



Master of Professional Practice

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Developing an experiential learning practice model for students at Otago Polytechnic Auckland International Campus (OPAIC) to make use of in their further studies (based on ESOL learning strategies)

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Attestation of ownership

"I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of an institution of higher learning."

Signed: Vera Maria Nistor

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Executive Summary

The purpose of this advanced negotiated project was firstly, to try and help my students to learn more effectively by developing an experiential learning model, and secondly, to reflect on my professional practice, in order to be able to improve it and, ultimately, improve the practice at my institution.

The research question addressed by the change project was to find out whether a personalised learning model or process could help students learn better in their English class (NZCEL) and whether this model could be further extended to help them learn in other subjects as well. This learning model was based on a combination of general experiential learning models and more specific ESOL experiential learning strategies.

The change project used the method of action research in three cycles with three different groups of students. A triangulation approach was used to gather data from multiple sources, including surveys and focus groups. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data gathered from the surveys and focus groups, by finding common themes across students' responses and summarising them. The second part of my project was my autoethnographic research, which helped me develop my professional framework of practice through critical reflection on the findings of my change project.

At the end of the action research, the findings proved that the use of metacognitive concepts in class was appreciated by the students, and that they started to understand the value of student autonomy and more independent learning.

Overall, the students understood and valued the learning model they practised in English class, and continued to use it in other subjects. Moreover, they appreciated the usefulness of this learning model outside of class, across other activities in their daily lives, and expressed their intention to continue using this learning model in the future, as it had become a lifelong learning habit for them.

As a conclusion regarding my own practice, I realised that this entire journey represented a process of professional growth. It made me question the definitions of 'learning' and 'teaching' and understand the true meaning and effective use of 'facilitation'. Through the change project action research cycles, I got the opportunity to learn about my own learning process at the same time as my students through the process of 'ako', as we constantly learned from each other. Other than becoming a more effective facilitator for my classes, I also became a better communicator and more flexible in approaching students and class activities. At the end of this process of reflection, I eventually developed my own learning model, which, unsurprisingly, was quite similar to the students' learning model, based on experiential learning and reflection and evaluation. Given the universal applicability of this learning model, I concluded that this was actually the same as my overall model of professional practice, as I understood that I am constantly learning while I am practising my profession.

At an institutional level, I would like to communicate more effectively with my colleagues, in order to apply this learning model not only in English classes, but also in other subjects. Through the systematic and consistent application of this model with more students, I will be able to verify its effectiveness, while continuing to develop and improve it according to the students' needs.

Introduction

This professional practice thesis describes my dual development as a teaching professional. On one hand, it will detail my change project about designing an experiential learning practice model for students during their Academic English preparatory course, to make use of in their further studies. On the other hand, it will describe my critical reflections and conclusions regarding my own professional framework of practice as an expert facilitator of learning experiences for my students, a teacher who understands how to help students develop their own learning practice. Throughout the thesis particular focus will be placed on the process that links my change project and my learning journey, while taking into account my background as lecturer of English for Academic Purposes (EAP). All of this, in turn, will inform the final articulation of my professional framework of practice.

The first chapter will go deeper into my teaching context through examples from literature, on both ESOL (English as a Second Language) theories, as well as other experiential learning theories. This will be followed by a chapter on methodology and the research methods I have used for this project. The most substantial chapter of this thesis will be the 'Work practice' chapter which will describe every cycle of my action research as part of the change project, including results and reflections on each cycle to inform the next. All this will be followed by a discussion chapter, where I will analyse the final results to inform the conclusion of my thesis. Finally, there will be some recommendations on how to further pursue and improve this project in the future. Last but not least is one the most important parts of this thesis, the critical review. This will be a deep reflection into who I am as a professional, starting with my past motivations, leading to my present practice and how this has changed and evolved because of the change project, to my future aspirations in this field.

Motivation

I have been working for the past 4 years as an English lecturer at Otago Polytechnic Auckland International Campus. Our English department teaches English for Academic Purposes (EAP), as preparatory courses for tertiary students who wish to enrol in undergraduate or postgraduate degrees at our institution. At the moment I am teaching New Zealand Certificate in English Language (NZCEL) courses for postgraduate students. My motivation for this project came from my reflection on my personal background and experiences as a teacher of English (ESOL) in a tertiary education context (EAP). This made me ask myself who I was as a teaching professional and where I wanted to be. I reflected on my learning journey, in order to better understand my students' learning processes, and I designed an aspirational framework of practice to work towards during this change project. Ideally, I would also like this project to be not just about my own development, but to also give me an opportunity to bring something new and positive to my organisation.

Overall, the research question I will be addressing throughout my professional practice project is whether a learning model or process can help students learn better, firstly in their English class, and then to investigate if this model could be further extended to help them learn in other subjects as well. I will be focussing on how to become a better lecturer to help my students learn better, and this will in turn help me grow professionally. I would like to be perceived as an

expert facilitator of learning experiences for my students, a teacher who understands how to help students develop their own learning practice and who combines approaches to help them thrive in the modern world. As a professional, my goal is to become: an expert facilitator of student-centred learning; an adult education strategist (possibly a facilitator of tertiary education learning practice later on) - a teacher trainer for ESOL and/or any other subjects; involved in a tertiary education programme (e.g. Bachelor of Education); generally involved in learning and teaching across any subjects/departments. These will be articulated in more detail in my professional framework of practice.

I wish to create a culture of learner-centred practice that any lecturer can use at tertiary level, irrespective of the subject they are teaching, based on the principles of “ako” (to teach and to learn simultaneously) (Cameron, Berger, Lovett, & Baker, 2007), which means considering students not just as students, but rather as partners that are included in the decision-making process, by facilitating experiences that are “context rich, relevant and appropriate, learner centred” (Edwards, 2013). As part of this process, I would like to give my students the opportunity and the tools to find a learning model that works for them, or adapt an existing one, and use it consistently, all along their learning journey. I would like to eventually find a learning model for my students that would work in any field and could be retained for future courses and professional career development. Ideally, this would inspire other tertiary educators, irrespective of the subject they are teaching, to enable their own students to continually enhance their learning models.

Impact of the change project

This project will be used as a stepping stone in my career as lecturer, and it will inform my future learning and teaching knowledge and my future teaching approaches and strategies. Other than for my own professional practice, this experiential learning model trialled with my English students could also serve as motivation for other lecturers to further improve their delivery and become more student-centred in their own classes, irrespective of the subject they teach. This change could also happen at a larger institutional level.

Literature and Wider Practice Context

There is a lot of literature in both an ESOL context and a more generic context that focuses on learner-centred teaching strategies and approaches. In order to support my research on finding an experiential learning model for my English students, I was looking at both literature from the field of ESOL, which is inherently more inclined to being experiential due to its practical nature (Knutson, 2003), as well as more general literature on experiential learning cycles and their role in the field of education in general.

To start with the field of ESOL, due to its applied nature, experts have always devised practical ways in which to encourage the use of language in a real-life context, through real-life means that reflect the practical aspects the students will meet outside the classroom.

One of the most popular ESOL strategies is 'Communicative language teaching' (Dörnyei, 2009), which normally encourages "authentic, functional use of language" and "real-life communication, such as roleplays and simulations. This strategy opposes the traditional view that language is learned through grammar rules and memorization of these, but that it is rather best learned through communication and interaction (both inside and outside of class). Language learning is nowadays seen as more of a socio-cognitive issue, rather than a cognitive one. Linguist John Firth believed that the sociocultural context includes "participants, their behaviour and beliefs, the objects of linguistic discussion, and word choice." (Richards & Rodgers, 1986). As an ESOL teacher, there is more freedom to choose more inclusive topics (not just the typical grammar topics/exercises). Similar to other non-ESOL literature on experiential learning, this strategy is based on a "learner-centred and experience-based view of second language teaching" (1986) and it also relies on students bringing up their own past experiences in order to improve their language skills in the future. Even though communicative language teaching tends to be used mainly in language classes, similar methodologies can be applied to other subjects as well. There is a parallel drawn between communicative language teaching and learning theory in general: "Activities that involve real communication promote learning." (Richards & Rodgers, 1986).

Another well-known component of any ESOL class is to always give students a 'learning opportunity' (Crabbe, 2007), which is defined as "a specific cognitive or metacognitive activity that a learner can engage in that is likely to lead to learning." Examples would include the usual 'input', 'output', 'interaction' and 'language understanding' tasks that are normally found in all language classes, as well as 'feedback sessions' and 'learning understanding' which include reflection on difficulties, the reasons for their errors, and how to overcome them in similar situations in the future (Crabbe, 2007) – (reproduced from Crabbe, 2003). It is more than just assigning tasks to students, but also understanding the learning opportunities that come with them. Crabbe's argument is that most teachers only focus on the 'design for learning' (setting up communicative tasks), but not on the equally important 'management of learning' and bringing about a "degree of awareness about learning" in the students (2007). Ultimately, learners should be able to see these communicative tasks as "prompts and models for managing further learning for themselves". But in order for this to happen, teachers need to better identify and understand these learning opportunities themselves before they can actually make the students

become aware of these – otherwise the risk is for students to just see tasks as isolated activities. According to Crabbe, teachers need to model these learning opportunities for their students more explicitly, so that the students can recognise these opportunities outside of the classroom as well (a more conscious process) – hence supporting the idea that learning is universal and can happen both inside and outside the classroom.

One of the most popular modern ESOL strategies is Task-based learning (Willis, 1996). This theory is mainly based on the concept of ‘learning by doing’ and addressing issues that arise within a clear relevant context. And although the teacher takes on the role of ‘facilitator’, it is not just a series of tasks that the students have to do. The task-based structure in a language class is normally as follows: pre-task, task cycle and language focus (Willis, 1996, p. 40). Which basically means that the teacher introduces the topic so that students are familiar with it, then sets a communicative task which should ideally inspire the language focus that needs to be addressed (based on the teacher’s monitoring) and then after that language focus is explicitly addressed with the students, the same task (or a similar one) is once again set. There are many supporters of this experiential theory, which seems to be a more efficient way to learn than the classic lecturing, as students can more clearly learn from their own mistakes and it offers a more ‘holistic experience’ for them (Willis, 1996, p. 40). Whereas task-based learning is at the centre of any ESOL class, there is no reason why it would not work just as well in any other subject, by keeping the same dynamic between teacher (facilitator) and students, to ultimately encourage learning by building on existing knowledge/experience.

As part of any ESOL class, due to the practical nature of language teaching, ‘scaffolding’ is a structure that is normally used to enable students to better and more easily retain new knowledge. Applebee’s 5 criteria (Foley, 1994) is that any class activity needs to include the following: student ownership of the learning event, appropriateness of the instructional task, a structured learning environment, shared responsibility (teacher cooperating) and transfer of control (to the student). According to Applebee and Langer, “learning is a process of gradual internalization of routines and procedures available to the learner from the social and cultural context in which the learning takes place.” (Foley, 1994) – for example, scaffolding by modelling a task. Once again, the process of scaffolding can help students learn not only within the language context, but these criteria can be applied to any task conducted in any other subject. The role of the teacher here is that of a facilitator, thus providing sufficient context at the beginning of a task and then guiding the students towards the final goal for them to get more control/autonomy, to take more responsibility of their own learning once they are better at internalising these processes.

Macaro (2006) outlines some popular “learner strategies” for learners of a second language. He quotes Oxford and Burry-Stock in showing that language learning seems to be more successful through the use of learning strategies, or “generally high strategy use” (Macaro, 2006, p. 320). He also quotes Nunan in showing that motivation can also be affected positively by strategy use. From his research, he raises an important question: “...whether it is the range and frequency of strategy use, the nature of strategies, or the combination of strategies that is the key to successful language learning.” (Macaro, 2006, p. 321). This dilemma is based on the fact that there is a lot of conflicting information and conflicting views from experts in the field of second-language learning, but Macaro concludes that most studies support the idea that

“learner strategy instruction (or “training”) appears to be effective in promoting successful learning if it is carried out over lengthy periods of time and if it includes a focus on metacognition.” (Macaro, 2006, p. 321). This of course has something to do with specific ESOL/second language learning strategies, such as strategies to learn new vocabulary, or to become a better speaker or writer. But metacognition is an idea that can be taken further into any similar/practical subject, for example when the learner moves on from an English preparatory course onto a mainstream programme at a tertiary institution. Archibald et al. believe that metacognitive learning strategies “are seen as the gateway to successful integration of language learners into mainstream classrooms.” (2008). This further distances modern learning from traditional learning, in that it is no longer believed that it is enough for students to just automatically learn all the information they receive in class without asking questions, without delving deeper into the reasons why this is important for their knowledge or life. Metacognition also positively affects motivation, through its relation to goal-setting: “the presence of a goal is a necessary condition for the construct of a strategy.” (Macaro, 2006, p. 330). And all this is further linked to “attribution”, or how a future goal is affected by past experience, showing the connections between all of these elements (Macaro’s learning model hence is a very complex one).

There are many epistemological parallels that can be drawn between the abovementioned ESOL learning strategies and other general experiential learning strategies, in that most of the literature relating to experiential learning and student-centred approaches is primarily based on the social constructivist view of teaching (Vygotsky, 1978), and this is also true of ESOL learning strategies. A connection between most of these ESOL principles can be made to ‘sociocultural theory’ (based on Vygotsky’s social development theory - (Vygotsky, 1978)) which also focuses on ‘interaction’, as it views the acquisition of language as a ‘social’ or ‘socio-psychological’ process (Ellis, 1999). Ellis describes interaction as “a social event which helps learners participate in their own development”, as he believes that “there is a psychological as well as social dimension to learning” (1999). Therefore, he expands the meaning of interaction to include two types: ‘social interaction’ and ‘private speech’ or internal speech. He “views ‘interaction’ as something that can be both social and private” (1999), so equally helpful outside the classroom too and in terms of encouraging reflection.

