	E
1		Learned	Developed	Helpful	Enjoyed
2	Abe	to use imagination and narrative	grammar and vocab	reading others' fanfic, giving feedback, receiving feedback (for LG dev.)	not knowing where your story will go, others' excitement
3	Ahmed	new style of writing, practice important, feel confident with writing ability	writing and reading, language thanks to practice weekly and over a long time, new vocabulary	reading others' stories, thanks to practice weekly and over a long time	the writing genre, writing about what you love – incentive to write, reading others' stories
4	Ali	writing a story, explaining own ideas to others, making interesting for reader	standardized English test score, grammar thank to feedback, vocabulary as thinking a/t story	feedback	the type of story (action/thriller), receiving feedback, giving feedback, sharing opinions

Research Question 2: *What kinds of feedback did ELLs provide in the in-class affinity space?*

For this question, I engaged in a linguistic analysis (Magnifico et al., 2015) that included a detailed study of the feedback students provided to each other for their fanfiction pieces. To facilitate the analysis, I broke down the discussions into idea units, or "bits of discourse in which the speaker or writer introduces one concept" (Chafe, 1980 cited in Magnifico et al., 2015, p. 162). Sentences and phrases served as salient units of analysis (Chi, 1997). For this part of analysis, I used the spreadsheet that I created with all of the posts across the 12 weeks of discussions. I created a separate sheet for each week. Figure 4 below represents what the spreadsheet looked like before analysis.

Figure 4

Excerpt from the Spreadsheet with Feedback Data Ready for Coding

date ▼	from ▼	to ▼	message ▼	
#####	Larry	Angie	There are many character dialogues, and the tone of the article is humorous, which makes people reverie and makes readers deeply involved in it	
#####	Angie	Larry	thanks	
#####	Ahmed	Larry	I agree with you it really interesting I don't play it but I have a friend who really crazy about it.	
#####	Angie	Ahmed	Thanks!	
#####	Jane	Angie	I really like the game you choose !	
#####	Angie	Jane	thanks!	
#####	Jay	Angie	You have good idea. I know Mario likes trip to everywhere so I can easily imagine that Mario in China. I haven't been in China but when I read your post, I felt like I'm tripping to there. I hope his trip go well!!	

As affinity space researchers have identified different functions of writing feedback (Magnifico et al., 2015), in my first cycle of coding (Saldaña, 2013), I focused on categorizing the feedback by functions. I looked for categories such as praise, advice, or encouragement which have all been documented types of feedback (Black, 2009; Kelley, 2016; Magnifico et al., 2015). Those categories were coded according to their functions such as *praise* or *advice*. As I read each post, I created a separate column with a new code name. Figure 5 below shows an example of what the table looked like after the first cycle of coding.

Figure 5

Excerpt from the Spreadsheet with Feedback Data After First Cycle of Coding

date	from	to	message	praise	advice	encoura gment	affinity	gratitud	act on advice
#####	Larry	Angie	character dialogues, and the tone of the article is humorous,						
#####	Angie	Larry	thanks						
#####	Ahmed	Larry	really interesting I don't play it but I						
#####	Angie	Ahmed	Thanks!						
#####	Jane	Angie	game you choose !						
#####	Angie	Jane	thanks!						
#####	Jay	Angie	idea. I know Mario likes trip to everywhere so I can easily imagine that						
#####	Angie	Jay	thanks!						

I engaged in a second round of coding focused on the content of the fanfiction and language use, since the assignment prompted the students to focus on these two categories. The content of the fanfiction was labeled *content* and to code for it, I looked for units of analysis that mention characters, plot, details, descriptions, dialogue, and others that emerged and had to do with what the piece of writing was about. I grouped all the content feedback into this one salient code as the course goals (Appendix D) do not include improving creative writing activities, thus it is not one of my research interests.

To code the language feedback, I read each post again to find mentions of cohesive devices, word choice, grammar, or spelling and coded them as *cohesion*, *vocabulary*, *grammar*, or *spelling* accordingly. As I coded, more sub-codes such as *style*, *length*, or *punctuation* also emerged. Depending of the function of the feedback type, I marked each sub-code in the column

representing that function (i.e., praise, advice, encouragement, etc.). An example of what the table looked like after the second round of coding follows in Figure 6.

Figure 6

Excerpt from the Spreadsheet with Feedback Data After Second Cycle of Coding

from	to	message	praise	advice	encourag ment	affinity	gratitud	a
Larry	Angie	character dialogues, and the tone of the article is humorous,	content, style					
Angie	Larry	thanks					feedback	
Ahmed	Larry	really interesting I don't play it but I have	topic			topic		
Angie	Ahmed	Thanks!					feedback	
Jane	Angie	you choose !	topic					
Angie	Jane	thanks!					feedback	
Jay	Angie	know Mario likes trip to everywhere so I can easily imagine that Mario in China. I	content			content		
Angie	Jay	thanks!					feedback	
Javier	Angie	funny. Good job and great conversation story. I	content			topic		
Angie	Javier	thanks!					feedback	
Larry	Tom	with a rich storyline that gives the reader	content					

My motivation for this detailed look at the linguistic feedback was rooted in the fact that those codes correspond to the criteria in the rubric (based on the course goals) which I developed to score the fanfiction pieces (Appendix F), thus allowing me to trace the writing language development (further addressed by RQ 3).

After the coding was complete, I created a code book seen in Figure 6 below (for full code book see Appendix G) which I used to train a second coder.

Figure 7

Excerpt from the Code Book Used to Train the Second Coder of Feedback Data

code name	definition	*sub-code*	post mentions	example
praise	positive feedback on the piece of writing; it ranges from specific to very general praises	*content*	characters, descriptions, imagination, details, plot, storyline, story, events, dialogue,	• Good job and great conversation story. • The article is perfect, with a rich storyline that gives the reader room to imagine
		style	humor, clarity, writing, narration, style, 1st person narration	• It is a really nice writing. • and the tone of the article is humorous • Your narration is very interesting
		cohesion	organization, transitions, connections, flow, structure, cohesion	• What I most want to praise is your article structure and way of thinking. • I really like your organization (…)
		vocabulary	word choice, academic language, academic words, learn new words	• And also I'm surprised of your vocabulary. • In your writing i know new words. • Good vocabulary easy to understand.
advice	suggestions and recommendations to improve, fix, add, delete specific or general parts of	*content*	descriptions, plot, characters, detail, scene, emotions, action humor, question asking for detail	• My suggestion is next time you can pay more attention on katarina with his father story or other stories about katerina, and maybe will be more attractive.

code name	definition	*sub-code*	post mentions	example
	the piece of writing	*cohesion*	organization, transitions, connections, flow, structure, sequence	• I hope you can enrich the structure of the article with more connective words. • I just suggest you, add more transition words.
		vocabulary	word choice, academic language, using easier words, using more language	• I hope you can use some bright words next time • if you can add more language, you'll add more interest
		grammar	grammar, tenses, use complex sentence, articles prepositions, sentence structure	• But I think you have some mistakes. In the fourth and the ninth sentences with the word start, I think it is started because of the past tense.
		spelling	spelling	• I think you have some spelling mistakes on the last paragraph.
		punctuation	punctuation, comma, period, spacing	• I think you shouldn't do a space between your last two paragraphs. • (…) but you have some punctuation problem in the second line

Intercoder Agreement

In order to establish intercoder reliability (Wilson-Lopez et al, 2019), I recruited an additional researcher to code the data. I met with the second coder and trained them using the code book. To establish agreement, I conducted Cohen's Kappa (McHugh, 2012) using the Online Kappa Calculator (http://justusrandolph.net/kappa/) (Randolph, 2005). The analysis yielded Cohen's k = .73 indicating a "moderate" level of agreement (McHugh, 2012). Any discrepancies between the codes were then discussed between the two coders and applied to the

remaining utterances. The procedures followed in this process are described in detail in Appendix H.

Research Question 3: *How was the feedback received in the in-class affinity space reflected in the student fanfiction writing?*

To answer this research question, I used the discussion board data obtained during the research question 2 analysis. I also analyzed the participants' weekly fanfiction writing. With those two sources of data, I was able to take a general look at feedback trends as well as observe writing skill development for specific participants.

My first step was to establish frequency counts of all of the discussion posts. In a spreadsheet, I entered each participant's posts for each of the 12 weeks of discussion. I repeated the process on a second sheet preserving how many posts their fanfiction received each week. The two resulting spreadsheets with the data can be found in the Appendix I.

During the second part of this analysis, I scored the fanfic writings that the participants submitted for each week. To accomplish that task, I created a scoring rubric which I based on the course goals (Appendix D) outlined in the syllabus of the course. The rubric focused on writing skill development and included four criteria such as task accomplishment, flow of writing, language and mechanics, and vocabulary. Each criterion was scored on a scale of 0-3 with 0 marking plagiarized, copied, or not submitted fanfics and 3 awarded to fully satisfied criteria (see details in Appendix F).

In the next step, I re-coded the discussion data to align with the criteria captured by the fanfic scoring rubric. I chose to code only the data in the praise and advice categories, as those two feedback types aligned with the instructions I set out for the assignment (Appendix B).

Those categories were also identified by students as most helpful feedback types in the research question 1 results of the reflection analysis (more on the results in Chapter IV). In this process, I coded sub-codes such as *content*, *topic*, or *length* as *task*; *cohesion* as *flow*, *grammar*, *spelling*, or *CAPS* as *language*; and *vocabulary* stayed as *vocabulary*. I used the matrix in table below as a guide during this re-coding process.

Table 2

The Matrix Used for Re-Coding of the Feedback Data to Align with the Fanfic Rubric Criteria

criteria	task	flow	language	vocabulary
Criteria descriptions	following directions, addressing the task, story development	Organization, logical order, coherence cohesion	subject verb agreement, verb tenses, sentence structure, spelling, punctuation capitalization	word choice appropriateness, lexical variety, fluency of idiom use
Corresponding sub-codes of praise and advice codes	content, style, topic, follow instructions, on posts for other people, length	cohesion	no mistakes, improvement, revise, grammar, spelling, punctuation, articles, CAPS	vocabulary

I left out any sub-codes that did not fit the four criteria thus could not be traced in the fanfic scores.

In the final step to answer the research question, a case study approach was chosen because the phenomenon being studied (fanfiction writing) cannot be separated from the contextual conditions (i.e., feedback in the affinity space) which are relevant to the phenomenon under study (Yin, 2003).

I used descriptive statistics to help me with analyzing trends of feedback type and fanfiction scores in the studied population. I also used those statistics to identify case studies. For each of these specific students I examined how the feedback types and fanfiction scores aligned with their perceptions as captured in their reflection papers.

To begin the analysis and gauge general trends, I created a spread sheet with all students' feedback including the comments they received, the comments they gave, codes (advice and praise) and sub-codes (task, flow, language, vocabulary) as well as their fanfic scores (task, flow, language, vocabulary, and total score).

I first established the writing development trends over time. I did so by looking at the participants' fanfic scores over the span of 12 weeks. I used the portion of the table mentioned above that included the total fanfic scores for each week for each participant. I used two variables: the fanfic scores served as a dependent variable; and weeks served as an independent variable. I found slopes as an indicator of the linear trend by using the "trendline" function on the scatter chart in Excel. I found the slope average and standard deviation for the studied population (N=17) and used those measures to divide the participants into three trend groups. The three trend groups were based on their language development as expressed by the slopes of weekly fanfiction scores. The average slope for all participants was 0.11 with a standard deviation of 0.17. I used these measures to place the participants in three writing development trend groups.

In the first group were the participants with negative slopes (n=6). That meant that their total fanfic score dropped over the span of 12 weeks and thus their fanfic did not show any writing skill development. In the second group, I placed the participants with positive slopes, yet below one standard deviation (n=9). This meant that their fanfic scores grew slightly, thus they showed some writing skill development. The final group consisted of students with positive

slopes that were higher than one standard deviation (*n*=2). These participants' total fanfic scores

grew the most out of the studied population and were thus showed the most writing skill

development. The groups can be found in Table 3 below.

Table 3

Participant Trend Groups According to the Slopes of Their Fanfic Total Scores Over the Span of 12 Weeks

Trend Group	Name	Slope
All negative slopes	Jay	-0.0969697
	Larry	-0.0866834
	Ali	-0.0818182
	Ahmed	-0.0588235
	Kate	-0.0472028
	Angie	-0.0192308
Positive slopes below +1SD	Javier	0.05909091
	Jane	0.06643357
	Bryan	0.15909091
	MJ	0.15994236
	Mary	0.16958042
	John	0.17482517
	Abe	0.20454545
	Mario	0.21853147
	Tom	0.23636364
Positive slopes above +1SD	Lucia	0.3006993
	Moira	0.57342657

After establishing the three salient writing development trend groups, I proceeded with

case study approach (Yin, 2014). I used the paradigmatic case approach (Flyvbjerg, 2006) to

select representative cases for each trend group. To help me identify the cases, I employed

descriptive statistics. I used three measures for each individual: the average total fanfic score

calculated by adding up individual fanfic scores and dividing their sum by the number of weeks

(time fanfics were submitted); the average number of received feedback calculated by adding up

received feedback instances and dividing the sum by the number of weeks; and the average number of given feedback calculated by adding up given feedback instances and dividing the sum by the number of weeks. I used the same approach as with the fanfic score slopes to see score distribution for the study population in the three measures. For each measure, I found the mean and using the one standard deviation (+/- 1 *SD*), I labeled students *below average* (*below AVG*, below – 1 *SD*), *at average* (*at AVG*, between -1 SD and +1 *SD*) or *above average* (*above AVG*, above +1 *SD*).

The average score for **Fanfic Total** was 8.79 (*SD* = 1.88). The distribution for the **Fanfic Total** score for all participants over the span of 12 weeks can be found in Table 4. The distribution by participant can be found in Table 5.

Table 4

The Distribution of Fanfic Total Score for All Participants

Labels	Score
maximum individual score	12
smallest average score	3.86
largest average score	11.29
average score	$M = 8.79$
standard deviation	$SD = 1.88$
below average score	< 6.81
at average	$> 6.81, < 10.47$
above average score	> 10.47

Table 5 shows the distribution of Fanfic Total scores by participant.

Table 5

The Distribution of Fanfic Total Score for Each Individual Participant

Labels	Name	Average of Fanfic Total
below AVG	Ahmed	3.86
	Abe	5.96
at AVG	Ali	7.25
	MJ	7.45
	Angie	7.96
	Javier	8.18
	Jay	8.30
	John	8.83
	Kate	9.21
	Lucia	9.25
	Bryan	9.71
	Moira	9.83
	Mary	9.96
above AVG	Mario	10.54
	Tom	10.91
	Jane	11.00
	Larry	11.29

The average score for **Received** feedback was 27.25 (*SD* = 16.06). The distribution of the **Received** feedback for all participants over the span of 12 weeks can be found in Table 6 and by participant in Table 7.

Table 6

The Distribution of Received Feedback for All Participants

Labels	Score
smallest average scores	6
largest average score	67

average score	$M = 27.25$
standard deviation	$SD = 16.06$
below average score	< 11.19
at average	$> 11.19, < 43.31$
above average score	> 43.31

Table 7 shows the distribution of **Received** feedback scores by participant.

Table 7

The Distribution of Received Score for Each Individual Participants

Labels	Name	Sum of # Received
below AVG	Jay	6
	Mario	7
at AVG	Ahmed	13
	Abe	14
	Kate	17
	Ali	20
	Mary	24
	Lucia	24
	MJ	25
	John	26
	Javier	26
	Angie	32
	Jane	35
above AVG	Moira	50
	Tom	50
	Larry	51
	Bryan	67

The average score for **Given** feedback was 28.44 (*SD* = 7.37). The distribution of the **Given** feedback for all participants over the span of 12 weeks can be found in Table 8 and by participant in Table 9.

Table 8

The Distribution of Given Feedback for All Participants

Labels	Score
smallest average score	19
largest average score	45
average score	*M* = 28.44
standard deviation	*SD* = 7.37
below average score	< 21.07
at average	> 21.07, < 35.80
above average score	> 35.80

Table 9 shows the distribution of **Given** feedback scores.

Table 9

The Distribution of Given Score for Each Individual Participant

Labels	Name	Sum of # Given
below AVG	Lucia	19
	Ali	20
	Jay	21
	Mario	21
at AVG	Kate	24
	Tom	25
	Larry	26

	Mary	26
	John	27
	Moira	28
	MJ	28
	Bryan	28
	Javier	29
above AVG	Ahmed	36
	Jane	38
	Abe	40
	Angie	45

I selected one interesting case from each of groups to take a closer look at their feedback and fanfic scores. Those case studies are presented in Chapter IV.

In the last portion of the analysis, I searched for correlations of types of feedback and the scores on fanfics. I used SPSS software to run correlations. I ran the analysis on averages for the entire semester, by quarters (averaging results for every three-week period), and on weekly scores looking at feedback type for one week and comparing it to the fanfic score for the next.

CHAPTER IV – RESULTS

In this chapter, I describe the findings organized by my three research questions.

Research Question 1

Recall that my first research question was: *What, if anything, can we learn about students' experiences participating in the fanfiction writing assignments from their final reflection essays?* I identified nine themes in the participant reflection essays. Those themes included ideas about how their language developed, what they learned, what was helpful, what strategies they used to complete the assignment, what they enjoyed, what they had difficulties with, what came easy to them, their plans for fanfiction writing in the future, and their general experience with the activity. Using SCT as a lens, I identified three categories into which the themes belonged: *development, tools, and motivation*. The first two themes (*how their language developed* and *what they learned*) offered an insight into how the participants perceived their *development* in different language areas those perceptions. The next two themes – *what was helpful* and *what strategies they used* – helped me identify the *tools* they used to mediate their development. The following themes of *what they enjoyed, what was difficult, what was easy, future plans for fanfic writing, and general experience with activity* provide a glimpse at how *motivational* the activity proved and a more critical perspective of the tools mitigating development in this assignment. The following section of this chapter will explore and illustrate with examples each of those categories.

Tracing Outcomes

The participants had many reflective comments on areas of their development. These areas included both those directly connected and not connected to the academic writing course goals and were reflected in the first two themes described below.

How Their Language Developed

The first theme running through the reflection papers was the area of writing language development. Improvement in writing skills is one of the goals for this course (Appendix D). It was also one of the motivations of including this assignment in the instructional design. Recall that one of the pedagogical challenges of academic writing is designing activities that promote writing skill development while also being engaging. Studying this theme shows where the students expanded on their ZPDs (Vygotsky, 1978) as designed by the course. The participants' reflections offered insights into their perceptions of this language development.

All but one participant ($n=16$) thought that their vocabulary improved. The majority of the participant ($n=12$) also noticed improvement in their grammar. They also noted improvement in their writing skills ($n=9$). Other areas of improvement that the participants reported, albeit in fewer numbers, included sentence structure ($n=4$), flow ($n=2$), spelling ($n=2$), punctuation ($n=1$), revision and proofreading strategies ($n=1$), feedback skills ($n=1$), and standardized test scores ($n=1$). Table 10 summarizes the findings which are detailed below.

Table 10

Participants' Perceptions of Development in Language Skills

Development Area	Number of Students
vocabulary	16
grammar	12
writing skills	9
structure	4
flow	2

spelling	2
punctuation	1
revision/proofreading skills	1
feedback skills	1
standardized test scores	1

The quotes below provide examples of students' reflections on their development:

Jay: *"In my case, I used a lot of words for emotion because I usually I used the form of POV. So, I learned that kind of words by it. (...) I learned vocabulary and grammar especially as I said by it."*

MJ: *"We helped each other to improve our writing. When I saw my first story and my last story in fanfiction website, I knew how much I improved. I improved many things like vocabulary, spelling, and grammar."*

Tom: *"When I finish my story, I will share to my classmates. In this way, I can know what wrong I need to correct, which parts I do the best. After get these reply, I will correct my mistakes in next story (...). Sometimes I forget to punctuate some sentences (...). Besides this, sometimes I have some spelling mistakes (...). Finally, I want to talk about the language influence. From this assignment, I really learn many new words, like wily, mission, demonstrate and so on. And I also correct my grammar in some story which the classmates' help."*

These findings directly answer my query about effectiveness of the pedagogical intervention aimed to foster language skills development. Although, all of the areas above are connected to language development, the three areas (vocabulary, grammar, and writing skills) that participants reported on improving the most are also the focus of the curriculum of the course. These areas are also where instructors expect the ZPD to develop in an academic ESL writing course. Writing fluency and accuracy have previously been areas of improvement noted

by participants of a Swedish study on fanfiction-writing pre-service EFL instructors (Sauro & Sundmark, 2016). However, these do not always connect the development with the tool which facilitated it. That is why the next theme from the participants' reflections sheds light on what tools they saw helpful in their language development.

