

# Collaboration or Bust?

An Inquiry into the use of Differing On-line Models of Delivery for a Pre-service Grammar Course for English Teachers

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## Summary and Impact comments on Jo Gakonga's dissertation

*The dissertation is titled:*

*Collaboration or bust? An inquiry into the use of differing on-line models of delivery for a pre-service grammar course for English teachers.*

The internet has changed the face of teacher training. Continuing professional development, once a luxury that few were able to access, is now open to any teacher with a computer and a broadband connection. Many in-service courses are run exclusively on-line or in a blended manner and even in pre-service training, it is becoming a more possible and common scenario that some aspects are delivered on-line. This study is innovative because it looks at what can be achieved before the actual timetabled course starts.

This study charts the development of an on-line course aimed at teaching language awareness to native English speaking pre-service teacher trainees and novice teachers. The primary concern was how the course could be taught most effectively using the range of technology available and what balance of interactive and independent learning was appropriate. Of particular interest is a comparison between synchronous learning using a virtual classroom such as *IlluminateLive!* and asynchronously accessed recordings of these sessions, focusing on the relative uptake of both and participants' attitudes to them. The study also sought to investigate the use of consolidation tools, comparing independently accessed materials such as quizzes with those which required collaboration such as web based forums. The effects were investigated using a ten week pilot course in *Moodle* and culminated in the development and launch of a final product for commercial use.

Although the original assumption was that a course that most nearly approximated a face to face experience i.e. synchronous and collaborative, would be more successful, this dissertation argues that for a large number of learners an asynchronously accessed recording is preferable. As may be expected, this is partly for the convenience that it offers but more interestingly, some participants reported that a recorded presentation was pedagogically more useful as it allowed them the freedom to replay, pause, take notes and consult other reference materials for consolidation of learning. There was also evidence that some participants watched the recorded sessions on more than one occasion for revision purposes. It appears that for both convenience and pedagogical reasons asynchronously accessed video presentations have an advantage over the potential benefits of a virtual classroom for this kind of course. It was also evident that whilst asynchronous collaborative learning via internet forums is of benefit and has motivational value for some learners, the majority of participants in this study preferred their learning to be of an independent nature.

In summary, the study indicated a significant advantage of asynchronously accessed video presentations and consolidation exercises for this type of course, not only for convenience reasons but also as pedagogically sound methodology. It is worthy of note here that the inclusion of a teacher-student interaction (albeit rather illusory) provided by a voiced over presentation seems to be an especially important element of the success of this methodology.

### **Potential for impact.**

The final course 'Grammar for Language Teachers' developed from the research, has been running commercially since January 2012 at [www.elt-training.com](http://www.elt-training.com) and has already attracted many trainees. There are excellent books which cover this area and the course is a compliment to these. It is relatively short and cannot hope to cover the subject in a comprehensive way but can enable trainees with a low level of language awareness to gain sufficient basic knowledge to revisit and understand better the grammar books that already exist. The site has had consistent feedback from trainees that this has been the case and that they find this method of delivery more accessible due at least in part to the 'personal' touch that the voiced over videos bring. In this respect, the course has already had significant impact on a number of trainees. In addition to trainee teachers, many practising novice teachers have also accessed the course and institutions (including the British Council in Naples) have purchased courses for their novice teachers as CPD.

Here is a short statement of the impact from Jo's point of view:

The research, demonstrating that this method of training can be effective, has also led me to utilise it in two further projects. The first is to produce monthly recorded 'webinars' on a range of teaching issues, largely aimed at novice teachers and the second is a range of short videos designed to be used within short initial training courses ('flipping' the classroom). Both of these resources are accessible through the [www.elt-training.com](http://www.elt-training.com) website free of charge and have had excellent feedback from many teachers and trainers worldwide. Ours is an industry where development in many institutions can often take a back seat and where remuneration is often not high. I hope that by providing a relatively low cost grammar course and free training, I can have some small impact on some teachers' professional lives.

Finally, with an eye to promoting this methodology further, Jo has recently contributed a chapter to an up-coming book to be published by the British Council titled 'Innovations in Teacher Training' (Edge and Mann forthcoming). The use of video presentation for training is not new but it is still relatively little used in ELT and I hope that by publicising my research this may be more widely utilised in a range of teacher training courses.

I hope that this summary provides a useful introduction and overview for Jo's excellent dissertation which received a high distinction grade.

Yours sincerely

Russell Stannard