Probably one of the most well-known experiential learning depictions in modern education is Kolb’s (1984) learning cycle of experiential learning (based on Lewin’s experiential learning model). It consists of a concrete experience, followed by reflective observation and abstract conceptualisation, and finally active experimentation which puts everything into practice and extends the purpose of the experience into other contexts.

There is some criticism of Kolb’s experiential learning cycle, in that not everything that constitutes an experience can actually be considered ‘learning’ if not guided properly. Everything can be an experience, but it is important “to discriminate between experiences which are educative and those which are mis-educative” (Dewey, 1938, p. 37). Elkjaer points out that Kolb’s experiential learning is often defined as “experiences derived from bodily actions and stored in memory as more or less tacit knowledge” (2009, p. 74). But Dewey, as a pragmatist, argues instead for “the principle of continuity” and generally a more inquiry-based approach to learning: “Hence it is argued that “growth” is not enough; we must also specify the direction in

which growth takes place, the end towards which it tends.” (1938, p. 36). There might therefore also be a tendency for teaching practitioners to misunderstand Kolb’s experiential learning as a teaching method, not a learning method, an experience that has to be imposed by the teacher. There are various experiential learning activities, but what they all have in common is ‘learning from experience’ and “the opportunity to reflect and think” about this experience (Beard & Wilson, 2013, p. 17). On the downside, what some of these experiential learning models seem to miss is that the student can be seen as a passive recipient of the experience, as opposed to having the opportunity to create the experience for themselves actively.

A useful addition to the classic experiential learning model is added by Boud and his ‘model of learning from experience’ (1994), which consists of three main steps: preparation (where the focus is placed on the learner’s existing skillset and past experiences and knowledge), the learning experience (the actual experience), and reflective processes (reflecting back on the experience while also considering the feelings experienced). Every student brings with them their ‘personal foundation of experience’ (Boud, 1994) – what Boud calls ‘learning through experience’, where students can only make sense of new material taught by linking it back to their existing knowledge. According to Osterman (1998), students should not be treated like “blank slates”, but that the learning process should rather be built on “prior experiences and knowledge”.

This existing experience that learner-centred practice is always trying to link back to is a complex issue and it depends on many personal factors. Something useful to take into consideration when dealing with students of any age is ‘the theory of multiple intelligences’ (Gardner, 1999), which is based on the fact that there is no universal method to make sure all of our students learn equally, since they all possess different types of ‘intelligences’: linguistic, logical-mathematical, spatial, bodily-kinaesthetic, musical, interpersonal and intrapersonal. Being aware of all of these different ways in which each student prefers to learn or learns best, it can be argued that it is a difficult job for a teacher to accommodate all of them in a large class, but most teachers try to combine different activities to cater to at least some of these.

When it comes to learning from experience, the model that has inspired most other authors on this topic is Dewey’s ‘theory of experiential continuum’ (1938), which Boud used in developing his aforementioned theory. At its core, this theory shows that students learn from previous experiences, which then in turn inform present and future experiences: “the experiential continuum” based on the “category of continuity” (Dewey, 1938, p. 33). In his book ‘Experience and Education’, he emphasises the need for a purpose to each experience, in order to enable an actual learning process in students through organised activities: “A purpose differs from an original impulse and desire through its translation into a plan and method of action based upon foresight of the consequences of acting under given observed conditions in a certain way.” (1938, p. 69). In his case, Dewey names the following as the formation of purpose in the context of learning through experience: observation of surrounding conditions, knowledge of what has happened in similar situations in the past (your experience or others’), and judgement which puts together what is observed and what is recalled to see what they signify.

‘Reflective practice’ (Moon, 2004) has been a part of any ESOL class in order to accomplish the understanding of how language is being retained and improved. However, reflection is a useful

tool in any subject, following any task. "It will usually involve the sorting out of bits of knowledge, ideas, feelings, awareness of how you are behaving and so on." (Moon, 2004, p. 187) - this whole process of re-organising and clarifying your thoughts Moon refers to as 'cognitive housekeeping' (2004, p. 188). Reflection is arguably one of the most important components of an experiential learning cycle, in that without reflection, learning from experience would not be possible.

At the heart of all of these learner-centred methodologies lies the concept of 'facilitation', meaning the teacher acts more as a facilitator or 'guide' (Richards, 1998, p. 52) than an actual 'teacher' in the classic sense of the word. Their main responsibility is to "create lessons that enhance communication and cooperation between learners" (Richards, 1998, p. 52), in order to increase their autonomy. Some examples quoted by Richards are lessons based on group activities, which have as a goal to build and increase trust among students. "The teacher's role is limited to setting up and monitoring activities, occasionally correcting errors, and maintaining variety and pace throughout the lesson." (Richards, 1998, p. 53). Heim (2012) also negatively refers to the teacher as an 'expert', who represents a figure of absolute authority for the students, and somebody students might even fear, rather than feeling comfortable cooperating with. She points out that there is a crucial difference between 'having expert knowledge' and 'using that expert knowledge to dominate a group' (Heim, 2012). Therefore, the teacher still serves as the authority figure who is most knowledgeable about the subject being studied, but the way this knowledge is transmitted to the students is done through a more active, inclusive method – and for adult education this would be a very important aspect to remember for any teacher/lecturer, irrespective of their subject. "Experiential learning also requires teachers to take on a different role in the classroom than the traditional teacher-as-expert. In the classroom they become facilitators, guides, and helpers" (Spruck-Wrigley quoted in (Knutson, 2003).

Going hand in hand with the idea that the teacher needs to take a step back and take on the role of facilitator instead of the traditional teacher, in order for a class to become truly learner-centred, a higher degree of autonomy should also be encouraged in the students. This idea of student autonomy has been recently discussed in the context of a psychological theory called "self-determination theory" (Ryan & Deci, 2017) which is closely linked to student motivation, and namely to the intrinsic motivation that students have and that involuntarily influences each one of their choices when it comes to how they learn. Self-determination theory works in that it "examines the perceptions, attributions, affective experiences, patterns of behaviour, and mechanistic underpinnings that characterize healthy self-organisation" (Ryan & Deci, 2017, p. 5). Another aspect linked to student autonomy is the idea of a teacher co-creating class materials, and even assessments together with the students. Rogers, Lyon and Tausch (2014) have written about "person-centred freedom" and supported the idea that each student should set their own assignment as much as possible and be more actively involved in the processes regarding their own learning. As of now, this idea still seems to require more time to be taken on board by most teachers in tertiary education.

Looking at all of these ESOL as well as non-ESOL learning theories from literature, I can clearly see the common threads between them, and it seems obvious to me that they can all be applied to any subject, not only English. Regarding my change project, I believe the main focus for me will be on how to best develop an experiential learning model within a learner-centred class, that

encourages experiential learning and reflective practice at all times. In order to support the practical and experiential nature of my project, it will mainly consist of several cycles of action research, to give me the opportunity to trial, learn and improve.

Methodology and Research Methods

As previously mentioned in the introduction, my research question for this change project is whether a learning model or process can help students learn better, firstly in their English (EAP) class, and then to investigate if this model could be further extended to help them learn in other subjects as well. In order to achieve this, I used a pragmatic research methodology, which is, as described by Patton (2002), an eclectic approach that uses multiple research methods. It is less traditional or restrictive, and relies on abductive reasoning, in that it is believed that different methods can all be used as long as they are appropriate for the analytical purposes. The reason why this particular qualitative methodology was the most suited for my project was the interactive nature of pragmatic research, as well as the flexibility in approaches (Patton, 2002). Due to the vastness of doing professional practice research, this methodology made it easier to incorporate all of these methods and approaches in order to draw some clear conclusions.

I used two different overarching methods in this change project. For the first part, the project enquiry into whether students can find an experiential learning model to use in English class as well as other future classes, I used the method of action research (Lewin, 1946). The project consisted of a total of three cycles (Figure 1) and at the end of each cycle, the data was analysed and lessons were learned from it, in order to inform the next cycle of research. In cycle 1 I interviewed past NZCEL students, in order to gauge how responsive and prepared the students were to engage with an experiential learning model, as well as to rethink my approach in terms of how to present this model to them. In cycles 2 and 3 I worked with and surveyed current students, in order to try and get them to develop this experiential learning model.

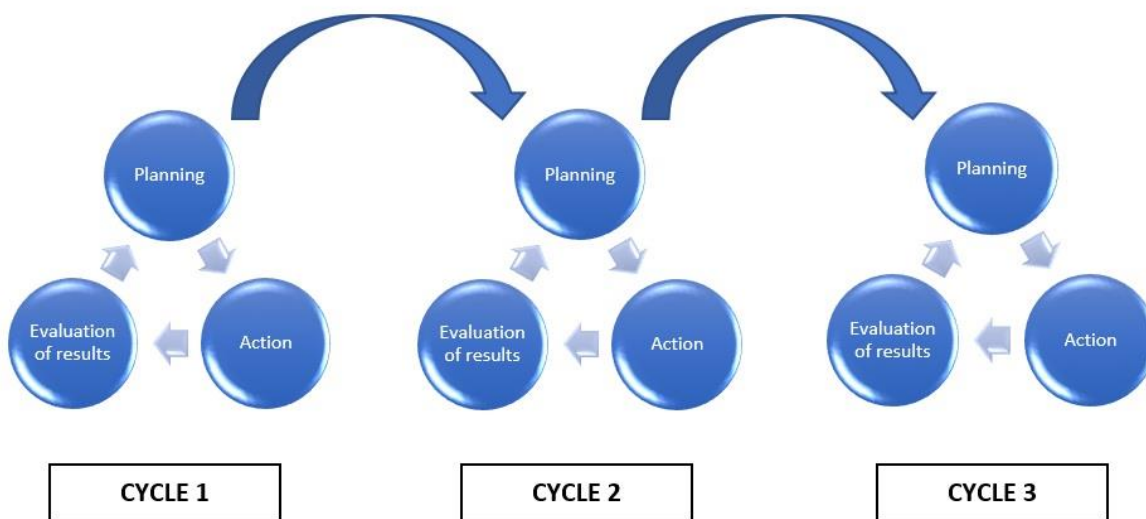


Figure 1: The three cycles of my action research

The second method used was autoethnographic research, which basically meant that I reported my own experiences and reflections as a primary data source, in order to become more self-aware of my own practice (Patton, 2002). I kept two separate reflective logs, which I updated regularly, and which kept track of my own learning journey and my own experiences and feelings throughout the project. This autoethnographic research worked together with the action research from the project in informing my own development as a facilitator of learning in both a language context and a wider context.

Due to the pragmatic nature of the research, a triangulation approach was used (Patton, 2002) (Long, 2005) to increase the validity of the qualitative research. Long (2005) recommends using both multiple sources of data (in my case three different cycles working with three different groups of students) and multiple methods (in my case qualitative surveys, focus groups, as well as informal observations). According to Patton (2002), there are three sources that can be used to collect qualitative data: interviews, observations and documents, and I used all three as part of my change project, to ensure that I gather all the information I can from my students and their views on the usefulness of the learning model.

For the analysis of the data gathered from both the qualitative surveys (written responses to open-ended questions) and the focus groups (oral responses), thematic analysis seemed like the most suitable process, in other words finding themes in large chunks of data and summarising them across participants (Patton, 2002). This was achieved through the use of both inductive analysis (finding common themes from the data), as well as deductive analysis (eventually finding hypotheses and connections between the themes through interpretation). The outcome was a summary of popular responses for each question accompanied by some memorable quotes given by the participants (Appx. 1 and Appx. 2).

Regarding ethics, all data was collected using ethical methods, strictly following the plan and guidelines of Otago Polytechnic's Ethics Committee at all times. All current students were surveyed online anonymously, with a third party administering the online survey. Only former students were allowed to participate in focus groups (where I was no longer their teacher or in any way connected to their academic results). All survey and focus group answers were kept confidential and were only available to the researcher at all times, thus ensuring that the anonymity and confidentiality of the participants was respected.

Work Practice

I started the work practice project following the plan I had made in my Course 2 Learning Agreement. It consisted of three cycles (working with three different groups of students): cycle 1 with former students, and cycles 2 and 3 with current NZCEL students. The goal from the beginning was to try and encourage my current students to develop an experiential learning model that they could use both in my class and for their future courses. Based on both the ESOL and experiential learning literature described in chapter 2, as well as my ESOL teaching practice, I imagined the student learning model to look something like the one in Figure 2 below. It is mainly based on task-based learning (Willis, 1996) as well as Kolb's learning cycle of experiential learning (Kolb, 1984) and represents a fusion between the two. At the centre of the entire learning process is the reflection, which should take place during every stage of the cycle.