What They Learned

The participants shared many lessons they learned during this semester-long activity. These reflections did not include comments on skills outlined by the course goals (Appendix D). Instead, in great part, they focused on what the participants learned about creative writing. These lessons are still important as they exhibit areas of unintentional development that show added benefits to such novel affinity space application. I use the term *development* here as described by the SCT (Vygotsky, 1978), and refers to the areas of learning. There were as many lessons as there were participants and each had an individual experience to share; however, four main lessons emerged. They are summarized in Table 11 and described below.

Table 11

Participants' Perceptions of Lessons Learned in Areas Other than Language Skills

Lessons	Number of participants
new writing style	8
academic skills	6
new ways of thinking	5
new attitude towards writing	3

A large group (*n*=8) of participants commented on learning a new style of writing. They noted learning to write sorties or prequels as well as learning to write about games. For participants Ali and Jane:

Ali: *"I learned from this assignment a lot, like writing a story and thinking about how you make it interesting for the reader."*

Jane: *"I think writing novels is very useful to me. Because I have learned a lot about the basics of writing. For example, the construction of the novel framework, the choice of the narrative style of the novel and the ambush of the novel clues. Only after possessing these aspects, the novel is complete."*

They learned how to write in a narrative form and focus on the audience in addition to practicing the basics of fiction writing. These areas of growth are consistent with findings from Sauro & Sundmark's study where EFL instructors reflected on a similar experience engaging in a creative writing task (2016).

Other observations (*n*=6) included practical lessons of academic skills. Those included learning the importance of practice, incorporating feedback, working with others, organization, and relaxing. The examples below illustrate the students' perceptions:

Ahmed: *"You also practice writing in a weekly manner and developing writing and reading at the same time. One of the lessons I have learned is that practice is one of the reasons for evolution in anything."*

Javier: *"This will be similar that when we are taking classes in the university. The relationship with international students, and doing projects help us each other out to improve our English skills."*

Moira: *"I think at first I learned how to organize myself. Second, I thought long enough before writing because I thought it was good to have several ideas before I started to write."*

> Mary: *"Later on after I figured it out everything and I started enjoying the game and writing the stories. I always thought that playing games is a waste of the time, but I found out that playing ten minutes a day helps you to relax."*

Some participants (*n*=5) also reported on learning new ways of thinking and processing information. They wrote that they learned how to use imagination and be creative, as well as how to use critical thinking. The examples from Lucia, Angie, and Abe below show what students noticed:

> Lucia: *"This assignment helps me to be more creative, to take my imagination to areas that I had never explored."*
>
> Angie: *"I have learned logical and critical thinking when I write something. It is important for me when I write passage. Also, imagination is necessary for fanfiction. No matter what you write, it does not need to be real."*
>
> Abe: *"I used my imagination to make up events and characters and I did not before I can use that much of the imagination that I used it in the fanfiction. They learned a new style of narrative writing and basics of fiction writing."*

The final learning experience reported by the participants (*n*=3) involved a change in attitude about writing. They learned to enjoy and feel confident in writing as illustrated by quotes from Angie and Ahmed below:

> Angie: *"In the future, I think I will write something in English. Fanfiction is a good start for me, that makes me like writing."*
>
> Ahmed: *"I was weak in writing, but now the practice has evolved a lot and now I write with confidence and I am very satisfied."*

As the examples above illustrate, the participants identified many areas of lesson learned that were not directly connected to the goals of this academic writing course. However, these were not the only areas where students reported learning.

Tracing Instruments

The next two themes focused on the tools and strategies that students used to achieve the object of fanfiction composition. The participants commented both on specific tools that they attributed to their learning as well as other tools they used but did not specify their utility. Those perceptions are reflected in the two themes below.

What Was Helpful

This next theme helped me understand which tools the participants found useful in developing their language skills through the fanfiction writing task. The term *tools* here is akin to the Vygotskian term (1978) that refers to objects with which a person engages with in the environment in order to learn. The online setting provided students with an infrastructure of semiotic tools (Vygotsky, 1978) that they found helpful. These tools were akin to affinity space portals where students posted their writing and provided and received feedback. It is important to note that these tools were also designed and built in as part of the instructional assignment. The assignment scaffolded how students interacted with the tools and the tools involving completing the tasks were reported as the most helpful. Table 12 summarizes the findings which are described and illustrated below.

Table 12

Participants' Perception of Tool Helpfulness

Tool	Number of participants finding it helpful
receiving feedback	10

reading others' fanfics	6
giving feedback	3
encouragements from classmates	3
writing practice	2
grammar	1
instructor support	1

The majority of the participants (n=10) attributed their language development to the feedback that they received from their classmates. Quotes from Mario, Ali, and Angie offer illustrative examples:

Mario: *"Also the comments of the people helped me to know what I can improve."*

Ali: *"Thirdly there is one thing I enjoyed a lot with this experience which is receiving the feedback from my classmates, it was really helpful for me and I check every comment in my posts to know no my mistakes and look to improve it next time."*

Angie: *"I also expect receive feedback from classmates. Especially they find my mistakes and tell me. The suggestions from others make me write better story."*

Some participants (n=6) reported that reading others' fanfiction stories helped them improve their own writing. The quotes below will help illustrate their comments:

Bryan: *"I really enjoyed feedbacks from peers and their encouragements. For example, at the beginning of my writing in this assignment, I did not use connection words as well. But after receiving a lot of feedbacks from my classmates, I started organizing my writing properly. I can confirm that feedbacks helped me to improve my writing."*

Jay: *"I also like the part of reading the writing of other students. Whenever I read the others, I found the new expression which I don't know and it helped me to write the fanfiction next week."*

Three participants (*n*=3) claimed that their language development was due to providing feedback to others as seen in an example below from Abe:

Abe: *"The fanfiction was very helpful because you need to read what the other wrote and give them feedback about the things they need to develop it."*

Some students also noted that encouragement (*n*=3), writing practice (*n*=2), grammar (*n*=1), and instructor support (*n*=1) played a role in their language improvement.

The findings suggest the importance of receiving feedback as a tool; it was the tool that most participants attributed to their perceived language development. However, reading fanfics of others as well as providing feedback and receiving encouragement also seem to have played a role in the participants' perceived language improvement. These findings are consistent with the assumptions of SCT where development is facilitated by an MKO. These findings are also consistent with the research on fanfic writers in the wild which states that feedback from their audience was the most helpful factor in their writing skills development (Kell, 2009; Magnifico et al., 2015; Sauro & Sundmark, 2016). In the present study, the participants reported that their language development was facilitated by their classmates not only through the process of exchanging feedback but also in terms of using their writing as models. However, as seen in the next theme, these tools were not the only ones that the participants used.

What Strategies They Used

Participants in the present study reported on a myriad of strategies that they used to complete the fanfic activity. Even though students dubbed them strategies (as prompted by the

reflection essay assignment instructions), they served as instruments (Engeström & Sannino,

2010), which the participants used to mediate their activity. In other words, they used these tools

to develop their writing skills but did not identify them as helpful to their writing development.

The strategies are summarized in Table 13 and their description follows.

Table 13

The Strategies Used by Participants to Complete the Fanfic Assignment

Strategy	Number of Participants
vocabulary search	6
finding fanfic models	5
using information from this and other courses	5
playing the game	3
using imagination	3
grammar search	2

The strategy reported by most of the participants (*n*=6) was searching for vocabulary to

support fanfic writing as seen in the examples from Ali below.

> Ali: *"I found the story was simple and there is no need to research the whole*
>
> *story in my native language, except some words that are new for me surely I*
>
> *translated it."*

Many ELL fanfic writers turn to this strategy to support crafting their piece (Magnifico et al.,

2015; Sauro & Sundmark, 2016) as this is something all language learners already do to improve

their skills.

Participants also turned to reading others' fanfics to learn about the genre and to get ideas

(*n*=5). They looked at models on fanfiction.net as well as those posted in discussion boards by

their classmates. Examples from Bryan and Kate illustrate their comments.

> Bryan: *"I read some writings on fanfiction.net to try to figure out how gamers write about their experiences."*
>
> Kate: *"I learned how to write a prequel by observing the fanfiction website. Before that, I didn't know what the format of the prequel was. In order to complete this assignment better, I observed some other passages on the website, so I know how to write prequel."*

Using fanfics as models for writing is also a strategy that was introduced as part of class instruction because it is a common practice in the wild and in creative writing classroom adaptations (Jwa, 2012).

The information and strategies learned in the course as well as other courses was also used by several of the participants (*n*=5). Jay explains how he leveraged what he learned in a different course for this assignment:

> Jay: *"In reading 4 class, we have the assignment to read novels. I learned some ways to express the emotion from them. So there was a good connection for me."*

Other strategies also reported, yet in smaller numbers, were playing the game before writing (*n*=3), using imagination (*n*=3), and performing a search for grammar needed for the fanfic (*n*=2).

The strategies described above served as tools to assist with completing the fanfic writing assignment but were not associated by students with their writing skill development. It is important to note that these strategies were sought out by students themselves and not imposed on them by the assignment. This finding is akin to proactive nature of learning that is a characteristic of affinity spaces and also built into their design (Gee & Hayes, 2012) which was described in detail in Chapter I.

Tracing Objects

The final four themes can all be interpreted as ways students found the fanfic activity motivating. Finding something enjoyable, easy, or overcoming difficulties can lead to the desire to continue the task, thus proving the activity motivating. This was an important finding as engaging students in writing activates was one of the pedagogical challenges named in Chapter 1. Those themes are described in detail below.

What They Enjoyed

In another popular theme, the participants shared the aspects of the fanfic activity that they enjoyed. This theme is important to note as it points to areas worth focusing on when designing writing activities that are engaging, which was one of the focuses on this study. The participant observations of what they enjoyed is summarized in Table 14 and summarized below.

Table 14

Instances When Participants Mentioned Areas They Enjoyed

Area of Enjoyment	Instances
topic	18
freedom of genre	10
feedback process	6
reading fanfics	4
audience	4
game	4
thinking	2

The first aspect of the assignment that the participants (n=18, as some commented on it more than once) enjoyed the most was the topic. It is a particularly important finding as providing an engaging topic in academic writing course has been one of the pedagogical challenges as I reported in Chapter I. The participants found being able to choose their topic

based on games they played most enjoyable as the quotes from Moira, Ahmed, and Jane below show.

> Moira: *"I really enjoyed this level of writing because I was able to write my own ideas."*
>
> Ahmed: *"This method of writing is one of the most beautiful ways I've ever tried to learn English for many reasons. First, you enjoy a lot because you write about something you love and know a lot and this gives you the incentive to write and enjoy."*
>
> Jane: *"When writing this novel, there are some things that make me feel very interesting. The interesting thing is that each hero has its own unique characteristics. For example, some of them make people feel cool, some feel terrible, and some feel very cute."*

The second most popular (*n*=10) aspect of this activity was the freedom of the genre of fanfiction writing. This, too is noteworthy as the rigidity of the academic writing genres is one of the pedagogical challenges I noted in Chapter I. The participants enjoyed not knowing where the story will take them, the ability to be inventive, and being in charge of the story as noted in examples below.

> Abe: *"I really enjoyed writing the story that I made it up because you don't know what is the end of your story even if you the author."*
>
> Angie: *"I want to create more interesting story about Mario. Like the first time I wrote Mario went to China and a series of plots happened in China. It gives me more imagination. Every week I do this assignment, I think what character should I add in, and do outline in my mind to prepare about this week writing."*

Another aspect that a large group of participants (*n*=6) enjoyed was the feedback process. As I noted before, the participants attributed their language improvement to giving and receiving comments from others. Therefore, it is important to note here that they also enjoyed the process as Ali and Bryan remarked below.

> Ali: *"Thirdly there is one thing I enjoyed a lot with this experience which is receiving the feedback from my classmates, it was really helpful for me and I check every comment in my posts to know no my mistakes and look to improve it next time, also I had a chance to give feedback to my friends which give me an opportunity to tell them what is their mistakes if they have and share my opinions too."*
>
> Bryan: *"I really enjoyed feedbacks from peers and their encouragements."*

Reading others' fanfics was another enjoyable aspect to the participants (*n*=4). Ahmed reported on it this way:

> Ahmed: *"Second of the fun things when you read the stories of others and some of them are very funny and this is the stuff that I prefer in that way."*

Other participants commented also on enjoyment of audience interaction (*n*=4), playing the video game (*n*=4), and ability to think (*n*=2) as seen in examples below.

> Bryan: *"(…) I enjoyed the sharing on fanfiction."*
>
> Mario: *"I really enjoyed all the activity a lot because when I wrote the story at the same time I played and it is a game in which I have a lot of fun."*
>
> Angie: *"(…) I want to create imagination and enjoy the time of thinking."*

As the above findings indicate, the participants enjoyed the aspects of this assignment that were specifically put in place to mitigate the pedagogical challenges, namely the freedom of topic, form, and the feedback and interaction online.

What Was Difficult

The participants also commented on various difficulties that they encountered throughout the semester while completing the assignment. Those issues are summarized in Table 15.

Table 15

Types of Assignment Difficulties the Participants Experienced

Difficulties	Number of Participants
writing fanfic	15
language	4
game	3
feedback	3
fanfiction.net	2
time	2

The biggest issue for the participants in the present study was writing in this new creative genre. Almost all participants ($n=15$) reported some difficulty ranging from writing dialogue or descriptions to coming up with new plot ideas. Some of them ($n=4$) also saw their language skills, ranging from grammar to vocabulary, standing in the way of fully expressing their ideas. Others ($n=3$) reported on difficulty with choosing or playing a new video game. Some ($n=3$) also expressed concern of providing respectful, appropriate, and error-free feedback. A few ($n=2$) had difficulty navigating the fanfiction.net portal while others ($n=2$) had a hard time devoting adequate time to the writing activity due to responsibilities outside of school. One important caveat to these reports is that most participants noted that those issues happened mostly in the beginning of the semester and dissipated as the semester progressed and they became familiar

with the assignment. However, the difficulties were but one aspect that the participants

commented on.

What Was Easy

The participants also shared what came easy to them during completing this semester-

long assignment. Their comments are summarized in Table 16 below.

Table 16

Aspects of the Assignments that Came Easy to Participants

Easy Aspects	Number of Participants
writing fanfic	11
language	1
game	1
fanfiction.net	1

Interestingly, the area which the participants (n=11) reported was easiest – writing fanfic

– was also the one they reported the most difficult. That is because, as noted earlier, the

difficulties came in the beginning of the semester.

When considered as a large picture, these easy aspects of the assignment put the

difficulties that I described earlier in balance. This shows that even though the participants found

the fanfic writing difficult, with practice they familiarized themselves with the activity and found

it easy.

Future Plans for Fanfic Writing

Although not all participants shared their future plans for writing fanfic, those who did

reported an enthusiasm for continuing the practice in some form after the course. Their

sentiments are summarized in Table 17 below.

Table 17

Participants' Future Fanfic Writing Plans

Future Plans of Fanfic Writing	Number of Participants
yes	10
no	4
recommend to others	2
write but not post	1
no fanfic but a diary	1
no writing but read fanfic	1

These findings suggest that most participants (*n*=10) said that they will continue writing fanfics beyond the course. Only a few (*n*=4) of them clearly stated that they will not continue the activity in this form. Others (*n*=2) noted that they will also recommend this activity to other language learners. In addition, some participants stated that they will continue to write fanfics but will not share them with anybody (*n*=1), or they will switch to writing a diary as they preferred to write non-fiction (*n*=1), or that they will stop writing but continue reading fanfics of others (*n*=1). What is worth noting here is that none of the participants reported the intention of stopping fanfic writing because it was too difficult, boring, or in any other way unengaging. Rather, they offered reasons such as other responsibilities and time constraints.

Experiences with the Activity

A few (*n*=5) participants also offered additional comments on their experiences that did not fall into any of the other themes. Three of the participants (*n*=3) noted that this activity was the first time they wrote so much in English. The other two participants commented on the feedback noting that on fanfiction.net they received both helpful as well as harassment comments while noticing that with their own feedback they were able to help others.

The findings from the analysis of the first research question allowed me to identify the areas in which the participants perceived their own development, the tools they used to mediate

the development, as well as what motivated their participation in the task. Table 18 offers a summary of the findings described above.

Table 18

A summary of Thematic Categories in Participants' Reflective Papers

Category	Theme	Examples
Outcome	course goal- related	vocabulary, grammar, writing skills, structure, flow, spelling, punctuation, revision skills, feedback skills, test scores
	other	new writing style, academic skills, new ways of thinking, new attitude towards writing
Instruments	identified as helpful	receiving feedback, reading other's fanfics, giving feedback, encouragement, writing practice, grammar, instructor support
	also used	vocabulary search, finding fanfic models, using information from this and other courses, playing the game, using imagination, grammar search
Object	enjoyable	Topic, freedom of genre, feedback process, reading fanfics, audience, game, thinking
	difficult	Writing fanfic, language, game, feedback, fanfiction.net, time
	easy	Writing fanfic, language, game, fanfiction.net
	future	Continue writing fanfics, not continue writing fanfics, recommend to others, write fanfics but not post, write a diary not fanfic, read fanfic

	experiences	1st experience writing so much in English, feedback on fanfiction.net both helpful and harassment

Research Question 2

In Chapter II, I described how the activity in affinity spaces allows for democratization of the role of the teacher (Gee & Hayes, 2012). Division of labor is fluid and learners in affinity spaces take turns serving as MKOs and offering feedback and encouragement to each other (Black, 2009). Thus, my second research question asked: *What kinds of feedback did ELLs provide in the in-class affinity space?* In particular, I was interested in how the students served as MKOs (Vygotsky, 1978) through their participation in the fanfic tasks. My findings are summarized below.

Feedback Functions

First of all, the participants engaged in feedback that served multiple functions. In this pedagogical application of affinity spaces, the participants chose to provide feedback that served eight distinct functions. However, some functions were used more frequently than others. Those functions and their frequencies are presented in descending order in Table 19 (for details see Appendix J) and are defined and described below.

Table 19

Percentage of Feedback Functions Calculated Based on the Number of Sub-codes in Each Function and the Total Number of Sub-codes

Function	Time Used	Instances
praise	43.9%	508

advice	26.6%	308
encouragement	12.9%	149
affinity	9.4%	109
gratitude	4.9%	57
act on advice	0.9%	10
interaction outside class	0.9%	10
questions	0.5%	6
Total		1157

As shown in Table 19, the function most commonly present (43.9%) was *praise*. This function included all positive feedback about the fanfic. It ranged from specific to general praises, as exemplified below:

> Specific praise: "*I really like the phrase in your article: "If you don't try to escape from here, we will never feel free in the future.'" That inspires me.*"

> General praise: "*This is a good piece of writing.*"

These findings are consistent with those on other affinity space research. Praises on creative pieces expressed as positive messages, "likes," or "thumbs up" are a common phenomenon among affinity space participants (Black, 2009; Kell, 2009; Lammers, 2016, Magnifico et al., 2015).

