


'LEARNING TO WRITE AND WRITING TO LEARN'

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Academic Development


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Outcomes

- To improve student writing practices in the extended curriculums;
- To ensure a holistic writing and learning approach for first year students in the extended curriculums at the UJ;
- To ensure that the journal intervention primarily translates the scaffolded writing and research practices of the FRP module.


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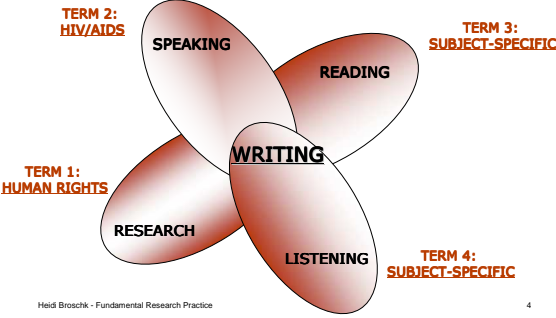
The FRP module

- The Fundamental Research Practice (FRP) is the language module of the extended diplomas (4 year national diploma) offered by Academic Development: Access.
- This module is based on the following practices: reading, listening, speaking, writing and research - which are scaffolded upon term by term.
- These practices are based on various themes.


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FRP Themes




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Context

- AD students are from disadvantaged backgrounds, but show potential;
- As a result of their profile, students are in an extended programme (4 yr national diploma);
- 2nd/3rd language English speakers (problem areas: writing, reading);
- Various interventions have been used to address these areas;
- Not successful enough (proven by: assessments, marks, lecturer feedback);
- Hence, introduction of **Journal Intervention** (2008).

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Journal Intervention (JI)

- Part of the FRP (language module) 2008 syllabus;
- A journal where students are expected to write in various genres;
- Focus is primarily on writing and partly on research;
- Students are expected to complete an entry per week per term, and one entry during the holidays;
- Uses precise and detailed instructions and themes to guide writing practice;
- Incorporates various practices alongside writing, such as reading, listening, research, etc. to promote holistic approach;
- Journals are personal, so any individualised creativity is encouraged;

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Generic topic example



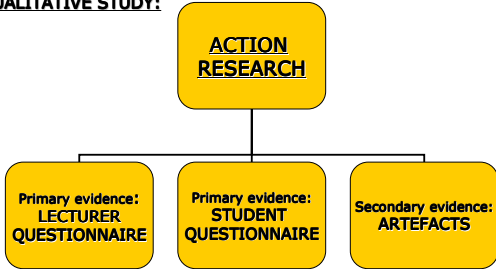
DATE	TOPIC	INSTRUCTIONS	RUBRIC
Holiday 26 May (week 8)	Is it ethical to have sex knowing that you are HIV positive? Briefly discuss this in a paragraph.	Adhering to the paragraph structure discussed in class, write a 5-sentence or 8-sentence paragraph answering this topic. Focus on your spelling, grammar and punctuation.	<u>Language, grammar, paragraph structure:</u> Complete grammatically-sound sentences (1) Paragraph structure correct (1) Punctuation (1) Language usage (1) Total (4)

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Research Design & Methodology



QUALITATIVE STUDY:




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graph TD
    A[ACTION RESEARCH] --> B[Primary evidence: LECTURER QUESTIONNAIRE]
    A --> C[Primary evidence: STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRE]
    A --> D[Secondary evidence: ARTEFACTS]
  
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Data collection




1. Students' questionnaires (open & closed questions);
2. Lecturers' questionnaires (open and closed questions);
3. Artefacts (3 journals: evaluative study based on comparison).

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Research question for this particular presentation




What influence/effect does the FRP Journal Intervention have on students' writing skills?



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Sample



- Purposive sampling;
- Building group (24 students);
- All FRP lecturers (8 lecturers).

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Data Analysis



- The open, descriptive coding method of Tesch (in Creswell, 1994:155-156) is used to analyse the data collected from the questionnaires.
- The sample of journals, the artefacts collected, are textually analysed according to a set of specified markers; comparing the initial writing to writing completed after a semester of JI.

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RESULTS: Lecturer's questionnaires



- All agreed that the JI promoted more writing amongst students;
- All students use different journal media;
- Most agreed that writing has improved in majority of spheres;
- Timeous feedback dependent on lecturer workload, written or given in class;
- All agreed that research was important and students were motivated;
- Marking was too much;
- Not enough time in classes to discuss JI.

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13

RESULTS: Students questionnaires



- Expresses thoughts, feelings and opinions;
- Promotes use of common sense;
- Improves skills (writing, research, reading, communication, listening, time management), taught structure in writing;
- Promotes general knowledge & awareness (educational);
- Advances self-understanding;
- Assistance with research;
- Builds confidence;
- Encourages creativity;
- Promotes critical thinking;
- Most students criticised the topics: want topics to be personal and reflective.

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14

RESULTS: Artefacts



Above average	Average	Below average
Applied structure , personalised journal	Applied structure	Applied incomplete, inconsistent structure
Completed all topics; followed all instructions	Completed 90% of the topics; followed majority of the instructions	Did not hand in journals or Completed 30% of work, not following guidelines
Always handed journal in on time (some exceptions)	Usually handed in on time (often excuses)	Hardly handed in on time
Always applied the rules of the written texts and topics, and satisfactorily	Mostly applied the rules of the written texts and topics	Made up their own rules of written texts and topics
Language use good, or improved (except spelling)	Language use average, did not often apply feedback suggestions	Language usage weak, hardly ever applied feedback suggestions
Conducted extensive research , did add additional info; well referenced	Conducted required research; Referencing satisfactorily, or none	Hardly conducted research (copies); no referencing
No abbreviation and 'sms' language used	Used abbreviation and certain 'sms' language	Used a lot of abbreviations and 'sms' language
Show cohesion , coherence and well-constructed sentences, paragraphs and essays	If feedback applied - started showing more cohesion etc., in the writing	Did not show any

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15

Findings



- The JI improves the *'above average'* and *'average'* students' writing practice, but has no discernible impact on the *'below average'* students;
- The JI improved students' language practices to varying degrees;
- The holistic improvement is dependent on lecturer interaction and support;
- The JI highlighted students' personal issues;
- No improvement in students' spelling;
- Not enough time given for the JI in the classroom.

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16

Recommendations



- Possibility of negotiated topics with students and staff;
- The problem of spelling can either be addressed in specific reading practices or in a possible reading/dictionary intervention...
- To re-address the JI in our PPLIP Programme;
- The personal problems of students need to be addressed with WPP lecturers or student counselling.

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17

Possible questions



- Is there anybody in the audience who has had success with improving writing skills of underperforming students using a journal?
- Could anybody suggest ways in which a journal intervention can be adapted to improve the spelling of students?

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18

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