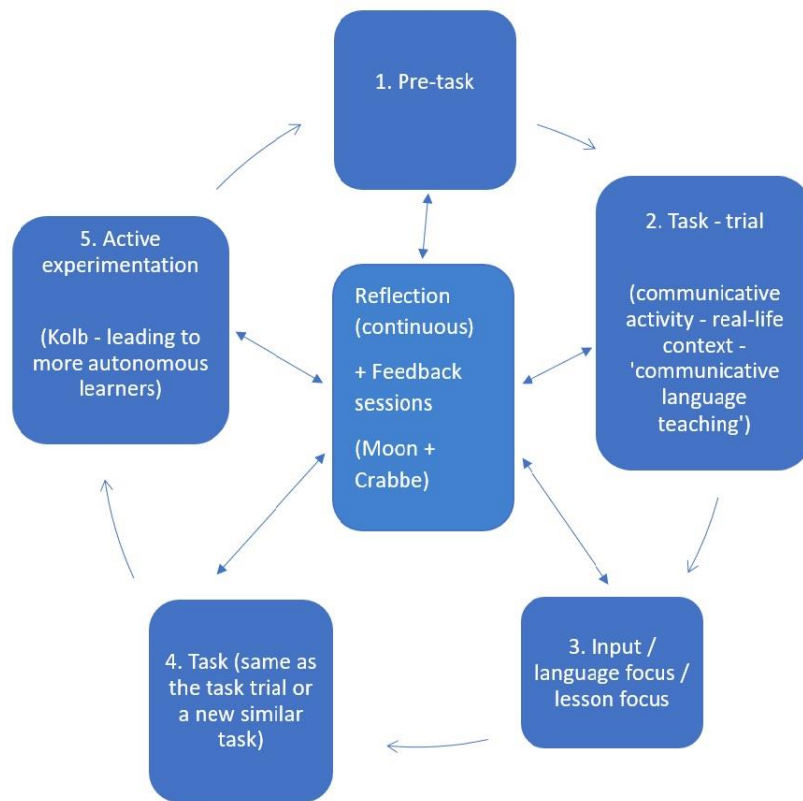


Figure 2: Possible experiential learning model based on ESOL and experiential learning theories

My change project was made up of three cycles. This chapter will first provide a brief outline for each one of these and will include each cycle's individual aim towards my main goal of developing an experiential learning model for my students. It will then analyse and discuss my findings from each cycle in detail under 'Data collection and interpretation of results'. Each cycle will then be followed by a reflective session discussing the lessons I learned from conducting each one of them, which have helped me further develop or readjust the next cycle, and, at times, rethink aspects of my approach to this project.

Cycle 1

Cycle 1 consisted of asking former students for feedback on their NZCEL course (which they had now completed) and also getting them to make the connection between this course and their main programme/degree here at OPAIC. The aim of this cycle was to gauge how responsive and prepared students in this programme would be to engage with an experiential learning model, as well as to understand which gaps would need to be addressed and how well-integrated and realistic this learning model would be in an ESOL context. This information would ideally help me to plan a more effective approach when presenting this model to future students.

The students were given a choice – attend a focus group in person (for the students who were still in Auckland at the time), or answer a qualitative online questionnaire (for those who had already returned to their country or could not attend the focus group in person). We ended up with two focus groups: former students from a recent cohort, who had finished NZCEL and were in their first block of their main programme (four students), and another group of former students who had finished NZCEL at least a year ago, and had already finished their main programme as well (two students). We also had four other former students complete the online survey, as they could not attend the focus groups in person.

The main idea behind the focus groups and the online survey was to get a very general idea of what students understood or remembered from their NZCEL course and if they thought that these general strategies helped them in their main programme as well. Not much depth was expected of them, since these were groups of former students and these learning models/strategies would have just been mentioned briefly and, for the most part, indirectly. However, it was expected that data generated by this cycle would be useful in devising a plan for current students in cycles 2 and 3.

The same set of open-ended questions was used for both the online survey and the focus groups. Some of the questions overlapped in meaning, so the answers to those questions have been summarised together. The results section below therefore combines common themes across the two focus groups and the survey using thematic analysis (Appx. 1).

Data collection and interpretation of results

(Appx. 1)

- 1. Was NZCEL level 4 your first experience studying at tertiary level in New Zealand? What was different about how you learned as compared to your experience studying at tertiary level in your country (if applicable)?**
- 2. What did you like / find most useful about your NZCEL level 4 course?**

The students found the whole education experience in New Zealand much more practical than in their home countries. They all mentioned learning through experience, and a focus on practice and applying rather than just learning theory. One student said:

“NZCEL level 4 [was] my first experience study[ing] at tertiary level in NZ and it was different than my country because it was experience learning”.

They enjoyed the problem-solving component (taking the initiative themselves) and education that prepared them for real life and their future careers – examples they gave for preferred activities were practical activities such as games, oral presentations, writing essays and reports. The topics in NZCEL were always connected to real-life and they were taught transferable skills (any issues in real life that could be solved in class; also classwork that reflected real life). They also appreciated the course structure overall and that it taught them the skill of independent learning.

Many noticed that the staff's role was different in New Zealand, rather than lecturing and providing theoretical knowledge, they were more involved with the students and addressed their individual needs. They believed the teaching staff here were much more understanding and gave students more space and time to study and submit assignments without too much stress. One student wrote:

"I loved the way the faculty of Otago Polytechnic takes every student's queries into consideration effectively and encourage[s] them to perform better."

- 3. Was there anything you learned in your NZCEL level 4 course that was especially useful for you in your degree course? What was it? What is the best way you learn now and why?**
- 4. How have you applied / developed your learning approaches in your further studies based on your NZCEL level 4 studies?**

The students who took part in the survey and focus groups all acknowledged that they learned many skills during NZCEL, which they are now using during their main degree programme. Most students named presentation skills as one of the most important skills they learned during the course, and one which could be used anytime and in any context in the future. One of the students wrote:

"[...] because how to deliver your ideas to other[s] and what way to present that is most important"

Almost every participant mentioned using correct referencing and in-text citations in their writing as one of the most useful skills they had learned. Many students also mentioned knowledge of paraphrasing and research skills such as being able to find more accurate reliable sources. Some students even said that they are now referencing experts and that they are like tutors to their less knowledgeable classmates on the main programme, with one of them saying:

"Right now in our class, what the situation is, we know everything about referencing in front of [the] new students. We are helping them and they are quite happy, so we feel like tutors."

Some mentioned having gained knowledge of academic language as being particularly useful on their main course as well. A few also said that the NZCEL course has taught them self-study skills that they can use on their main course as well. One student mentioned learning to work in groups as an important skill that can be used on any course.

5. Did NZCEL level 4 help improve your knowledge of how to learn? How?

The answers to this question were quite similar and related to the answers in question number 4. Most students said that NZCEL helped them improve their knowledge to learn and that they

are now using this knowledge either in their main degree course, or in their life in general. Many students stressed on the further use of learned presentation and writing skills, mentioning how the presentation skills they learned in NZCEL helped them achieve a Diploma at NZQA level 7 Applied Management. Others said that they were gaining good results in their Bachelor degree because of their knowledge of referencing and academic language. Many students said that NZCEL helped them improve their research skills, and one said that they now know how to learn better by using computers and the internet to do more independent research:

“It’s a lot more practical and simple; we don’t feel like we’re studying a language or studying a certain subject, that we are in a course, it’s a more natural and particular learning”.

6. What are your suggestions to improve the delivery of NZCEL level 4 in the future (as a preparatory English for Academic Purposes course), to better help with students’ further studies?

The responses to this question were short and mainly showed that students would want even more practice with the useful skills mentioned in the previous questions. Most students said they would want more practice to increase their vocabulary for presentations and more writing tasks. One student mentioned needing more support to study more and be more confident. Many students were very appreciative towards the NZCEL course and its teachers.

Lessons learned from cycle 1

Cycle 1 was very general (this was reflected in the type of questions asked in both the survey and focus groups). It was rather used to find out general impressions that the students got about NZCEL, in order to better know what to address and from which angle to look at introducing the learning model.

The responses received from my past students in both the online survey and the focus groups proved that they have a good understanding as well as an appreciation for the practicality that is characteristic of an ESOL course. The students have acknowledged the difference between the traditional classroom and a classroom with a practical and experiential learning focus when comparing the learning process in different countries, and they are familiar with the concept of learning through experience (Kolb, 1984); (Beard & Wilson, 2013). Most students confirmed that they were still using skills and knowledge learned from NZCEL in their main degree courses, and that they appreciated knowing these skills ahead of starting those degree courses. However, they never clearly explained how exactly they were using these skills in the present. The responses alluded to some sort of reflective activity being part of the course (mentioning useful feedback between teacher and students), but the concept of reflection (Moon, 2004) itself was absent from all responses.

Overall, I came to the conclusion that the questions were a bit too general, and some would need to be worded differently to yield better and less repetitive/overlapping answers. Question 5 might have been the most confusing for students, as their answers referred to teaching

strategies rather than to their own learning strategies, as had been intended. Nevertheless, most of the responses contained useful information that I was able to use further in planning for cycles 2 and 3.

All in all, I was pleasantly surprised that my former students remembered so much about their former course, even the ones who graduated from NZCEL over a year previously. I was very happy that they made more connections metacognitively than I expected. They might not have always been able to articulate these learning strategies they learned and used, but in their mind the concept seemed to be clear.

Cycle 2

Cycle 2 monitored participants who were current NZCEL students, and therefore it consisted of two parts: informal observations and information gathering during NZCEL classes, as well as a qualitative online feedback survey at the end of the course. I chose the anonymous online survey option to gather feedback from the students for ethical reasons, as they were my current students and I wanted to avoid any conflict of interest (per my ethics approval).

Students were introduced to different learning strategies and learning styles during their NZCEL course, as well as the notion of self-reflection, in order to better understand their academic English development metacognitively. I started warming them up to the concept of 'metacognition' and thinking about how they are learning, as opposed to just automatically learning, from the early stages of the course, in order to give them enough time to get used to this type of thinking.

Informal observations

My plan to introduce the students to more metacognitive concepts during this course was aided by the material in the Oxford EAP Upper-Intermediate B2 Student's Book (the textbook we used for NZCEL level 5), which tackled deeper topics such as 'learning styles', 'rote learning' and 'discovery learning' already in week 1 of the course (De Chazal & McCarter, 2016). The students were very responsive to these new concepts and understood them clearly – an explicit connection was also made between 'discovery learning' and 'experiential learning', in order for them to see not only the practical side of our course, but also the fact that it is based on real-life context experiences.

Weeks 7 and 8 of the course came with a case study assignment which offered a further opportunity to revisit learning styles/strategies, as this case study dealt with a student who was having learning difficulties with her university study. The students had to do lots of research on learning theories and models in order to provide this student with hypothetical advice on how to overcome these difficulties. They ended up researching theories such as Rebecca Oxford's 'Taxonomy of Learning', 'Adaptation Theory', 'Social Penetration Theory' of Altman and Taylor and Covey's 'Four Generations of Time Management'. The students were quite creative with

their recommendations for the hypothetical student and, in the process, we widely explained and discussed in class the notions of 'cognition' and 'metacognition'.

In the second part of the course I noticed that the students had become more actively involved in their own learning and were quite responsive to suggestions to developing strategies that would help them learn more easily. In week 9 they even came up with a strategy to help them with their listening assessments, to better understand the content of the listening: warming up to the topic first, then predicting content based on assessment questions, and only then listening; and during the listening, listening for key words and signposting language.

Towards the end of the course, in week 10, we had another useful chapter in the book that contained some reading material on 'Cooperative learning', as well as a reading text and lecture on 'Independent learning'. This opened up the class discussion to learning methods again, and the students were able to connect these with previous knowledge of 'self-study', 'discovery learning', 'flipped classroom', 'cloud schools', and learning styles in general (visual, auditory, kinaesthetic), which had all been covered earlier in the course. That same week we did some group discussion practice on 'best place to learn' and 'learning styles' and the students had many useful and interesting ideas regarding these topics. The concept of 'transferable skill' or 'transferability' came up during the lecture on 'Independent learning' - it was explained as "how we can transfer the skills we are learning into new contexts". One of the learners then explained what she understood by this: "some knowledge/skills we learn on this course, that we can use in the future on another course, for example postgraduate studies, or maybe even in our workplace" (paraphrased).

Overall, based on informal class observations during this course, the students seemed to understand their own learning processes quite well, despite not always knowing the terminology for these processes. They seemed very open to learning more about learning strategies and discussing these in groups, to figure out what works best for them personally.

Data collection and interpretation of results

A total of three students participated in the end-of-course survey, which was meant to test their understanding of all the concepts we discussed during the course and to see if the students had been able to come up with their own learning model.

- 1. Was NZCEL level 5 your first experience studying at tertiary level in New Zealand? What was different about how you learned as compared to your experience studying at tertiary level in your country (if applicable)?**
- 2. What did you like / find most useful about your NZCEL level 5 course?**

For most participants this was the first time studying in New Zealand, and they all pointed out the practical nature of the course as opposed to just theory. They also recognised that this course relied more on a friendly environment and good communication and that it was a better academic programme that was not so teacher-centred. One student said:

“In my country I got just theoretical knowledge. I was not taught how to do presentation[s], how to find relevant information and how to determine reliable websites”.

The most useful skills they learned were giving presentations, as well as written academic assignments in general. They mentioned how useful it was for them to improve their research skills, namely finding relevant information, determining reliable sources and correct referencing. One student said:

“I think the most useful is writing, because this might improve my other skill[s] such as my research skill, my reading skill, using citations, and I can apply [all this] to my speaking skills.”

One student saw the transferability of being on this type of academic course:

“I learnt academic basic study for my next course. The most useful is that I know now how to write academic assignment[s] for my postgraduate [course], such as references and in-text citation[s]”.

3. Did NZCEL level 5 help improve your knowledge of how to learn? How?

4. What learning strategies have you found most useful on this course?

All participants said that NZCEL helped improve their knowledge of how to learn. When they explained it, they stated reasons such as through the improvement of many different skills, mainly presentation and conversation skills, listening skills and writing skills. It helped them improve all English language skills through practical lessons. They especially saw a big improvement in their listening and speaking skills. One student said:

“I really believe that my English skills are better than before, so I [am] more confident to make conversation with others.”