The second most popular function of feedback was *advice* (26.6%). As with most writing feedback experiences, this function included suggestions and recommendations to improve, fix, add, delete specific or general parts of the fanfic. The examples below serve as illustration of how the participants used this function:

> Specific advice: *But I have a suggestion maybe next time you should starts with a short summary like one or two sentences.*

> General advice: *I will suggest you to try revise a little before submitting. Just some couple mistakes.*

Feedback in a form of advice is also present in affinity space practices. Many fanfiction writers explicitly request feedback or beta-reads (Black, 2009) focused specifically on grammar, vocabulary, story ideas, or proofreading (Burke, 2013; Kelley, 2016). Yet, one study that systematically reviewed feedback on two major fanfiction sites (fanfiction.net and Figment) found that critical feedback, one that identifies issues and suggests revisions, is quite rare (Magnifico et al., 2015). The examples of constructive feedback above and the fact that over a quarter (26.6%) of all feedback consisted of this type of advice, show how participants in the present study committed to helping each other improve.

The third most common feedback function observed in the present study was *encouragement* (12.9%). In encouraging comments on fanfics, the participants urged the author to write more. The example posts are listed below:

> *I can't wait for your next story.*
>
> *Keep doing more chapters.*
>
> *If you keep going like this you are going to get better.*
>
> *Keep working on that.*

This type of feedback is also a popular way to engage with others' writing on affinity spaces in the wild (Black, 2009; Magnifico et al., 2015). The reviewer who encourages other writers shows solidarity and approval of their peers without the need to expand much effort, as these comments are direct and brief.

Another function feedback served was to show *affinity* (9.4%). This feedback function included the participants' reactions such as opinions, complaints, or general statements about the fanfic stories, the games the fanfics were based on, the assignments, or the technology platforms used. The quotes below serve as example of this function.

I used to play Mario long time ago with my brothers and friends.

I also want to publish quickly now. But I have to wait 7 hours. h it's a long time to wait.

Leaving comments that show how reviewers relate to the piece of writing are also a common practice in affinity space (Kell, 2009; Magnifico et al., 2015). In fact, those comments are meant to exhibit the affinity that the participants of the space all share.

The participants also use the discussion board to express *gratitude* (4.9%). In this function, the authors showed their appreciation for the feedback while the readers showed their appreciation for the fanfic. The examples of this function are below.

From an author: *Thanks for your suggestion.*

From a reader: *I like the way that you wrote it I was curious about it a lot thank you Bryan.*

As with *affinity*, *gratitude* serves more of a social function in an affinity space and can also be found on fanfiction affinity spaces (Kelley, 2016) as a pragmatic way of continuing the feedback process.

A small part of feedback comments served three additional functions: *acting on advice* (0.9%), *interact outside of class* (0.9%), and *questions* (0.5%). In the first one, writers reacted to the feedback they received by promising to use the feedback, as seen in the example below.

hhhh I will try to add.

The second function allowed the participants to invite authors to play or discuss the game (the writing topic) together outside of class in real life. This function also allowed the authors to respond to these invitations. Both instances are showed in the examples below.

Invitation: *Next time, let's play together! I will teach you to use these heroes.*

Reply*: Hhh little Jane, of course we can do that next time. I hope that so much!!!*

With the final function, readers asked question about the fanfics that were not direct suggestions

to improve writing, like in the examples below.

Anyway why did you choose Chile??:)

But is it suitable for minors to read?

The analysis of feedback functions showed that in this classroom affinity space portal, the

participants behaved similarly to the affinity space portals studied in informal settings (Black,

2009; Kell, 2009; Kell, 2009; Magnifico, 2015). However, this study allowed me to find the

types of feedback as expressed by the sub-codes of the analysis. The types are described in the

following section.

Feedback Types

These feedback types span from comments about the stories to mentions of language.

Most of the types were distributed between multiple functions while some types were function

specific. Table 20 below summarizes the feedback types and their occurrences in functions and

their descriptions follow.

Table 20

Types of Feedback Given and Functions It Served

Type	Functions
content	praise, advice, affinity, questions
style	praise, advice
topic	praise, affinity
follow instructions	praise, advice
on posts for other people	praise
cohesion	praise, advice
vocabulary	praise, advice
no mistakes	praise
improvement	praise

revise	advice
length	advice
grammar	advice
spelling	advice
punctuation	advice
articles	advice
capitalization	advice
look forward	encouragement
keep going	encouragement
good luck	encouragement
you can do it too	encouragement
apologize for mistake	affinity
learn from feedback	affinity
complain about tech	affinity
for sharing	gratitude
for feedback	gratitude
for support	gratitude
I will	act on advice
I did	act on advice
play together	interaction outside the class
talk a/t topic	interaction outside the class
agree to interact	interaction outside the class
audience	questions

Three categories of feedback types emerged. The first category had to do with what the fanfics were about. The first feedback type which was used with 4 distinct functions (praise, advice, affinity, and questions) was feedback on *content*. In this type of feedback, the participants mentioned specific story content such as characters, plot, descriptions, or dialogue as well as general content ideas. The second type was feedback on *style* that was used as praise and advice. In this type, the participants commented on narration, writing, clarity, or humor. *Topic* was another type of feedback used with praise and affinity functions. Here, the participants alluded to the game which served as the topic of the writing.

The next category of feedback types was about how well the authors followed instructions of the assignment. The *follow instructions* type was present in both advice and praises and with this type students either admired or admonished each other on their fulfilling of the assignment expectations. In the next type, *on posts for other people*, the participants praised each other on feedback given to others.

The last category of feedback types was associated with language skills. The first two types were used as praise and advice; *cohesion* included comments about organization, transitions, flow, or cohesion, while *vocabulary* consisted of mentions of word choice, academic language, new words, or vocabulary. The next two types were praises on general language skill and included mentions of *no mistakes* or *improvement* in writing. The types that followed were all functioning as advice on language. They included varied suggestions to *revise* the fanfic in general or which area to focus on, change *length*, *grammar* use, *spelling*, *punctuation*, *article* use, and *capitalization* rules.

The rest of the feedback types which did not fall into any of the three categories, were very specific and were used exclusively with one function each. For example, wishes of *looking forward, keep going*, and *good luck* were naturally meant as encouragement. In affinity comments, the participants *apologized for their mistakes*, claimed to *learn from mistakes*, or *complain about fanfiction.net*. As seen in Table 20 above, they also made other statements dictated by the function such as thanks *for sharing* (gratitude), *I will* (acting on advice), let's *play together* (interacting outside the class), or is this appropriate for this *audience* (questions). The list of all of the feedback functions and types can be accessed in Appendix G.

Through this qualitative look at weekly discussions, I was able to learn more about how the participants engaged in the feedback process. They served as MKOs to each other offering

feedback that was instructional such as praise and advice. They also used the feedback feature to serve social functions such as encouragement, affinity, gratitude, or mobilizing to socialize outside of class. These findings are consistent with those from my pilot study in which the participants used the canvas discussions mostly for social purposes (Halaczkiewicz, 2020).

The analysis of the discussion board helped not only understand how the participants engage with each other, but also what they commented on. The findings point to feedback types such as content of the fanfics, style, and topic of the fanfics, as well as the language skills of the authors. While feedback that included praise, encouragement, and show of affinity has been documented by affinity space and fanfiction research, the feedback that focuses on advice is still found to be rare in those informal spaces. In the remaining social functions of the discussion boards, the types of feedback were dictated by its function, such as gratitude or request to play together. These findings helped also shape the answers of my final research question.

Research Question 3

To answer my third research question, *How was the feedback received in the in-class affinity space reflected in the student fanfiction writing?* I drew on the findings from research questions 1 and 2. Using those findings, I engaged in a two-step analysis. In the first step, I identified three groups in participants' writing performance. In the second step, I chose representatives of two of the groups as case studies. My findings are described below.

Groups

As one of my major research interests of this study was tracing writing development of the participants, I identified three groups based on the measure which was closest to showing how much their writing improved over time, the slopes of their fanfic total score. Once I

identified the groupings, I looked at the other measures I collected (i.e., averages of fanfic total scores, received feedback, and given feedback) to find any trends.

Motley Crew

The first grouping (*n*=6) was composed of participants who showed negative slopes on their weekly fanfic total scores, thus, did not seem to show writing skill improvement. This group had inconsistent results on all of the three measures: average of fanfic total score, average of received feedback, and average given feedback. There were no patterns in the amount of feedback they received, gave, or their fanfic total score for the semester. For example, Angie, who gave the highest amount of feedback and was labeled as *above AVG*, was also labeled as *at AVG* for the amount of feedback received and her fanfic total score. Larry, on the other hand, had the highest fanfic score average of the study population (11.29 out of 12) and was labeled *above AVG* for that measure. He also received *above AVG* amount of feedback and only gave *at AVG* amount of feedback. Another example was Ahmed, whose fanfic total AVG score was the lowest of the study population (3.86) and who gave *above AVG* and receives *at AVG* feedback amount. Given their diverse nature, I dubbed this group the Motley Crew and their results are in the table below.

Table 21

The Summary of Motley Crew's Scores and Averages in the Three Measures of Fanfic

Name	# of Given Feedback	# of Received Feedback	Average of Fanfic Total	Given AVG	Received AVG	Fan AVG	Slope
Jay	21	6	8.30	below	below	at	-0.0969697
Larry	26	51	11.29	at	above	above	-0.0866834
Ali	20	20	7.25	below	at	at	-0.0818182
Ahmed	36	13	3.86	above	at	below	-0.0588235
Kate	24	17	9.21	at	at	at	-0.0472028

| Angie | 45 | 32 | 7.96 | above | at | at | -0.0192308 |

True Crew

The second group consisted of participants whose fanfic total scores increased over the span of 12 weeks (*n*=9), as expressed by the scores' positive slopes. Most of the participants (*n*=5) in this group placed *at AVG* for all three measures. Some of the group members (*n*=2) were labeled *at AVG* for one of the measures and *above AVG* for one of the measures. One participant (*n*=1) was labeled *at AVG, below AVG,* and *above AVG* for each of the measures. One participant was labeled *at AVG* for one measure while *below AVG* for two of them. All of this group's members experienced steady writing skill development and most of them had average participation in feedback and average semester scores for fanfic. Because they were true in meeting the expectations and dutifully progressing forward, I called this group the True Crew. Table 22 summarizes the results for the True Crew.

Table 22

The Summary of True Crew's Scores and Averages on the Three Measures of Fanfic

Name	Sum of # Given	Sum of # Received	Average of Fanfic Total	Given AVG	Received AVG	Fan AVG	Slope
Javier	29	26	8.18	at	at	at	0.05909091
Jane	38	35	11.00	above	at	above	0.06643357
Bryan	28	67	9.71	at	at	at	0.15909091
MJ	28	25	7.45	at	at	at	0.15994236
Mary	26	24	9.96	at	at	at	0.16958042
John	27	26	8.83	at	at	at	0.17482517
Abe	40	14	5.96	above	at	below	0.20454545
Mario	21	7	10.54	below	below	at	0.21853147
Tom	25	50	10.91	at	above	above	0.23636364

Flight Crew

The final group's (*n*=2) representatives' fanfic score slopes showed the most writing skill development. Both members of the group were labeled *at AVG* or *above AVG* for most of the three measures of given feedback, received feedback, and the average fanfic score for the semester. Lucia, however, had the lowest number of given feedback of the entire study population and thus was labeled *below AVG* for this measure. Moira, on the other hand, was labeled *above AVG* on the received feedback measure. Because this duo had the steepest fanfic score increase over the semester, as if soaring above all others, I named them the Flight Crew. Their scores are depicted in Table 23 below.

Table 23

The Summary of Flight Crew's Scores and Averages on the Three Measures of Fanfic

Name	Sum of # Given	Sum of # Received	Average of Fanfic Total	Given AVG	Received AVG	Fan AVG	Slope
Lucia	19	24	9.25	below	at	at	0.3006993
Moira	28	50	9.83	at	above	at	0.57342657

Case Studies

In a paradigmatic case approach (Flyvbjerg, 2006), using the data in Tables 21, 22, and 23, I carefully selected two case studies. I chose the cases from the lowest performing group (Motley Crew) and the highest performing group (Flight Crew) and did not select a representative from the middle group (True Crew). My motivation for this choice was to present two most interesting and contrasting cases. Since the representatives in the True Crew performed as expected according to the course goals and constituted the majority of the studies population, I did not deem any of them an interesting case for this study.

The first case was selected because the participant had the steepest negative slope on the fanfic total score over the semester. The second case was selected due to the participant's steepest positive fanfic total score of the twelve weeks. This way I was able to examine the perceptions and participation of the representatives who experienced least and most writing improvement in this academic task.

Jay of the Motley Crew

Jay was a young adult who came to our university for two semesters as an exchange student from Japan. It is common practice for international exchange students to spend the first semester working on improving their language skills by taking ESL classes and then take courses related to their major in the second semester. Jay enrolled in my academic writing course during his first semester. He was friendly, engaged in the class, and participated actively in pair and group work. Throughout the course, he never missed class and submitted his assignments on time with the exception of the last two fanfics. He did not turn in a fanfic assignment for weeks 11 and 12, but he did provide online feedback to his classmates in week 11. Analyzing his case, four themes emerged: Jay played multiple games, he maintained the same fanfic genre, he engaged in minimal feedback (he gave and received low amount of feedback, and he gave feedback to same people), and his perceptions of his writing skills developments did not match his scores. It was clear to me that his eclectic results (characteristic for this Motley Crew) warranted a closer exploration of his experience. Those observations are described below.

Multiple Games. Jay was enthusiastic about playing games for a class and as he stated in the reflection paper, he "*liked this assignment. (…) It was very first experiment in English so that I would say it was nicely fun for me.*" His fanfic was based on three games, each slightly different in genre. For the first four weeks, Jay played the SIMs, a life simulation in which the

player controls activities (biological, social, professional, etc.) of one or more avatars, a concept that earned this genre a "god game" moniker. Simutrans was his game of choice for the following four weeks. This is a business simulation game relying heavily on strategy to run a successful transportation system in a city. During the final two weeks of the assignment, Jay played a first-person shooter (FPS) called Catacombs of the Undercity. Each of those games offered different types of gameplay experiences ranging from eliminating obstacles or completing simple tasks to navigating social norms or solving logistical problems at a network scale. Switching between multiple games was a rare choice, as most participants continued with one or two games. However, Jay's case was unique in other ways as well, as I describe below.

Point of View. Despite changing the games, he played as inspiration for his fanfics, Jay maintained the same narration style for the 12 weeks of writing. He chose to write in first person singular modifying one of the fanfic genres he learned in class, the Alternative Point of View (B. Jenkins, 2015; H. Jenkins, 1992). In the Alternative Point of View fanfic, the author takes on a perspective of a villain or a minor character as long as it is not the protagonist of the book, movie, or video game (see Appendix B for a list of fanfic genres we studied in class). Jay experimented with this point of view by writing as the first Sim (an avatar in the SIMs) he created called Ayano-Ayano Hight. For example, in his second-week fanfic he wrote:

> *Speaking about my friends, Izzy is one of the funniest guys for me. One day Dahila*
> *introduced him for me but he kept talking most of whole time of our hanging out. I got*
> *more information about him after that, he works as a fashion designer. Dahlia said his*
> *"rushing talk" is from his job, but I think its from just his personality.*

Even though, he created and controlled more Sims, he wrote from the perspective of Ayano-Ayano who recalled his interactions with other Sims as friends and colleagues. While the game

does not have a protagonist as players can create and control multiple characters, Jay chose his first avatar as the protagonist of his story. This stylistic choice is logical as the SIMs player may identify with the first character they play and write about (Barnes, 2015) and not know that there might be more characters to control. It is also a practice for ELL writers who are trying to find their voice in the new language (Jwa, 2012). It is also consistent with narrative choices of other participants of fanfic affinity spaces (Chandler-Olcott & Mahar, 2003; Curwood et al., 2013). He used first-person narrative as a tool with which he regulated his language development.

This narrative style was also Jay's choice for fanfic based on the next game he played, Simutrans. This game does not have characters and Jay invented a persona of a transportation business company employee whom he voiced in first person singular. The hero just got a new project and is hoping for a promotion to "president" if he works hard. An excerpt from his week five fanfic offers an illustration:

> *It's time to big challenge. Finally, I got a huge chance to success in this company! After I get this job in here, I worked so hard...and this project could be the hardest project in my history. So this is the super hard project-I need to make plan to make railways. Railways means not only railway but also Buses, Ships, and even airways...as I said couldn't it be so hard mission for me? But I'm excited because after I did these things successfully, I can get the title of president...it's so hot isn't it?*

His readiness to invent a character to tell his story shows Jay's commitment to this style of narration. Even though in the game there is no protagonist, Jay wrote in fanfiction genre, called "fill in the gap" (Barnes, 2015) in which he created a protagonist through whose perspective we learn the story.

Jay also maintained the first-person narrative for the last game he played, the Catacombs of the Undercity. In this FPS, the player is controlling a shooter who navigates corridors and reaches higher levels by killing hostiles and interacting with friendly non-player characters. First-person narrative style choice is more compatible with the first-person perspective of the game. That is maybe why Jay chose to write as the shooter he controlled in the game. Below is a fragment of his prose from week 9:

> *When I woke up in the underground in the Catacomb, I just thought nothing because this is not the first experiment anymore though I've never ever been dead. buried bones-this was a new word even this world. these days, the disaster, which is the tons of dead body move like alive, They also break their tomb out and attack living people. The living humans on the ground stopped to join the war each other to oppose them from the underground world, but we are dominated step by step.*

True to his stylistic choice, he wrote from the perspective of the game protagonist and wrote in first person singular as with the two previous games. With his commitment to the narrative style through all three games, he showed his knowledge of the fanfic style prevalent in the affinity space. In his consistency, he claimed kinship to the affinity space by following the popular practice of first-person narrative, thus exhibiting his knowledge of the fanon (fan canon) (Jenkins, 2015).

His narrative style was unique not only for his group (Motley Crew) but also for the entire studied population. He was the only participant grouped in the Motley Crew who employed first-person narrative. Only two participants grouped in the True Crew, Bryan and John, used it consistently. Moira, who was grouped in Flight Crew, switched to first-person narration in her fanfic in week 8 when she switched to a new game. This way, Jay became of the

few of the entire studied population who showed the insider knowledge of the fanfiction style.

Although there are other narrative styles present in fanfiction, first-person narrative is very

popular and often the style of choice of fan writers (Barnes, 2015; Curwood et al., 2013; Finn &

McCall, 2016; Haynes-Moore, 2015).

Feedback Scarcity. Jay participated in the class by offering feedback to his peers.

However, by the end of the semester, the amount of feedback he gave dropped to a below

average count. Nevertheless, as you can see from Table 24 below, his comments tended to offer

praise and encouragement.

Table 24

Distribution of Jay's Given Feedback by Types

Types of Feedback	Number of Instances
Praise	23
Encouragement	17
Affinity	15
Advice	6
Gratitude	1
Act of advice	1
Questions	1
Interaction outside of class	0

His feedback included messages such as:

To Moira (week 2): *I'm really excited by your story. And also I'm surprised of*

your vocabulary. Please keep it make improved!,

To Bryan (week 3): *Whenever I read your story I can guess what you wrote like a*

movie. I thought you really like this game so that I'm sad to hear you were

arrested finally:(However I'm looking forward to your next adventure!!

These quotes exemplify the type of praise and encouragement he gave his peers.

In addition, he made comments that suggest close reading of his peers' work:

>   To Angie (week 5): *I know it's just accident, but when I read the part of the burnt waffle, I remember about my friend did the same thing! Anyway, I like your story because I can find some humanity of your characters from this sentences. So that I think your story will be improved if you focus on characteristics like Mario or Peach:)*

The quote above shows a personal connection to the story in Angie's fanfic.

Throughout the semester, Jay's messages were approximately the same length and showed equal amount of interest in the stories he read. However, as you can see in Table 25 below, he focused his feedback on the fanfics of four of his classmates.

Table 25

Summary of Jay's Feedback Recipients

Feedback Recipient	Number of Messages
Bryan	5
Moira	5
Lucia	4
Angie	3
Javier	1
Mario	1
John	1
Ali	1
Abe	0
Ahmed	0
Jane	0
Kate	0
Larry	0
Mary	0
MJ	0
Tom	0

Despite his personal messages and weekly feedback engagement with the same classmates, Jay received the lowest amount of feedback from the studied population on his fanfics. What is worth noting is that the feedback he received was short and critical. His classmates rarely reciprocated at the same level of engagement in his writing. In fact, three of the six messages he received were gratitude for his feedback from Angie. Angie, who received high quality feedback from Jay (as the quote above shows), did not offer him any feedback on his own writing. The other three messages he got were critical of his spelling and grammar, though some did offer polite praise as well. Jay engaged with the stories his classmates wrote. His classmates, on the other hand, did not comment on the content of his stories much. Instead, they commented on the language of his fanfics offering very little praise. Table 26 below shows the distribution of feedback type he received from his classmates.