As learning strategies, they found watching videos and TED talks in class particularly useful, as well as reading articles and doing research and planning. One student thought doing presentation and group discussion practice for speaking was very useful.

5. Do you think that you will continue using these strategies in your further study? How?

All students said that they will continue using these strategies they had learned on NZCEL in their further study. One of them wrote:

“Yes, I will apply this strategies in my further study because this course is the foundation for me in the next main course.”

One of them mentioned making changes to these strategies or adding some new ones, if suitable:

“Yes, it depends on my future topic. I can use [the] same strategies or I can find something new if it works.”

6. How would you describe your learning model (it can be a mix of different styles/models, depending on what works best for you)?

There were varied answers to this question, but they all relied on adaptations of practical and experiential models. One participant described their learning model as practising by speaking,

another said that for remembering information, it is better for them to read and write it down first. Another wrote that they learn best by listening to visual audios and doing practical activities.

7. What are your suggestions to improve the delivery of NZCEL level 5 in the future (as a preparatory English for Academic Purposes course), to better help with students' further studies?

Many participants mentioned that they would like the quality of the recordings in the listening assessments to be improved. One student suggested even more practical activities:

"I think this course should add more practice for all skills."

Lessons learned from cycle 2

Based on the informal class observations, I was quite happy with the responses from students in terms of metacognitive processes for learning – they seemed interested in the topic. Students seemed to be receptive and understood concepts related to learning strategies quite well (even though they were only slowly becoming more familiar with the concepts for these).

General remarks based on students' responses during class time, but mainly on student responses to the online feedback survey, were that the students understood these concepts in general, but did not get enough input/chance to study these learning strategies in more depth. Therefore, I do not think that they were able to find a clear learning model for themselves, one that they could further apply successfully in their future study and in other fields. Instead, they showed a more superficial understanding of these learning strategies, and, whereas they proved the ability to flexibly use a mix of these strategies to suit their needs to perform a particular task, I do not think they could fully understand the importance of these strategies or their transferability. They included some reference to strategies and this survey had answers that were more relevant to how they learn, but they still did not include any acknowledgement of continuous feedback and reflection during the implementation of every practical task.

Looking at their answers to the strategies question (question 4) in the online survey (although during class time they could remember and understood concepts such as 'discovery learning', 'self-study' and others), they did not seem to understand that the question was asked from their perspective, not the teacher's; not what strategies the teacher used in order to better teach them these skills, but what strategies they used to better learn these skills. It could have been a fault in the wording of the question (as well as lack of in-depth knowledge about these learning strategies). A very likely prediction for these students going on to their main programme is that their knowledge of these learning processes will probably stay at a more superficial useful skills level, and not at strategy level.

There were not many new insights in cycle 2 compared to cycle 1, data stayed a bit general still. A future goal for cycle 3 was to find a way to ensure that these strategies are studied in more depth, which also involves more trialling. This would have ideally helped with metacognition and, hopefully, even changing their mentality of how to learn to best suit their needs, their personality and/or their individuality. The questions needed to be reworded to stress more on

how they learn instead of *what* they learn, so the set of questions had to be modified to obtain precise information on how they learn in class and at home; what strategy can complement the model or what part of the model should be emphasised to make students learn easier, faster and become a learning habit.

I needed to make students more aware of how the learning process works, in order to make them use strategies and models to help them learn further. I also needed to give them sustained use of learning models (not just strategies) more explicitly, to make them more aware of learning models, as it is obvious students could not come up with one by themselves. I had to find a way to go about eliciting their own per se favourite learning model (we had discussed favourite learning strategies together in class, but they seemed to relate to many/most of these as being very useful for them). I needed to find a more effective way to get them to discover their own learning model.

Cycle 3

Cycle 3 was made up of three separate stages. Stage 1 was data based on informal class observations and a qualitative online survey at the end to test out concepts learned during class time. Once again, I opted for an anonymous online survey for this stage of cycle 3, because of ethical reasons when dealing with current students. Stage 2 consisted of focus groups (two focus groups) that were conducted with the students once I was no longer their teacher, but they were still studying on the NZCEL programme, to see if they were still using their learning model once there was no more explicit teacher input on this. And finally stage 3, which was one last focus group with the same students, once they had moved on to their main degree programme, in order to check if they were still using their learning model in a different subject.

Stage 1 - Informal class observations

Following a long discussion with my supervisor on 16 October regarding the progress of my project, I reflected quite heavily at home too and I changed my mind about my strategy, about the way I was going about getting this learning model from my current students. I had learned from Cycle 2 that I had to be more specific and explicit, explaining exactly what it was that we were doing – not just leaving it up to the students to infer/discover for themselves. They were not from an educational/teaching background, so these concepts that were clear to me, were not that clear to them unless explicitly pointed out. Previously I had given them too much freedom and was expecting too much from them.

I came up with a new strategy. Going back to my Learning Agreement in order to remember what the whole point was and how I had planned these cycles with current students was particularly useful. I took out the approximate experiential learning model I had suggested in my plan (Figure 2) and decided to start with that, to use that in class as a starting point. I also tried to use a simplified version of the model, to make it easier for students to follow (Figure 3). I was going to incorporate this learning model from the beginning in all of my lessons, so the students would familiarise themselves with it, so they could try it out and see if it worked for them. They

were free to change or modify it to their liking, and this opportunity was especially encouraged later, once they had become more comfortable with using a learning model. I told them that this learning model I gave as an example might not work for everyone all the time, and that they were free to make changes to it, to better suit their learning style or learning needs.

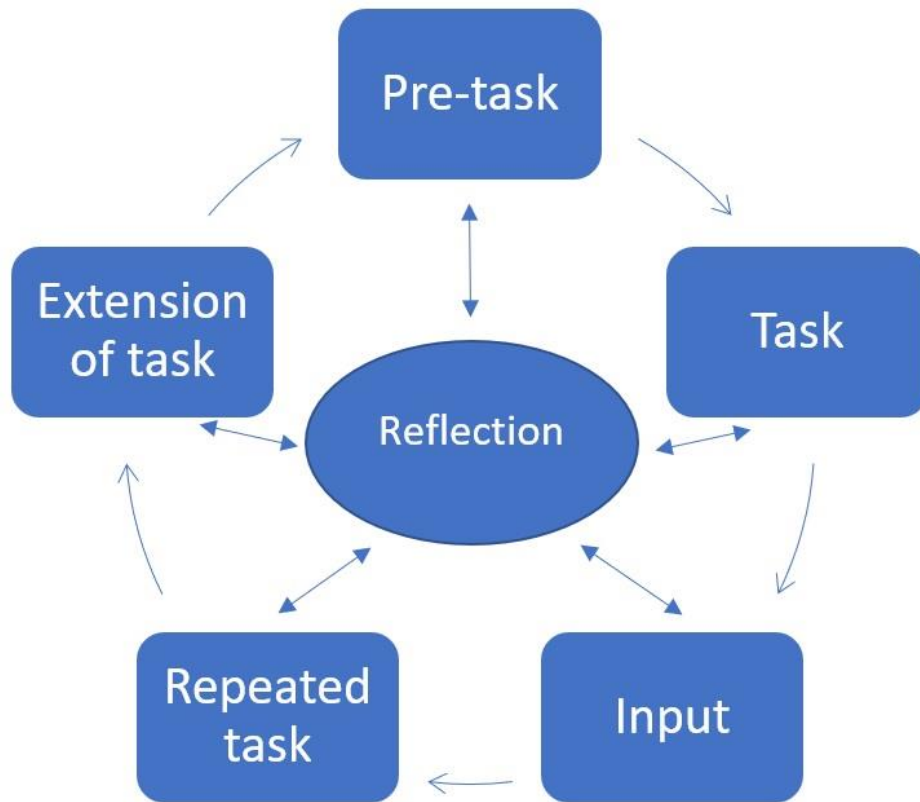


Figure 3: Simplified experiential learning model for current students (cycle 3)

Following this revised strategy, I already introduced the students to the experiential learning model presented in my Learning Agreement in Week 1 of the course. I did not just give them the model. I drew the cycle on the board with empty boxes (Figure 3) and I went through all the logical steps of the lesson and after each step, I would get the class to say what that particular stage represented (in their words – sometimes the exact concept I was looking for, sometimes an approximate paraphrase). I would then add the correct terminology to the cycle drawn on the board.

The topic for week 1 was 'education' and the task they had to do in this first lesson was a group discussion on the topic of 'education'. Breakdown of the lesson as follows:

1. We did a couple of warm-up exercises from the book, where students had to discuss their preferences on how they usually learn best, in groups or one-to-one, and their priorities on how they chose the place they wanted to study at. Another exercise dealt

with previous experience in doing group discussions and how good they felt they were at individual components.

I then asked them what these activities were – why did we do this? How was it useful for this lesson? And one student replied that it was to get familiar with the topic, to warm up. So I wrote “pre-task” in the first box. Then I asked what we were doing now – having a chat about what we did and why the pre-task was important to this lesson. And I was able to elicit “reflection”, which I wrote in the middle box.

2. Then I asked what the next step could logically be – what follows a pre-task? And they answered – a “task”, so I wrote this into the box.

I elicited some general tips (revision) on what they needed to include in a group discussion (e.g. interactive strategies and sounding natural). The task was the actual group discussion, describing the education systems in their own countries and comparing them to each other and to New Zealand. They recorded this.

Then we went back to the middle box and said that it was time for the reflection of this step too, reflection on the task. What went well? What didn't go so well? They noticed that they did not sound quite as natural as they should have, and that not many questions were asked – it looked more like a short monologue from each.

3. So we went on with the material in the book – a recording of 3 students doing the same task (having a group discussion about their countries' education systems) in order to compare and see if there's any difference or anything better to follow. There were a couple of listening comprehension exercises, as well as a language focus on interactive phrases (questions, agreeing, disagreeing, opinions, acknowledging). The transcript was used to highlight some of the phrases. We could have used their first recordings as a comparison with the example from the listening exercise, but I thought it was all still fresh in their minds and that it was not needed at this stage.

At the end of all this, I went back to the cycle diagram and asked what this step represented – the listening, the example, the phrases; what did we do here? This one was a bit more difficult for them to guess, but someone said that they were examples for us – I translated this as “materials” and wrote into the box “input”, and explained it as examples or things we put in to the existing knowledge, so we can try and improve it.

4. I asked what the next logical step would be after trying out a task, looking at examples to improve it, and I said that we had to try that same task again, by taking into consideration the language focus and examples from the input, in order to see if there was any improvement. I wrote into the next box “repeated task”.

The students were a bit confused about it having to be the exact same task, but in the end they seemed to understand the purpose of this repetition exercise. We had another reflection at the end where they said that it went much better than the first time, which is true, they used more interactive phrases. They recorded this one too – to have as comparison later at home.

5. The homework contained two parts. I revised the model with them one last time at the end of the lesson – we started with a pre-task to warm up to the topic, then we tried the task to see how it goes, then we had some input by listening to some examples of other people doing the same task and by studying some of the language there, and we finally did the task again, to hopefully see some improvement in our reflection. So, the process seems to be logical and complete – we're all happy, it helped us all make a bit of progress with our group discussions. So what could be that last step missing? I set as homework for them to try and guess what that could be.

The second part of homework was more reflection. The students had to go through the two recordings of the initial task and the repeated task and note the differences. They were also asked to make some more recommendations for themselves in future group discussion tasks, based on the transcript.

The next day of class, we checked the homework. In terms of the last bubble that was missing from the cycle, one of the students came up with an idea “improvement on the task”, which was not quite what I was looking for. I filled the final box with “extension (of context)” and explained that it meant that this cycle could be further applied to other activities (within our English class – not just speaking, within their study – postgraduate study for writing long papers) and other contexts too (in real life – problem-solving, job interviews, and one of the students here suggested “at work”).

Then we moved on to a writing activity. We followed the exact same procedure and the task this time was to write a summary of a text. Then we compared it with other students, corrected errors, looked at a sample summary from the book, and finally re-wrote the summary. I did not take them through the learning cycle during this activity, we just did it. At the end of the activity, I asked them if this wasn't similar to what we had done the day before with the group discussions, if it couldn't be included in that learning process/cycle. They said yes, and a few of them were able to identify the exact steps we took that matched the cycle on the board.

So we proved that for speaking and writing activities this model works. On this occasion I also realised something very important – that this learning model, being task-based, only works for productive tasks – real tasks where students have to produce some sort of output. It is basically a model for productive skills – in my English class, these would be speaking and writing. On the other hand, receptive skills (listening and reading) cannot form a full cycle, but are only part of it. Receptive tasks/skills can stand alone (as a standalone lesson), but they are always part of a productive skills lesson/cycle/model (they are usually part of the “input” step). This helped me become more aware of how interconnected all of these language skills actually are, and that everything can be part of this learning cycle. On the other hand, I realised that this learning cycle can only be used in applied subjects or in practical activities where the students need to produce some form of output themselves.

A few days later, on the last day of Week 1, the students tried an essay writing task. They had to write an argumentative essay on the topic of “Higher education needs to be more innovative to still be relevant in the 21st century” (still part of that week's ‘education’ topic in the course curriculum). We firstly did a lot of warm up activities, including advice on essay writing and

referencing. Then they started writing the essay, using previously used articles as references. As class ended, I said we would do the 'repeated task' the next week, after doing a bit more 'input', that this was just a trial. Everybody was following and they were very familiar with the structure now by the end of Week 1 already, and were looking forward to repeating the task, in order to better master this particular writing activity.

I continued to draw the model on the board in the following weeks to remind them of it and to see if they could (without any help from me) relate the steps in the model to all of the productive language tasks we were doing each time. They generally got very good at identifying the different steps, and, even after I was away from class for one week and they had a relief teacher for that time, they could still remember the model very well when I came back. Moreover, when I asked them when else they used the learning model ('learning process') and with what activities while I was away, everybody immediately started giving me examples such as oral presentations (that they practised twice following feedback) and summary writing (repeated task following feedback).

Stage 1 – Data collection and interpretation of results (Appx. 2)

A total of 5 current students participated in the online anonymous survey, which was designed to see how much the students could remember from the learning model that we had practised together in class. As mentioned before, I updated some of the survey questions for this cycle to make them clearer than in cycle 2 and to elicit more detailed answers about the learning model. The open-ended survey questions also inquired if the students found this process useful, and if they would be willing to use this learning model in the future on their own.

1. Please briefly describe the learning process/model you have learned during your NZCEL level 5 course.

All participants remembered the learning model well, most of them described it quite accurately and in detail, step by step. An example of this would be:

"Firstly, Vera makes us prepare the task, then we do it, after that we analyse our strength and our weakness, then we repeat the task and to finish, we extend the subject to another one."

From this example we can see that this student has clearly understood what seemed to be the most difficult step in this learning model to understand, which is the extension of the task/context, and the transferability of this task to another activity or even subject.

Everybody also understood the importance of 'reflection', at the core of any learning process. Even though we always called it a 'learning process/model' in class, the positioning of the 'reflection' bubble in the middle of the diagram was very effective for their understanding, so that two students actually called this process "*the reflection circle process*" and "*the reflection circle model*".

Most students mentioned the idea of repetition in order to improve their skills in these tasks:

"This model of learning helps us to do better and improves our skills everyday."

2. **How difficult was it for you to understand and apply the learning process/model in this course?**
3. **How useful did you find this learning process/model in your current study (on a scale from 1 to 5)?**

The responses to question 2 were divided quite equally between two groups. The first group found the learning model easy to understand and everything made perfect sense for them, one mentioning that every step is *“clear and well-defined during the class”*. The second group mentioned that they initially found some aspects of it difficult because this whole process was new to them, but that they now found it easy and helpful. One of them wrote:

“In my opinion, it was difficult for me to understand the extension of context at the beginning, because I usually just complete the task and do the reflection. But now I find that it is necessary for the next task.”

Many participants (from both groups) stressed here how useful this process was for them, with one of them writing:

“The more we apply this process in our task(s), it makes us more habituated to use this process in each and every task.”

On the scale from 1-5 of how useful this learning model was in their current English study, 3 of the participants chose 5 (very useful - 50%), with 2 choosing 4 (useful - 33.3%) and only 1 selecting 3 (neutral - 16.7%).

4. **Have you tried to use this learning process/model outside of class? Give at least one example of where/how you used it.**

All the participants said they use the learning model outside of class sometimes. One of them said that they use it after class when they have to do homework, such as writing tasks. Another alluded to the transferability of this process when mentioning that they use it in their workplace with positive results. Many also came up with some very original ways in which they use this model, mainly during free-time activities such as hobbies. One mentioned using this model when practising the piano at home:

“[...] it is useful because I need to repeat and practise, it can help me to think about [what] I have done wrong and what I can improve.”

Another student mentioned using it during boxing training:

“[...] because every training begin[s] with a briefing of what we would do, after that we start the exercise, then we analyse what was good and what was wrong. After that I have to repeat the exercise a hundred times if necessary and at the end my trainer extend[s] the exercise to other skills that I need to have during a fight and introduce[s] the next training.”

Overall, participants could really make the connection between using the learning model during study time, as well as outside of class time, showing that they understand the transferability of this process.

5. What would you change (add or not use) in this learning process/model to better suit you?

None of the responses suggested any changes or modifications in the learning model. They all seemed happy with the existing model the way it was shown and practised in class. One believes:

“Every step in this learning process [is] simple, clear and easy to apply in and out of the class.”

Another wrote:

“For me it is the best learning process and I use it a lot since I know it.”

6. Do you think that you will continue to use this learning process/model in your further study and make it a learning habit?

The participants seemed very optimistic that they would all want to continue this learning model in their future study and make it a learning habit. One of them said:

“I hope that this will become a habit and will be useful in my further training.”

Another student described it in more detail, pointing out the efficiency of using this model and how much time it could save during the years of study:

“Yes, definitely because with this model, I do not have the impression [of] spend[ing] hours at home to learn (which was the case in my home country). Most of the reflection work is done in the class so it is really easier to learn the courses and to do my homework after. I really feel that my English level has increase[d] in a good direction.”

Stage 2 – Data collection and interpretation of results

As mentioned above, the second stage consisted of two focus groups with the students in their last 8 weeks of their 16-week NZCEL course (the first focus group in week 12 and the second focus group in the last week of the course, week 16). At this stage, the class had been taken over by someone else, so I was no longer their teacher. I used this opportunity to prepare them for what was going to be the situation once they would complete the NZCEL programme, to get them to become more independent/autonomous, without relying so much on my input regarding the learning model, the way they were used to in the first half of the NZCEL course. Therefore, the focus of these two focus groups was to use them as a transition period approaching their main degree courses, when they were firstly not going to have me to provide constant input on the learning model, and secondly they would also have to deal with a completely new subject and very likely tasks/projects of a different nature.

Due to the nature of focus groups (as compared to the more question-specific surveys), I prepared an approximate and flexible set of questions for the focus groups, rather being willing to let the conversation develop based on the students' answers and ideas. The topics covered areas such as whether they had used the model in recent weeks (during the long Christmas

break and during the first few weeks they went back to class), whether they still remembered all the steps in the learning cycle, and whether they had modified it in any way since.

The two focus groups yielded quite similar answers, having been not so far apart from each other, so they are discussed together for this reason, using thematic analysis. Overall, the responses from both focus groups were very positive – students not only confirmed that they were still using the experiential learning model independently after I had left their class, but they also remembered all the steps accurately and could give various examples of how and when they used the model. Such examples included writing tasks such as essay and report writing, and summaries in their reading and listening assignments.

One student mentioned that it was easier using this learning process when they were using it more actively with me in the first half of the course, in terms of feedback on using it, because the other teacher did not remind them of it. He said that what was missing now was a more comprehensive “input” stage with lots more feedback and construction on the first task trial. We explained this and mentioned that input is complex and that it doesn’t just consist of feedback, not just what has been done right or wrong. It comes in many forms, it could also be extra information, advice, or a model of someone doing a similar task. It could also be expectations for the assessment, such as sharing the assessment criteria with the students, so that they know what to change from the first trial of the task to the repetition of task. By discussing this, they realised how much they knew by themselves and that they had been filling in the gaps left by the teacher themselves, sometimes by self-reflection and sometimes by engaging in peer feedback. One example they gave was when they practised presentations, they gave each other feedback (peer feedback) as the “input” and then repeated it. The conclusion they drew was that once they knew the criteria for this assessment, they could practise by themselves using the learning cycle.

Even without explicit reminding of the learning cycle, they all said they still use it actively in their NZCEL class, and the most important factor identified by them was that reflection happens all the time during their learning process and this is why this learning model is so essential for their study and makes it easy to do any kinds of tasks. One student said it is an “elegant” model to use in class, in that all the steps are logical and easy to follow every time. Further proof that they were using the model autonomously was that through our discussion they showed that they really understood the steps and could adapt them to almost any situation, whether for study or for other purposes. They gave some examples of how they had sometimes split the cycle between homework and class time (for example for some writing tasks they would do the “pre-task” and “task” at home and then the rest in class to get feedback and improve on the task).

Another aspect that was missing in their class more recently was the explicit connection between activities, the extension of task connection that we used to previously stress on together in class. However, they all said they were aware about the connections between different tasks/activities on the course and how they made up a bigger picture, either regarding a particular topic, or a particular skill such as speaking or writing and its constant progress. There was a conversation on what exactly “extension of task” meant and most of them suggested some useful ideas on how they extended this entire process to other topics related to

this subject, or even other activities in their lives, for example driving a car, or practising other hobbies in their free time.

Regarding their future use of this learning model, they all agreed that it worked so well for them on this course, that they would definitely continue to use it no matter the subject. One student believed that on a postgraduate course, such as a Master programme, it would be very useful, as there will be even bigger writing projects. Other students believed that they might use this learning model even more than now, since tasks or projects will be of a more complex nature, with more information to understand and to memorise. They noticed that in English we were focusing more on smaller tasks, but in other subjects they imagined there could be bigger projects where this learning cycle could come in useful.

The last question I asked them was whether they had noticed any changes in the sequence of steps when they used the learning model, whether they would like to make any changes to better suit their learning needs. The answer from all of them was no, they all said they thought it was logical and that it worked well the way it was. They had applied it to their English study, as well as to other areas in their lives when they needed to learn or improve something, and they believed that it worked and they were going to use it in the same way, with the same sequence of steps during their main degree course and later on in the future too. They stressed on the fact that “you always repeat” to learn and they remembered that practice makes perfect.

From the second focus group I even got an interesting suggestion from one of the students, that it might be useful to add some additional information for each of the steps to make the learning model more complex. The way he saw it, it is a complex learning model, and the simplified diagram we used in class could be a little bit more complicated to reflect the complexity of the learning processes taking place in the human mind. He suggested drawing in some additional connections with other materials, connecting to our entire knowledge (prior knowledge included). It would end up looking more like an infinite network, and from each step we would go into several other directions and show the connections, for example connections starting from the “extension of task” step to other models and so on. Whereas this idea seemed quite complicated and impractical for the purpose of this learning model, which needs to be simplified in order to provide a framework for other variations to take place in the learning process, it clearly proves that students are actively thinking about this model and are trying to analyse their processes in relation to it. We discussed the spiral analogy together with the group, concluding that the so-called cycle is not actually a circle, but more of a spiral, which keeps evolving with every new learning cycle enabled by the “extension of task”. This spiral more accurately reflects the human mind and the infinite number of connections taking place within a person’s learning process, and, in a way, this is probably what the student himself was trying to say – he mentioned that we couldn’t predict where we could be when we are on a particular step during this learning process.

Stage 3 – Data collection and interpretation of results

The third and final stage of the project consisted of a final focus group with my students, who had now completed their NZCEL course and had already started their main degree course at

our tertiary institution. The questions discussed in this focus group were similar to the ones discussed in the other two focus groups in stage 2 of cycle 3, but with more of a focus on if and how they are using the experiential learning model in their new subject.

During the focus group the students said that they were constantly using the learning cycle during their new Applied Management course (they were in the same class at this stage). Even a few weeks in, they had already used it on their first research and enquiry project, which they needed to do as a base for their presentation. They detailed to me how they used it, how they went through each step of the learning cycle: collecting information (pre-task), then putting the actual research project together (main task), then sending it to the teacher for input/feedback, and finally repeating the task according to this feedback. All of this was happening together with constant reflection on the task and they also mentioned that they thought about extending the task to other future projects that were scheduled on the course. This proved that they still remembered all of the steps perfectly without me having to remind them of anything, so it became obvious that they had fully adopted this model as part of their daily learning process.

They noticed that Applied Management was still a very practical field, like English, which made it easy to use the experiential learning model again in this new context. The applied nature of the subject means that the learning is still based on trial and error.

When asked if they had noticed anything that did not work as well in this new context or if they had needed to make any changes to the model, they confirmed that it was still working well the way it was on this course. The students understood that this is not a fixed model, and that it can be adapted to better fit their learning style or personality, and that, ultimately, the goal is for them to find a way in which they learn best. Although it would probably not be changed completely, they kept in mind that in the future they might need to make some small adjustments around some of the steps. However, at this stage, they were still very happy with the learning model as it was and as they had previously used it on their English course.

Discussion

Cycles 1 and 2 were very useful in terms of my action research, as they provided a lot of inspiration and learning from past mistakes, in order to better structure cycle 3, to give the students the most of the opportunity to develop their present and future learning model.

When compared to cycles 1 and 2, cycle 3 was much better organised and I had learned many useful lessons from my students' feedback in the first few cycles, in order to make me understand what would be a better strategy to introduce my students to the learning model. In cycle 3, the students were able to experience this learning model in 3 different stages, both with active teacher support, as well as more autonomously in stages 2 and 3: stage 1 was taught (the teacher taught the model and practised it with the students), but stages 2 and 3 were designed to check if the students were able to use the model completely by themselves or independently. They got to exercise student autonomy (Rogers, Lyon, & Tausch, 2014); (Ryan & Deci, 2017) and understood that they can also learn without a constant input from the teacher. They got more familiar with the idea of 'facilitation' (Richards & Rodgers, 1986); (Heim, 2012); (Knutson, 2003) during the stage 1 class time, as I tried to step away and let them make sense of these concepts and steps by themselves, even when we were in the actively taught phase of the learning model. This strategy served as preparation for the next part of their English course and their future courses when they were not going to have me in class with them to constantly remind them of the learning model. In general, the learners got gradually more used to this "autonomy-supportive teaching" as opposed to the "controlling instructional behaviours" of more traditional teachers (Reeve, 2016, p. 131), and understood the benefits this type of flexible and inclusive class facilitation had for their motivation and learning. From the second focus group it became more apparent that working in groups or teams during class time had helped them further engage with this learning model autonomously. They confirmed that following cycle 3 stage 2 of the autonomous practice with the learning model, they could use it autonomously and together with their peers during NZCEL class activities/tasks, and that they believed they could continue to use it in their future degree programmes the same way, even if their new teacher was not going to be on board with this model or actively reminding them of it.