Table 26

Distribution of Jay's Received Feedback by Type

Types of Feedback	Number of Instances
Advice	5
Praise	4
Gratitude	4
Act of advice	1
Encouragement	0
Affinity	0
Questions	0
Interaction outside of class	0

In order to understand the feedback Jay received, it is important to see his writing. The following excerpt is taken from week two fanfic:

> "*Speaking about my friends, Izzy is one of the funniest guys for me. One day*
>
> *Dahila introduced him for me but he kept talking most of whole time of our*

hanging out. I got more information about him after that, he works as a fashion

designer. Dahlia said his "rushing talk" is from his job, but I think its from just

his personality. Anyway, he is cool designer and funny guy. Actually, this my

favorite green skirt I wear is his work. It's so energetic, fresh, and so "sparky".

Maybe you can't understand, but literally sparky. He is amazing undoubtedly."

As you can see, there were grammatical and spelling errors in his submission. In response to this

fanfic, Moira opened up with praise but then commented on his spelling errors:

From Moira in week two: *It is a quite good story I like the way or how you are*

describing. I think you have some spelling mistakes on the last paragraph.

However, in week seven fanfic, Jay was still making spelling mistakes:

"First, I made a station in the biggest city then I made smaller on one second

biggest town. this is our first line for the passenger. what a big step of my carrier!

But in fact, it was not going as well as I guess. the problem was super-crowded

station and because of it, the passengers missed some trains. that was a fatal

problem, so I needed to find a solution to it."

Jay's classmates took notice and made specific recommendations on how to improve his writing:

From Javier in week seven: *My recommendations for you must be that you have to*

use capital letter when you have already began a new sentence. In addition, if you

are using THERE IS and THERE ARE, like in the last sentence, you should write

the correct one.

Feedback from his peers was often in the form of how to improve the technical aspects of

writing (e.g., grammar, punctuation, etc.). In general, the classmates' feedback was accurate,

though critical, as Jay's fanfic was fraught with mistakes. As noted in findings of the second

research question, the participants of this study were keen on providing constructive feedback in a supportive way, which is not often the case for affinity spaces in the wild (Magnifico et al., 2015).

  Perception vs. Performance Mismatch. To learn more about Jay's experience, I examined his perceptions preserved in the reflection paper and compared them to his fanfic rubric scores. The quote below reveals that Jay attributed his vocabulary (i.e., "*expression*") improvement to this assignment by way of reading his classmates' fanfics:

> *"Whenever I read the others, I found the new expression which I don't know and it helped me to write the fanfiction next week."*

However, when I examined his fanfic rubric scores, I was not able to trace that improvement. Instead, his fanfic scores, including scores on the task, flow, language, and vocabulary criteria all declined over the span of ten weeks in which he participated. The decline was seen by calculating the slope of each measure again, similarly to the procedures followed during the trend group selection.

  I looked for a relationship between Jay's fanfic scores and participation in the feedback. I used the results of the correlations I ran during the analysis process (described in Chapter III) to trace any relations between those measures, looking at feedback from one week and the fanfic for the next week. I compared the total numbers of given and received feedback against the fanfic total score as well as the type of feedback (task, flow, language, and vocabulary) against the corresponding fanfic score type for the following week. Alas, there were no measurable significant correlations. Yet, the general trend was that Jay's participation in the feedback process declined as the semester progressed. His fanfiction scores (including task, flow, language, vocabulary, and total) followed the same trend.

It is also noteworthy that his reflection paper did not mention the feedback from classmates at all. The only mention of the process in the reflection is seen in the quote above when Jay refers to reading other classmates' fanfics, but not to comments he gave or received from them. This is not surprising as he received very little feedback on his writing.

This result of Jay's perception and performance provided a nuanced look at what made the Motley Crew so diverse. Although Jay did not experience gains in fanfic scores, he did perform at average as compared to the rest of the study population. One observation we can make is that as his fanfic rubric scores dropped over the semester so did his feedback numbers.

Jay became the Motley Crew representative because I saw his case as the most interesting out of the already unique group of participants. He had the steepest negative slope among the participants on the fanfic total score even after adjusting for the two last fanfics he did not submit. Yet, despite scoring low on those measures, Jay's average fanfic score for the semester was *at average.* His fanfic scores were surprising to me as his classroom performance on other assignments was excellent. Over the span of the semester, his writing skills, as measured by course rubrics, improved. He put visible effort into his academic essays both those that he composed using sources and the ones that required opinions and were time-limited. As his classmates noted in the limited feedback they did offer him, he did not approach fanfic writing with the same devotion. Jay's fanfics were poorly proofread and akin to hasty mental notes. In his reflective paper, Jay did offer some explanation to this discrepancy in task performance:

> *"I felt this task was not the same as a normal assignment. This one is more casual than other assignments like Academic Writing."*

Jay may be referring to the fact that grammar, vocabulary use, or language flow were not graded. This may explain his lack of attention to detail while writing fanfic, a phenomenon observed in

other affinity space research (Magnifico et al., 2018). It might have also been due to the fact that he knew others were going to peer-review it for him, so he might have waited for others to notice his mistakes rather than proofread it himself.

He also gave the *below AVG* amount of feedback and received the lowest amount of feedback. His feedback scarcity might be explained partially by his apparent lack of effort. Even though his stories were interesting, they were short and not very imaginative beyond a unique voice. Paired with frequent mistakes, they might have seemed like a lot of work to give feedback to by other participants (Magnifico et al., 2015). Others might have not been able to engage with Jay's writing and moved on to other, more interesting stories. On the other hand, Jay might have felt discouraged by his peers' lack of feedback. The lack of encouragement and scarce praise from his classmates might have contributed to his low motivation to offer more-than-required feedback to others. This may be particularly true considering his placing high value on reading of fanfics of his classmates as he commented on in his reflection:

> *"I also like the part of reading the writing of other students. Whenever I read the others, I found the new expression which I don't know and it helped me to write the fanfiction next week."*

As the example above shows, Jay identified others' fanfics as a tool with which he was able to expand on his ZPD in terms of vocabulary. He might have considered fanfics as a more effective tool than receiving or giving feedback itself. However, as noted above, this perception was not supported by his writing performance as his fanfic scores did not capture any vocabulary development over the period of 12 weeks.

In summary, Jay's lack of writing skills improvement on the fanfic writing task might be connected to his low participation in the feedback activities. This in turn, might have been due to

the low-stakes nature of the task. This, on the one hand, takes pressure off writing, but on the other hand, might cause lack of effort. This erratic participation paired with performance characterized by uneven effort, earned Jay a spot in the Motley Crew and serves as an example of this eclectic group and a contrast of the next case study.

Moira of the Flight Crew

Moira was a middle-aged female student from Peru. She was a non-traditional student who was returning to school two decades after graduating from high school. She actively participated in class and encouraged others to do the same by asking them questions and offering advice. Moira was also dedicated to her work. She often asked questions about assignments and requested feedback on her academic writing. She used this feedback to improve her drafts. Despite a long morning commute, she was never late and always ready to begin right at 9 am when the class started. Moira was an example of how a hardworking student can reap benefits of an intensive English writing course. Her data painted a picture of a student who begin a course at a lower spectrum of writing proficiency and throughout the semester not only improved but surpassed most of her classmates. This was true of all of her assignments for this course including timed and documented academic writing. Examining Moira's case, I noticed three themes characterizing her performance on the fanfiction task. The first theme was experimenting. The second theme was the exponential growth in writings skills. Extensive social support was the last theme of her experience in the fanfic task. Those three themes in her performance are described below.

Propensity to Experiment. Moira was keen on trying new things especially when it came to video games and fanfic genres. She often remarked on how new things were for her after two decades away from formal education. In class, she eagerly participated in group and pair

work, stating that she'd never participated in group work back home in Peru. The first week of class, she was a bit taken aback when she found out that this academic writing course also involved playing a video game. As she noted in her reflection:

> *"I have never ever played a video game in my life. However, I learned very quickly with the help of my nephew. (...) It was difficult to play because it was hard to pass from one level to another level. The more I played I had more experience playing with the video game. So, I enjoyed it a lot especially when I passed from one level to another level."*

This quote illustrates that even though Moira was new to gaming, she did not let it stop her from succeeding in and enjoying the task. In fact, she never complained about the task and took it on with fervor. This can be credited to the affinity space resources which she was able to employ. Her nephew became an MKO who helped her hone in her gaming skills. Much like many other ELLs studied in affinity space research, Moira used the tools of the affinity space to improve her digital literacy skills which in turn served her in developing her writing skills (Black, 2009; Burke, 2013; Lam, 2014).

Moira, also wanted to get a full experience of game play. It is exemplified in her choice of her first video game. Even though the assignment instructions encouraged students with less gaming experience to choose free and simple games, Moira opted for an action adventure off-the-shelf game requiring more than 20 hours of game time to finish. She felt confident that her affinity space (family members) could support her in her gameplay so that she could maximize her opportunities to learn (and hopefully have fun) in my class. She was enthusiastic to try a new technique while also working on a new skill, as academic writing was such for this non-traditional student.

Moira's propensity for experimentation extended to her gameplay. During the first seven weeks of the course, she played God of War, an action-adventure game. However, for the final five weeks, she played Temple Run, an endless running game in which the protagonist is chased by demon monkeys. The pace and skills needed to accomplish game objectives was significantly different in each game. While God of War required exploration, problem solving, and fighting, Temple Run required quick reflexes while running an obstacle course and avoiding getting caught. Both games had historical elements, as the first one focuses on Greek and Norse mythology and the second game takes place at an Aztec temple. While most of her classmates stuck to the same game and shied away from experimenting with other games (with the rare exception of students like Jay of the Motley Crew), Moira switched to a new game genre with a different gaming experience.

Another area where Moira was eager to experiment was in her fanfics. When she wrote fanfics about God of War, she described epic battles and complicated stories that aligned with the game plot. For example:

> *"Kratos and Pandora are inside of an old Castle and it looks dark and dangerous. Flames were burning in some parts of the Castle. In the middle of the Castle there is a very high burning, blue flame which seems to reach the sky. When Kratos and Pandora where close to the blue flame, suddenly Zeus appeared and grabbed Pandora by the neck and took her. Kratos said leave her alone she is my friend. Immediately Zeus threw her in the middle of the fire. Kratos and Zeus started to fight very hard. Kratos was using his blades and he was very powerful."*

This quote shows how using third-person narrative, she described characters, their relationships, and the adventures they endured in the game. She wrote from an observer's perspective focusing on the protagonist of the story. Moira was able to explore this type of creative writing genre which is a recognized strategy to assist ELLs in building writing skills (Bräuer, 2001; Tarnopolsky, 2005).

She reflected on her experience in her final essay:

> *"When I got started writing, it was not difficult. The difficult part was when I thought and had to invent the characters and what role they were going to play. But week after week I was able to learn and write easier."*

> *"I felt more comfortable because after [playing] the game I had to invent my characters. It was more fun. I did not really prepare or search for anything. The only thing I did was to think a lot and use my imagination. The words just came into my mind. I think it is more fun when you choose what you are going to say. "*

As these quotes illustrate, she saw these assignments as opportunities to learn and grow. This willingness to experiment might be explained by the change in her attitude towards writing that happened during the semester. This change in how she perceived writing can be traced by reading the narrative of her reflective paper:

> *"Writing has been very useful for me and always will be mainly because I had problems in the past."*

In the quote above, Moira identified writing as her "problem" area. Yet, in the next expert from her reflective paper, we see a clear shift in attitude:

> *"I enjoyed writing a lot because it helped me to discover that I might have abilities to be a writer."*

Those words suggest that during the fanfiction task, Moira had a revelation that writing was not as difficult as she had though before. The closing words from Moira's reflection confirm this new attitude:

> *"Now I feel more confident with myself because this type of writing helped me to develop intellectually."*

As the quote above illustrates, she attributed the fanfiction task with helping her feel stronger as a writer. This is not surprising as other fanfictions writers have reported on the fact that participating in affinity space helped them develop confidence in their skills (Kelley, 2016).

Moira also felt empowered to experiment with the writing form. After she switched her game, she changed her narrative to 1st person and wrote from the perspective of the Temple Run runner. Although, in class we studied the alternative point of view fanfic narrative style in which the story is written from a perspective of a villain or a supporting character, Moira took on the persona of the protagonist. She did not choose the genre-suggested alternative which in this case would have been the demon monkey (she actually referred to them as "condors" which is a quite fair mistake as the chasing creatures do have bird-like skulls and their jet-black fur resembles feathers). Below, is an example of the first-person narrative Moira used:

> *"I don't know how I ended in the Temple Run in the Amazon. I went there for vacation but I got lost and I could not find anybody I went with. So I started running as fast as I could to get out. When I suddenly saw condors running behind me, they were trying to get me. I was so scared of them I have never been in this situation before. I was running faster and faster with my backpack on my back."*

This switch in narrative that happened when she switched her game might have been due to the change of the game perspective. The God of War gameplay has multiple characters and often involves elaborate cutscenes (non-interactive gameplay intermissions) during which the player watches parts of the story much as a movie and thus may feel more disconnected from the protagonist, resulting in 3rd person narration of the fanfic. On the other hand, Temple Run involves control of one character with no shift in perspective or cutscenes. This gameplay perspective might have inspired Moira to experiment with the 1st person narration, much like the FPS perspective inspired Jay of the Motley Crew to do the same.

Another possible explanation might come from the fact that Moira by this time in the semester, was feeling a more confident gamer as well as writer. Having had 7 weeks of practice writing and reading fanfics (both of her classmates and in the affinity space), she took on the prevalent narrative style of this creative type of writing – first-person narration (Barnes, 2015; Jwa, 2012; Chandler-Olcott & Mahar, 2003; Curwood et al., 2013). Although, Moira never commented on the stylistic choice change in her reflection, it showed her switch from a fanfic outsider to a fluent user of the style. Like Jay, she marked herself as an insider of the fanfiction writing style.

In general, Moira showed a unique tendency to try new things. Not only did she change games but also her fanfic narration style. This propensity for experimentation might have led to the second theme I noticed in her data, the exponential growth.

Exponential Growth. Moira experienced a great deal of improvement in her writing skills. The first area where this growth was evident were her fanfic scores. Her fanfic total scores were at average compared to the rest of the participants. However, Moira experienced the most growth of all participants in writing skill, as captured by the total fanfic scores over the 12

weeks. The slope of her fanfic total scores was the steepest in the studied population which also earned her the place in the Flight Crew. So, even though overall, Moira's score was average, she improved the most out of all the participants on this task. A closer look at her progression over the semester revealed that on her first fanfic assignment, she only received 5.5 out of 12 possible points on the fanfic rubric (Appendix F). The following example is from her first fanfic assignment:

> *"The top bar is green and shows Kratos health, the second bar is blue and it shows his magic pool, the last one is yellow and shows his energy levels. The story of Kratos begins during his service to the Gods. He was an warrior and he was often challenged by mortals and immortals, sometimes he has nightmares and wanted reunited with his dead family. But Kratos eventually succeeded in gaining enough power to face and kill his enemies."*

In the excerpt above, Moira lost points on each of the four categories from the fanfic rubric: *task* (following directions, addressing the task, developing the story), *flow* (organization, logical order, coherence, cohesion), *language* (subject-verb agreement, verb tenses, sentence structure, spelling, etc.), and *vocabulary* (word choice, lexical variety, fluency of idiom use). For example, she referred to in-game mechanics like the color bars that show characters health or energy levels, thus losing *task* points. She also used few transition signals losing *flow* points. What is more, she showed little control over tenses and used a narrow range of words, thus losing points on *language* and *vocabulary* respectively.

As the semester progressed, her writing improved and so did her scores on the fanfic assignments. In week seven, she received 11 out of 12 points and in weeks 10-12, she received

full points on her fanfic assignment. This improvement is capture by the excerpt below from Moira's fanfic in week 12.

> *It was a beautiful small town surrounded by mountains and big trees. The three of us sat for about five minutes to eat. I was so lucky that Huiracocha had some potatoes and quinoa to eat. Huayna Capac was explaining to me which direction I had to run, because I was confused about where I was going. The two Incas knew those places very well. They also told me that I had to continue to run by myself because they were going back to their town. On the other hand, they told me to be very careful because the jungle is very dangerous. They were worried about me and one of them gave me a knife with a Tumi figure. Therefore, I was very grateful to them for everything they had done for me. I gave them a big hug and I started to run very fast. I was full of energy because I had been eating delicious food.*

This excerpt illustrates as shift from describing in-game mechanics to writing a story that connects to the game play but is an independent narrative, thus fulfilling the *task* criterion (see the fanfic rubric in Appendix F). She also used transitional signals to add to the *flow*. In addition, she used tenses correctly and had control of sentence structure to score full points on *language*. Finally, Moira uses a wide range of *vocabulary*.

In addition to her improvement on *task*, *flow*, *language*, and *vocabulary* scores, Moira was writing longer fanfic stories. During the first two weeks her fanfics were about 140 words each. In week three, Moira's fanfics doubled in length to 283 words, and her average fanfic was 250-words long from then on. It is important to note that on average, the length of fanfics for

Moira's classmates decreased over time. This shows her commitment to learning and improving her writing.

Moira noticed the growth she experienced in her writing abilities. She reflected on her performance on this task commenting on her language development:

> *"I really enjoyed this level of writing because I was able to write my own ideas. On the other hand, I was learning new words and it helped me to develop my abilities."*

She went on to say:

> *"It also influenced me week after week and I learned many new words that I did not knew before. For this reason, this writing has been very helpful to me as a student, especially when I put it into practice every day."*

As these excerpts from her reflective paper show, she noticed vocabulary development thanks to writing fanfics. She also mentioned that:

> *"It influenced me a lot in the way that I learned or made good, structured sentences (…). For this reason, this writing has been very helpful to me as a student, especially when I put it into practice every day. I learned how to use grammar in the proper way, and my ability has also been growing in this aspect.*

As seen in her own words above, Moira attributed her language growth (*"structured sentences"* and *"how to use grammar"*) to this frequent and intensive writing task. Much like fanfic writers in an EFL teacher-in-training course in Sauro & Sundmark's study (2016), Moira felt that this creative style of writing served as a tool assisting in her language development.

These perceptions of growth that Moira noticed were confirmed by her fanfic scores, as not only did her total fanfic score grow over the span of 12 weeks (as mentioned above), her

rubric scores for *language* and *vocabulary* (for full rubric see Appendix F) also experienced exponential growth with steep positive slopes over the semester.

   Extensive Social Support. Another theme of Moira's participation in the fanfic task was the outpouring of social support in the form of feedback. Her fanfics were popular and the number of messages with feedback her classmates left on Moira's work increased each week. Overall, she received a total of 50 messages with feedback for her fanfic, well above the 28.44 average. When recognizing different types of feedback (praise on topic, advice on content, encouragement, etc.) within those messages, there were 144 individual pieces of advice. In week one, she received seven pieces of advice across four messages. This number grew exponentially by the end of the course when she received 19 individual pieces of advice across six messages. In addition, the feedback she received was overwhelmingly positive with 73 praises and 26 encouraging messages as seen in the comments from her classmates included below:

    Mario (week one): *"Your narration is very interesting, I would like to read more of this story."*

    Jay (week two): *"I'm really excited by your story. And also I'm surprised of your vocabulary."*

    Bryan (week three): *"I really like your piece of writing and mostly the you organized things."*

    Ahmed (week four): *"Noting to say after these beautiful comments, just keep going like that."*

    Javier (week11): *"Interesting story. You are doing a good job because you are using the transitions words correctly. I hope you continuous like this."*

The table below summarizes the type and amount of feedback she received throughout the 12 weeks.