Based on their responses in the qualitative surveys and focus groups, the students showed that they not only understood what the learning model was about, but that they also understood the importance of being aware of it and using it, or what Illeris refers to as the "understanding of learning", which is at the core of any learning model (Illeris, 2009). This further supports the idea that metacognition is highly appreciated by students and that it gives them an extra level of control over their own learning (Macaro, 2006); (Archibald, et al., 2008); (Osterman, 1998). They clearly stated that they found the model useful in their own learning journey and that they wanted to continue to use it in the future. In their answers they not only quoted examples from how we used the model in class, but they were also able to come up with examples of how they have used the model autonomously outside of class time, such as at work, or in their pastimes, or even during their main degree course. Inspired by Dewey's beliefs, this proves the increasing popularity of the active "inquiry-based approach to teaching and learning, that is defined by agency, a questioning attitude, experiential engagement with resources and materials,

discovery, integration, and an overall desire to continue learning.” (Makaiau, Ragoonaden, Wang, & Leng, 2018, p. 97).

By the end of cycle 3 stage 2 the students still seemed quite happy with the ESOL-based learning model for experiential learning that had been initially presented to them and did not wish to make any big changes, but this was probably due to the fact that they were still only using it in an ESOL class (NZCEL). But even by the end of the full cycle 3 they still did not wish to make any changes, even once they had started their main degree course in a different subject, and the typical ESOL ‘tasks’ became bigger ‘activities’ or even ‘projects’. Their responses have further consolidated my belief that all subjects are the same when it comes to encouraging experiential learning and student autonomy in a learner-centred classroom, as learning is a truly universal process that can be gained from any subject of a practical, applied nature: “In practice, experience-based, project-based, and task-based learning become experiential when elements of reflection, support, and transfer are added to the basic experience, transforming a simple activity into an opportunity for learning.” (Knutson, 2003).

Conclusion

Even though it is an English language learning model at its core, as this is how we learn a language by trying and trying again, the students have noticed that this model is not limited to this subject and they understood the universality of the learning experience/process. The students have also realised by themselves that they are able to use this learning model independently, and that this will be very useful for them in a world where the focus in education is currently on self-development and self-study. They understand the need to develop their own learning habits in this context, and so far it seems that this experiential learning model has become one of their useful habits.

The main conclusion for their future use of this experiential learning model was that they can use it on their own. It doesn't matter if their current teacher doesn't use it, because their future teachers will probably not use it in quite the same way either, as explicitly as we have practised it in class. So, if there are any shortcomings, such as the missing input step or extension of task, the students can fill in the void. Self-reflection, self-feedback, or even peer feedback are all very useful strategies they can use by themselves, even when there is no particular support from the teacher. They need to make sure they are using the learning model correctly and fully however, in order to get an accurate learning experience, and this will be up to them. It is an independent learning model – it does not need to be teacher-imposed or even teacher-led. Once they know what type of task or activity is required of them, they can just use it by following the steps.

This model is for the students to keep with them on their future learning journeys, and it can always work alongside or in conjunction with the usual exams and other aspects that are involved in a course at tertiary level. They will be able to use it forever, mainly for their studies, but for other activities too. Most importantly, this project shows that students are willing to delve deeper into metacognition and being in control of their own learning by exercising student autonomy and understanding these processes more explicitly.

Recommendations

Already in the beginning, the topic seemed interesting, understanding how students learn is probably always a teacher's main purpose, so that they can adapt their teaching strategies accordingly. Even after completing this project I still think that this is a big topic that can be further explored in the future, and that new insights into this could be found further.

As a first recommendation, I would like to further keep track of how my former students are using this learning model long-term. A suggestion would be to schedule in regular short meetings or focus groups, especially when they join a new course. As a second recommendation, it would be very useful to keep trialling this learning model with new classes, new groups of students at different levels and maybe even in different subjects, to confirm if their experiences are similar to my English students. And an overarching recommendation would be for me to start thinking more in terms of the autonomy-supportive facilitation, rather than the classic teaching practices that might distract me from my goals to deliver experiential learner-centred classes.

Critical Review

This entire process I went through during my change project has been a process of growth for me professionally. It has made me rethink the ways in which I learn, in order to try and help my students more with their learning. It has made me question the definition of learning itself, as well as the definition of teaching. I have always been an adept of facilitation rather than the traditional teaching or lecturing, but during this project I got into more depth regarding how exactly facilitation works, and what students find useful when it comes to facilitation. Overall, I have seen my students getting better at the learning process (yielding good results in a possibly shorter time), and starting to better enjoy the learning process, despite their usual assessment-heavy tertiary education life.

When I started this project, I had a general idea of what I wanted to achieve, but I was not very clear on how exactly I was going to go about extracting a learning model from my students. Reflecting back on this now, I think this might have been the case because I myself was not sure about my own learning model at the time. This entire project has really helped me help my students with their learning model, as well as help myself with discovering how I learn best.

I have been teaching English language classes for over 10 years (EAP – English for Academic Purposes, ESOL – English for Speakers of Other Languages and others). My teacher training consisted of the standard Cambridge English courses. The Cambridge CELTA – Certificate in English Language Teaching to Adults was the first one, where I learned the basics of teaching and it was very prescriptive in nature, as none of us knew about or had any experience in teaching. We learned one way to teach English and we all had to practise that same method by following the same steps in the same order. At the time I found it very helpful, as I thought and mostly still think that when you are at the beginning of a process and you have no experience in doing it, you might benefit from a stricter routine. However, after a few years of practising using that method, I realised that it could not be the only one, and that the CELTA course was in fact quite inflexible. A few years later, after I was already a fairly experienced English teacher, I went on to study the Cambridge Delta qualification (Diploma in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages). I found this course extremely different from the CELTA and I really enjoyed it; I felt like this course was giving teachers much more freedom to have their own voice, to experiment with lots of different new teaching techniques, and mostly, I appreciated that it respected us as unique individuals with our own unique teaching style.

Having started my MPP project, I started looking back and thinking about these courses and what I had learned, in order to understand who I was as a teacher (how I had trained for this, and how my teaching experience had changed and adapted to different teaching contexts, to make me the teacher I am now). I started out as a more inflexible teacher, probably more teacher-centred, then moved on to try out different strategies to make my classes more learner-centred. I think it was when I started teaching English for Academic Purposes at a tertiary institution (Otago Polytechnic) that I became very interested in facilitation and student autonomy. This was probably due to being a part of a more continuous system, where I was able to see my students progress onto their degree courses after having completed their Academic English preparation course. As part of a tertiary institution, I was able to get in touch with the lecturers from the other departments as well, and, on occasion, even cooperate on common projects (something that did not use to happen at language schools). Here at Otago Polytechnic I had the opportunity to participate in an induction programme for new academic

staff starting their employment with us. Together with another colleague from the construction department, we designed an induction programme focussing on what we thought was important in terms of teaching, experiential learning (Dewey, 1938); (Kolb, 1984) and reflective practice (Moon, 2004), and our belief was that lecturers should adhere to these two models irrespective of the subject taught (Nistor & Samarasinghe, 2019).

It was around the time I started the MPP project, that I really reflected on my Cambridge Delta course which had taught me so many useful teaching strategies. So I came to realise that the problem with all of these teaching courses was that none of them mentioned 'learning' and 'learning models/strategies'; all they ever taught us about were 'teaching models/strategies', and I realised that I was still very much a teacher in the classic sense of the word (a more flexible, student-oriented teacher, but nonetheless still a teacher, not a 'facilitator' the way I wanted to be). Therefore, one of my main goals in this project has been to become a more experienced facilitator (Richards & Rodgers, 1986); (Heim, 2012), to empower students more and encourage autonomy (Reeve, 2016); (Rogers, Lyon, & Tausch, 2014); (Ryan & Deci, 2017) throughout their learning journey. Thanks to the method of action research and the three different cycles, I could learn from one stage to the next, as I could not get it right the first time. Throughout the project I oscillated between giving them too much autonomy (in cycle 2) and then eventually finding the right balance between autonomy and facilitation (cycle 3), as there is always value in well-placed teacher input and guidance.

Previously, I had thought that the best help I could give my students to get them to learn better was for me, as a teacher, to be patient, friendly and approachable, to set an example through my approach to the subject I was teaching, and to make the class interesting, entertaining and interactive for the students. I was sure that the passion I had for teaching my subject would be contagious somehow, and that students would respond positively to my attitude, and therefore, gain the motivation to improve. What I did not understand at the time was that less teaching and more facilitation did not mean losing control of the students and turning into an unorganised classroom, but that those qualities I listed before were also key to a facilitator's role, and that this method would make the students learn and improve even more. If I were to define what 'learning' means to me now, it would be knowledge or a skill gained through practical experimentation in a more autonomous environment. In this context, 'learning' would not only be considered the outcome after many trials, but also the process itself where a student gets to build on that knowledge and experience. Within the same context, I would also replace the traditional word of 'teaching' with 'facilitating', as I believe it to better reflect my role and my activities in class. I set out to become an 'enabling facilitator', or someone who is "seeking to explore and release the inherent potential of individuals." (Harvey, et al., 2002).

Referring more specifically to my project, I came to realise that, together with my students, I have also developed a better understanding of how I learn best. My learning model is definitely an experiential one, fuelled by trial and error, and very similar to my students' learning model. Looking back at my three project cycles, and how I did not get it 'right' the first time around, I realised how much I learned between each cycle and how useful the feedback (both positive and negative) had been in developing my understanding of the learning process as a whole. Cycle 1 was very general, so I was not sure at the time how I was going to approach the project, but I saw cycle 2 as a failure when I did it, as it did not yield the results I was expecting to see from the students, and it confused me in terms of what I wanted to achieve with this project and whether it was at all achievable at that stage. But the reflection part of my own learning process

helped me through this slightly difficult time, and by looking back and analysing what I had done with the students in cycle 2, I realised that if I wanted to get through to the students, I had to completely change my approach when making them aware of learning processes. I understood that, because the students were not coming from a teaching background like me, their minds would not be ready to easily accommodate the terminology and metacognitive items that are so familiar to me. So, after a lot of self-reflection and feedback in the form of conversations with my supervisor, I came up with a new, more direct strategy for cycle 3 and went on to repeat the 'task', to try it again. This time it worked very well, as the lessons I had learned from the first trial helped me to not repeat the same mistakes, and I was able to find a way to make the entire process more helpful and less confusing for the students. I ended up simplifying the learning cycle that I gave to them, and I stopped using highly technical vocabulary and instead replaced it with more accessible language that English learners would be familiar with – “practice makes perfect”, to explain the essence of this model. An important point I noticed during the project, especially during cycle 3, was that I have learned the true meaning of “ako” first hand, and I now understand that learning and teaching are never two separate areas, but that they always need to work together in order for real learning to take place (Cameron, Berger, Lovett, & Baker, 2007). At all times during this project I was questioning how I learn, in order to better help students to learn, and the realisations that I was going through and that I was sharing with them proved very helpful for them, and the feedback they gave me in the end was very positive. This transferability can be summarised as: “ako is the grasping of a new knowing or ability and at the same time can be the process of facilitating knowing or ability.” (Edwards, 2013, p. 71).

On one hand I was receiving very helpful feedback from my students in class and from surveys, but there was another crucial part of my own learning process during this project, the conversations I was having with my supervisor regarding my project. At the time they seemed very useful in helping me to reflect and making me think of new ideas and angles I hadn't thought about before. But looking back at those conversations now I realise that this dynamic between me and my supervisor represented a perfect example of 'facilitation', not teaching. This facilitative process relied mainly on open communication, which was always starting with something that I had done or tried with my class, and then my supervisor would then get me to think deeper about what this meant and what implications and ramifications could arise from here in the future. Overall, this was a very useful process for me and a positive experience, which helped me overcome the times during the project when I was stuck and could not easily find a way forward, it provided the support I needed to clear my mind and organise my thoughts for the subsequent stage or project cycle. I understood that this facilitation process was actually what I was trying to apply in my own classes with my English students, only that instead of one-to-one facilitation, I had a bigger group of students. But this was the ideal I was trying to work towards in becoming a better facilitator, that balance between guiding students just enough to get them to a more autonomous state of learning. The lessons that I learned from my MPP helped guide my own behaviour in class and I got to apply them in my course, in my own practice. I became more confident to openly communicate about various topics and issues with my supervisor, and also with my students. I have also become a more intuitive teacher, more readily responding to changing circumstances and more easily adapting. I am now much more comfortable to make spontaneous changes to a class activity, based on how I see the students responding (the simplification of the language in the learning model would be an example for this). These open conversations made me think of this project as not only a process I needed to research in the technical sense, but I started to also be more receptive to the emotional side of

my students. It was not so much about imposing a structure to them, but more about listening to their opinions and feelings and critical thinking related to this model, and responding and adapting it accordingly for their own benefit, just the same way as my supervisor was doing for me and my learning process.

One example of how this project has impacted my communication and facilitation skills for the better, is that I have established a much better rapport with my current students in my new NZCEL class (outside the MPP change project). The challenge here was that this new class started as a fully online class, so I never got to meet any of the students in person, only online, but this does not seem to have impacted our rapport. As a better communicator it was easier to connect to them now, and even online, we were always engaging in open discussions and negotiating strategies for our class activities. The unexpected opportunity to teach my NZCEL class online for an entire study block, because of the Covid-19 nationwide lockdown, proved to be an invaluable experience. Because of this online means of study, face-to-face contact with the students for 4 hours a day was not possible, and class meeting times had to be reduced to mainly just giving instructions and feedback on specific class activities. On one hand, this meant that the reduced face-to-face time had to be more to the point and clearer for the students, by engaging in meaningful conversations with them, so that they could go on and work on their own or together in groups afterwards, and improve on particular tasks. On the other hand, this entire process helped them become more independent learners and I immediately introduced them to this concept from the very first day of the online course. I tried to get them into the habit of relying less on the teacher, since online delivery came with time constraints for presenting or lecturing anyway, and to get them used to learning by trialling, getting feedback, reflecting and then repeating tasks. I introduced them to the experiential learning model I had practised with my former students, and it seemed to work perfectly well in an online delivery context. The students immediately got into a pattern (the cycle) that repeated almost daily, and which allowed them to practise each of the four skills (speaking, writing, listening and reading) and improving in each one through building on previous knowledge every time. Seemingly a difficult task in the beginning, we were able to emulate a real-class feeling for feedback and reflection as well; self-reflection was encouraged at all times, while also forming smaller online groups within the class, where students could break away from the main lesson and discuss, clarify and give each other feedback on particular tasks. This peer feedback seemed to work very well and the students would then come back to the main class meetings to share their thoughts in an open class discussion with the other groups and the teacher. In terms of results from this online experiment with student autonomy and supported by the experiential learning model, I can confidently say that these new students are much more confident in their English language acquisition as well as in their use of academic skills, and have overall achieved better results in exams, when compared to their counterparts in previous NZCEL cohorts. Being only half way through their 16-week NZCEL course, I could also confirm that these improved results happened in a shorter amount of time than with previous classes. So, the experiential learning model seems to be working very well and helping students, no matter what the means of study is, online or face-to-face on campus. Students are encouraged to become more autonomous, even if they are lower level (my current online class is level 4, whereas the previous NZCEL class in cycle 3 of the change project was level 5).

I think that my understanding of teaching Academic English or ESOL has changed quite a lot following this project. This cyclical model of learning has prompted me to see the bigger picture in my field more clearly, as opposed to just seeing English class as teaching students separate

isolated tasks. Now it is clearer than ever to me how everything is always part of a whole, and how everything connects with the use of the experiential learning model. The activities we do in class are not isolated, it is not just about getting through a reading lesson or a speaking task, but all the skills are interconnected, for example listening and reading are both part of a productive skills lesson, leading to improvement of speaking and writing. Everything is connected and everything works in cycles of trialling until we get to see improvement in our learning. The learning model the students have used symbolises exactly this transition from big picture and bigger tasks or projects, to careful analysis and reflection, and then finally back to the big picture in the hope of seeing improvement.

In terms of English and language development specifically, I think that I now understand the entire practicality of this field much better, and I can definitely understand the connections better, following my MPP project. As well as seeing the universality of this experiential learning model and how it can be applied very well in other subjects as well, I will always remember that it started with English and it relies on ESOL principles and theories. By trialling it with several English classes, and having received positive feedback from the students, as well as good results, I can definitely say that I am using it more confidently now and that I will continue to use it in all of my English classes from now on. In the future, whether classes will happen more online or face-to-face, I will hold onto these lessons that I learned during this project and will never be willing to go back to old 'teaching' habits. Instead, I will continue along the same lines and I will keep exploring this learning model further with my students.

In terms of how I will change my practice to better help students, I think taking all of these aspects into consideration and building on them is the way forward. Thinking about it now, I only really started learning about my learning process when I started observing my students, and talking to them about their own learning processes. These conversations I was having with them made me think more actively and more seriously about my own learning. I think that many teachers think they are just 'teachers' and because of this, they sometimes involuntarily neglect the fact that we are all learners too. And in this way, we can get much closer to the students, and help them better, because we are in the same boat, we all have this learning experience in common in all of our lives. By delving deeper into these learning processes, we can better understand our students and their motivations, and in this light, we can provide a better learning experience through reflection and student autonomy.

Other than having become a better communicator with my own students, I think that in the future I can be even more confident in engaging in meaningful conversations with my peers within my department or within the institution. By this I mean not just colleagues I am working with on specific projects, but with any other lecturers, as this would be a good way to get new ideas and constantly reflect on new learning and teaching practices. The MPP has opened new horizons for me professionally, and I have since become a more experienced researcher because of it. The MPP research process has given me more of an inquisitive outlook into the nature of learning, so I can now add the experience of having attended and presented at international conferences, as well as having published some papers in peer-reviewed journals. All of these papers dealt with the topic of encouraging staff to use learner-centred practice and experiential learning in their classes. They were aimed at improving the teaching culture in general, by giving examples of an academic staff induction programme from our own tertiary institution, which was focussing on experiential learning and learner-centred practice. These papers were co-written with a lecturer from the Construction department, to better prove that all

of these teaching and learning models and strategies truly are cross-departmental, and that they can be used institution-wide. The only requirement we noticed during our research was that this type of learner-centred practice can only take place in an applied context – if the subject is applied, it works very well; if the subject is not applied, then it will need to be delivered in such a way that it will become applied, because this is the only way students can learn, by applying the knowledge themselves. At the moment I am involved in another research paper I am cooperating on with a lecturer from the IT department on co-creation of assessments. Having started giving students more autonomy and control over their own learning, I would like to continue to explore this topic and more of its possible ramifications within a tertiary education context. I would like to see if students can be given more of a voice or autonomy when it comes to their assessments too, not just during classwork. Overall, the impact that this MPP project has generated is that, ideally, I would like to be able to share all of this research and all of my findings not just with my department, but also with colleagues from other departments within the institution, as well as colleagues from other tertiary institutions. I believe that the findings from this MPP project, as well as my other research projects could be of great value to any teaching professional to take on board or to trial for themselves, in order to provide an overall better learning experience for their students.

Finally, looking at my aspirational professional framework of practice following the completion of this project, I can see that I have made progress and I am definitely a step closer to my goals, if not already there in some respects. This framework of practice, of course, will now also include some unexpected changes and realisations that I came across in the process of completing this change project. I feel like I am not in the same place as when I started and wrote this professional framework of practice for myself, and that my view of learning and teaching has also been reinforced and changed for the better.

Table 1: My professional framework of practice at present

Who I was before the change project	Who I wanted to be before the change project	Who I am now
ESOL lecturer	A better practitioner who provides more effective language tuition	A better (and more knowledgeable) practitioner who provides more effective language tuition
Teaching practitioner trying to incorporate student-centred practice into my classes	An expert teaching practitioner of student-centred learning	A much more experienced teaching practitioner of student-centred learning due to a better understanding of the importance of facilitation (aiming to get even better at this in the future)
Teaching practitioner in ESOL	Adult strategist across different areas/subjects (not limited to ESOL)	A teaching professional who can now operate across different areas/subjects (not limited to ESOL) and who understands the commonalities between these when it comes to learning processes

Lecturer with strong interest in research	A more experienced researcher	A more experienced active researcher, whose work has been published in peer-reviewed journals
Teaching practitioner interested in continuous self-development (professional development)	A practitioner with a better understanding of who I am professionally and a desire to keep improving further in the future	A practitioner with a better understanding of who I am professionally and a desire to keep improving further in the future

For the transition from “ESOL lecturer” to “A better practitioner who provides more effective language tuition”, I would say that the clarity of the connections that take place within an ESOL class as part of the bigger picture has enabled me to achieve this. Language tuition can only be more effective if the teacher understands that everything is intertwined and that through the principle of ‘ako’ both learners and facilitator are part of the same project, working on the same activities together, while both teaching each other and learning at the same time. In terms of language tuition specifically, I have understood that the practicality and applied nature of an ESOL class is at the core of every single lesson, and that facilitation of these practical activities in class is the only way to get students to perform independently and improve their language skills. Through giving them a louder voice in class to confidently engage in practical activities, as well as peer feedback and cooperation, and open communication with the teacher, more effective language acquisition can be achieved. When I wrote this, the word “effective” seemed a bit vague and elusive, but now I can understand what this really means, and the best way to measure it is by looking at the improved results of my students following the classes that encouraged more awareness about their own learning process.

In terms of becoming “An expert teaching practitioner of student-centred learning”, I could say that I have definitely made a lot of progress in this area. I feel like I have become more of an expert in ‘facilitation’ during this project, and that I understand that student autonomy plays a crucial part in every student’s learning and development. The way I see it, however, is that this is a long-term goal, which would need more sustained practice on my part along these lines, in order to truly master the ‘facilitation’ strategy and become an ‘expert’ in student-centred learning. The research papers I wrote and published also gave me another angle into this topic, helped by getting other views from other teaching professionals on this topic during the staff induction programme. I got to better understand how other subjects were being taught and how learner-centred practice would be incorporated there and through what types of activities. Overall, I have been able to see the universality of student-centred learning through this research, as well as through the last focus group I conducted with my cycle 3 students as part of the MPP. I realised that the experiential learning model, and awareness about metacognitive processes in general, helped students learn better, irrespective of the subject they were studying. I might have had an inkling when I first started, but the MPP project confirmed that this is really the case.

Therefore, from both my research projects and my reflection on this experiential learning model and its implications for the future study of my students, I would say that I have become more of an “Adult strategist across different areas/subjects (not limited to ESOL)”. I am convinced that this learning model that comes from an applied field such as ESOL can be used in any other applied subject, and my students have confirmed this themselves when they moved on to their

main degree courses in another subject. This shows that a good learning strategy can work in many different areas and subjects, including outside of the formal study environment. What was rather unexpected for me, was how easily my students in cycle 3 connected this learning model to numerous other activities they were involved in outside of their classes. I was pleasantly surprised to get examples such as learning a new hobby (a sport, or a musical instrument), or even using this learning model at work.

My present and future research is also inclined towards further exploring this inter-departmental commonality in tertiary education. As mentioned before, I have been involved in several research projects and have published several research papers on this topic, with a few more planned for this year. So, I would say that I have become “A more experienced researcher” overall. Through the completion of my MPP, I have become much more skilled in the field of research. However, I do see this as a developing skill for me, as I am only at the beginning of my career as a researcher, and I could benefit from more experience with this in the future. Enrolling in a PhD programme could be a possible way to further expand my research experience, which I will be considering after completion of this Master of Professional Practice.

As a learning journey, and due to the constant reflection that played a major part in my MPP, I think that I have progressed from being a teacher with a keen interest in professional development, to “A practitioner with a better understanding of who I am professionally and a desire to keep improving further in the future”. As a future plan, I would like to keep trialling this learning model with my future students, to get more confirmation from them and how they see their learning processes. This will also help me possibly further expand my understanding of how I myself learn, and maybe even make some adjustments to my learning model based on this. I would also like to keep in touch with my former students from cycle 3, to study the effects of using this learning model in the long term. In the meantime, it would also be very useful to get in touch with my peers and compare models and strategies, to inform them of my research and to possibly continue to use this learning model in other subjects as well, with students that do not necessarily need to come from an English class first. As a future plan, I would like to keep enquiring and writing about this as part of further research, or maybe even as part of doctoral study.

Overall, my learning model, that I have developed alongside my students’ learning models, is actually what I see as my professional model of practice. As a teacher, or rather facilitator, I can now say that I can only practise my profession by understanding how my students learn, and for this to happen, I had to understand my own learning process. Like I mentioned before, my learning model is quite similar to the learning cycle we practised with the students, because ultimately, it is an experiential model, based on practice and repetition (trial and error) in order to improve. It is a cyclical process, more or less like a spiral, where we go through the same process over and over again and, hopefully, we keep growing and arriving in new places or stages in our learning. Therefore, at the conclusion of this project, and inspired by my experience in the MPP, my learning model would look something like this (Figure 4):

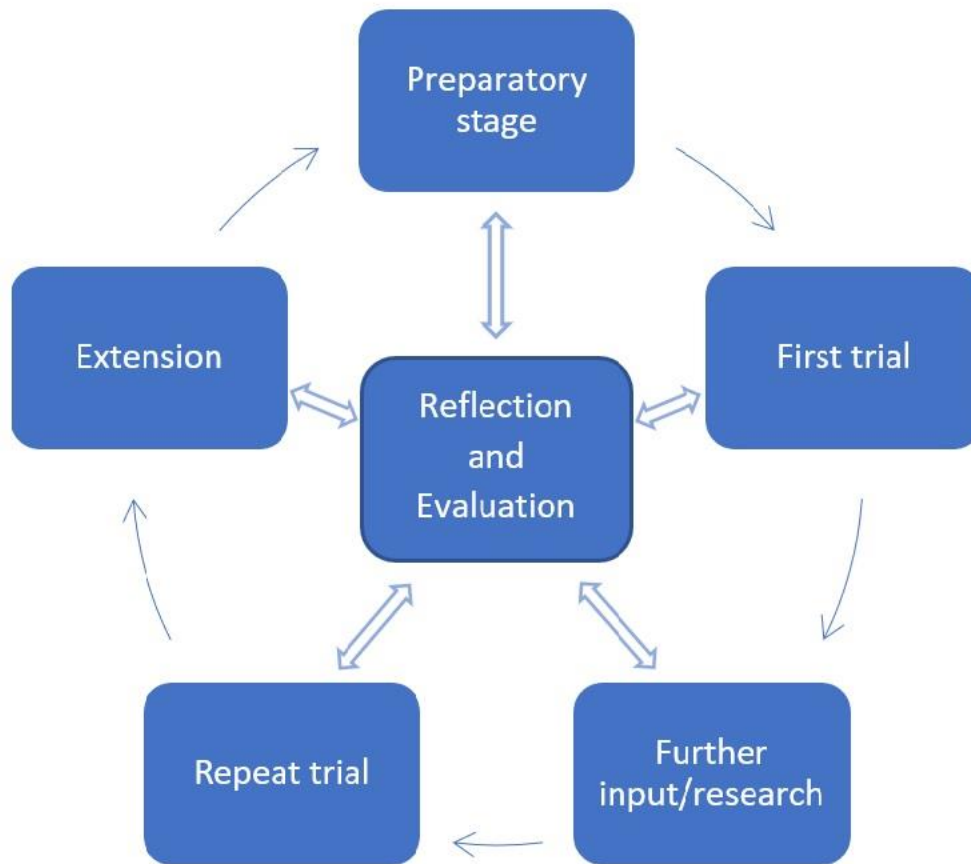


Figure 4: My learning model / my model of professional practice

At the beginning, before I am about to undertake any new learning in the form of a new class activity I want to try out with my students, or a different kind of project, I will go through a 'preparatory phase' to gather more information about what I am trying to do, and to decide how to best approach it. This preparatory phase firstly includes some research on the topic, to find out what other practitioners have previously done that is connected to my planned activity (through finding publications from literature on the subject, of existing theories or strategies for this particular type of activity). It also includes a brainstorming session with other professionals involved in my field: for the MPP this was mainly in the form of conversations with my supervisor James, where we would be brainstorming different ideas and approaches, and make a plan; but outside the MPP this could be achieved through informal conversations with other colleagues/teaching staff from the department or the institution.