Table 27

Distribution of Moira's Received Feedback by Types

Types of Feedback	Number of Instances
Praise	73
Encouragement	26
Advice	24
Affinity	9
Gratitude	8
Act of advice	2
Questions	1
Interaction outside of class	1

Moira noticed the feedback she received. In her final reflection she wrote:

> *"I felt happy that most of my classmates enjoyed my fanfiction. Most of them were saying that it was easy to follow or how funny it was. I told them that I appreciate their comments. They made my day every week as I read and I felt compensated after a very hard job."*

The positive feedback she received not only acknowledged her effort but also provided motivation for her writing. This is a common effect reported in affinity space research. Fanfiction writers praise each other's efforts and encourage each other which in terms inspires them to keep writing better and improving (Black, 2009; Burke, 2013; Curwood, 2013; Magnifico, 2010).

In terms of the feedback she provided to other students, she gave only what was required each week. The amount of feedback she gave was *at average* for the class. She provided 28 feedback messages with 62 individual instances of different feedback types.

The feedback she gave tended to be positive:

> To Bryan (week one): *"I think you writing it is good, if you keep going like this you are going to get better."*
>
> To Javier (week two): *"I like your story. It makes my laugh it is short but good. I suggest you to write a little more."*
>
> To Lucia (week two): *"While I was reading your story I laugh because it is pretty good and funny, and the way you described is really good."*

As illustrated above, Moira focused her feedback on parsing her classmates' writing, making gentle suggestions, as well as encouraging them to persevere in the task. The table below provides a distribution of the types of feedback Moira gave her peers over the 12 weeks of the assignment.

Table 28

Distribution of Moira's Given Feedback by Types

Types of Feedback	Number of Instances
Praise	32
Advice	12
Encouragement	9
Gratitude	5
Affinity	4
Act of advice	0
Questions	0
Interaction outside of class	0

As mentioned above, despite receiving an overwhelming amount of feedback from her classmates, Moira only provided an average amount of feedback back to them. She does provide an explanation for not reciprocating the enthusiastic feedback from her classmates:

"I did not really like giving feedback to my peers, because I was not yet an expert

or I was not confident about it."

The quote above, reflects Moira's lack of confidence as a writer. While she became a more independent writer whose attitude about her abilities changed over the 12-week span of this activity, as mentioned before, she did not feel competent enough to confidently assist others in their learning. In fanfiction affinity spaces, novice writers welcome feedback but felt anxious to leave it for other writers (Kell, 2009). It has also been reported that fanfic writers take some time to develop the sense of right to give feedback, especially when it comes to critical feedback (Magnifico et al., 2015). Recall that Moira left mostly praising comments (32) as feedback (see Table 28 above). These were in contrast to advice which she gave almost three times less frequently (12). Given more time and practice, Moira's confidence as a reviewer might have caught up with her confidence as a writer.

In sum, Moira was a hard-working student who put in great effort and time in her writing. She was not afraid to experiment with the new tasks both those involving writing and those supporting writing. Her efforts resulted in her growth in the course. This growth could be seen in her language development as measured by the fanfic rubrics. She was also well-supported by her classmates who received her work positively. All of those factors made her an exemplary member of the Flight Crew, the group of successful learners whose language learning and writing improved over the 12-week project.

CHAPTER V – DISCUSSION

In this dissertation study, I set out to examine how an innovative pedagogical approach, affinity spaces, can be used to address challenges ESL students face in their writing courses. Challenges such as the rigidity of academic writing topics and structures, superficiality of peer feedback, and lack of language development have been shown to have negative effects on ESL students' experiences in writing courses (Ángel & García, 2017; Bräuer, 2001; Hu & Lam, 2010; Huang, 2008; Kim, 2015). The findings of the present study suggest that using affinity spaces as part of instruction in an ESL writing course had a positive effect on students' experiences, including making academic writing freeform and engaging, making the peer review process more in-depth and less stressful, and promoting language development. In this chapter, I discuss the findings of the present study in light of the current state of ESL writing pedagogy and research. I then discuss the possible implications for instruction and second language research. Finally, I present the limitations of this study and offer suggestions for further research.

Discussion on Pedagogy and Research

In order to situate the findings of the present study, the discussion is organized around the three main pedagogical challenges in ESL writing instruction introduced in Chapter I: academic writing form, feedback engagement, and writing skills development

Academic Writing Form

Recall that in Chapter I, I explained how difficult it is to engage students while teaching them to write for academic purposes (Hyytinen et al., 2017). Academic topics often prevent students from connecting to writing or pose too much of a language challenge (Giridharan, 2012; Huang, 2008). On the other hand, personal or general topics while being more accessible, might be too generic and boring (Giridharan, 2012; Phakiti & Li, 2011). What is more, having to follow the rigid structures of academic writing, such as including introductions, thesis statements, topic sentences, etc., may also stifle language development and cause disengagement (Ángel & García, 2017; MacArthur et al., 2016; Winer, 1992).

In order to address the issue of topic choice, I designed a 12-week intervention on fanfiction writing, a popular affinity space practice, in my ESL writing course. Students engaged in the process of reading and writing fanfics and providing written feedback to each other, all the while using the semiotic tool (Lantolf & Thorne, 2007), English language, which was also their learning objective. As with fanfics in the wild (Black, 2009; Curwood et al., 2013; Magnifico et al., 2018), the participants in the present study embraced their common endeavors as topics of their writing. Similar to previous findings (Halaczkiewicz, 2020), students identified the freedom to choose their own topic as one of the aspects they liked most about the fanfic activity. However, the present study extends previous findings by examining which tools and MKOs students used to engage with their self-selected fanfic topics. As mentioned previously, instruments are concrete and semiotic tools and signs (Engeström & Sannino, 2010) that we use

to learn in our surroundings. while MKOs are people who help us to fulfill our learning goals and include peers, teachers, or parents (Chaiklin, 2003). For example, some participants in the present study reported that reading fanfic written by their peers served as a model and helped in their own fanfic writing. This idea of peer writing as a model is similar to findings by Jwa who found that novice ESL writers drew inspiration from the content of the fanfiction affinity space (2012). Other instruments participants in the present study said they used to learn and share about their topics include searching for vocabulary and grammar, playing the video game they selected, and using imagination. This is an important finding of the present study in that it shows how the fanfic assignment allowed them to combine tools more closely aligned with out-of-school learning – video game play and imagination – with tools more aligned with formal instruction, such as vocabulary and grammar searches. This allows us to see how affinity space writing practices have the potential to enhance instruction as the students are engaged in a topic they enjoy while practicing an important academic skill.

Research has also found that using creative genres in academic writing offers more flexibility to experiment with language and its form (Bräuer, 2001; Iida, 2008; Jeon & Ma, 2015). Similarly, in the present study, participants agreed that their outcomes included not only learning a new style of writing but also a new way of thinking, as the following examples first presented in Chapter IV show:

> Lucia: *"This assignment helps me to be more creative, to take my imagination to areas that I had never explored."*
>
> Angie: *"I have learned logical and critical thinking when I write something. It is important for me when I write passage. Also, imagination is necessary for fanfiction. No matter what you write, it does not need to be real."*

What is more, in their reflections, many students wrote that they found fanfic writing to be difficult. At the same time, they wrote that they enjoyed the freedom of the genre and being able to use their imagination in their writing. As a result, they said the task of fanfic writing became easier over time. This student perception can be attributed to the fact that the task offered them just enough challenge to keep them motivated yet was not limiting them to stifle perseverance (Malone & Lepper, 1987). An important note is that the majority of participants expressed their intent to continue with the fanfic writing after the class ended which is an indication that the academic form was engaging.

The flexibility for students to experiment with the language was best exemplified by the two case studies. Both Moira and Jay used narrative styles that are not very common for academic writing. They both relied on first-person narrative for all or some of their fanfics. However, the two cases showed a marked difference in their efforts. Jay's case exhibited a phenomenon also observed in other studies in which participants valued more structured assignments or expected more constructive feedback on their writing (Magnifico et al., 2018). Jay shared in his reflection that he liked the fanfic assignment but did not value it the same way that he valued other assignments that were graded on different course goals (grammar, vocabulary use, organization, etc.). As a result, he did not proofread his fanfics and his writing was unpolished and fraught with mistakes. Therefore, despite the fact that Jay was flexible with the form of writing and used first-person narration, he was inflexible with the language because his performance on it was not graded, as he admitted in his reflection. In other studies of fanfiction writers, the opposite was true; patricians valued their personal (fanfiction) writing more that the work completed for class and thus put in more effort into it (Chandler-Olcott & Mahar, 2003). We can observe the friction between objects and rules in Jay's activity system.

First, the rules established by the teacher did not make this assignment strict. Second, Jay did not see the fanfic assignments as important and thus did not follow the rules established for other class writing.

Moira offered a contrasting case to Jay's when it came to her efforts. She self-identified as someone who struggled to write and did not have a lot of confidence in her ability to write. Her object was very clear and aligned with the course objectives – improve writing. The fanfic assignment provided a context, and thus motivation, to try new things and perform better. As a result, she completed her fanfics putting in as much effort as she did across all course assignments. She applied the same rules to the fanfic assignment as she did to other class assignments that had stricter grading policies. In contrast to Jay, she valued all course assignments equally. Here, the object and community rules work in congruence helping Moira with pursuing her object. She later reflected that this flexibility resulted in two outcomes; it helped her gain confidence in her writing as well as improve her writing skills. This is in line with other studies on affinity spaces that found participants' writing not only improved but they also became more confident in their writing (e.g., Kellye, 2016). While most research on affinity spaces is done in the wild (Black, 2007; Curwood et al., 2013; Fields et al., 2014; Lammers, 2016; Magnifico et al., 2015; Thorne et al., 2009), the case of Moira shows that using affinity spaces as a pedagogical approach in classrooms has the potential to be as effective as affinity spaces in the wild in terms of writing improvement and confidence. However, the case of Jay reminds us that learners are not all the same and it provides implications for how instructors may want to structure and grade such assignments, discussed later in this chapter. For the learning space to be successful in helping students in achieving desired outcomes, the activity system for each subject (learner and teacher) has to work in unison.

Feedback Engagement

The role of peer feedback and how to implement it is challenging in writing instruction. Multiple studies on in-class peer review have found that feedback is often superficial, a fact that research attributes to culturally motivated anxiety of direct critique as well as the limitations of class time (Giridharan, 2012; Hu & Lam, 2010; Kim, 2015, Naumoska-Sarakinska, 2017). In the present study, I examined how the affinity space portal could help mediate the peer review process. In this pedagogical design, the portal was an online class discussion forum which was also a tool that writers could use to mediate their skill development by providing and using the received feedback, the instruments of their activity systems. This way students did not have to interact with their MKOs (classmates in this case) face-to-face. In addition, due to the asynchronous nature of the portal, students were allowed to engage in the process at their own pace.

Similar to research on online feedback which has shown that the digital format might help alleviate those issues of traditional, face-to-face peer review (Li & Li, 2018; Yu & Lee, 2016), the present study found that the feedback was complex and engaging. Recall that I explained in Chapter IV that each student writing received feedback from multiple reviewers and included comments that showed engagement with the content of the writing. The participants engaged in feedback in similar ways to affinity space writers observed in the wild (Black, 2009; Kell, 2009; Kelley, Lammers, 2016; 2016; Magnifico et al., 2015). The majority of feedback consisted of praise closely followed by statements encouraging authors to continue writing. In addition, participants in the present study reported that they were eager to read their peers' feedback and also appreciated the comments from their peers, which is similar to findings on affinity space in the wild (Kell, 2009).

This digitally facilitated feedback also assisted with overcoming the culturally motivated anxiety of providing critique. An interesting finding in the present study was around feedback in the form of advice. Research shows that while many fanfic writers specifically request feedback focused on grammar, vocabulary, or proofreading (Black, 2009; Burke, 2013; Kelley, 2016), very few of them actually receive such thorough help (Magnifico et al., 2015). In the present study, quality advice that focused on grammar and vocabulary was part of more than a quarter of all student interactions. Students offered advice aimed at improving the author's writing skills by calling out a global issue like need for proofreading which can be seen in the examples below:

> Bryan to Moira (week 2): *"I will suggest you to try revise a little before submitting. Just some couple mistakes."*
>
> Moira to Jay (week 2): *"I think you have some spelling mistakes on the last paragraph."*
>
> Mario to MJ (week 3): *"It would be better if you connect ideas with comas or some words that can help you to make the story perfect."*
>
> Larry to Bryan (week 3): *"I hope you can use your words more accurately next time"*
>
> Tom to Larry (week 6): *"I suggest you have some academic vocabulary"*

However, the advice given by participants of the present study included comments on specific issues like identifying a specific language problem and offering a fix, such as in the quote below:

> Bryan to Ahmed (week 1): *"Instead of secondly in line two you can use 'then'."*

MJ to John (week 2): *I think you shouldn't do a space between your last two paragraphs*

MJ to Javier (week 4): *"It's a great story, but there is some mistakes. However, Supermarket not super market. Yes, I am not yea I am. after that, I want to say to superman "*

Javier to Bryan (week 5): *"Please can you verified the second sentence, I think is (he has gotten), and there are 3 missing letters."*

Ali to Lucia (week 7): *"I think you have a little mistake with the third sentence with the word (them)."*

Javier to Jay (week 7): *"My recommendations for you must be that you have to use capital letter when you have already began a new sentence. In addition, if you are using THERE IS and THERE ARE, like in the last sentence, you should write the correct one."*

Ali to Angie (week 9): *"But I think you have a mistake when you said "Almost person come" maybe the correct form is "people not a person"*

This is a significant difference from the findings on feedback offered during beta-reading in the wild (Black, 2007; Kelley, 2016). In the present study, a classroom application, students were trained to spot areas of improvement and offer advice as part of class curriculum. While these findings offer a different view of feedback, they are reasonable given that this was a classroom application of affinity spaces. Students were being taught how to identify mistakes and how to offer constructive feedback as part of the classroom instruction. This finding also challenges ideas that affinity spaces in classrooms may not be as effective as those in the wild because they are artificially created. Yet, the present study suggests that affinity space in a classroom offers an

advantage when it comes to learning about and practicing constructive feedback such as advice on grammar use. In the present study, students actively learned how to be effective MKOs who helped each other develop their writing skills.

Another area where the findings of the present study differ from the existing research is in confidence as a reviewer of other people's writing. In the online fanfic writing communities, authors often have to establish their credibility as reviewers or beta-readers by including bios with accomplishment and experience on their profiles (Magnifico et al., 2015). In the present study, students knew that everybody was expected to give feedback and thus, there was no need to establish credibility. Yet, providing feedback for other language learners was challenging for some participants as they did not see themselves as language experts, which is a constraint of classroom-based peer review (Giridharan, 2012). Moira, for example, offered feedback less frequently than she received it. She explained in her reflection that while she appreciated the feedback she received, she felt less confident making suggestions on her peers' writing. Therefore, because of the classroom training in and expectation of providing feedback, students did offer it regularly. Yet, the perception of having language deficit persevered and prevented some participants from offering more-than-required feedback. Of course, reviewer confidence should not be confused with the confidence one has as a writer which is described in the following section.

Writing Skills Development

The final hurdle of pedagogical approaches to teaching academic writing is designing instruction that stimulates writing development. As I noted previously, the focus on the academic genre may shift the focus on teaching essay structures and form while neglecting language scaffolding (Alamri, 2018; Mutekwa, 2013; Shawer, 2013). Recall that using affinity space

elements in my course was the pedagogical approach aimed at improving writing development. It was inspired by research suggesting that when students engage in creative writing, they commit to it more and seek out the language needed to improve the piece of writing (Bräuer, 2001). This was confirmed in the present study as the tools, or strategies, students reported using included active vocabulary and grammar searches. Quotes from student reflections offer examples of students commenting on this strategy:

> Ali: *"I found the story was simple and there is no need to research the whole story in my native language, except some words that are new for me surely I translated it."*
>
> Angie: *"When I want to say some but I do not know what word is correct to use, I find it in directory and enlarge my vocabulary."*
>
> Jane: *"When I was writing about the hero of Olaf, my description of him was cruel, so I wanted to use the word cruel, but after I checked the dictionary, I found that the word bloody is more suitable for him."*
>
> Lucia: *"I research the language that I needed to write my Fanfiction sometimes."*

Another confirmation of utility of this approach came in the area of perceived language skill improvement. Similar to other studies (Jwa, 2012; Sauro & Sundmark, 2016), participants in the present study noted that their writing skills improved. As in other studies, participants in the present study also attributed those language gains to engaging in writing fanfics, reading others' fanfics, and receiving the constructive feedback. They reported learning how to write

creative pieces as well as a general improvement of their writing fluency. The findings from the present study add to our knowledge by identifying the specific areas of language improvement that students reported growth in. They perceived gains in vocabulary, grammar, sentence structure, flow of writing, spelling, and punctuation. This paints a detailed picture of not only participants' perspectives on their language growth but a growth of their awareness of the areas of language that can be improved.

The present study also confirmed findings of previous affinity space literacy studies about confidence building qualities of fanfiction writing. Several participants commented that they felt their confidence as writers in English grow over the semester. This was consistent with findings in other fanfiction practices studies (Kell, 2009; Kelley, 2016) where writers' confidence improved thanks to the opportunity to use imagination and creativity, an experience rarely allowed in academic writing courses. Moira serves as the best illustration of this change in perception. Despite her lack of confidence in providing feedback (as reported in previous section), Moira's confidence in her writing skills grew over the span of the affinity space activities. She attributed that growth to the repetition and thus opportunity to practice and receive feedback for her writing. So, even though she did not see herself as an expert yet, she did gain confidence in her writing skills.

The present study differs from previous studies on affinity spaces in that it explored language gains over the length of the assignment. In addition to noting the perceptions of language gain areas (dictated by the curricular goals), those gains were also measured in the participants' fanfics by using the four criteria of *task, flow, language, vocabulary* (see the Fanfic Scoring Rubric in Appendix F) to score them. While most participants reported language gains,

this was not always a true reflection of reality. For example, Jay in his reflection praised the

fanfiction writing task and claimed that it helped him improve his vocabulary and grammar:

"I learned vocabulary and grammar especially as I said by it"

He even went as far as predicting that if he continued the practice, his language skills would

improve further:

"If I can, I want to write this again like my end of the exchange. I think it can be

very interesting because there will be an improvement of my English (If I

would)."

However, he did not experience gains in his fanfic vocabulary or grammar scores. He also did

not mention the feedback process in his reflection in any way, perhaps because he received and

provided very few constructive comments over the span of 12 weeks. In fact, he only received

six comments with 14 different instances of feedback (see Table 26 for details). The lack of his

classmates' engagement in his writing might have contributed to his putting low amount of effort

into his writing and thus causing no language gains. After all, if his classmates did not have

anything nice to say about his writing and left no encouraging comments for him, it is no surprise

that he as unmotivated to improve his writing. The community of his activity system

(classmates, or MKOs) followed an unspoken rule of engagement and did not provide feedback

to a piece that seemed unfinished or rushed. An alternative interpretation is that in his final

reflection he wrote about the fanfiction's positive influence on his vocabulary and grammar

because he thought it was expected of a student to comment positively on effects of a classroom

activity.

Moira's fanfic scores, on the other hand, did show a marked improvement on all of the four fanfics scores and were consistent with her perception of vocabulary and grammar gains. Moira commented in her reflection on this:

> *"I was learning new words and it helped me to develop my abilities. (...) I learned how to use grammar in the proper way, and my ability has also been growing in this aspect."*

Moira, a reluctant reviewer herself, received copious amounts of supporting and constructive feedback as the examples below show:

> From Jay (week 2): *"I'm really excited by your story. And also I'm surprised of your vocabulary. Please keep it make improved!"*
>
> From Ahmed (week3): *"I really like your writing and how you organized the ideas"*
>
> From Mary (week 8): *"I liked your story. I really liked the way the described it. Can't wait for your next story."*

She also identified the feedback as helpful in improving her writing skills. Her reflection also reveals how motivational the feedback from classmates was to her:

> *"I felt happy that most of my classmates enjoyed my fanfiction. Most of them were saying that it was easy to follow or how funny it was. I told them that I appreciate their comments. They made my day every week as I read and I felt compensated after a very hard job."*

Moira's experiences with feedback stand in stark contrast to those of Jay. While he received little praise or encouragement (not to mention the amount of comments), she was inundated with positive comments which provided motivation for her to perform better. Jay might have seen

little point in working on his writing, while Moira had an audience to perform for and thus put much effort into her fanfics. These findings draw a significant parallel between perceptions of gains, language improvement and the importance of peer feedback.

Implications

The findings of the present study have several pedagogical implications. With these implications in mind, I will present several suggestions for pedagogical applications of affinity space elements into ESL writing instruction.

Pedagogical Applications

Writing fanfiction based on students' favorite video games proved to be a successful solution to the problem of topic and form rigidity in academic ESL writing. Creative writing opportunities offered more flexibility than typical academic genres. All students reported that they enjoyed writing on the topic of their favorite game or character, as we can learn from quotes below:

> Abe: *"I really enjoyed writing the story that I made it up because you don't know what is the end of your story even if you the author."*
>
> Ali: *"I really enjoyed the writing every week for the fanfiction because the story, it was my type which is action and thriller, so, I enjoyed all the time."*
>
> Bryan: *"I could widely express myself through a game. It was easy for me to write about a personal experience. It was just amazing and fun."*
>
> Kate: *"What makes me very happy is that this assignment gave me an opportunity to write fanfiction. And let me write a fanfiction based on my favorite game! This*

opportunity is rare for me. I devoted all my enthusiasm to writing novels. I completely enjoyed writing this assignment."

Having a personal and engaging topic helped students continue with the task for a long period of time. They were able to tap into intrinsic motivation (Malone & Lepper, 1987) using a topic they were personally invested in as examples, such as Kate's above illustrate.

What is more, students engaged multiple semiotic tools to assist in their writing. They employed tools that are typically used for supporting academic writing, such as searches for vocabulary and grammar structures, as illustrated by quotes earlier in this chapter (and in Chapter IV). Some students also flexed their writing skills by using semiotic tools in the form of narrative styles that are uncommon in academic writing, such a first-person narration which we observed in both Jay's and Moira's cases (see examples in Chapter IV). In general, students appreciated the flexible structure of the assignment as the quotes below show:

Bryan: *"My passion for writing made this task easier to me because it was a free writing assignment"*

Larry: *"I didn't regard it as a challenge any more because I can write everything that I thought and I can't do in the real life. I didn't consider any rules of writing."*

The creative nature of the task seemed to have taken the pressure off writing as students did not have to concern themselves with the structure of an essay. They connected with their topics and let writing happen. That is why introducing fanfiction writing based on a common endeavor could prove helpful in ESL instruction. This task has to be carefully structured, however, so that the common endeavor can be modified to fit individual student's passions and, hopefully, engagement.

Another implication for design is using creative writing tasks in academic ESL instruction to build students' writing confidence. This was mostly evident with the case of a low-performing student who not only improved her writing skills but also reported feeling confident. However, it is also important to provide more responsibility on the student to exhibit effort. In the case of students who prioritize course assignments with a strict grading scale, a stricter rubric on grammar and spelling may be needed to motivate some students to pay attention to their quality of writing. That is why it is important to provide instructions that request students pay attention to language by proofreading before sharing their fanfics. In addition, using a rubric that grades language and effort might also result in a better product, more feedback from peers, and lead to language development.

Another implication for future research design is to explore how providing students with a self-assessment on grammar, vocabulary use, and organization that requires them to proof-read their fanfics before posting them to the class portal affects student participation and performance. This extra step might help keep students accountable for their performance. Further research could also explore how such a student-centered approach (self-assessment) differs from one in which students are graded by the instructor on grammar, vocabulary, and organization, in terms of participation and performance.

Jay's case offers additional implication for future pedagogical design in which instructors could be using the fanfiction scores to identify students who struggle with writing. In academic writing assignments, rubrics can get complex as they measure not only language and flow, but also multiple essay elements. The student's language development may get lost in those metrics and lack of progress may not be properly diagnosed. The fanfic assignment which is short and has a simplified rubric, could be used as a diagnostic offering a picture of students' language

development over several weeks. Structuring the rubric to measure language areas like vocabulary, flow, or grammar and analyzing score slopes over a span of several weeks might alert the instructor to specific areas that a student might need helping with. To address these issues, the instructor might inform the student and ask them to pay extra attention to them while writing their fanfic (and other assignments) and to request specific feedback focusing on those areas from their classmates.

The online peer review also resulted in a feedback process that was engaging for students, further highlighting the limitations of in-class feedback. Students not only enjoy the process of online feedback, but they are also able to provide suggestions that are of higher quality and helpful for their peers. While the feedback in the wild is not scaffolded, in class, the students can be trained in how to provide meaningful feedback and how to use the feedback they receive. While the feedback process can be carried out outside of class, there still needs to be time spent in class to prepare students how to provide feedback. The students in the present study commented that providing feedback was more difficult in the beginning of the semester, thus making it an ideal time to scaffold that skill in class. The time and effort to support students' feedback process skills should be decreased over time, as most students in the present study reported that the task become easier towards the end of the semester. Yet, the feedback support should not completely be abandoned as it may help those students in whom the low reviewer confidence persists.

In the present study, we learned that the feedback process and the fanfiction writing had a positive influence on the participants' writing skills development. What is more, most participants in the present study did improve their fanfic scores. The applications of this activity in ESL instruction proved to be a worthwhile endeavor producing writing that improved in

quality over the span of the semester. Yet, these activities have to be structured in a way that will help students focus on the different target areas of language improvement, such as grammatical structures, vocabulary, or fluency. That way students will be able to not only identify areas for improvement but also have strategies to improve those areas. The present study findings show that using affinity space portals in a classroom has advantages over sending students to portals present in the wild. The structuring of fanfiction writing and revisions as an academic assignment facilitates timely feedback and assures its quality and usefulness for authors.

Study Limitations

This study was not without its limits. To begin with, the research was based on a small sample of 17 students. This number was dictated by the nature of the program that served as the context for the study. Courses in this ESL program often have 12 to 15 students to maintain the quality of instruction and support that is needed in a writing-intensive course. Another limitation of the study might be my connection to the participants as their instructor. While I might have tried to approach the results as objectively as possible, I might have projected biases based on my students' performances in the course on other assignments. This study also did not include participant interviews as those proved impractical to arrange after the course ended. Many of the 17 students left the university either to study at other US institutions or back in their native countries. The interviews would have allowed an even closer look at student perceptions of participating in the feedback and the writing process. These limitations might offer future directions of affinity space writing research.

Future Research Directions

The present study informs future research in several ways some of which are inspired by the limitations of the present study. First of all, the study population was small, so conducting affinity space classroom applications on larger population would yield robust findings. This could be accomplished by identifying several classrooms of academic writing ESL courses. This would also allow for examining how using fanfiction writing and affinity space feedback works with different levels of English proficiency, which was not possible in one course. Second of all, while conducting research in one's own classroom is convenient, it would help to minimize the instructor bias if the researcher was not the instructor. Finally, future studies will benefit from adding participant interviews to be conducted later in or after the semester is over. While it might not be practical to interview all of the participant, identifying and interviewing a few key participants might be more feasible.

Additional implications for future research include using an in-class affinity portals to study how effective they are for feedback. While affinity space portals in the wild allow researchers to observe feedback as it happens spontaneously, the in-class portal allows for control of structure of participation, such as establishing rules for student behavior. As a result, the negative or hurtful feedback that one of the participants of the present study reported experiencing in the online affinity space portal, can be minimized or completely avoided. However, future studies should also consider including the examination of specific classroom intervention. For example, if the course trains students on fanfic genres, it would be helpful to see how those are reflected in the fanfics that students write. What's more, it would be

interesting to study how the peer review participation is scaffolded and then how it is realized in the feedback practices.

Conclusions

Engaging ESL students in affinity space fanfiction writing has the potential to enhance their academic writing skills. A careful adaptation of affinity space practices into writing instruction can assist in engaging students in their writing (Lammers, 2013; Magnifico et al., 2018; Thorne & Reinhardt, 2008). This can be achieved by providing common endeavors as topics that students are passionate about (Black, 2009; Curwood et al., 2013; Hannibal Jensen, 2019). Students can become even more invested in their writing while interacting with other writers passionate about the same topics. What is more, students, presented with an opportunity to write using a creative genre like fanfiction, are free to combine multiple tools and strategies, both from formal instruction and practices in the wild, to assist in their writing skill development (Bräuer, 2001; Jeon & Ma, 2015; Stillar, 2013). In the present study, students reported being engaged and enjoyed writing. They also engaged in a sophisticated and meaningful peer review process and showed improvement in their writing skills. These results point to the fact that the common hurdles of academic writing instruction can be overcome by a carful adaptation and use of tools of affinity space practices.

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Appendices

Appendix A. Game Journal Assignment in the Pilot Study

Game Journals

During this semester, you will play Pokémon Go and write about your experience in Game Journals. You will use the Discussion Boards set up in Canvas for the Journals (each titled by week). Each posting will be due on Thursday, starting September 1. You will also respond to two other posts by the Sunday of that week.

Here are specifications for this assignment:
1. 1-2 paragraphs
2. description of a new experience (new Pokémon, new PokéStops, new gym victory, new information source, new game strategy to level up, win or train at a gym, evolve, etc.)
3. reflection – likes, dislikes, difficulties, future suggestions

Here's how I will grade you on this:

criteria	yes 1 pt.	no 0 pts.
Is the post 1-2 paragraphs long?		
Is there a description of a new experience?		
Is there a thorough reflection?		
Did the post meet the due date?		
Did you respond to two other posts?		
Did you respond by Sunday?		

Appendix B. Extensive Writing Assignment: Fanfiction

Extensive Writing - Fanfiction

To help you with the fluency of your writing and the variety of your vocabulary, we will engage in extensive writing.
Here's what you need to do for this activity:

1. Chose a video game to play this semester. It may be a game you have played in the past or are still playing. It may also be a game that you think you may enjoy. It has to be a game that has a story and some short and long-term goals. A puzzle or card game will not work for this assignment. Here are some games that have worked in the past: SIMs Free Play, Clash of Clans, The League of Legends, Halo, War of Warcraft, Mario Bros, Legends of Zelda, Pokemon Go, Minecraft, Star Wars, Onmyoji, Final Fantasy, Grand Theft Auto. Some of those games are free, but you will have to pay to play others. My suggestion is to keep it simple.
2. Play the game 30-60 minutes a week. With mobile games, it only takes 5-10 minutes a day to get the full experience.
3. Choose the type of fanfiction you would like to write. You can review the types of writing other gamers like to compose by going to https://www.fanfiction.net/game/. You can see what kinds of fiction other write for your specific game. Some of the types of fanfiction you may consider are:
    a. Prequel – write an origin story of the characters of your game
        i. If you play Mario Bros, you may write a story from when the Brothers were children.
    b. Sequel – write a story that happens after the storyline of your game has finished
        i. If you play the Legends of Zelda, you may write a story of Link after he freed Zelda.
    c. Alternative Point of View (POV) – write a story from the point of a different than the main character of your game.
        i. If you play Pokemon Go, you could write a story from the POV of a Pokemon like Pidgey. Or if you play Minecraft, you could write a story from the POV of the zombie.
    d. Missing Moment – write a story that happens during the game but was not a part of it.
        i. If you play SIMs Free Play, you may write a story of what happened to your character during their work at the Fire station.
    e. Alternative Universe – write a story of your game character in a different universe (not the one in the game), or a character from a different fiction piece in the game universe. If you play GTA, you could write a story of the main character being lost in the world of Final Fantasy. You could also write a story of a Valkarie from Clash of Clans being lost in the world of GTA. You could also include characters from your favorite movies, shows, books, comics being lost in any game world (e.g., Winnie the Poo lost in the Onmyoji world) or your game characters lost in your favorite fiction (e.g., Mario lost in Harry Potter world).
4. Write a weekly post. Each week you will write one chapter of your fanfiction. Your fiction can be prose (where narrator or character tell a story, just like in a novel) or drama with only dialogues. If you like poetry, you may also choose to write one poem a week.

You can switch from prose, to drama, to poetry whenever you want. You can also mix and match the types of stories you write (start with a prequel, switch to a missing moment, and finish with an alternative POV). The point is that you try different things and see what works best for you. It is creative writing, so if you have never done this, it will take some time to get used to this. Think of it as writing stories. You tell stories of what happens to you all the time. This time you get to make up your own stories. The length of you post is up to you, but make sure you are making it interesting for the reader. If it is too short, it will be boring for others to read.

5. Post your fanfiction on fanfiction.net. Create your account and post your story to the community for your game. Make sure you create the account early enough. New users cannot post for 12 hours after registering.

6. Share the link to your post with the class in Canvas. Every Monday, paste the link to your fanfiction in the Post assignment in Canvas for that week.

7. Engage with others in your class. Read posts by your classmates and respond to at least two of them by midnight on Tuesday. Responding to others, tell them what you think of their fiction. Is it interesting, too long, too complicated, too boring? Why? Even if the post is a smashing hit, suggest some improvements. Your suggestions could be changes in the story, character, type of fiction, or language/vocabulary improvements. This way you will not only judge others but also help them in a constructive way. This part will be done in Canvas by responding in the "Post" discussions for each week.

8. Write a reflective paper looking back at your experience with this type of writing. It will be in a form of a few paragraphs that describe your experience in the writing. Write about your difficulties and aspects that came easier to you. Write about what you enjoy and not enjoy in this type of writing. Write about what you find helpful to complete this task. Write about what you have learned from this task. Write about how you see this task influencing your language use, vocabulary use, sentence structure. Write about your preferences or how or if you plan to change/improve your fanfiction.

9. Submit the reflective papers to Canvas.

Appendix C. Extensive Writing Reflection Assignment

Task 8 and 9 of the Extensive Writing – Fanfiction Assignment

<u>Reflective Paper</u>

Write a reflective paper about the extensive writing assignment. At the end of the semester you will write a reflection paper looking back at your experience with this type of writing. It will be in a form of a few paragraphs that describe your experience in fanfiction writing. Write about your difficulties and aspects that came easier to you. Write about what you enjoy and not enjoy in this type of writing. Write about your experiences with giving and receiving feedback for fanfiction. Write about what you find helpful to complete this task. Write about why you chose the type of fiction you wrote (missing moment, prequel, sequel, alternative point of view, alternate reality). How did you prepare for the wiring? Did you research fanfiction examples of the type you were writing? Did you research the language you needed to write your fanfiction? Write about what you have learned from this task. Write about how you see this task influencing your language use, vocabulary use, sentence structure, etc.. Write about your plans to continue or not this type of writing and why.

See next page for the grading rubric (also available in Canvas)

Reflective Paper (1)   ✎ 🔍 🗑

Criteria	Ratings			Pts
Submitted on time	**2.0 pts** **Full Marks**	**0.0 pts** **No Marks**		2.0 pts
Lenght	**2.0 pts** **Good Length** It was 3-5 paragraphs	**1.0 pts** **Too short** it was two or one paragraph	**0.0 pts** **No Marks**	2.0 pts
Difficulty/easiness level	**2.0 pts** **Full Marks** Difficulty and easiness of the task was clearly discussed and reasons were given	**1.0 pts** **some points** Difficulty/easyness was discussed but reasons were missing	**0.0 pts** **No Marks** difficulty level was not discussed	2.0 pts
Enjoyment level It was fully discussed how enjoyable (or not) this task was	**2.0 pts** **Full Marks** Enjoyment level of the writing task was discussed and reasons explained	**1.0 pts** **some points** Enjoyment level was discussed but no reasons were given.	**0.0 pts** **No Marks**	2.0 pts
Helpfulness	**2.0 pts** **Full Marks** The level of helpfulness of the task was discussed and reasons were given.	**1.0 pts** **some points** The level of helpfulness was discussed but no reasons were given.	**0.0 pts** **No Marks**	2.0 pts
Lessons learned	**2.0 pts** **Full Marks** Lessons learned from the task were discussed in detail.	**1.0 pts** **some points** Some lessons were mentioned but not discussed in detail.	**0.0 pts** **No Marks**	2.0 pts
Language Influence	**2.0 pts** **Full Marks** The ways in which this task influenced your language (grammar, vocabulary, sentence structure) were explained with examples.	**1.0 pts** **some points** Some ways were mentioned but with no examples or details.	**0.0 pts** **No Marks**	2.0 pts
Plans for future	**2.0 pts** **Full Marks** Plans for continuing with this writing after class was mentioned with reasons.	**1.0 pts** **some points** The plans were mentioned but with no reasons.	**0.0 pts** **No Marks**	2.0 pts
				Total Points: 16.0

Appendix D. Intermediate Academic Writing Course Description

Writing from Authentic Texts

Catalog Description
Focuses on developing writing skills at the intermediate level, moving from the paragraph to theacademic essay. Students learn to acknowledge sources and use the library and the Internet to inform their writing.

Course Goals
Students will...
- progress from paragraph- to essay-level writing*
- write different types of essays/multi-paragraph texts

Expected Learner Outcomes
1) Students will write a well-developed and organized composition of 3-5 paragraphs or morethat...
   - uses grammar appropriate to the task, and
   - follows the conventions of academic writing

2) Given a task, students will write a coherent essay/multi-paragraph text that follows the appropriate rhetorical mode, e.g., comparison-contrast, cause-effect, classification, etc. anduses outside sources.

Typical Classroom Activities
- What is academic writing?
- Building general and academic paragraphs
- Rhetorical organization of the paragraph, essay, and essay-question answers
- Conventions of academic writing
- Formatting papers: margins, line spacing, title, subheadings
- Writing short essays as in response to, for example, essay questions, visual or writtenmedia, a historical event, or a theory
- In-class writing
- Avoiding plagiarism
- Writing as a process of prewriting, composing, revising, editing, and publishing
- Sentence types
- Clear writing
- Drawing conclusions
- Sources of information used in academic writing
- Paraphrasing, summarizing, & synthesizing information
- Supporting information
- Stating and supporting opinions
- Acknowledgement of sources (textbook, news, Internet investigations) by using reportingverbs
- Criterion software (ETS) – get TOEFL score from 0-6 – $15/student in the campusbookstore

* Students can perform the writing tasks at an ***intermediate*** level.

AS (2/2013)

Appendix E. USU IRB Protocol

Using Fanfiction Writing in an ESL Writing Course.

Purpose
You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Marta Halaczkiewicz, a student investigator (researcher) working with Jody Clarke-Midura, a professor in the Instructional Technology and Learning Sciences Department at Utah State University. The purpose of this research is to study use of fanfiction writing in ESL instruction.

This form includes detailed information on the research to help you decide whether to participate in this study. Please read it carefully and ask any questions you have before you agree to participate.

Procedures – what will you have to do
Your participation in the study will not require any additional activity from you. After grades have been submitted, we would like to study the assignments from the course: academic essays, timed essays, and extensive writing. Your grades will not be included in the study. Your decision to participate, or not, will not influence your standing or grade in Marta's class or any other IELI classes. Marta will not know who is participating until the grades for the course have been posted. Marta will gain access to the signed consent forms after the grades for the course have been posted. We predict that up to 19 people will participate in this research study.

Risks
This is a minimal risk research study. That means that the risks of participating are no more likely or serious than those you have in everyday activities. As with any storage of data, there is a small risk of revealing your identity. If you have a bad research-related experience or are injured in any way during your participation, please contact the principal investigator of this study right away at (435) 797-0571 or jody.clarke@usu.edu.

Benefits
There is no direct benefit to you for participating in this research study. More broadly, this study will help the researchers learn more about fanfiction writing use with ESL learners and may help future ESL students in English language programs.

Confidentiality – how we make sure your privacy and identity is protected
The researchers will make every effort to make sure that the information you provide as part of this study remains unknown to others. Your identity will not be revealed in any publications, presentations, or reports resulting from this research study.