The next step would be to trial the activity, based on all of the information gathered and the plan made in the preparatory stage. In my profession, this trial would normally come in the form of trying out a new class activity with my students, but it could also represent a project related to my teaching practice, such as the MPP, or a research paper. As part of the trial, if the activity is a class activity with my students, I would also get some ideas from them about a suitable approach, in the form of brainstorming together with them.

After the first trial is complete, more lessons will need to be learned from here as to what was successful and what could still be improved next time. Like before, this feedback can come from both the students themselves, as well as from a colleague, such as James. The feedback will further prompt deep reflection on my part, in order to inform my next trial. Also in this reflective stage, I would try to get some more input in the form of further research or examples, to build on the existing research and maybe get more ideas for a new/better approach next time.

And then, of course, it would be time to try everything again, to repeat the activity or the project, hoping for better results this time, hoping to have improved on the less desirable outcomes from the first trial. This time, the activity might undergo some changes or modifications, or it might be a completely new approach altogether. This would be further followed by deep reflection and feedback from students and/or peers.

Finally, an equally important stage in the cycle is always the 'extension' stage, which basically means extending the acquired knowledge or experience into other areas of my learning or professional activity. Because this cycle/ascending spiral in our learning and knowledge acquisition never ends, the extension stage is particularly important in understanding how everything is connected and how one activity in my professional practice flows into the next and how they all inform each other. One important aspect to note (that might not be reflected so well in the above diagram) is that the 'extension' never goes back to the 'preparatory stage' in the same place as it started; instead, it further connects to another 'preparatory stage' for a different activity, at a higher level as our learning keeps growing and evolving. The entire model is meant as a spiral that keep progressing, not a closed circle that ends.

At the centre of it all are two stages that are happening throughout the learning process for me, simultaneously, as I have noticed. The first stage that happens throughout the learning cycle is 'reflection', which is mainly self-reflection following feedback conversations. This reflection leads to a thorough analysis of successful and not so successful strategies and ultimately, to a new plan on how to proceed. As I have learned throughout my MPP journey, reflection is indispensable and can be the pivotal point that can bring an enlightening conclusion, or a fresh, inspired idea or approach. Looking at an important example from my MPP change project, reflection has prompted me to come up with a better plan for cycle 3, when I was stuck with unsatisfactory results in cycle 2. The other important stage at the centre of everything is 'evaluation', which works alongside the reflection process in informing the next stage of the cycle accordingly. Evaluation includes feedback, which can come in the form of conversations with the students when involved in a class activity, or feedback from other colleagues (James in the case of the MPP) when involved in any other professional development activities or projects. Through the MPP action project I have learned that conversations with others can be extremely important and are always part of our learning process, as there are many different ideas and angles, that might not even cross our minds before we engage in these discussions, and which might never come from published research. Colleagues, as well as students could shed a new light on a particular issue, and this could trigger a chain reaction that leads to much better and more successful learning. Other than feedback, the evaluation also includes data gathering and the analysis of results, which, together with reflection, forms the basis or plan of how to proceed onto the next stage of the cycle. Because they are so closely linked together, I decided to put reflection and evaluation together at the centre of the learning model.

As mentioned before, because learning is such a universal process, I have proved through this change project that students (and myself) can devise a learning model that works across

different fields or activities. This is the reason why my students' learning model and my learning model are so similar – they have the learning experience in common, and they are following a very similar pattern. One important difference to mention here is that my students' learning model, being part of an ESOL class, was focussed more on smaller tasks, such as doing a group discussion or writing an essay. In contrast, my trials as part of my teaching practice or my postgraduate studies, are usually encompassing larger projects and activities. But ultimately, the process stays very similar, whether for smaller or bigger tasks or projects.

In conclusion, the impact of this change project has been quite far-reaching. Not only have I learned so much that I can now apply in my own practice, but the project can also bring a positive example of increased learner-centred practice at my tertiary institution through professional conversations around the topics of student autonomy and learner-centred practice.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Work Practice Cycle 1 – Keywords from **one** of the two focus groups, selected from the recording for Cycle 1 Data collection and interpretation of results

	Participant 1	Participant 2
<p>Was NZCEL level 4 your first experience studying at tertiary level in New Zealand? What was different about how you learned as compared to your experience studying at tertiary level in your country (if applicable)?</p>	<p>Yes, first time</p> <p>In my country - don't know how to apply the theory / a lot of spoon-feeding</p> <p>Here in NZ – Learned through practice; everything much more practical</p> <p>Here in NZ – more self-study</p>	<p>Yes, first time</p> <p>In my country – lectures/all theory</p> <p>Here in NZ – much more practical, less theory / theory in the background</p> <p>Here in NZ – learn how to apply, read a lot yourself if you need the theory</p> <p>Here in NZ – students need to be involved and take the initiative themselves</p> <p>Here in NZ – connection to the industry; very practical</p> <p>Here in NZ – a focus on problem-solving; Independent learning (with teacher guidance); Learn through experience</p> <p>Here in NZ – Exams are different – more practical/not so lengthy</p> <p><i>“NZCEL level 4 [was] my first experience study[ing] at tertiary level in NZ and it was different than my country because it was experience learning”.</i></p>
<p>What did you like / find most useful about your NZCEL level 4 course?</p>	<p>NZCEL connection to real-life</p> <p>Transferable skills (any issues in real life that could be solved in class; also classwork that reflected real life)</p>	<p>Definitely a clear connection between NZCEL – further study – industry project and work</p>

	<p>Mistakes are “forgiven” – if you make a mistake, it is always possible to correct it/correct yourself</p> <p>More fun overall – practical context</p>	
<p>Was there anything you learned in your NZCEL level 4 course that was especially useful for you in your degree course? What was it? What is the best way you learn now and why?</p> <p>How have you applied / developed your learning approaches in your further studies based on your NZCEL level 4 studies?</p>	<p>Referencing and in-text citations (and understanding the importance of doing this)</p> <p>Paraphrasing</p> <p>Awareness of Turnitin plagiarism software</p> <p>Presentation skills through lots of practice <i>“[...] because how to deliver your ideas to other[s] and what way to present that is most important”.</i></p> <p>Academic vocabulary list (academic word list) (x1 participant)</p>	
<p>Did NZCEL level 4 help improve your knowledge of how to learn? How?</p>	<p>Yes, through:</p> <p>Games</p> <p>Debates</p>	<p>Yes, through:</p> <p>Direction/guidance to do research</p>
	<p>Interesting topics that are relevant to real-life (following the current scenario, not just knowledge)</p> <p>Using computers to do research</p>	
<p>What are your suggestions to improve the delivery of NZCEL level 4 in the future (as a preparatory English for Academic Purposes course), to better help with students’ further studies?</p>	<p>Students need to speak more English in class/break time</p> <p>Put students in mixed groups during class activities (x1 participant)</p>	

Appendix 2: Work Practice Cycle 3 – Survey raw data for Stage 1 – Data collection and interpretation of results

This data was analysed using thematic analysis and the results are listed question by question under Work Practice: Cycle 3: Stage 1 – Data collection and interpretation of results

	Participant 1	Participant 2	Participant 3	Participant 4	Participant 5
Please briefly describe the learning process/model you have learned during your NZCEL level 5 course.	I am using the reflection circle process. In which I am doing one task and then putting some required inputs and again repeat the same task and meet the requirements.	The learning process during our course is so much effective. Before we start any course in our class, we start from pre-task, task, input, repeated task and extension of task. After each step we also do the reflection of each step what we have done. This model of learning helps us to do better and improves our skills everyday.	Firstly, Vera makes us prepare the task, then we do it, after that we analyse our strength and our weakness, then we repeat the task and to finish we extend the subject to another one.	First, we do the task and input some information, during this process we need to gain some knowledge and do the reflection. Next we repeat the task and extension of the context, for example when we do the group discussion, for the second time we have more information to discuss and expand the content. Also, during this process we need to do reflection. At last, we do the task again, which is called Pre-task.	The learning process is well organised and meet my expectation. We use the reflection circle model that help us better understanding all kind of tasks and materials. This approach is allow us effectively use the class time and collaboration.
How difficult was it for you to understand and apply the learning	In starting it was difficult because in language, culture & study environment	It is not difficult for me to understand this learning process because	It was and it is not really difficult because every steps are clear and	In my opinion, it was difficult for me to understand the extension of	It is not so hard for me to understand and apply the learning process of

process/model in this course?	is new for me. But, now it is very helpful.	this learning process is so simple and easy to understand. The more we apply this process in our task, it makes us more habituated to use this process in each and every task.	well defined during the class, Vera takes the time to pass through every steps for every kinds of exercise.	context at the beginning, because usually I just complete the task and do the reflection. But now I find that it is necessary for the next task.	this course, because I am already familiar with this model of teaching and have used this approach in my previous education.
How useful did you find this learning process/model in your current study (on a scale from 1 to 5)?	5	5	5	4	4
Have you tried to use this learning process/model outside of class? Give at least one example of where/how you used it.	Yes, i used it at my part time workplace and it gives me positive results.	Yes, I have tried this learning process outside of class also. I used this in my home to do the homework such as writing essay, summary and so on.	I mainly use it during my boxing training with my coach because every training begin with a briefing of what we would do, after that we start the exercise, then we analyse what was good and what was wrong. After that I have to repeat the exercise a hundred times if necessary and at the end my trainer	Yes, I have tried to use this learning process when I practise the piano at home, it is useful because I need to repeat and practise, it can help me to think about where I have done wrong and what I can improve.	The one of examples, that may be mentioned, is about homework and methods for repetition when I do writing and listening assignments.

			extend the exercise to other skills that I need to have during a fight and introduce the next training.		
What would you change (add or not use) in this learning process/model to better suit you?	Nothing	Every steps in this learning process are simple, clear and easy to apply in and out of the class. So, I think there is no any thing to add or remove from this learning process.	Nothing for me it is good enough and does not require any modifications.	For me it is the best learning process and I use it a lot since I know it .	-
Do you think that you will continue to use this learning process/model in your further study and make it a learning habit?	yes, I want to continue this learning process in my further studies.	Yes, I will definitely continue to use this learning process in my further study and make it a learning habit.	Yes, definitely because with this model, I do not have the impression to spend hours and hours at home to learn (which was the case in my home country). Most of the reflection work is done in the the class so it is really easier to learn the courses and to do my homework after. I really feel that my English level has	Yes, also it is useful for many situations, not only for study but also for something like cooking.	I hope that this will become a habit and will be useful in my further training.

			increase in the good direction.		
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Appendix 3: Questions for online surveys and focus groups

Cycle 1	Cycle 2	Cycle 3
1. Was NZCEL level 4 your first experience studying at tertiary level in New Zealand? What was different about how you learned as compared to your experience studying at tertiary level in your country (if applicable)?	1. Was NZCEL level 5 your first experience studying at tertiary level in New Zealand? What was different about how you learned as compared to your experience studying at tertiary level in your country (if applicable)?	1. Please briefly describe the learning process/model you have learned during your NZCEL level 5 course.
2. What did you like / find most useful about your NZCEL level 4 course?	2. What did you like / find most useful about your NZCEL level 5 course?	2. How difficult was it for you to understand and apply the learning process/model in this course?
3. Was there anything you learned in your NZCEL level 4 course that was especially useful for you in your degree course? What was it? What is the best way you learn now and why?	3. Did NZCEL level 5 help improve your knowledge of how to learn? How?	3. How useful did you find this learning process/model in your current study (on a scale from 1 to 5)?
4. How have you applied / developed your learning approaches in your further studies based on your NZCEL level 4 studies?	4. What learning strategies have you found most useful on this course?	4. Have you tried to use this learning process/model outside of class? Give at least one example of where/how you used it.
5. Did NZCEL level 4 help improve your knowledge of how to learn? How?	5. Do you think that you will continue using these strategies in your further study?	5. What would you change (add or not use) in this learning process/model to better suit you?
6. What are your suggestions to improve the delivery of NZCEL level 4 in the future (as a	6. How would you describe your learning model (it can be a mix of different styles/models,	6. Do you think that you will continue to use this learning process/model in your further

preparatory English for Academic Purposes course), to better help with students' further studies?	depending on what works best for you)?	study and make it a learning habit?
	7. What are your suggestions to improve the delivery of NZCEL level 5 in the future (as a preparatory English for Academic Purposes course), to better help with students' further studies?	