We will collect your information by accessing your writing assignments in Canvas and in Criterion. This information will be copied and securely stored in a restricted-access folder on Box.com (only the researchers will have access to them), an encrypted (changed and hidden by using a special code), cloud-based storage system. Your name on all of the data will be changed, so that no one will know who you are. The cross-reference list with your actual names and changed names will be stored in a restricted-access folder on Box.com until all the results are matched, and then it will be destroyed no later than April 2019. It is unlikely, but possible, that others (Utah State University or state or federal officials) may require us to share the information you give us from the study to ensure that the research was conducted safely and appropriately. We will only share your information if law or policy requires us to do so.

Voluntary Participation, Withdrawal
Your participation in this research is completely optional and up to you. If you agree to participate now and change your mind before the end of the course, you may withdraw at any time by letting Jody know in any form you choose

(in person, by email, by phone, etc.). After the course ends, you may withdraw by contacting Marta or Jody. If you choose to withdraw we will remove your data from the study and we will not analyze your assignments.

Future Participation

The researchers would like to keep your contact information in order to invite you to participate in future research studies. If you would like them to keep your contact information, please initial here: _____. This information will be entered into a future research contact list that is completely separated from anything to do with this research study and maintained for one year after the completion of this study. You can contact Marta Halaczkiewicz (marta.hala@usu.edu) at any time to be removed from this list.

IRB Review

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the protection of human research participants at Utah State University has reviewed and approved this study. If you have questions about the research study itself, please contact Jody at (435) 797-0571; jody.clarke@usu.edu or Marta at 435-797-2059 or marta.hala@usu.edu. If you have questions about your rights or would simply like to speak with someone other than the research team about questions or concerns, please contact the IRB Director at (435) 797-0567 or irb@usu.edu.

Jody Clarke-Midura
Principal Investigator
(435) 797-0571; jody.clarke@usu.edu

Marta Halaczkiewicz
Co-Investigator
(435)797-2059; marta.hala@usu.edu

Informed Consent – I understand what I agree to

By signing below, you agree to participate in this study. You show us that you understand the risks and benefits of participation, and that you know what you will be asked to do. You also agree that you have asked any questions you might have, and are clear on how to stop your participation in the study if you choose to do so. Please be sure to keep a copy of this form for your records.

_____   _____
_____
Participant's Signature   Participant's Name, Printed   Date

    By checking this box, I state that I am 18 years of age or older and I agree to participate in this study.

I'd like to be contacted for further research at this email address: _____

Appendix F. Fanfic Scoring Rubric

Fanfiction Scoring Rubric

degree to which each criterion was met	**task** • following directions • addressing the task • story development	**flow** • organization • logical order • coherence • cohesion	**language mechanics** • subject verb agreement • verb tenses • sentence structure • spelling • punctuation • capitalization	**vocabulary** • word choice appropriateness • lexical variety • fluency of idiom use
3 – effective				
2 – sufficient				
1 – poor				
0 – plagiarized, copied, not submitted				

Appendix G. Feedback Data Code Book

Fanfiction Feedback Code Book

code name	definition	sub-code	post mentions	example
praise	positive feedback on the piece of writing; it ranges from specific to very general praises	*content*	characters, descriptions, imagination, details, plot, storyline, story, events, dialogue, conversation, surprise, suspense, action, specific sentence, specific phrase, emotions, good, interesting, good, good job, like, love, nice, interesting, good idea	- You have good idea - Good job and great conversation story. - this is a good piece of writing - The article is perfect, with a rich storyline that gives the reader room to imagine - Also, I like the last sentence you written. - And you are good at showing how dangerous the character you are. - good description of what each thing and the character mean! - I really loved your story. - You have a really good imagination! - I loved the way you described your characters in this story. - I really like the phrase in your article: "If you don't try to escape from here, we will never feel free in the future.'" That inspires me - That is a good story and surprised me.
		style	humor, clarity, writing, narration, style, 1ˢᵗ person narration, way of writing	It is a really nice writing. and the tone of the article is humorous Your narration is very interesting I really like your **writing** and how you organized the ideas
		topic	the game the writing is based on	I really like the game you choose !
		cohesion	organization, transitions, connections, flow, structure, cohesion	What I most want to praise is your article structure and way of thinking. I really like your writing and how you **organized the ideas** I really like your organization (…)

		vocabulary	word choice, academic language, academic words, learn new words, good vocabulary	And also I'm surprised of your vocabulary. In your writing i know new words. Good vocabulary easy to understand. Your academics words using impressed me a lot
		no mistakes	finding no mistakes	So far, I did not see mistakes.
		improvement	author's general improvement in writing	Your writing level is much higher than before.
		follow instructions	assignment instructions	You have a very good organization and **follow the instructions.**
		on posts for other people (1)	author's responses to other's writing	I like your way to respond to other people as well
advice	suggestions and recommendations to improve, fix, add, delete specific or general parts of the piece of writing	*content*	descriptions, plot, characters, detail, scene, emotions, action, humor, cliffhanger, dialogue, preview, summary, conclusion, should, recommend, suggest, might, questions asking for details	My suggestion is next time you can pay more attention on katarina with his father story or other stories about katerina, and maybe will be more attractive. I recommend you write more details about the Bilgewater is better. I would like more detail about (…) I suggest adding a few character descriptions Can you tell me what kind of magic did his mother have? I suggest adding some action narration to make your article more engaging (…) but in some parts I didn't understand to what were you referring. But I have a suggestion maybe next time you should starts with a short summary like one or two sentences. it would be better if you can write more details about your feelings in the game. but if you give us the conclusion

		length	post is too long or too short, add content, write more, write less	But it can also add some content to make it rich. I suggest you to write a little more I hope you can increase more information In my opinion it's better to make it shorter
		cohesion	organization, transitions, connections, flow, structure, sequence	But maybe next time you can write more details and **use connections i suggest. The structure will be better.** I hope you can enrich the structure of the article with more connective words. I just suggest you, add more transition words.
		revise	revisions, proofreading, double check, no specific area, fix mistakes, some mistakes	I will just suggest you to double check next before submitting it. I will suggest you to try revise a little before submitting. Just some couple mistakes.
		vocabulary	word choice, academic language, using easier words, using more language	I have a little suggestion on improvement. Instead of secondly in line two you can use 'then'. I hope you can use some bright words next time if you can add more language, you'll add more interest
		grammar	grammar, tenses, possessive, use complex/longer sentence, articles (a/the), prepositions (of, on, with, etc.), sentence structure	But my only concern is grammatical rules. But I think you have some mistakes. In the fourth and the ninth sentences with the word start, I think it is started because of the past tense.
		spelling	spelling	I think you have some spelling mistakes on the last paragraph.
		punctuation	punctuation, comma, period, spacing	I think you shouldn't do a space between your last two paragraphs. (…) but you have some punctuation problem in the second line
		articles	articles a, the	you need to put before car word (the) like this: but you won't use the car and in New York not of New York

		CAPS	capitalizations, capital letters	But I think you should write the word Amphibious without a capital letter. Everything
		style	humor, clarity, writing, narration, style, 1st person narration, way of writing	(…) but if you avoid using I do and I can it will be perfect.
		follow instructions	assignment instructions	you supposed to make up a story not writing about the game you are playing. Maybe you should look to the paper the instructor gave us for the direction again.
encouragement	feedback urging the author to write more	*look forward*	looking forward, can't wait, read more, next steps, next post, excited to read	I would like to read more of this story. look forward to the next update ! I can't wait to find out about your sequel! I am looking forward for your next story.😁 I can't wait for your next story. I would like to wait for the next part. We just want to know upcoming events. I very expect the next story. i do really hope for it. I am excited to see the next steps.
		keep going	keep writing, keep going, keep it up, come on	Keep doing more chapters, if you keep going like this you are going to get better. Please keep it make improved! Keep working on that Go on.
		good luck	see example	Good luck!!
		you can do it too (1)	see example	thx~😊 You can also publish the article soon.🤩
affinity	reactions (opinions, complaints, statements) of the readers to the story, the	*content*	plot, character	I know Mario likes trip to everywhere so I can easily imagine that Mario in China I have already had great curiosity about these five heroes. They all have their own characteristics.

	game or games in general, the assignment, or the technology platform used	*topic*	playing video games, specific game, memories of play	I don't play it but I have a friend who really crazy about it. I used to play Mario long time ago with my brothers and friends. I have never played this game but I've watched videos about it. I agree with your idea about time wasting. I have a cousin who can spend more than 03 hours a day with video game playing. Go outside or hangout with friends instead playing video games.
		apologies for mistake (1)	see example	Sorry,there are some things wrong in my article
		learn from feedback (1)	learn from you, learn from mistakes	I feel happy because you enjoy mi writing and at the same time I am learning from my mistakes.
		complain a/t tech (1)	Fanfiction.net, registering, posting, publishing, problems	I also want to publish quickly now. But I have to wait 7 hours. h it's a long time to wait.
gratitude	writers' appreciation of feedback and readers' appreciation of the piece of writing	*for sharing*	Sharing, thank you	I like the way that you wrote it I was curious about it a a **lot thank you** Bryan
		for feedback	thank you, thanks, appreciate	Thanks! thanks for your suggestion I'm appreciating you can read my article
		for support	love, support, reading	Thank you for your love!
act on advice	writer's promise to use the feedback	*I will*	see example	hhhh I will try to add. I'll do it.
		I did	see example	I fixed one of them:)
interaction outside the class	readers invitation of the author to play or discuss the game (the topic of	*play together*	play together, teach gameplay, learn to play, train	Next time, let's play together! I will teach you to use these heroes. I like your game. I hope to learn it with you I am looking to play with you soon.

	writing) together outside of class in RL or writers responding to invitations	*talk about the topic (1)*	a meeting about the game/topic of writing	I will show my Pokemon to you if you want **!**
		agree to interact (1)	response to invitation	Hhh little Jane, of course we can do that next time. I hope that so much!!!
Question s a/t	readers asking questions about the writing that are not direct suggestions to improve writing	*content*	character, plot	Anyway why did you choose Chile??:)
		audience (1)	is it suitable for…?	But is it suitable for minors to read?

Reading the code book:
When the sentence in an example contains more than two codes, the fragment about the sub-code is in bold.
When a sub-code was applied once only, that number is in parenthesis (1) next to the label of the sub-code.
Coding:
Sentence clauses and sentences were used as units of analysis.
If several sentences in one post referred to same sub-code, it was recorded only once.
If one sentence referred to multiple sub-codes, all that applied were recorded.

Appendix H. Intercoder Reliability Plan and Procedures

<u>Intercoder Reliability Plan</u>

1. Establish 10% of data: calculate all units of analysis. Count all comments left on classmates' fanfics – "from frequencies" – this will capture the number of posts. I'm not using "to frequencies" as some are one comment/post addressed to several classmates.
2. There are 485 comments/posts with about 40 posts in a week. 48.5 posts make 10% of all data. I will use data from two weeks to make sure the inter-coder reliability is reached in at least 10% of data.
3. 2nd coder was first trained on types of codes by reviewing the "code book" with the first coder.
4. Next, 1st and 2nd coder coded together the "week 1" (50 posts) and discussed the codes.
5. Subsequently 2nd coder went on to code "week 1" (53 posts) and "week 2" (43 posts)
6. Create a sheet with 3 columns; two columns for each rater and one column for agreement/disagreement
7. For each code marked by coder 1 (C1) enter the value and enter the value for the same spot for coder 2 (C2), if the spot in the spreadsheet is empty, mark it is 0
8. In column 3 mark 1 for each time the value is identical, 0 if it is different. Some spaces may have more than one code (e.g., "content, vocabulary"). The C2 has to have exactly the same code and if it has only one word same as C1 (e.g., "content"), it is marked as disagreement.
9. Add the number of 1 and divide by the total number of recorded codes to calculate parentage of agreement.
   a. 158/201=0.786
10. Count all the code categories assigned (i.e., content, look forward, topic, 0, etc.) and create a new table with as many columns as there are categories. Create as many rows as there were code cases (or coding instances).
11. Use the Online Kappa Calculator http://justusrandolph.net/kappa/ to calculate the interrater agreement (Randolph, J. J. (2008). Online Kappa Calculator [Computer software]. Retrieved from http://justus.randolph.name/kappa)
12. Use the free-marginal multirater kappa because the raters were not forced to assign a certain number of cases to each category. (explained in: Randolph, J. (2005). *Free-marginal multirater kappa (multirater κfree): An alternative to Fleiss' fixed marginal multirater kappa*. Joensuu Learning and Instruction Symposium 2005, Finland.
13. Based on Cohen's suggested interpretation on the measure assume that:
    a. values ≤ 0 indicate no agreement
    b. 0.01–0.20 none to slight agreement
    c. 0.21–0.40 fair agreement
    d. 0.41– 0.60 indicate moderate agreement
    e. 0.61–0.80 indicate substantial agreement
    f. 0.81–1.00 indicate almost perfect agreement
       (From: McHugh, M. L. (2012). Interrater reliability: The kappa statistic. *Biochemia Medica*, *22*(3), 276–282.

Intercoder Agreement Procedures Followed

In order to establish intercoder reliability (Wilson-Lopez et al, 2019), I recruited an additional researcher to code the data. Before the second coding took place, I established the amount of the discussion data constituting the 10% necessary to render intercoder-reliability valid (Wilson-Lopez et al, 2019). To do so, I first calculated all of the units of analysis. To capture the number of posts, I counted all comments left on classmates' fanfics. The calculation revealed 485 individual posts, not counting the posts in which students shared their fanfics. Each week consisted of an average of 40 posts. Since 10% of all posts is 48.5 posts, I decided that data from at least two weeks should be coded by the second coder to meet threshold

I met with the second coder and trained them using the code book. We coded the week 1 data (50 posts) together and discussed the codes. After the discussion of our coding of week 1 data, the second coder coded week 2 (53 posts) and week 3 (43 posts) data independently.

After the second coder completed their coding, I created a spread sheet with 3 columns, on for each coder and last one for the agreement/disagreement. In "coder 1" column, I preserved the subcodes they entered in a field of the coding matrix. For the "coder 2" column, I marked the subcode in the corresponding matrix filed. If the corresponding filed is empty of any coder, I marked it 0 to preserve the disagreement. In the last column, I marked "1" for each time the subcode of both columns was identical and "0" if it was different. Some fields may have more than one subcode (e.g., "content, vocabulary"). In such case both coders had to agree on all of the subcodes to reach agreement. I marked their agreement as 0 if one or more of the subcodes differed. The example of the table is presented in Figure 8 below.

Figure 8

Intercoder Agreement Data

	A	B	C	D	E
1	weeks	code #	coder 1	coder 2	agreement
2	1	code 1	look forward	look forward	1
3		code 2	content	content	1
4		code 3	content	content	1
5		code 4	topic	topic	1
6		code 5	content, style	content	0
7		code 6	revise	revise	1
8		code 7	look forward	look forward	1
9		code 8	for feedback	for feedback	1
10		code 9	content, vocabualry	content, vocabualry	1
11		code 10	keep going	0	0
12		code 11	content	style	0
13		code 12	content	content	1
14		code 13	content, vocabualry	content, vocabualry	1
15		code 14	content	content	1
16		code 15	content	content	1
17		code 16	content	content	1
18		code 17	content	content	1

To establish the interrater agreement, I conducted Cohen's Kappa (McHugh, 2012) using the Online Kappa Calculator (http://justusrandolph.net/kappa/) (Randolph, 2005). To prepare the data, I first counted all of the subcode categories assigned (i.e., "content, look forward, topic, 0," etc.). Then, I created a new spreadsheet with as many columns as there were subcode categories (30) and as many rows as there were coding instances (201). For each field, I entered how many coders marked the subcode/ category in the column for each coding instance. I entered "2" if both marked it, "1" is only one used it, and "0' if neither of them used the subcode. The example to the resulting spreadsheet can be seen in Figure 9 below.

Figure 9

Spreadsheet with Intercoder Agreement Data Prepared for Cohen's Kappa Calculation

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
1	case #	look forwa	content	topic	content, styl	revise	for feedba	content, voca
2	1	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
3	2	0	2	0	0	0	0	0
4	3	0	2	0	0	0	0	0
5	4	0	0	2	0	0	0	0
6	5	0	1	0	1	0	0	0
7	6	0	0	0	0	2	0	0
8	7	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
9	8	0	0	0	0	0	2	0
10	9	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
11	10	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
12	11	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
13	12	0	2	0	0	0	0	0

I copied and pasted the table into the online calculator which subsequently issued the following results: overall agreement was 78.61%, free-marginal Kappa was 0.78, and fixed marginal Kappa was 0.73. I used the results for the free-marginal kappa because the raters were not forced to assign a certain number of cases to each category (Randolph; 2005). According to McHugh (2012), Cohen's k. 73, indicates a "moderate" level of agreement. Any discrepancies between the codes were then discussed between the two coders and applies to the remaining utterances.

Appendix I. Given and Received Feedback Frequency Counts

Given Feedback Frequency Counts

Week	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	Total
Abe	1	4	4	3	3	3	4	3	4	4	4	3	40
Ahmed	2	2	4	4	4	4	4	2	4	2	2	2	36
Ali	1	2	2	2	2	1	2	1	2	1	2	2	20
Angie	8	7	7	3	3	3	2	3	4	2	2	1	45
Bryan	2	3	2	3	2	3	1	4	2	3	1	2	28
Jane	9	3	3	2	3	3	3	2	2	2	3	3	38
Javier	3	4	1	1	1	3	3	3	3	2	3	2	29
Jay	2	3	2	2	2	2	2	0	2	2	2	0	21
John	4	2	2	2	3	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	27
Kate	2	4	2	2	2	1	2	1	2	2	2	2	24
Larry	2	3	2	2	2	2	2	3	2	2	2	2	26
Lucia	4	2	2	2	1	2	2	2	2	1	1	2	23
Mario	2	2	2	2	2	2	0	2	1	2	2	2	21
Mary	3	2	2	2	2	2	1	1	3	2	4	2	26
MJ	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	3	1	2	4	4	28
Moira	1	5	2	2	2	3	2	3	2	2	2	2	28
Tom	2	3	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	25
Total	50	53	43	38	38	40	36	37	40	35	40	35	485

Received Feedback Frequency Counts

Week	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	Total
Abe	2	4	0	2	3	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	14
Ahmed	3	0	3	2	1	0	0	0	0	2	1	1	13
Ali	0	0	1	1	4	4	2	2	3	1	1	1	20
Angie	4	4	6	1	2	2	1	2	3	1	3	3	32
Bryan	3	6	6	7	5	6	3	6	9	5	5	6	67
Jane	9	3	3	2	3	3	2	2	3	2	2	1	35
Javier	3	6	0	4	1	2	1	2	0	3	2	2	26
Jay	1	2	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	6
John	2	5	5	1	1	2	1	2	3	2	2	0	26
Kate	3	2	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	17
Larry	5	6	1	7	4	4	3	6	3	6	3	3	51
Lucia	2	0	1	2	3	5	6	2	1	0	1	1	24
Mario	0	2	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	3	0	7
Mary	5	0	0	1	0	1	4	2	2	3	4	2	24
MJ	0	0	3	0	3	0	5	2	2	1	4	5	25
Moira	4	6	3	4	1	3	3	4	5	5	6	6	50
Tom	4	7	9	3	5	7	2	3	6	1	0	3	50
Total	50	53	43	38	38	40	36	37	42	35	40	35	487

Appendix J. Percentage of Each Feedback Function by Type

Percentage of Feedback by Type

Type of Feedback	praise	advice	Encouragement	affinity	gratitude	act on advice	interaction outside class	questions	totals
week 1	41	4	12	21	9	0	7	0	94
week 2	49	30	12	11	10	3	2	1	118
week 3	43	26	11	12	6	0	0	2	100
week 4	40	23	17	10	3	0	1	0	94
week 5	42	27	9	8	4	1	0	2	93
week 6	44	25	13	6	5	0	0	0	93
week 7	36	32	17	8	1	0	0	0	94
week 8	35	27	10	4	6	2	0	0	84
week 9	47	28	14	9	4	1	0	1	104
week 10	45	26	16	7	4	1	0	0	99
week 11	47	30	12	7	2	1	0	0	99
week 12	39	30	6	6	3	1	0	0	85
Totals	508	308	149	109	57	10	10	6	1157
% of total (1157)	43.9%	26.6%	12.9%	9.4%	4.9%	0.9%	0.9%	0.5%	

CURRICULUM VITA

Marta Halaczkiewicz – C.V.
marta.hala@usu.edu

Education

PhD	Instructional Technology and Learning Sciences Utah State University, Logan, UT	2022

Dissertation Title: *Applications of Affinity Spaces in English Language Instruction: Writing and Peer Review of Fanfiction Based on Video Games in an Academic English as a Second Language Writing Course*
Dissertation Committee: Jody Clarke-Midura, (Chair), Deborah Fields, Jina Kang (University of Illinois at Urbana- Champaign), James Rogers, & Joshua Thoms

Master of Arts	Educational Technology	2011

Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo, MI
Capstone Project: Educational Technology Professional Development Website for CELCIS

Master of Arts	Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (**TESOL**) Madonna University, Livonia, MI	2006
Bachelor of Arts	Communication Arts Madonna University, Livonia, MI	2004
Bachelor of Arts	Teaching English as a Foreign Language	2001

Warsaw University, Warsaw, Poland
100 out of 120 units completed

Professional Experience

Director Full-time	*Intensive English Language Institute* Utah State University, Logan, UT	2021 – present
Senior Lecturer Full-time	*Intensive English Language Institute* Utah State University, Logan, UT	2018 – present
Lecturer Full-time	*Intensive English Language Institute* Utah State University, Logan, UT	2012 – 2018
Lead Professor	*Intensive English Language Institute/John Huntsman*	2012 – Present

Full-time	*School of Business*, *China Cooperative Program* Utah State University, Logan, UT	
Faculty Specialist II Full-time	*Center for English Language and Culture for International Students*, Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo, MI	2010 – 2012
Faculty Specialist I Full-time	*Center for English Language and Culture for International Students*, Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo, MI	2008 – 2010
Writing Rater Part-time	*TOEFL iBT Online* Educational Testing Services, Princeton, NJ	2008 – 2012
EFL Instructor Part-time	Advanced Corporate Training Warsaw, Poland	2006 – 2007
EFL Instructor Part-time	Bakalarz Language School, Warsaw, Poland	2006 – 2007
EFL Instructor Part-time	Akademos Language School, Warsaw, Poland	2006 – 2007
Writing Tutor Part-time	Writing Lab, Madonna University, Livonia, MI	2005 – 2006

Awards and Grants

Ed Glatfelter Faculty Service Award   *2021*
    World Languages and Cultures Department (formerly LPCS), Utah State University
Lecturer of the Year Nomination   *2020*
    Languages, Philosophy, and Communication Studies Department, Utah State University
Legacy of Utah State Award   *2020*
    Instructional Technology and Learning Sciences Department, Utah State University
Spring Travel Grant ($1000)   *2020*
    College of Humanities and Social Sciences, Utah State University
Lecturer of the Year Award   *2020*
    College of Humanities and Social Sciences, Utah State University
Giraffe Award Nomination   *2020*
    College of Humanities and Social Sciences, Utah State University
Conference Travel Grant ($900)   *2020*
    Instructional Technology and Learning Sciences Department, Utah State University
Graduate Student Travel Grant ($200)   *2020*
    School of Graduate Studies, Utah State University
Lecturer of the Year Award   *2019*

Languages, Philosophy, and Communication Studies Department, Utah State University

Conference Travel Grant ($900)   *2019*

Instructional Technology and Learning Sciences Department, Utah State University

Graduate Student Travel Grant ($300)   *2018*

School of Graduate Studies, Utah State University

Conference Travel Grant ($900)   *2018*

Instructional Technology and Learning Sciences Department, Utah State University

Conference Travel Grant ($900)   *2017*

Instructional Technology and Learning Sciences Department, Utah State University

Lecturer of the Year Award   *2016*

Languages, Philosophy, and Communication Studies Department, Utah State University

Undergraduate Advisor of the Year Nomination   *2015*

Languages, Philosophy, and Communication Studies Department, Utah State University

National Dean's List   *2001 – 2006*

Starr Foundation Scholarship   *2001 – 2004*

Peer Review Conference Presentations (* = graduate student)

Halaczkiewicz, M. (2020). *Bringing the World to Students: Virtual Reality Experiences in a Language Classroom.* CALICO Conference, Seattle, WA, United States. (Conference canceled)

Halaczkiewicz, M. (2020, April 1-4). *Total Immersion in Language with Google Cardboard: Using Virtual Reality with English Language Learners.* TESOL International Convention, Denver, CO, United States. https://www.call-is.org/ev/schedule.php (Conference canceled)

Halaczkiewicz, M. (2020, March 28-31). *Fantasizing about Writing or Writing about Fantasizing: Using Fanfiction in L2 Academic Writing.* AAAL Conference, Denver, CO https://aaal.confex.com/aaal/2020/meetingapp.cgi/Paper/3800 (Conference canceled)

*Lyman, S., *Duncan, E., & Halaczkiewicz, M. (2019, September 11-12). *Field Trip Time: Getting Students Out and Bringing Z.E.A.L. into the English Classroom.* ITESOL Conference, Salt Lake City, UT, United States. http://itesol.org/2019-conference-schedule/

Halaczkiewicz, M. (2019, March 12-15). *Domesticating Pokémons: A Study of One Classroom Application of Using Mobile Video Games with English Language Learners*. TESOL International Convention, Atlanta, GA, United States

Halaczkiewicz, M. (2019, March 12-15). *Let Them Fantasize: Publishing Student Extensive Writing on fanfiction.net.* TESOL International Convention, Atlanta, GA, United States

Arshavskaya, E., Halaczkiewicz, M., & Rogers, J. (2018, October 29). *Promoting Inclusion and Understanding in the Multicultural Classroom*. Inclusive Excellence Symposium, Utah State University, Logan, UT, United States

Halaczkiewicz, M. (2018, October 23-27). *Using Video Games to Enhance Academic Writing Experiences of Language Learners.* Association for Educational Communications and Technology International Convention, Kansas City, MO, United States.

Roemer, A. & Halaczkiewicz, M. (2018, September 28-29). *Get a Job: Do's and Don'ts for an Academic Position*. ITESOL Conference, Salt Lake City, UT, United States.

Halaczkiewicz, M. (2018, June 8-10). *Forging Future Global Citizens in a Cooperative Chinese-American Program by Culturally-responsible, Technology-mediated English Language Instruction.* International Conference of the China Association for Intercultural Communication, Jinan, China

Halaczkiewicz, M. (2018, March 27-30). *Head Over Heels or In Over Your Head with American Idioms - Hi-Low Tech Vocabulary Games*. TESOL International Convention, Chicago, IL, United States

Halaczkiewicz, M. (2017, March 21-24). *Catch 'em All, Engage 'em All! Using Pokémon Go to Engage English Language Writers.* TESOL International Convention, Seattle, WA, United States

Halaczkiewicz, M. (2017, March 4). *I Got Quizlet! So Now What? How to Use Quizlet Effectively in an ESL Class*. ITESOL Mini-conference, Salt Lake City, UT, United States

Halaczkiewicz, M. (2014, March 26-29). *ESL Application of Educreations*, TESOL International Convention, Portland, OR, United States

Halaczkiewicz, M. (2012, March 28-31). *Pronunciation with Oddcast and Voicethread.* TESOL International Convention, Philadelphia, PA, United States

Halaczkiewicz, M. (2012, March 28-31). *Get a Voice! Speaking Activities with Voicethread*. TESOL International Convention, Philadelphia, PA, United States

Halaczkiewicz, M. (2010, October 9-10). *Dos and Don'ts of Criterion*, MITESOL Conference, Ypsilanti, MI, United States

Invited Conference Panels

Halaczkiewicz, M. (2020). *Fanfiction: Encouraging Creative Writing in Language Learners.* TESOL International Convention, Denver, CO, United States (Conference canceled)

Peer Review Journal Articles

Halaczkiewicz, M. (November, 2020). "Let's go on a gym raid tonight!": Video game affinity spaces in English language instruction. *TESL Electronic Journal, 2*(3)

Halaczkiewicz, M. D. (2019). Harnessing writing in the wild: Practical applications of affinity spaces for English language instruction. *TESOL Journal*, *11*(1), 1–10 https://doi.org/10.1002/tesj.453

Book Chapters

Arshavskaya, E., & Halaczkiewicz, M. (in preparation). Imagining future technology and IEP innovation. In Litzenberg, J. (Ed.), *From start to future: Innovation in university-based intensive English programs.*

Open-Source Publications

Halaczkiewicz, M. (2018). *Voices of America Activity Book*. https://digitalcommons.usu.edu/voa/

Courses Taught

First-Year Composition for ESL and Multilingual Students

Intensive English Language Institute, Utah State University
- IELI2420 – Writing from Academic Sources

Center for English Language and Culture for International Students, Western Michigan University
- ENGL3600 – First Year Composition for International Students

<u>English as an Additional Language</u>
Intensive English Language Institute, Utah State University
- IELI1120 – Writing I
- IELI1220 – Writing II
- IELI2320 – Writing from Authentic Texts
- IELI1230 – Cross-Cultural Talk
- IELI2330 – Spoken Discourse and Cross-Cultural Communication
- IELI2440 – Academic Discourse
- IELI1240 – Integrated Skills
- IELI2310 – Comprehending Authentic Discourse
- IELI2410 – Comprehending Lecture Discourse
- IELI1260 – Reading II
- IELI2360 – Reading Authentic Texts
- IELI2460 – Reading from Academic Sources
- IELI2450 – Topics in ESL (Gaming, Games and Learning, American Pop Culture, Civil Rights)

Center for English Language and Culture for International Students, Western Michigan University
- ESL0102 and ESL0103 – Advanced Reading/Writing
- ESL0102 and ESL0103 – Pre-advanced Reading/Writing
- ESL0102 and ESL0103 – Elementary Reading/Writing
- ESL0102 and ESL0103 – Pre-elementary Reading/Writing
- ESL0100 – Intermediate Speaking/Listening
- ESL0101 – Intermediate Grammar/Communication
- ESL0100 – Pre-advanced Speaking/Listening
- ESL0101 – Pre-advanced Grammar/Communication
- ESL0100 – Advanced Speaking/Listening

<u>Learning Sciences</u>
Instructional Technology and Learning Sciences, Utah State University
- ITLS3130 – How People Learn (undergraduate, online, asynchronous course)
- ITLS6730 – Games and Learning (graduate, online, asynchronous course)

Short-Term Courses
Intensive English Language Institute, Utah State University

- Approaches to Teaching Writing, a session in a two-day workshop for the incoming graduate instructors and teaching assistants in the MSLT program
- Business English, an annual week-long course for Business majors visiting from Beijing Institute of Technology
- General English, an annual month-long course for hydrology majors visiting from Nanchang Institute of Technology

Courses Developed and Mentored

Beijing Institute of Technology, Beijing China
- IELI2420 – Writing from Academic Sources
- IELI2320 – Writing from Authentic Texts
- IELI2460 – Reading from Academic Sources
- IELI2410 – Comprehending Lecture Discourse

Northeast Electric Power University, Jilin, China
- IELI2420 – Writing from Academic Sources
- IELI2320 – Writing from Authentic Texts
- IELI2460 – Reading from Academic Sources
- IELI2410 – Comprehending Lecture Discourse

Northwest Minzu University, Lanzhou, China
- IELI2320 – Writing from Authentic Texts
- IELI2460 – Reading from Academic Sources
- IELI2410 – Comprehending Lecture Discourse

Institute of Advanced Learning in Honk Kong
- IELI2460 – Reading from Academic Sources

Independent Studies
- LING6490, Masters in Second Language Teaching (Zachary Brown, Spring 2022)
- LING6490, Masters in Second Language Teaching (Emma Duncan, Fall 2019)
- LING6490, Masters in Second Language Teaching (Sharon Lyman, Fall 2018)

Students Mentored
- Becca Jackson, Masters in Second Language Teaching Practicum supervisor (IELI2330, Spring 2021)
- Andrea Juarez, Masters in Language Teaching Approach student at Universidad Autónoma de Chiapas, Mexico, faculty advisor, September – October 2019
- Emma Duncan, Masters in Second Language Teaching student: IELI1000 course (Fall 2019)
- Martha Trundle Selby, International TEFL Academy: Practicum Supervisor (Fall 2018)
- Sharon Lyman, Masters in Second Language Teaching student: IELI1000 course (Fall 2018, Spring 2019), IELI2310 (Summer 2019, Fall 2019)

Student Advising
- Zachary Brown, Masters in Second Language Teaching, MA committee member (thesis defense planned in April, 2022)

- Becca Jackson, Masters in Second Language Teaching, MA committee member (thesis defense successfully defended on August 9, 2021)
- Jessica Hercules, Masters in Second Language Teaching, MA committee member (thesis defense successfully defended on July 30, 2021)
- Brandee Burk, Masters in Second Language Teaching, MA committee member (thesis defense successfully defended on April 23, 2021)
- Emma Duncan, Masters in Second Language Teaching, MA committee member (thesis defense successfully defended on November 23, 2020)
- Sharon Lyman, Masters is Second Language Teaching, MA committee member (thesis successfully defended on April 16, 2020)

Service to the World Languages and Cultures (formerly LPCS) Department

- Member, Promotion Committee, Virginie Reali, French Language Lecturer, 2022-2023
- Serve on the CHaSS New Language Building Advisory Board, 2021 - present
- Served on the LPCS Awards Committee, 2020
- Chair, Promotion Committee, Taira Nieves, IELI Lecturer, 2019- 2020
- Member, Promotion Committee, Yurika Izumi, Japanese Language Lecturer, 2019-2020
- Coordinate the Conversation Partner Program, Fall 2017 – present
- Served on the LPCS Awards Committee, 2017
- Member of MSLT Advisory Board, 2017 - present
- Served on the IELI committee designed to update the IELI classroom/Lab, Fall 2016 – Summer 2017
- Served on the IELI committee designed to assess technology needs, Fall 2014
- Served on a committee designed to help fulfill accreditation requirement of distinguishing between levels in a multi-level course, Fall 2012
- Served on the IELI Lecturer Search Committees, 2012 – Present

Service to The College and Utah State University

- Outside Member, Promotion Committee, Ashley Wells, English Lecturer, 2020-2023
- Co-lead a university-wide seminar (ETE seminar series) titled Integrating Digital Resources, Online Response and Feedback Tools into College Classrooms, February 5, 2020
- Serve on a College of Humanities and Social Science Scholarship Award Committee, January, 2020 - present
- Serve on an ITLS Assistant/Associate Professor Search Committee, September 2019 – February 2020
- Co-lead a university-wide seminar (ETE seminar series) titled Helping English Language Leaners Succeed in the Classroom and Beyond, February 15, 2018
- Served on the College of Humanities and Social Sciences Curriculum Committee, September 2013 – December, 2019

Service to the community

- Member of Afghan Refugee Task Force, an effort to provide funds for Afghan refugee woman to live and study at Utah State University, 2021 – present
- Volunteer during the Utah Public Radio pledge drive, bi-annually

Service to the field
- Serve as a Chair of the CALL Interest Section of TESOL Int., 2020-2023
- Chair a conference session, *Innovate and Implement: Practical Tech-Supported Instruction Tips,* TESOL 2022 International Convention, Pittsburgh, PA, United States
- Served as a proposal reviewer for Digital Learning and Technologies Strand academic presentations, TESOL 2022 International Convention, Pittsburgh, PA, United States
- Chair a conference session, Technology Fairs at the Virtual Electronic Village, TESOL 2021 International Convention
- Chair a conference panel, CALL- IS Academic session titled *Mixed, Augmented, and Virtual Reality for English language Teaching and Learning,* TESOL 2021 International Convention
- Chair a conference panel, CALL-IS and SSD-IS Intersection session titled Universal Design: Utilizing Technology to Enhance Accessibility in ELT Settings, TESOL 2021 International Convention
- Co-Chair a conference panel, EFL- IS and CALL-IS Intersection session titled Effective Speaking Instruction Online, TESOL 2021 International Convention
- Co-Chair a conference panel, SLW- IS and CALL-IS Practical Approaches to Leveraging Technology in L2 Writing Instruction, TESOL 2021 International Convention
- Serve as a judge for the TESOL Awards 2021
- Served as a proposal reviewer for Digital Learning and Technologies Strand academic presentations, TESOL 2021 International Convention, Huston, TX, United States
- Serve as a manuscript reviewer for TESL Electronic Journal, January 2020 – present
- Served as a proposal reviewer for the TESOL Electronic Village – Technology Fairs, TESOL 2020 International Convention, Denver, CO, United States
- Served as a proposal reviewer for Digital Learning and Technologies Strand academic presentations, TESOL 2020 International Convention, Denver, CO, United States
- Planed and delivered webcasting of Technology Showcase and Electronic Village sessions, TESOL 2019 International Convention, Atlanta, GA, United States
- Planed and supervised Technology Fairs at Electronic Village, TESOL 2019 International Convention, Atlanta, GA, United States
- Served as a proposal reviewer for Digital Learning and Technologies Strand academic presentations, TESOL 2019 International Convention, Atlanta, GA, United States
- Served as a proposal reviewer for the TESOL Electronic Village – Technology Fairs, TESOL 2019 International Convention, Atlanta, GA, United States
- Planned and facilitated webcasting of Technology Showcase and Electronic Village sessions, TESOL 2018 International Convention, Chicago, IL, United States
- Planned and supervised Technology Fairs, a three-day event, TESOL 2018 International Convention, Chicago, IL, United States

- Served as a proposal reviewer for the TESOL Electronic Village – Technology Fairs, TESOL 2018 International Convention, Chicago, IL, United States
- Served as a proposal reviewer for the TESOL Doctoral Research Forum, TESOL 2018 International Convention, Chicago, IL, United States
- Served as an elected member of the Steering Committee of the CALL Interest Section of TESOL Int., 2017-2020
- Served as a volunteer at the Electronic Village at TESOL 2017 International Convention, Seattle, WA, United States
- Served as a volunteer at the Electronic Village at TESOL 2012 International Convention, Philadelphia, PA, United States
- Served on the MITESOL 2011 Conference Planning Committee
- Organized CALL Spring Workshop (2011, May 14) Use of Moodle, hosted by Eastern Michigan University, Ypsilanti, MI, United States
- Served as a CALL SIG leader/ MITESOL Advisory Board 11/2010 to 08/2012
- Co-lead a CALL workshop – using blogs and RSS readers in ESL instruction, hosted by Michigan State University, East Lansing, Michigan, 04/10/10 (website available for viewing at http://sites.google.com/site/springcallworkshop/)

Professional Development Activities
- Attended EnglishUSA Stakeholders Conference, October, 2021 (virtual)
- Attended CEA Accreditation Workshop, September, 2021 (virtual)
- Attended Inclusion Excellence Symposium, Utah State University, Logan, UT, 2018, 2019, 2020 (virtual)
- Attended AECT International Convention, Kansas City, MO, October 23-27, 2018
- Attended ITESOL Conference, 2018, 2019
- Attended CAFIC International Convention, Jinan, Shandong, China, June 8-10, 2018
- Participated in a Webinar: Technology in Language Acquisition Research and Pedagogy, organized by TESOL CALL and AL Interests Sections, March 7, 2018
- Attended ITESOL Mini-conference, Salt Lake City, UT, March 4, 2017
- Attended ETS Criterion Training, online, September 30, 2015
- Participated in Web conference: Gaming and Gamification – a Win-Win for Language Learning, organized by TESOL CALL-IS and IETEFL LT SIG, June 14, 2014
- Attended TESOL International Convention, 2011, 2012, 2014, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020 (virtual), 2021 (virtual)
- JPN1000, Basic Japanese I, Winter 2010
- EDLD6510, Student Affairs class, Fall 2009
- Attended Michigan TESOL Conference, 2009, 2010, and 2011
- Attended Turnitin.com Seminar, Western Michigan University, February 2009

Professional Organization Membership
AAAL, AECT, AERA, CALICO, EnglishUSA, ITESOL, NAFSA, TESOL, UCIEP